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SOKNOPAIYOU NESOS PROJECT.
REPORT ON SEASON 2012 OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL
MISSION OF THE CENTRO DI STUDI PAPIROLOGICI
OF SALENTO UNIVERSITY
AT DIME ES-SEBA (EL-FAYYUM, EGYPT)

Abstract

The article illustrates the Archaeological and Papyrological results of the 2012 Season carried out by the Mission of Università del Salento at Soknopaiou Nesos (Fayyum, Egypt).

Keywords

Soknopaiou Nesos, Excavations, Fayyum

The archaeological works 2012 (Paola Davoli)

The excavation took place in the great temple enclosure¹, in the centre of the *temenos*. The west side of the temple dedicated to the god Soknopaios (ST 20) (Fig. 1) has been completely exposed².

The excavated area is long 18.60 m from north to south and wide 6.50 m from east to west. A great quantity of building debris and architectonic elements derived from the demolition of the temple ST 20, as blocks of yellow limestone, grey limestone pavement slabs, parts of lintels and remarkable accumulation of chalky mortar originally used in the masonry of the building, was removed. The

¹ The Archaeological Mission of the Centro di Studi Papirologici of Salento University, Lecce, directed by Mario Capasso and Paola Davoli, carried out the Tenth Excavation Season at Dime es-Seba (El-Fayyum), the ancient Soknopaiou Nesos, from 26 October to 10 December 2012. Also taking part in the Mission were Ashraf A. Mostafa (geologist, University of Asyut), Stefania Alfarano (assistant archaeologist), Clementina Caputo (ceramicist), Mauro Cremaschi (geoarchaeologist, University of Milano), Sylvie Marchand (senior ceramicist, IFAO), Giuseppe Alvar Minaya (supervisor), Moataz Abu el-Nil (assistant directors), Mohammed Ahmed (conservator), Anna Chiara Muscogiuri (registrar), Simone Occhi (surveyor), Roberta Petrilli (egyptologist, Vatican Museums), Elvira Pisanello (senior registrar, papyrologist), Borna Scognamiglio (egyptologist, Paris-Sorbonne), Stefania Trizza (assistant archaeologist). The Supreme Council of Antiquities was represented by the inspectors Ahmed Mawad and Ahmed Hassan.

² The investigation of this side started in 2010, cf. M. CAPASSO-P. DAVOLI, *Soknopaiou Nesos Project. Rapporto dell'Ottava Campagna di Scavo 2010*, «RISE» 5 (2011), pp. 71-81.

accumulation of gypsum mortar was present on the whole area of the building and has been originated from the activity of dismantling of the temple's walls probably occurred since the Byzantine period. In particular, in the area excavated in 2012 it was mixed with limestone debris and its texture was very hard and compacted, very difficult to remove. For this reason it has protected the original underlying stratigraphy from recent clandestine excavations.

Among the building materials found in this deposit of mortar there were two groups of large blocks belonging to the original gutters of the temple, collapsed from the upper part of the lateral west wall. They consist of two large gutters in fossiliferous grey limestone, two imposing lions that formed the decoration of the gutters and two supports (Fig. 2-3). The lions, different from each other in size and style, are perfectly preserved and carved with great skill and care up to their shoulders. The backside of the two sculptures has been left rough as it was intended to be inserted in the perimeter wall of the temple. The lion found in the southern part of the area (ST12/802/3743) measures 156 cm in length, 65 cm in width and 51 cm in height. The lion found further north is bigger and measures 166 cm in length, 88 cm in width and 50 cm in height (ST12/803/3744). Their estimate weight is around 2 and 2.5 tons. The grey limestone in which they are made is the same kind used for the lintels and architraves of the temple. Its quarry has been identified in the desert southwest of Dime.

This kind of gutters, decorated with large lions, is similar to those in Edfu and Dendera temples, still well preserved. However, in the Upper Egyptian temples the lions were not carved in one block only, as it is in Dime cases, but their forelegs are part of the gutter blocks³.

This find proves that the temple dedicated to the local god Soknopaios was built with great accuracy and monumentality. So far, these are the first decorated gutters found in the Fayyum sites. A similar decoration was present in the temple of Dionysias / Qasr Qarun, but it is only partially preserved.

