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THE CONSULAR DATE IN P.RYL. IV 616

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P.Ryl. IV 616 consists of two fragments, (a) and (b), of a taxation list for a series of districts in Lower Egypt. In a. ii.12-13 the edition gives the following reading:

Ἰνδικτίονος τοῦ ἐνεστ[ῶτος] κανόνος ὑπ[ατεί]ας τῶν δεσποτῶν
 ἡμ[ῶν] Κωνστα[ντίνου καὶ] Λικιννίου[υ] Σ[εβασ]τ[ῶν] α (ἔτους) (δην.) (μυρ.) /Αψλς [

The editors do not offer a translation but in their note they comment “The only year in which a consulate of Constantine and Licinius coincides with the first year of an indiction cycle is 312”; and they therefore assign the text to c.AD 312. This consular date produces formidable problems, as Bagnall and Worp pointed out in 1980.¹ They there suggested that the consulship referred to is that of 309.² But in 1987, in the standard work on the consuls in this period, this conclusion is questioned; indeed, the evidence of P.Ryl. 616 is considered so dubious that the text has been excluded altogether.³

The first step is to establish the text of line 13. In *CNBD* Bagnall and Worp pointed out, on the basis of a photograph, that the symbol which the editors had resolved as ἔτους was really no more than the usual S/ marking a numeral, and that there was sufficient room between Σ[εβασ]τ[ῶν] and the alpha to insert τό. They therefore read in this line ἡμ[ῶν] Κωνστα[ντίνου καὶ] Λικιννίου[υ] Σ[εβασ]τ[ῶν τὸ] α S/. In *CLRE*, 626, however, it is said that “a restudy of the photograph persuades us that the faint traces of Σεβαστῶν are insufficient to compel that reading”. There is, in fact, no real doubt that the reading originally suggested in *CNBD*, and described there as “virtually inescapable”, is correct, as I was able to confirm from an inspection of the original:⁴ the trace after Λικιννίου[υ] is consistent with sigma and the broken letter a little later in the line can hardly be anything other than tau; furthermore, the spacing exactly suits Σ[εβασ]τ[ῶν] and leaves ample room for the insertion of τό after it.

We must therefore accept that the consulship in P.Ryl. 616 is described as that of τῶν δεσποτῶν ἡμῶν Κωνσταντίνου καὶ Λικιννίου Σεβαστῶν τὸ α. This creates a problem, since there is no example of a consulship attested in this form. Constantine and Licinius held no less than four joint consulships, and on the second, third and fourth occasions (in 312, 313 and 315 respectively) they are both *Augusti* and Constantine’s name precedes that of Licinius.⁵ That is to say, the consulship is referred to in the way in which it appears in P.Ryl. 616 except for the iteration number. This of course ought to mean that the reference in P.Ryl. 616 is to the *first* joint consulship of these two emperors, which occurred in 309. But if we are to take the reference as being to this consulship two major difficulties must be faced. Firstly, in 309 Licinius was senior to Constantine and so his name should appear first; and secondly, Constantine was not officially recognised as *Augustus* in 309, at any rate not in the East; in the East he only had the titles of *Caesar* and *filius Augustorum* at this date.⁶ All references in the papyri to the consulship of 309 give Licinius’ name first and record Constantine with the title *filius Augustorum*

¹ See ‘Chronological Notes on Byzantine Documents 46’ in *BASP* 17 (1980) 10-12; henceforth cited as *CNBD*.

² They had already remarked in 1978 in *The Chronological Systems of Byzantine Egypt*, 106, when listing the evidence for the consuls of 309, “possibly P.Ryl. IV 616 a.ii.12 (ed. 312)”.

³ Roger S.Bagnall, Alan Cameron, Seth R.Schwartz, Klaas A.Worp, *Consuls of the Later Roman Empire* = *CLRE*: see p. 626, note to AD 312, where the editors remark “we prefer to regard this papyrus for the present not as evidence for any particular year”.

⁴ I am grateful to Dr Peter McNiven for making the papyrus available for me to inspect during a visit to Manchester in May 1996.

⁵ See *CLRE*, Eastern entries. The papyrological evidence for the relevant years, known up to 1978, is cited in Bagnall and Worp, *Chronological Systems*; evidence which has been published subsequently does not alter the picture.

