



## **Foundation Deposit Plaques from the Boubasteion**

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Between the end of the year 2009 and the beginning of 2010 Dr. Abd El Maksoud, SCA, was endowed with the responsibility of digging, with an Egyptian team, at the site of the Police Security Forces. It was in fact a rescue excavation that lasted only three months. However, its results were extraordinary.<sup>1</sup> Among the finds discovered at this site are inscriptional and archaeological data as for example a group of six foundations deposit plaques. They were recovered at the north-eastern corner of an outer wall (Fig. 1), buried in a rectangular shaped cavity delimited by roughly worked limestone blocks.

The text which is inscribed on them indicates without doubt the existence of a sanctuary dedicated to the Goddess Boubastis in this site. This result alone is of great importance because for the first time we know that in Ptolemaic Alexandria from the very beginning; Greek immigrants worshipped the Egyptian cat Goddess "Bastet", but under her Greek name Boubastis.<sup>2</sup>

In ancient Egypt, foundation deposits are a common feature from the 3<sup>rd</sup> Dynasty till Christian times.<sup>3</sup> Although the Greeks in their homeland did not know and performed this ritual, i.e. putting foundation deposits before constructing their temples, it was nonetheless popular for the temples of Ptolemaic Alexandria and its chôra in the form of plaques.<sup>4</sup>

The 10 famous plaques found at the Serapeion of Alexandria by A. Rowe in 1943/44 are inscribed with Hieroglyphic as well as Greek texts; they are made of different materials: gold, silver, glass, faience and mud.<sup>5</sup> Later on at

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1 Abd El-Maksoud, M., Abd El-Fattah, A., Seif el-Din, M., 2012: 427-445; Bricault, L., 2013: 62-65; Abd El-Maksoud, M., Abd El-Fattah, A., Seif el-Din, M., Forthcoming.

2 Otto, E., 1975: *LdÄ* I, s.v. Bastet, col. 628- 630; Jentel, M.- O., 1986: *LIMC* III, s.v. Bastet, 81-83; Dunand, Fr., 1986: *LIMC* III, s.v. Boubastis, 144-145; Quaegebeur, J., 1991: 117-127; Bricault, L., 1997: 117- 122, esp. 120 note 16; Leitz, Chr., 2002: s.v. Bastet, 739-743; Malaise, M., 2005: 51- 59.

3 Weinstein, J. M., 1973. Sabottka, M., 2008: 107, note 210; Sakar, F. M., 2005: 343- 355, Fig. 26.

4 Sabottka, M., 2008: 108.

5 Rowe, A., 1946: 4-10; Drioton, E., 1946: 97-112; Grimm, G., 1998: 83, Figs. 84a-84g; Bernand, E., 2001: 42-43, no.13, pl. 6, no.13; Bricault, L., 2006: 32; Sabottka, M., 2008: 95-96; Alexandria, GRM: Inv. nos. 8357, 8366.

the time of Ptolemy IV "Philopator" another set of plaques also in various materials was discovered at the shrine of Harpocrates.<sup>6</sup>

In a temple dedicated to the Gods Osiris/Apis, Sarapis and Isis on the Canopic street, exactly under the so-called Bursa Toussoun, now Qaser el Abdaa, another set of plaques, with Greek and Hieroglyphic texts, from the time of Ptolemy IV and Arsinoe III (225/24-204 BC.) was unearthed. They were made from different materials: one in silver, one in copper, two in faience (light/blue) and one in gold (11,5 cm; 5,3 cm.).<sup>7</sup>

Turning now to the Alexandrian surroundings and starting from the east, we can first mention a golden plaque found in Abu Kir/Canopus in 1818 dedicated by Ptolemy III and Berenice II, now in the British Museum.<sup>8</sup> Another one was discovered by the French underwater excavation at Herakleion dedicated to the God Osiris from the same time like the previous one, Ptolemy III and his wife.<sup>9</sup> West of Alexandria, at Taposiris Magna, Zahi Hawass discovered a set of foundations deposit plaques also belonging to Ptolemy IV.<sup>10</sup>

The six plaques from the Boubasteion are rectangular shaped and their measurement varies from 13,5 cm to 7,2 cm; they are 6 to 3 mm high and 5,9 cm wide. Two of them are made of red glass altered in green, three of blue-green glass<sup>11</sup> and the sixth one is of light blue faience. Their state of preservation is not very good: they are fragmentary and very poorly preserved. The texts are written in black ink. The faience plaque, unfortunately, did not show any traces of text on its both sides, except for some traces of black ink on its surface. The other glass plaques have Hieroglyphic as well as Greek texts. Two have a text written in

6 Bricault, L., 1999: 334-343, esp. 333, note 11; Bernand, E., 2001: 53-54, no. 18; Bricault, L., 2006: 32; Sabottka, M., 2008: 182, note 514.