Several fragments of statues, including two heads representing a male and a female (Fig. 4) were also found in the debris layers. Both are carved with excellent manufacturing in local fossiliferous limestone, as well as a *thymiaterion* or incense burner. The female statue (ST12/803/3805) was in Egyptian style, and its face is completely missing. The remaining details are the tripartite wig, with echeloned stylized curls, a squared basis with a central mortise to support

³ P. ZIGNANI, *Le temple d'Hathor à Dendara. Relevés et études architecturale*, Le Caire 2010, p. 376 and Pls. 35-39. Other gutters but not finished and thus not decorated with lions but built with the same system of three blocks are at Deir el-Shelwit and Kalabsha temples: cf. Ch.M. ZIVIE-M. AZIM-P. DELEUZE-J.Cl. GOLVIN, *Le temple de Deir Chelouit*, IV, Le Caire 1992, pp. 45-46 and note 119, Pls. 41-42.

the crown, both ears and the makeup stretched on his right eye. The workmanship is very fine and it suggests the possibility that the statue represented a Ptolemaic queen⁴. A similar example is the head Metropolitan Museum of Arts 38.10 in white limestone, identified by Bothmer on the basis of comparisons with Arsinoe II⁵. However, the uraeus, or double uraei, no longer exists and its body is not represented on top of the wig. So far it is not possible to be more precise on the identification of this statue until more pieces will be found.

The male sculpture (ST12/800/3742) is not so easily identifiable as a king or a priest. The workmanship is very fine and the style is Egyptianizing in the face but Greek in the hair. The band around the head is plain and without any kinship reference. The inlaid eyes are lost as well as the nose, both ears and most of the back. A blackish thick line is still visible around the eyes (a possible remain of the colours that once completed the statue) and the eyebrows are natural⁶. The eyes were big and rounded and two light wrinkles are horizontally represented on the forehead. Part of the back pillar is preserved. Possible comparisons can be a head of the Graeco-Roman Museum of Alexandria (inv. 3511, possibly attributed to Ptolemy VI) and a head in the Louvre (Ma 970, attributed to Ptolemy VIII)⁷. The kind of coiffure on the forehead and the face shape seem to suggest a possible identification with Ptolemy VI⁸.

A floor (ST12/810) made with slabs of grey fossiliferous limestone is perfectly preserved on the whole investigated sector. Its extension to the north and west remains unknown due to the limits of the excavation (Fig. 5). This pavement is a renovation of the original floor, built during the restoration of the external bottom of the west wall of ST 20. In fact, it abuts a coating of grey limestone slabs applied with great quantities of white mortar to the lower part of the outer wall already heavily eroded. The new casing is completely different and less accurate than the one built along the east perimeter wall of the same building and recovered in 2009-10⁹.

⁴ B. VON BOTHMER, *Egyptian Sculpture of the Late Period 700 B.C. to A.D. 100*, New York 1960 (Catalogue of the exhibition at Brooklyn Museum), p. 135 no. 105. See also on the iconography of Ptolemaic queens: S.-A. ASHTON, *Ptolemaic Royal Sculpture from Egypt. The Interaction Between Greek and Egyptian Traditions*, Oxford 2001, pp. 37-43.

⁵ BOTHMER, *Egyptian Sculpture* cit., pp. 125-126 no. 98, Pl. 92.

⁶ For these definition see P.E. STANWICK, *Portraits of the Ptolemies. Greek Kings as Egyptian Pharaohs*, Austin 2002, p. XV.

⁷ STANWICK, *Portraits* cit., nos. B27 and C11.

⁸ STANWICK, *Portraits* cit., pp. 37, 56-57.

⁹ P. DAVOLI, *Lo scavo archeologico: 2003-2009*, in M. CAPASSO-P. DAVOLI (eds.), *Soknopaïou Nesos Project I (2003-2009)*, Pisa-Roma 2012, p. 198, Fig. 105.

Two trenches in the floor were opened (Trench 8 and Trench 9, Fig. 1) in order to ascertain the time of the construction of the temple and its restoration. The trenches are located at both ends of the sector. Trench 8 (2.20 x 3 m) was excavated to a depth of 1.90 m from the floor, but the end of the anthropic stratigraphy has not been reached yet. The excavation will continue in 2014. Below the floor ST12/810, another floor made with limestone slabs was found in Trench 8 (ST12/813) (Fig. 6). It is only 60 cm wide and thus it is possible that the original paved floor outside the temple was limited to a sidewalk.