⁶ As pointed out in *CNBD*; the other difficulties mentioned in *CNBD* are not serious, cf. *CLRE*, 626.

only.⁷ There are only two papyri which give the full titles of the imperial college at this period, and in both of them Constantine is mentioned last of the four members and has the titles *Caesar* and *filius Augustorum* (or equivalent).⁸ Exactly when he was recognised in the East as *Augustus* is not clear.⁹ In the papyri I know of no evidence earlier than 312, when he regularly appears in the consular dating not only as *Augustus* but as the senior emperor.¹⁰ The coinage does not give us much help,¹¹ but there is no reason whatsoever to think that Constantine was recognised as *Augustus* in Egypt as early as 309.

To what year then does the consulship recorded in P.Ryl. 616 refer? The editors of P.Ryl. 616, as we saw, supposed that the text was referring to the consulship of 312. The order in which the names of the consuls appear in P.Ryl. 616 and their titles do indeed correspond with the normal form for 312, but they should of course be followed by τὸ β.¹² The editors no doubt assumed that the iteration number had simply been omitted. However, they had misunderstood the alpha in line 13, and now that this has been correctly explained as an iteration number, it becomes very hard indeed to believe that the consulship can be interpreted as that of 312. It is only possible to accept this if we suppose that the scribe blundered and wrote alpha by mistake for beta. This is so unlikely that we must surely reject this explanation.¹³

In *CLRE*, 626, the possibility that the consulship might be that of 319 is mentioned. In that year the consuls were Constantine for the fifth time along with Licinius Caesar for the first time. At the same time it is there recognised that “319 presents difficulties as formidable as those which 309 offers”.¹⁴ In fact the suggestion that the consulship in P.Ryl. 616 might be that of 319 was only put forward because it was coupled with the suggestion that Σεβαστῶν was perhaps not the correct reading in line 13. If the reading Σεβαστῶν is accepted, there is no longer any serious possibility that the consulship could be that of 319.¹⁵

It seems, therefore, that we have to return to the idea that the consulship is that of 309 and try to explain away the difficulties indicated. I suggest that the most plausible solution is to suppose that the text was written after it became correct to describe the two emperors as Constantine and Licinius in that order and to give them both the title *Augustus*. The papyrological evidence makes it quite clear that this had happened by 312, when, as we have seen, the consulship was regularly spoken of as that of τῶν δεσποτῶν ἡμῶν Κωνσταντίνου καὶ Λικιννίου Σεβαστῶν τὸ β. There is no compelling reason why

⁷ See Bagnall and Worp, *Chronological Systems*, 106; add now P.Oxy. XLVI 3270, SB XVI 12289 and XVIII 13852.

⁸ See P.Sakaon 1 = P.Stras. I 42, which dates from February 310 but which refers to a proclamation previously issued by Galerius and Licinius as *Augusti* and by Maximinus and Constantine as Καίσαρες and υἱοὶ Σεβαστῶν (lines 4-6); we do not know when this proclamation was issued, but it was probably some time in the previous year, 309. The other example is P.Oxy. XLVI 3270.24-28 of September/October 309, which records Galerius and Licinius as *Augusti* and Maximinus and Constantine as Καίσαρες and υἱοὶ τῶν βασιλέων.

⁹ T.D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (1982), 6-7, says of Constantine in the period between the Conference of Carnuntum in November 308 and the death of Galerius in April/May 311 “In the East: Caesar; then *filius Augustorum*; then Augustus”, citing the evidence in his n. 22.

¹⁰ Again for the evidence up to 1978 see Bagnall and Worp, *Chronological Systems*, 106; add now CPR XVIII 1 and P.Oxy. LIX 3981.

¹¹ In the catalogue of Alexandrian coinage in RIC VI 676-679 the period from late 308 - mid 311 is treated as a single unit and it is stated that within this period Constantine is found with the titles *Caesar*, *filius Augustorum* and also *Augustus*. It is not made clear which titles he held in which years, but there are no grounds for thinking any Alexandrian coins of Constantine bore the legend *Augustus* as early as 308-9. I am grateful to Richard Brickstock for advice on this point.

¹² See the evidence cited above in n. 10.