7 Adriani, A., 1966: 253; Thompson, D. J., 1993: 143-156; Bricault, L., 2006: 32; Sabottka, M., 2008: 182, note. 514.

8 Conney, J. D., 1976: 159, no. 1839; Bailey, D., 1984: 389-393, pl. I; Bisman-M., Freestone, I. C., 1988: 11-15, Fig. 5; Bricault, L., 2006: 32 note 148; Arveiller-Dulong, V., Nenna, M.-D., 2011: 343, Figs. 563-564.

9 Fabre, D., 2007: 110-127, Heracleion (SCA 876).

10 Hawass, Z.; Martinez, K., 2006: 235-251, esp. 241 Fig. 14; Hawass, Z., Goddio, F., 2007/8: 207.

11 For other plaques made of opaque glass from Ptolemaic Egypt, for example: plaque dedicated to the Goddess "Aphrodite Urania" by Ptolemy IV. The writing of the Greek text of this plaque has a great similarity with our plaques, i. e. in the way how the Greek letters were written (A, B; c lunar; small o) as well as the II see: Hayes, W. C., 1948: 114-115; Fraser, P. M., 1956: 97-98. For other opaque glass plaques see supra note 8.

Hieroglyphic, two in Greek and one has a Hieroglyphic text on one side and a Greek one on its other side recto/verso. All the inscriptions are badly worn, but despite their bad condition, the text in both languages is readable. All specimens are bearing a similar text and the final text mentioned here is reached through the comparison of all texts on the plaques with each other, where some words can be read on one plaque and not on the other one.

The Hieroglyphic text on the plaques consists of three lines separated from each other by lines drawn in black. The three pieces are bearing the same inscription with a slight variation. The text begins from the right to the left and can be reconstructed (see catalogue) and translated as the following:



(1) *nb(t) t3wy s3t R<sup>c</sup> (Brnyqy) rdit ... .. hwt-ntr... g3yt ... .. ?wy*

(2) *hn<sup>c</sup> h<sup>c</sup>wt tn hr rn n nswt-bity (Ptlwmys 'nh dt mry Pth) ... .. hn<sup>c</sup>*

(3) *rn.s hn<sup>c</sup> rn n msw.sn*

Lady of the two lands, Daughter of Re (Berenice) offered .....[this] Temenos....[and this] Chapel/ Naos together with this Altar on behalf of the name of the king of Upper and Lower Egypt (Ptolemy, living forever, [beloved of Ptah] and on behalf of her name together with the name of their children.

The Greek text has five lines and is inscribed from left to right. It reads as follows:

- βασίλισσα Βερενίκη ὑπὲρ βασιλέως
- Πτολεμαίου τοῦ αὐτῆς ἀδελφοῦ
- καὶ ἀνδρὸς καὶ τῶντου τῶν τέκνων
- τὸν ναὸν καὶ τὸ τέμενος καὶ τὸν βωμὸν
- Βουβάστει
- Queen Berenice on behalf of the king

- Ptolemy her own brother
- and husband and of their children
- (dedicated) the Naos and the Temenos and the Altar to Boubastis

The following information are recorded:

**Identity of the dedicants:** Two cartouches: one with the name of the queen "Berenice" and the other shows the title of the king, her own brother and husband "Ptolemy". The royal couple is already married but does not yet carry the divine titulature. In addition both texts mention that the royal couple has already more than one child.

**Architectural elements:** The Naos, the Temenos and the Altar. These words prove the existence of a temple (sacred enclosure), Naos<sup>12</sup> containing the cult image of the deity<sup>13</sup> and an Altar in Alexandria<sup>14</sup>. These elements prove that some ritual ceremonies occurred during the festival periods in the temple and its enclosure<sup>15</sup>.