Two walls, perpendicular to each other and to the temple, were below floor 813. They are built with rough stones bounded with mud mortar. They probably belonged to two different buildings demolished during the construction of the temple ST 20. The visible sides are probably the outer ones. The study of the findings will provide a dating of the various phases recognized. In addition to the usual fragments of common pottery and amphorae, two Greek *ostraka* of the Roman period and 10 Demotic *ostraka* were found.

Trench 9 (1.65 x 1.95 m) has reached a depth of 1.95 m. The stratigraphy found differs in part from that in the Trench 8 (Fig. 7). In fact, a thick layer of artificial fill (ST12/818) of the foundation trench of temple ST 20, consisting of mixed debris coming from construction and demolition of buildings, sand and organic deposits, was found. This kind of filling was not present in Trench 8. Its surface, flat and hard, has been certainly a walking surface (ST12/825) outside the temple for a period of time and was probably in phase with floor 813. At the bottom of the trench the top of a wall in rough stones, partially demolished, has been reached.

The stratigraphy deserves further and more thoroughly investigation in the future.

In the last days of the season a new sector was opened, labelled Trench 10, an area 7 x 7.50 m located in the southeast corner of the *temenos*, where an excavation made probably in the early XX century originates a small heap. This area is mentioned in some Ch.L. Freer's private notes as the origin of some biblical texts, known today as the Freer Manuscripts and preserved at the Smithsonian Institution in Washington DC¹⁰. The debate on the origin of these important manuscripts involved several scholars, like F.W. Kelsey who corresponded with Freer about this and other matters. Kelsey wanted to organ-

¹⁰ K.D. CLARKE, *Paleography and Philanthropy: Charles Lang Freer and his Acquisition of the "Freer Biblical Manuscripts"*, in L.W. HURTADO (ed.), *The Freer Biblical Manuscript: Fresh Studies of an American Treasure Trove*, Atlanta 2006, pp. 17-73.

ize an archaeological expedition of the University of Michigan at Dime after having visited it in 1920, but it never occurred until 1931¹¹.

The Christian presence inside the *temenos* is not proved so far, but the recent discoveries of a late occupation phase (4th-7th century) with restoration of floors inside ST 20 encouraged a new inquiry about the possibility that Freer Manuscripts could have been found here. The excavation brought to light the perimeter walls of a room of a mud-brick building (ST 217), similar to the other visible along the perimeter of the *temenos*. The objects and pottery found on top of this heap are of the Hellenistic period and thus testify to a quite deep pit dug nearby. The excavation will continue in 2014.

From November 4 to 8 a pottery survey was carried out by Sylvie Marchand, C. Caputo and S. Occhi in a wide area to the west of Dime¹². Potsherds have been systematically collected in particular in the area of the so-called “Watch Towers”, on the shores of a paleo-lake and around the embankments structure whose function and dating are not yet known. Eleven new sectors (Sectors 36-56) are to be added to the 35 areas examined in 2010. The collected pottery has been dated between the Neolithic Age and the beginning of the Ptolemaic period. It confirmed the presence of a settlement of the New Kingdom located west of Dime, of which only a few scattered graves, ceramics and few items are preserved. The dwellings have disappeared because of the harsh erosion that has resulted in a significant decrease in the walking surface elevation on which the artefacts now lie. Hellenistic pottery was collected inside an enclosure located within the so-called embankments west of Dime. A house and a silo have been identified inside the enclosure and the pottery collected is all consistent and datable to the 3rd century BC.

M. Cremaschi, Ashraf Mostafa and S. Occhi continued the geomorphological survey already started in 2007. The survey was carried on from 9 to 16 November in order to better define the geomorphological nature of the *plateaux* on which Dime stands and better understand the changes of the landscape during the various prehistoric and historic periods. The surveyed area is included between the edge of the Jebel Qatrani to the north, the edges of the “Moeris

¹¹ CLARKE, *Paleography and Philanthropy* cit., p. 64 and *passim*; J.G. PEDLEY, *The Life and Work of Francis Willey Kelsey. Archaeology, Antiquity, and the Arts*, Ann Arbor 2012, pp. 329, 379-380.

¹² The results of the 2010 survey are now published in: S. MARCHAND, *Prospection céramique de 2010 des environs du site de Dimeh (Fayoum). Habitats et nécropoles de l’Ancien Empire à la Basse Epoque*, «BCE» 23 (2012), pp. 63-75.