¹³ Likewise we need not consider that the text really refers to the third or fourth joint consulships of Constantine and Licinius, in 313 and 315 respectively. For further objections to 312 see *CNBD*.

¹⁴ One difficulty is that the iteration number for Constantine would have been omitted, since there is certainly not room to insert τὸ ε after Κωνστα[ντίνου] in line 13.

¹⁵ It is perhaps worth remarking that the way the word ἰνδικτίων is used in P.Ryl. 616 suits a time before it became the practice to use ἰνδικτίων to mean an indiction-year. This seems to have come about in Egypt in late 313 or early 314: see *CNBD* with reference to *Chronological Systems*, 3-5.

P.Ryl. 616 should have been written in 309,¹⁶ and there are two reasons why it might be thought to have been written somewhat later, in or after 312: (1) it is then easier to explain why the first consulship of Constantine and Licinius should have been given a number, since by 312 it would have been known that they enjoyed a second joint consulship;¹⁷ and (2) the papyrus belongs to the 'archive' of Theophanes and the other texts from this group, in so far as they can be dated, belong between 317 and 323.¹⁸

My conclusion, therefore, is that the consular date in P.Ryl. 616 is to be taken as that of 309, and that it is given in a form which was correct for the titles of Constantine and Licinius and for the order in which they are mentioned at the time it was written, even though this was not the correct form for 309.¹⁹

For the present I prefer to defer consideration of the question whether this has implications for the organisation of the provinces into which Egypt was divided at about this period.²⁰ There are, however, a few minor points of reading in P.Ryl. 616, which arise from my inspection of the original:

a.ii.10: in *Chronique d'Égypte* 49 (1974) 165 John Rea has suggested, from a photograph, that instead of λίτρ(α)ι κε we should read λίτρ(α)ι κ, with medial points before and after the figure. This suggestion is certain and is important for the price of gold at this period. It may also be added that, if it is accepted that the taxation list dates from 309 and not from 312, this further strengthens Rea's argument for dating P.Oxy. XVII 2106 to the period 304-306.

Other points concern the spelling of the names of some of the districts. In a.ii.2 and b.7 the editors read Φθέμ[ουθ and Φθέμ[ο]υθ respectively. The usual form of the district is Φθεμφούθ.²¹ The lacuna in b.7 is sufficient to permit the restoration Φθεμ[φο]ύθ, so that there is no reason to doubt that the papyrus had the normal spelling here and in a.ii.2. b.2: [Κα]β[ο]σίτο[υ]: elsewhere the district is invariably spelt Καβασ(ε)ίτης,²² and I feel confident that it was so spelt here; I should read [Κα]β[ο]σίτο[υ]. b.3: Ναυκρά[τιδος]: the genitive elsewhere seems to be always Ναυκράτεω²³ and this is no doubt what we should read here. As a trace of the sigma remains, I read Ναυκρά[τεω]ς.

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¹⁶ The word ἐνεστῶτος, used in P.Ryl. 616 a.ii.13, is applied to the κανών not to the consulship (as pointed out already in *CNBD*).

¹⁷ It was, not surprisingly, unusual for a number to be used of a first consulship, cf. *CNBD*.

¹⁸ A point already made in *CLRE*, p. 626. It is not, however, a strong point since P.Ryl. 616 contains, apart from the taxation list, some jottings relating to expenditure on a journey made by Theophanes. This indicates that by the time the papyrus came into the archive the taxation list had already been discarded as being out of date.

¹⁹ One wonders whether the scribe blundered or whether he deliberately used the form which was correct at the time he was writing, even though it was anachronistic.

²⁰ Cf. *CLRE*, 626, with reference to my comment in *BASP* 21 (1984) 230 n. 30 that a date of 309 for P.Ryl. 616 would mean that it antedates the earliest date at which the provinces of Aegyptus Iovia and Aegyptus Herculia can be proved to have existed.

²¹ See the important discussion by G.Bastianini in his note to P.Rain.Cent. 55.3. To the evidence he cites add now P.L.Bat. XXV 49. The placing of the accent is uncertain.

²² See Calderini-Daris, *Dizionario* s.v. In the Theophanes papers it is spelt Καβασείτης in P.Ryl. IV 630/638.509.

²³ E.g. BGU VI 1211, P.Cair.Zen. II 59192.9, P.Oslo III 92.3.