**Divinity:** The Goddess, to whom these structures are offered, is the Goddess Bastt/Boubastis the counterpart of the Greek Goddess Artemis as already mentioned by Herodotus.<sup>16</sup> The name of the Goddess can only be read in the Greek text, as the Hieroglyphic one is deteriorated.

The name of the Goddess is also confirmed by the ex-votoes of the three other caches found in situ.<sup>17</sup> Some of them were inscribed in Greek language, giving the name of the dedicant, the purpose of the dedication (*ex-voto*) without however entering into details: they are meant to fulfill a vow (Figs. 2- 3). Last, they mention the name of the Goddess to whom these ex-votoes were offered namely "Boubastis".

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12 We were able to identify only the determinative of the hieroglyphic word and it is surely followed by a word which could be the name of the material from which the naos was made since it is ending with two letters ".....wyl".

13 For the altars with Greek inscriptions see the one in Münster: Schreiber, T., 2011: 187-201, pl. 52- 55.

14 For the altar found in the Serapeion in 1901, dated to 274/273 BC. see: Grimm, G., 1983: 70- 73; Idem 1998, 82, Fig. 83a; Bricault, L., 2006: 33.

15 McClain, J. Brett, 2007: 85- 96; Goyon, J.-Cl., Golvin, J.-C., Simon-Boidot, C., Martinet, G., 2004: 222-226.

16 Herodotus II, 59, 137, 156.

17 *Supra* note 1.

The name Boubastis is the Greek version of the Egyptian cat-goddess Bastet. It appeared frequently in the inscriptions from Graeco-Roman Egypt<sup>18</sup>, but also in the Graeco-Roman world (for example: in Delos and Rhodes)<sup>19</sup>, in Italy<sup>20</sup> and also in Nîmes in France<sup>21</sup>.

**Date:** The mention of the name of queen Berenice offers two possibilities: Berenice I wife of Ptolemy I “Soter” or Berenice II, wife of Ptolemy III. Unfortunately, the cult epithet of the couple is not recorded. Both Ptolemies were very active in religious matters especially towards animal cults<sup>22</sup> and constructed several temples all over the country.<sup>23</sup> Ptolemy I activities concerning temple’s construction are recorded in the Delta as well as in Middle Egypt.<sup>24</sup> It is worth noting that Ptolemy I and his wife did not receive the divine title during their lifetime.

Ptolemy III “Euergetes” continued on a large scale the same policy of his grandfather and father in temple building program<sup>25</sup> and both royal couples had more than one child.

Ptolemy I declared himself king of Egypt in 306/5 BC., got married to Berenice I, the third wife, and had from this bound three children: Arsinoe II (born in 316 BC.), Ptolemy II (born in 306 BC.) and Philotera.<sup>26</sup>

Ptolemy III came to power upon the death of his father in 246 BC. And married Berenice II queen of Cyrene in 246 BC. They possibly had six children: Arsinoe III born ca 246/245 BC.; Ptolemy IV (244 BC.); possibly Lysimachus ca 243BC.; Alexander born 242 BC.; Magas 241 BC. and Berenice ca 239 BC.<sup>27</sup> They obtained the cultic epithet “Theoi Euergetai” in 243 BC.<sup>28</sup>

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18 Fraser, P. M., 1972: I, 193, note 12, 196; Bernand, E., 1975: 63-65, no. 23; 117-119, no. 197; Wagner, G., 1983: 247-252.