Bay” to the east and up to a deep *wady* to the west. To the south the sequence of coastal shores of the current margin of Birket Qarun was investigated.

The 2012 survey has confirmed the geomorphological context, which was already observed during 2007, and 2008 seasons. Lacustrine carbonates littoral and aeolian sand have been recorded and surveyed in detail (yardangs). Their sedimentological study will allow a reconstruction of the oscillations of the Fayyum lake from the beginning of the Holocene until the Roman period and the morphological evolution of the territory. In particular, the analysis of yardangs allowed identifying the alternation of depositional and erosive phenomena caused by climate changes, and closely related to human activity. For these reasons the ancient landscape underwent significant changes during the time. Stratigraphic columns at various points considered critical have been described in detail.

Papyrological Report (Mario Capasso)

A total of 15 *ostraka* (11 Demotic, 2 Greek, 2 figured), 2 Greek *tituli picti*, 4 scraps of papyri (3 Greeks, one hieroglyphic) and two inscriptions (one Greek, one hieratic) have been found¹³. The three Greek papyri, like most of the others found in previous seasons, are fragmentary and of a small size; therefore, the portions of texts preserved are scanty. In papyrus ST12/807/3870 the name Arsinoe is clear (Fig. 8), as well as Soknopaios in ST12/807/3871. It also shows the names ΓΑΙΟC (l. 2), maybe ΠΕΤΟCΙΠΙC (l. 4) and the word κώμη (l. 7) perhaps connected to the god’s name on the previous line. The *ostrakon* ST12/812/3866 comes from Saggio 8; it preserves the name ΕΡΓΕΥC, after which, at the following line, is a couple of letters, the second of which is an A. The *ostrakon* seems a memorandum-label. ἘργεῦC is the Greek transcription of the Egyptian name Ḥr-ij.w¹⁴; it is a quite common name¹⁵, also at Soknopaiou Nesos: a statue from this site portraying Imhotep-Asklepios is devoted to a man named ἘργεῦC; it dates back to the Imperial age and it was sculpted on the initiative of a Pnephros and his family (IFay I, nr. 80

¹³ The volume on Greek and Demotic inscriptions is in preparation. It will be the second volume of the Soknopaiou Nesos Project series.

¹⁴ Cf. F.T. GIGNAC, *A Grammar of the Greek Papyri of the Roman and Byzantine periods*, I. Phonology, Milano 1975, p. 73

¹⁵ Cf. D. FORABOSCHI, *Onomasticon Alterum Papyrologicum*, p. 107.

¹⁶ Cf. J. BINGEN, *Statuaire égyptienne et épigraphie grecque: le cas de I.Fay. I 78*, in W. CLARYSSE-A. SCHOORS-H. WILLEMS (eds.), *Egyptian Religion. The Last Thousand Years, Part I: Studies Dedicated to the Memory of Jan Quaegebeur*, Leuven 1998, pp. 314 f.

Bernand)¹⁶; a Ἐργεῦς the Young is mentioned in a statue's dedication, dating back to the period 44 a.C.-48 d.C. (IFay I, nr. 78 Bernand): a Satabous, together with his wife and his sons, devotes this statue probably to the god Soknopaïos in honour of Pisis the Old, son of Hergeus the Young (Bernand I, nr. 78)¹⁷; however the most well-known man with this name at Soknopaïou Nesos is Ἐργεῦς (also written as Ἐριεῦς or Ἐριγεῦς) the Young, son of Paophis and father of Satabous, protagonist of the long dispute with Nestnephis, dating back to the period between the last years of 1st century B.C. and the beginning of 1st cent. A.D.¹⁸.

The rough chessboard painted in black ink on the *ostrakon* ST12/809/3876 is similar to others found in Bakchias and Soknopaïou Nesos¹⁹.

ΠΑΙ was written with chalk on a body-sherd of a Late Roman Amphora 7 (ST12/807/3867).

Two fragmentary lines of a Greek inscription are incised on a basalt vessel (ST12/800/3735) of which only part of the rim is preserved. The inscription dates from the Roman Period and seems to mention the village]Σ Γυνα[ικῶν Νῆσος] or a wife of an unidentified man: *ex. gr.*: [ὑπερ - -]Σ γυνα[ικός.

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¹⁷ Cf. BINGEN, *Statuaire* cit., pp. 312 f.

