

A GHOST-WORD: *νιλοκαλάμη*

In a number of papyrus documents the word *ν(ε)ιλοκαλάμη* is found. It is interpreted by M. Schnebel, *Die Landwirtschaft im hellenistischen Aegypten* 116 as « Nilschilf »; *LSJ*<sup>9</sup> translates it as « bulrush ». I have found the following references in non-literary texts (the word seems not to have been used in any literary text): *BGU* II 633.20, *P.Giss.Univ.Bibl.* VI 53.13-14, *P.Lond.* I 121.490-91 (= *Pap.Graec.Mag.* II, p. 22), *P.Stras.* 576.24 and *O.Bodl.* II 1983.5-6. The editor of the *P.Stras.* proposes in her note: « Lire *λιννοκαλάμην* (?) »; cf. M. Schnebel, *Die Landwirtschaft* 204 (cf. 116), but does not draw any further conclusions about the other attestations for *νιλοκαλάμη*. I venture to suggest that in the other texts too *λιννοκαλάμη* has to be substituted for *νιλοκαλάμη*.

In *P.Lond.* I 121.490-91 = *Pap.Graec.Mag.* II, p. 22 *νιλοκαλάμης σπέρμα* is used for the composition of a magical recipe. It is a well-known fact that linseed was used in Egypt for many purposes, *inter alia* for linseed oil, medical recipes, etc. For linseed used for medical purposes cf. V. Gazza, *Aegyptus* 36 (1956) 88; *R.E.* VI 2467-68, s.v. *Flachs*. Now in *P.Cair.Zen.* III 59494.14-15 one finds use of *σπέρμα λιννοκαλάμης* (cf. *P.Oxy.* XVIII 2201: *σπέρματος λιννοκαλάμου*; a supplement of an ending on *-[μης]* seems more likely), and the Zenon text induces me to change *νιλοκαλάμης* in the magical text into *λιννοκαλάμης*. I have not found any attestation of the magical potency of bulrush (*Nilschilf*), let alone its seed.

*O.Bodl.* II 1983 contains a receipt for rent paid for a plot of land stated to be (lines 5-6): *ἐν νιλοκαλάμῃ*. A similar text is *P.Michael.* 37, where the land is stated to be (lines 4-5): *ἐν λιννοκαλάμῃ*. On the basis of this I prefer to take the spelling in the *O.Bodl.* as a scribal error (already suggested by H. C. Youtie, cf. *ZPE* I [1967] 158).

*P.Giss.Univ.Bibl.* VI 53 contains an oath by the *pediophylakes* to the effect that they will not allow anybody to bring *νιλοκαλάμη* upon the threshing-floor, before the (wheat?) crops have been threshed. One can very well imagine that here in fact *λιννοκαλάμη* is meant, and that no flax has to be brought upon the threshing-floor lest otherwise the wheat could be polluted.

*BGU* II 633 is a lease application from the Fayum in which the prospective tenant offers to pay rent in wheat. After expiration of the lease he will return the land (lines 17-21): *μετὰ τὸν χρόνον παραδώσω σοι τὰς ἀρούρας ἀπὸ νιλοκαλάμης ὡς παρέλαβα*. This is interpreted by D. Hennig, *ZPE* 9 (1972) 124 as « frei von Nilschilf ». As the land is not explicitly stated to be situated at the borders of the Nile, one wonders why exactly *Nilschilf* should

be mentioned. Giving ἀπό the meaning of «after a harvest consisting of» (cf. J. D. Thomas in *JJP* 15 [1965] 131-32) I think that the prospective tenant offers to return the land after expiration of the lease after his harvesting a crop consisting of flax, i.e. λινοκαλάμη.

Linguistically, the substitution of λινοκαλάμη by ν(ε)λοκαλάμη is a case of «reziproke Distanzmetathese» (cf. E. Schwyzler, *Griechische Grammatik* I 268). For a comparable case with λίνον/Νῦλος see *BL* VI 73 ad *P.Lugd.Bat.* XVI 32.18. Illuminating is also the parallel case of φαιδόνης instead of φαινόλης as discussed by F. T. Gignac, *Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine Periods* I 154 (1).

[Addendum]: A new example of νειλοκαλάμη is to be found in *P.Laur.* III 75.21. Cf. the note by the editor. The origin and the date of this document will be discussed in a further «Chronological Note» by R. S. Bagnall and me in *BASP*.

University of Amsterdam

K. A. Worp

---

(1) I owe this reference to the kindness of R. S. Bagnall, whom I want to thank here for his correcting my English.

## APPENDICE