19 Bricault, L., 1997: 117- 122; Malaise, M., 2005: 56 note 164-168.

20 Tran Tam Tinh, V., 1964: 136, n. 30, pl. V, 2; Malaise, M., 1972: 189-190; Idem, 2005: 54- 58.

21 Leclant, J., 1992: 251-257; Ghini, G., 1997: 335-337.

22 Heinen, H., 1994: 157-168; Hölbl, G., 2001: 89. For the sacred animal cult see: Pfeiffer, St., 2008: 373-393.

23 Hölbl, G., 2001: 85-90.

24 Derchain, Ph., 1961: Cauville, S., 1989: 45; Gestermann, L., 1992: 11-34; Hölbl, G., 2001: 86.

25 Hölbl, G., 2001: 87; Bingen, J., 1998: 88-97; Bingen, J., 2007: 31.

26 Hölbl, G., 2001: 24.

27 Bennett, C., 2002: 141-145, esp. 145.

28 Hölbl, G., 2001: 49; Hauben, H., 2011: 357-388; Bennett, C., 2002: 143, note. 13.

But starting the text with the name of the queen means that this queen had a prominent position in political and religious domains and was active in sharing and participating in the cultic and ritual acts. This was the case of Berenice II: she was the daughter of Magas of Cyrene and Apama from Syria and became queen of Cyrene before getting married to Ptolemy III.<sup>29</sup> At the time of her husband's absence from Alexandria during the Third Syrian War, Berenice ruled Egypt and was in the supreme position of power over the country.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, it is logic to think that the queen dedicated these above mentioned structures to the female cat-Goddess, whose main role was to protect women, girls who reach the marriage age, children, and babies of both gender and the new coming offspring. The queen cared for the Greek families and their future in their new home. She obviously played a vital role in the political as well as in the religious life of Ptolemaic Alexandria.<sup>31</sup>

A close examination of the formula of the Greek text shows that it is not a frequent one. The only similar text was found in the Sarapeion<sup>32</sup>, where queen Berenice is acting on behalf of king Ptolemy, her brother and husband (Fig. 4). The opening formula begins with the name of queen Berenice in nominative on both texts. It is followed by the mention of her bound with Ptolemy being at the same time her brother and husband. Both texts define exactly the relationship between the Ptolemaic ruler and the queen. As it was mentioned before, the royal couple does not yet have the divine titulature "Theoi Euergetai"; however, it was already married and had children. The date of the Serapeion inscription was much debated.<sup>33</sup> In fact one can assume that these plaques can be dated after the year of 245 BC. Therefore we think that the Boubasteion was for some reason modified or extended in the time of Ptolemy III and Berenice II. This date was confirmed by the second foundations group found together with the plaques, and the pottery vessels which date from the second half of the 3rd to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC.

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29 Scherberich, K., *Zur Griechenlandpolitik Ptolemaios III*, 2009: 25-43. For the role played by queen Berenice see: Caltabiano, M. Caccamo, 1998: 97-42.

30 Cheshire, W. A., 2009: 116, note 785.

31 Bingen, J., 2007: 31- 43.

32 Inscription on marble slab, rectangular shape: H. 16,5 cm, W. 16 cm, Th. 3,5 cm, four lines, the left part is missing see: Breccia, Ev., 1911: 62-64, no. 13 (32); Bernand, E., 2001: 50-51, no. 16.

33 According to Bernard, E., 1991: 145-146, it should be assigned to the time of Ptolemy XI Alexander and Cleopatra Berenice III, daughter of Ptolemy IX Soter II at first. However, he changed his mind after J. Bingen confirmed its date to the reign of Ptolemy III and Berenice II due to the writing: see Bernand, E., 2001: 50-51.

The foundations deposit plaques were considered as a ritual practice before the construction of a sacred place in hope of blessing it. The contribution of the royal family personally or symbolically through the members of the temple institution was an important participating act which sheds lights to our understanding of the form and function of the worship system in Ptolemaic Egypt. Such ritual process was not known in Greece. In spite of this fact, the Ptolemies maintained the religious Egyptian tradition and adopted easily the Egyptian ritual customs following the conception of Alexander the Great.

### **Catalogue: Foundation Plaques from the Boubasteion**

1. Inv. no. E211, 1 (Fig. 5). Photos 79; 3965; 3968

Measurement: H. 5,7 cm, W. 12,3 cm, Th. 3 mm.

Complete, broken in three pieces, restored.

Red glass altered in blue green.

Faded Greek inscription in five lines:

- βασίλισσα (Βε)ρενί(κη) (ύ)πέρ βασιλέως
- Πτολεμαίου (του) αὐ(τῆς) ἀδελφοῦ
- καὶ ἀνδρὸς καὶ τῶν) τούτων τέκνων
- (τὸν ναὸν καὶ τὸ τέμενος) καὶ τὸν (β)ωμὸν  
Βουβάστει

2. Inv. no. 211, 2 (Fig. 6). Photos 80; 3947; 3950

Measurement: H. 5,6 cm, W. 12,3 cm, Th. 3 mm.