¹⁸ Cf. G. MESSERI, *Papiri greci di Socnopaïou Nesos e dell'Arsinoites*, Corpus Papyrorum Raineri, Bd. XV: *Griechische Texte XI*, Wien 1990, pp. 11-37.

¹⁹ From Bakchias: B98/239/308, B98/241/369, cf. M. CAPASSO, *Il papiro e gli ostraka della Campagna del 1998*, in S. PERNIGOTTI-M. CAPASSO-P. DAVOLI (eds.), *Bakchias VI. Rapporto Preliminare della Campagna di Scavo del 1998*, Pisa-Roma 1999, pp. 103 f.; B99/301/198, B99/308/377, cf. M. CAPASSO, *I papiri e gli ostraka della Campagna del 1999*, in S. PERNIGOTTI-M. CAPASSO-P. DAVOLI (eds.), *Bakchias VII. Rapporto Preliminare della Campagna di Scavo del 1999*, Imola 2000, pp. 76 f. From Soknopaïou Nesos: ST05/212/910, cf. M. CAPASSO, *I papiri e gli ostraka greci, figurati e copti (2001-2009)*, in CAPASSO-DAVOLI (eds.), *Soknopaïou Nesos* cit., p. 243.

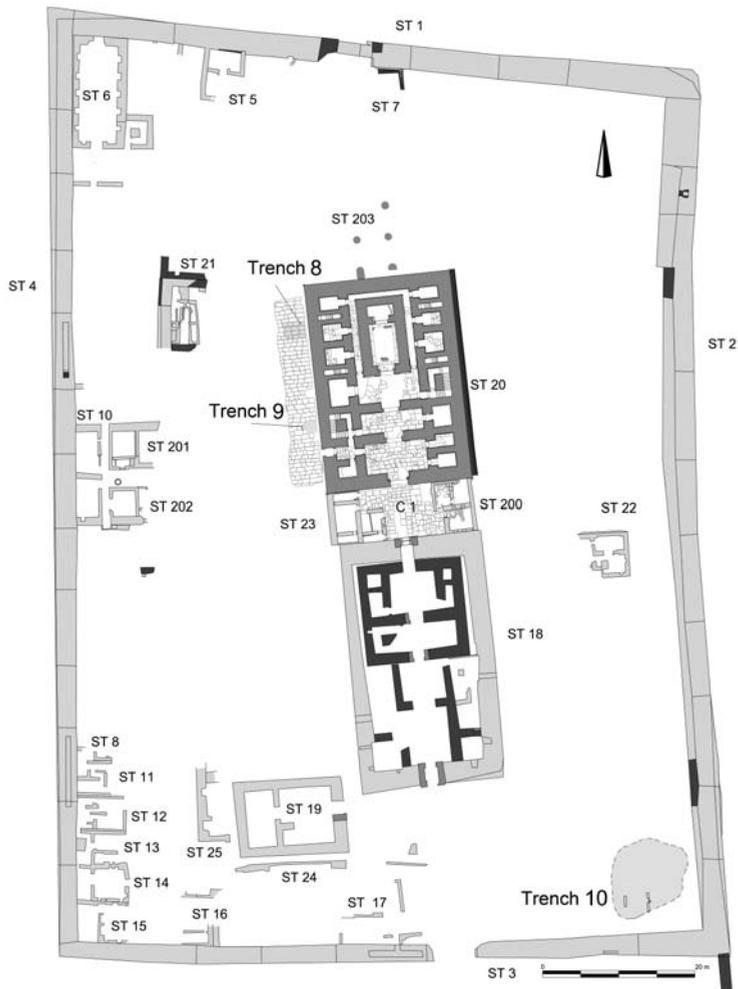


Fig. 1: The temple of Soknopaios and the excavated areas (2012).



Fig. 2: The gutters decorated with sculptures of lions.



Fig. 3: The gutters decorated with sculptures of lions, detail.



Fig. 4: The heads of two statues possibly representing Hellenistic rulers.



Fig. 5: The floor ST12/810 of the Roman period along the west side of the temple of Soknopaïos.

