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Κωντοναίτωρ: A GHOST WORD

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## Κωντοναίτωρ: a Ghost Word

In 1890, A.-H. Sayce published two papyri dated respectively A.D. 512 and 513, which were entrusted to him by Flinders Petrie.<sup>1</sup> The second document, a contract of sale of a monastery, was signed, among others, by Φλ(άουτος) Τιμόθεος υἱός (l. υἱός) Ἀβρααμίου βουλ[ευ]τῆς κωντοναίτωρ τῆς Ἀρσινοειτῶν πόλεως (SB I 5175, 21).

In the *editio princeps*, Sayce did not accentuate the word κωντοναίτωρ, otherwise unknown, and put a question mark after it, not really knowing how it should be understood. He wrote (p. 143, n. 3): "J'ai traduit, suivant une ingénieuse suggestion de M. Dareste, κωντοναίτωρ comme le latin *centonarius*". A *centonarius* is a fireman who uses blankets (*centones*) to put out a fire.

The word κωντοναίτωρ was then incorporated into F. Preisigke's *Wörterbuch* III (Abschn. 8), without any interpretation. The original of the papyrus disappeared for some time, before being rediscovered by E. G. Turner a little before 1952, at University College, London.<sup>2</sup> Turner took the opportunity to revise Sayce's readings, and confirmed κωντοναίτωρ, although he did not offer an interpretation of the word.

This was done by S. Daris, who proposed a bad spelling of κωντιονάτωρ = Lat. *contionator*.<sup>3</sup> The word *contionator* does not occur in any other papyrus found in Egypt, neither under its Latin form nor transcribed into the Greek alphabet.

The *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*<sup>4</sup> quotes GRAMM. *suppl.* 242,5: "*contio dicitur congregatio. inde contionator dicitur qui ad contionem i.e. ad congregationem sermonem facit, sicut Salomon ecclesiastes Graece, Latine contionator*". The *Thesaurus* also says: "*apud christianos, idem quod ἐκκλησιαστής, praedicator*". If one follows Daris' interpretation, one would have to consider the existence of an official function in Arsinoe, held by a *contionator*, "he who addresses the assembly".

Examination of the original during a class given by Prof. H. Maehler in London has convinced me that the reading κωντοναίτωρ is wrong, and that one should read instead κωντούκτωρ, a Greek transliteration of the Latin *conductor*. The first omega is hardly surprising: Flavius Timotheos, the signatory, apparently does not distinguish omicron from omega (see e.g. υἱός = υἱός, same line 21). Instead of the first tau, one would expect a delta, but the phenomenon needs not surprise us. In P. Panop. Beatty 1, 60 (and 63 ?), one finds κωντούκτωρσι =

<sup>1</sup> REG 3 (1890) 131-144 = SB I 5174-5175.

<sup>2</sup> See JEA 38 (1952) 132-133.

<sup>3</sup> *Il lessico latino nel greco d'Egitto*, Barcelona 1971.

<sup>4</sup> Vol. IV, col. 734 (A. Gudeman, 1907).

κονδούκτορσι.<sup>5</sup> The letter that gave most trouble to previous scholars is the second kappa, although very similar to the one in δικέων (= δικαίων), l. 18-19, written by the same hand.<sup>6</sup>

So much for the ghost word κωντοναίτωρ, and welcome to a new attestation of a *conductor*. The word means "contractor", and, in Roman Egypt, applies to the contractor for the *cursus uelox* (ὄξυς δρόμος in Greek), the postal service. From P.Oxy. VI 900, 6-7 (= W. Chr. 437), we learn that the office was a liturgy and lasted for one year: ὑποβληθέντος ἔτι εἰς κονδουκτορίαν τοῦ ὄξέος (l. - ἕως) δρόμου τοῦ εὐτυχῶς εἰσιόντος ἔτους. The *conductor* was in charge of the *conductorium*, which dealt with a whole metropolis, as is the case in SB I 5175, 21, and also in P.Oxy. XVII 2115, 1-4: Φλάουιος Εὐλ[ό]γιος λογικτῆς Ὁξυρυγγίτου λογογράφου κονδουκτορίου τῆς αὐτῆς πόλεως χαίρειν.

It seems likely that he could have worked for a service at a higher level in the administration: in P.Mich. XI 624,24, we find a *conductor* apparently connected with a praesidial *officium*.

The conductor was apparently subordinated to a λογικτῆς. Contractors for the κονδουκτορία belonged to the bouletic class.<sup>7</sup> Of course, the *conductor* did not actually deliver the mail himself: he was given help for that purpose.<sup>8</sup> Postal delivery must have been fairly frequent, as one can see from P.Cornell 52, 9-12: πούδακον οὖν ἔχων πολλοὺς ἐρχομένο[υς εἰ]ς τὴν Τακόνα ἢ τοῦ κονδουκτορίου ἢ τ[ῆς] κώμης ἀντιγράψαι μοι περὶ πάν[τ]ων.

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<sup>5</sup> See F.T. Gignac, *Grammar I* (Milano, 1976), p. 81.

<sup>6</sup> It is worth noticing that Sayce's reading, δικαίεων, is also wrong, and has never been corrected since.

<sup>7</sup> See SB I 5175,21 and P.Oxy. VI 900,4.

<sup>8</sup> See P.Oxy. VI 900 and P.Panop. Beatty 1, 60-61.