Broken in 2 pieces and restored, one piece missing.

Red glass altered in blue-green.

Faded Greek inscription in five lines:

- (βασίλ)ισσα Β(ερεν)ίκη (ύ)πέρ βασι(λέως)
- Πτολ(εμαίου του) αὐ(τῆς) ἀδ(ελ)φοῦ
- (καὶ ἀνδρὸς καὶ τῶν)τούτων τέκνων
- τὸν (ναὸν καὶ τὸ τέ)μεν(ος καὶ τὸν) βωμὸν  
Βο(υ)βάστει

3. Inv. no. 211, 3, Bilingual Greek and Hieroglyphic inscriptions (Figs. 7a-7b)

Measurement: H. 5,5 cm, W. 12,3 cm, Th. 3 mm.

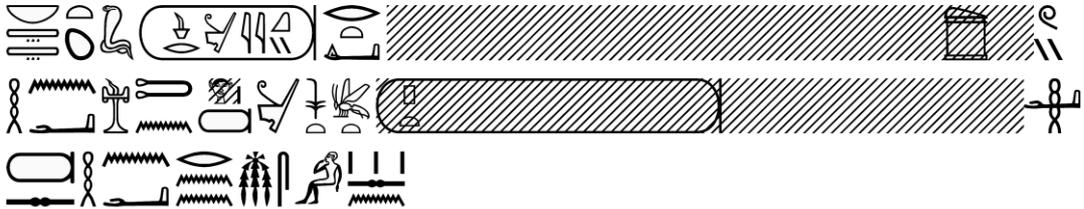
Broken in 8 pieces and restored.

Blue-Green glass

On the recto a Greek inscription, consisting of five lines, Fig. 7a:

- βασί(ι)σσα (Βε)ρενί(κη) (ύ)πὲρ βα(σ)ιλέως
- (Π)τολ(εμαίου τοῦ (αὐ)τῆς ἀ(δε)λφ(οῦ)
- καὶ ἀ(ν)δ(ρὸς) καὶ (τῶν τ)ούτων τέκνων
- (τὸν ναὸν καὶ τὸ τέμενος καὶ τὸν) βωμὸν
- Βουβ(ά)στει

On the verso is written a Hieroglyphic text in three lines (Fig. 7b):



(1) *nb(t) t3wy s3t R' (Brnyqy) rdit ... [g3yt] ... ?wy*

(2) *hn' h'wt tn [hr] rn n nswt-bity [(Pt... )] ... hn'*

(3) *rn.s hn' rn n msw.sn*

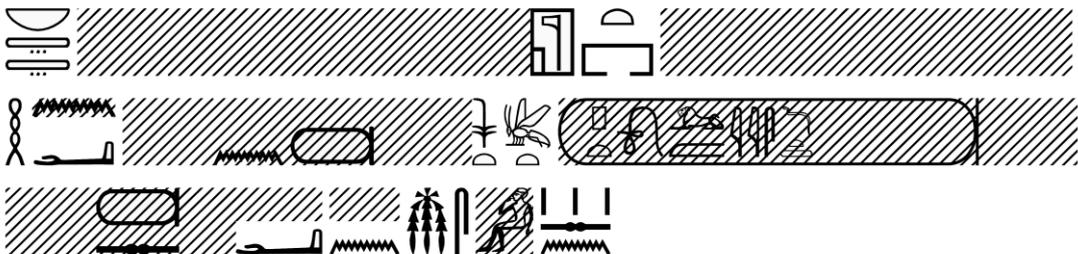
4. Inv. no. E 211, 4 (Fig. 8). Hieroglyphic inscription:

Measurement: H. 6 cm, W. 11 cm, Th. 5 mm.

Blue glass.

Broken in 8 pieces and restored, some parts of the top missing.