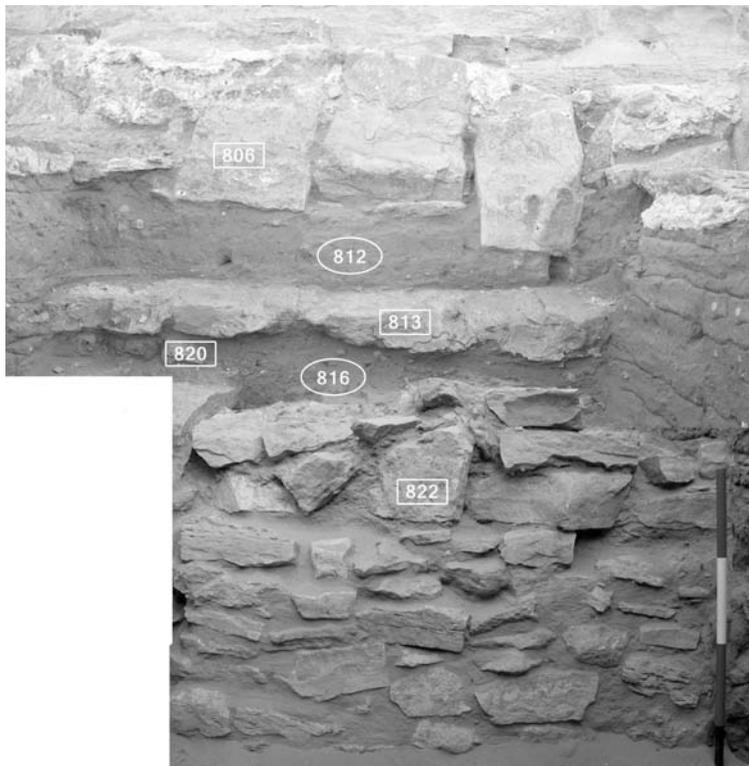


Fig. 6: Trench 8, section east. The sidewalk ST12/813.

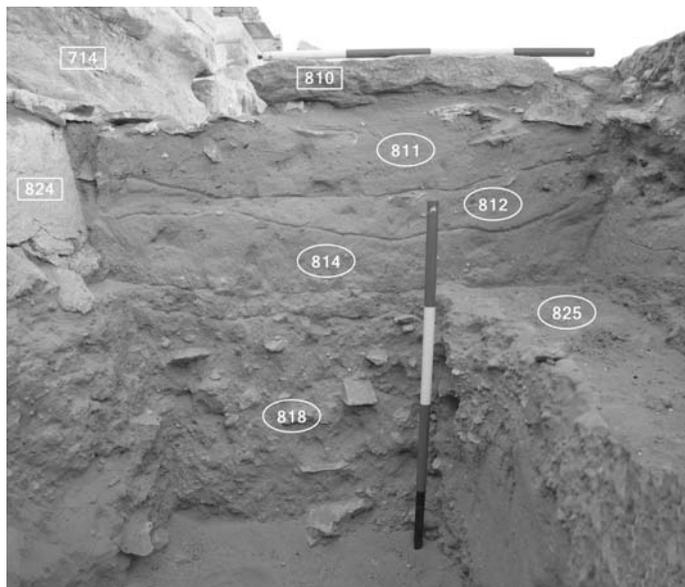


Fig. 7: Trench 9, section south.

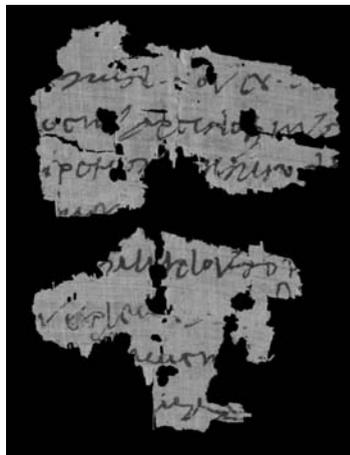
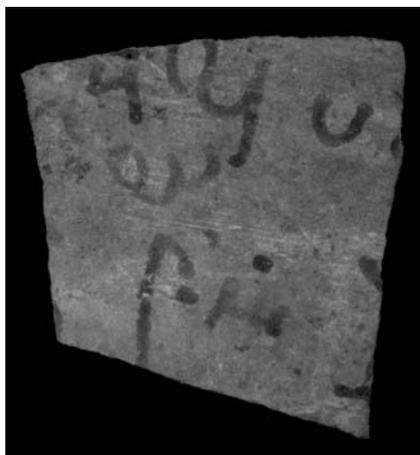


Fig. 8: A Demotic ostrakon (ST12/826/3846) and a Greek papyrus (ST12/807/3870).