Faded Hieroglyphic inscription in three lines:



(1) *nb(t) t3wy ... hwt-ntr ...*

(2) *h[n]' ... n rn ... nsw-bity [(Ptlwmys dt ... )] ...*

(3) *... rn.s [hn]' ...n msw.sn*

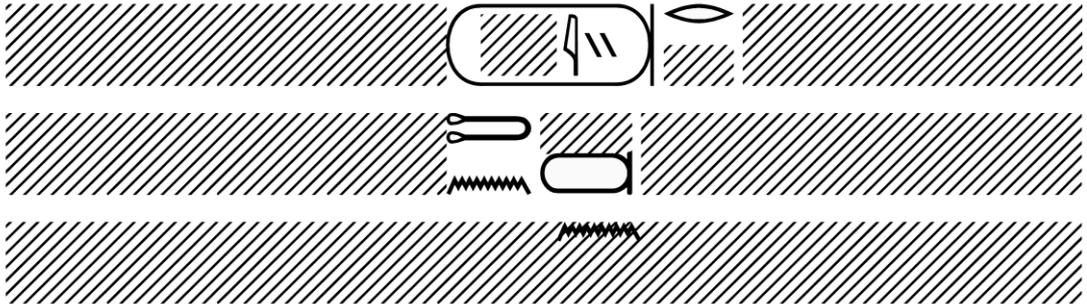
5. Inv. no. 211, 5 (Fig. 9). Hieroglyphic inscription:

Measurement: H. 6 cm, W. 7 cm, Th. 5 mm.

Broken in 4 pieces and restored.

Light blue glass.

Faded Hieroglyphic inscription in three lines:



(1) ... .. C ...y[q]y) r[dit]... ..

(2) ... .. tn [hr] rn ... ..

(3) ... .. [h]n['] ...

6. Inv. no. E211, 6 (Fig. 10) no inscription preserved.

Measurements: H. 5,7 cm, W. 13,5 cm, Th. 6 mm.

Broken in 7 pieces, restored, surface partly removed, peeled and corroded.

Light-blue/green faience, white core, faint traces of black ink and of the lines which separated the inscriptions, which once existed.<sup>34</sup>

Illegible.

### Addendum

The short paper on the Boubasteion written by Jean-Yves Carrez Marataz published directly after the delivering of our article <sup>35</sup>, is worth to be commented on here since the author had different reading of the texts of the foundation plaques of the Boubasteion than us. The author reads part of the name of the goddess Artemis in one of the Greek texts on the foundation

34 Since there are some traces of these lines it was most probably inscribed with a Hieroglyphic inscription, as the three other plaques found in the Boubasteion.

35 Marataz, J.-Y., Carrez, 2014: Vol. I, 268- 271.

plaques which, in our reading, is not the case. In fact, on the plaques cat. nos. 1-2 (Figs. 5-6), after the word *temenos* we read, without any doubt, the word *alter* "τὸν βωμὸν". Both words are readable and this is confirmed in the hieroglyphic texts which include both words *temenos* and *altar*.

The name of the goddess Boubastis is written alone in the last line (Figs. 5-7a) where it is complete "Boubastei" on the plaque cat. no. 1 (Fig. 5) and the letters "Bo" on the plaquette cat. no. 2 (Fig. 6) and "Bouba" on the one in cat. no. 3 (Fig. 7a).

Again the only name of a goddess mentioned on the statues or on the Greek texts of the plaques is that of the goddess Boubastis and there is no mentioning of the goddess Artemis. Therefore we insist to keep the name of the temple as the Boubasteion of Alexandria and not the Artimiseion in spite of the Greek iconographical representations of both of the *ex-voto* figurines of the cats and of the children and in spite of the lacking of statues of the Pharaonic goddess "Bastet".

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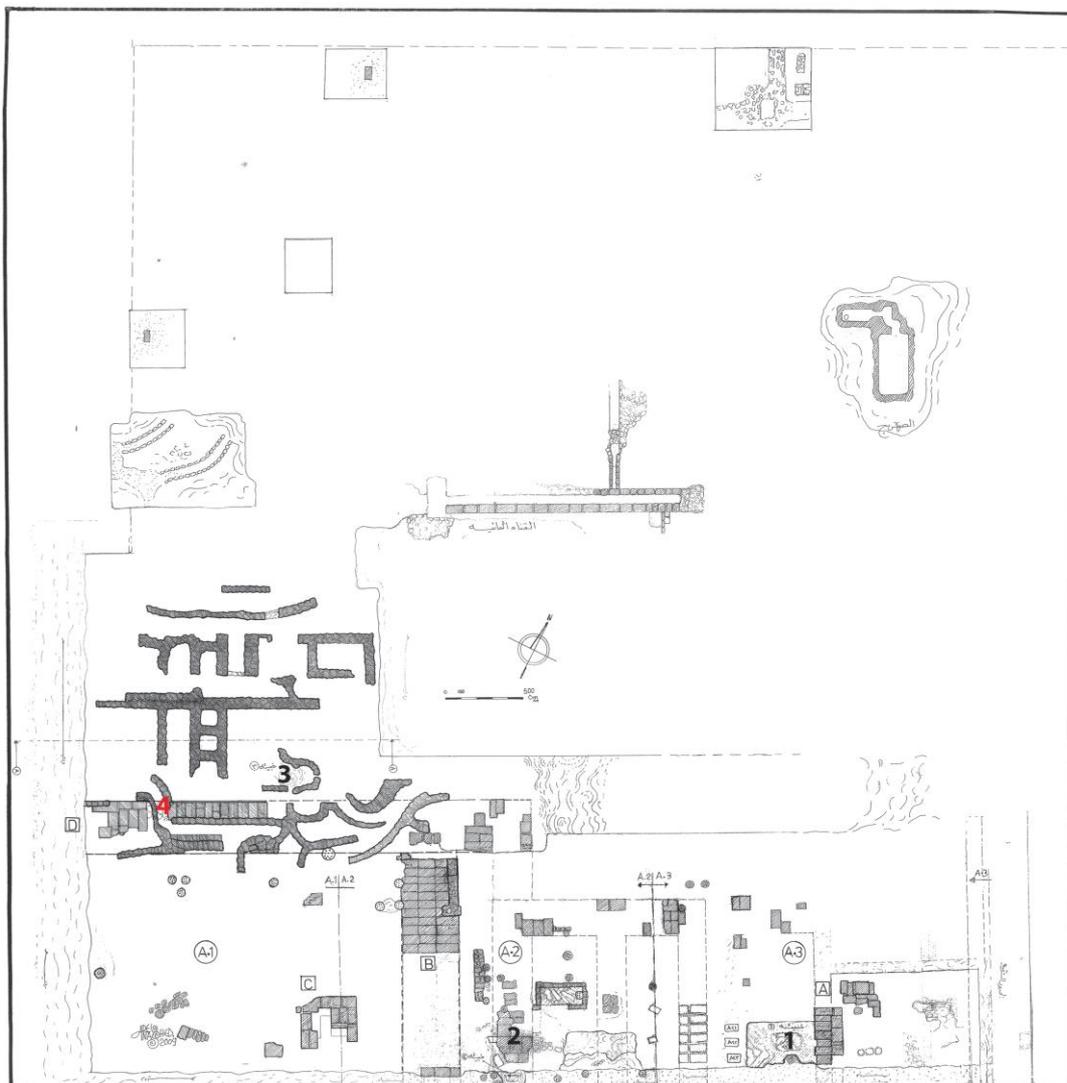


Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

TAV. IV

CATALOGUE DU MUSÉE D'ALEXANDRIE. — INSCRIZIONI GRECHE E LATINE.



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

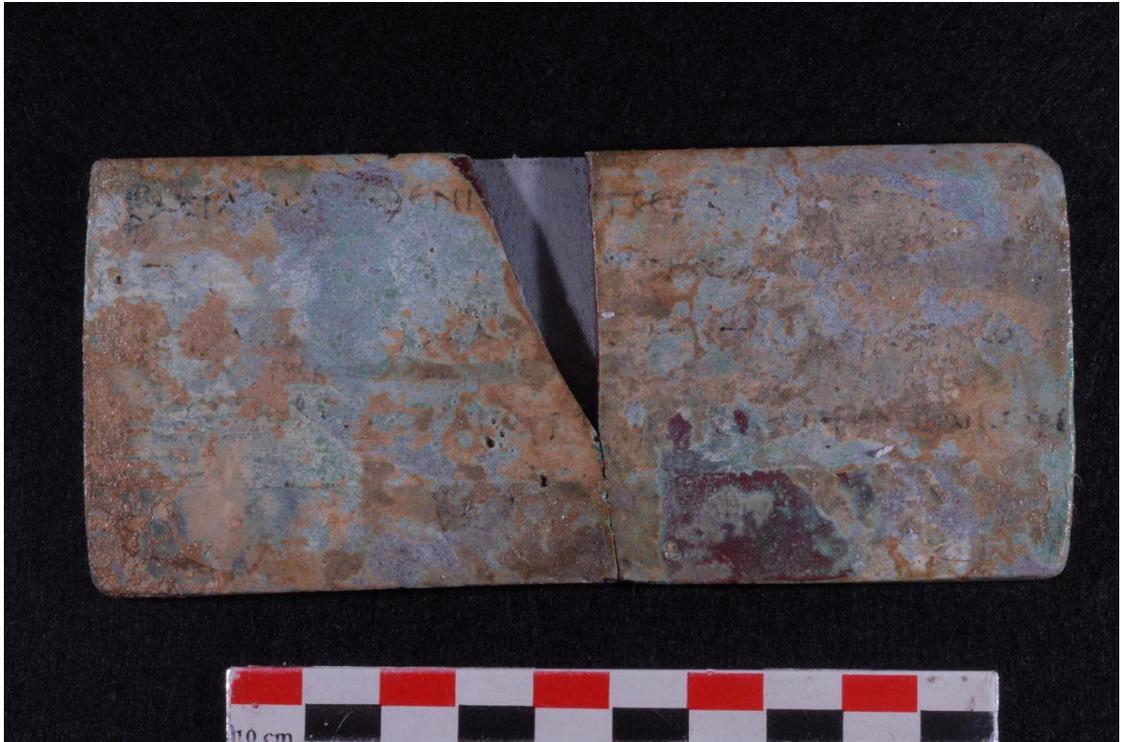


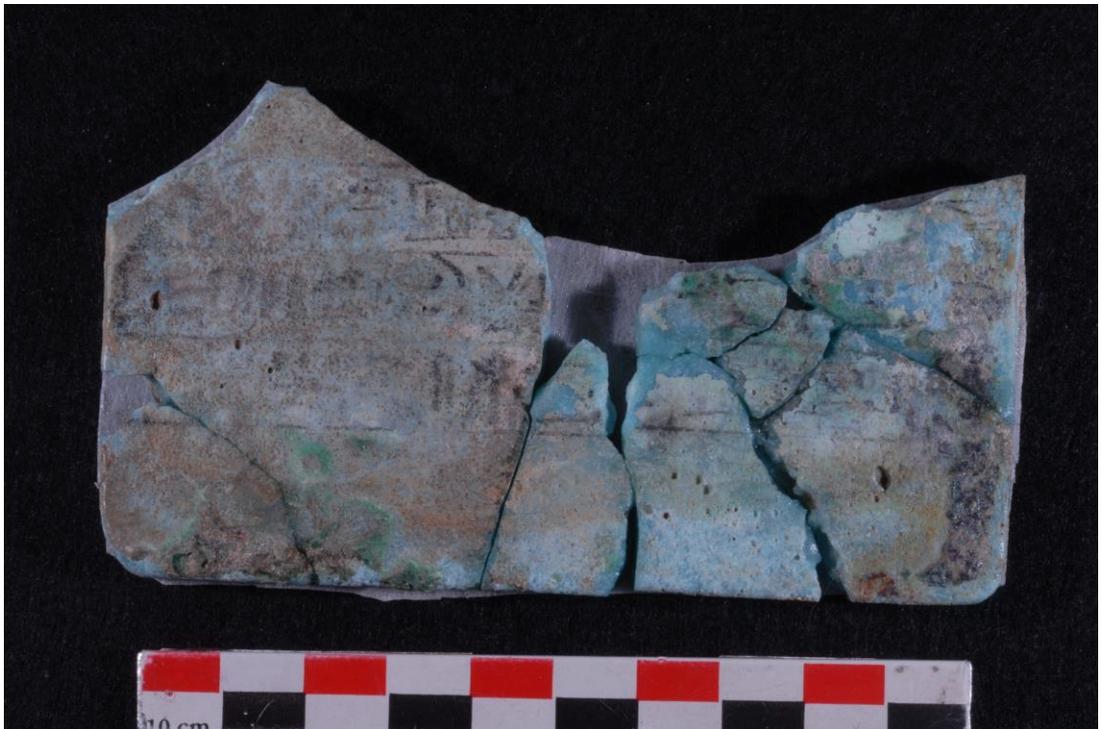
Fig. 6



Fig. 7 a



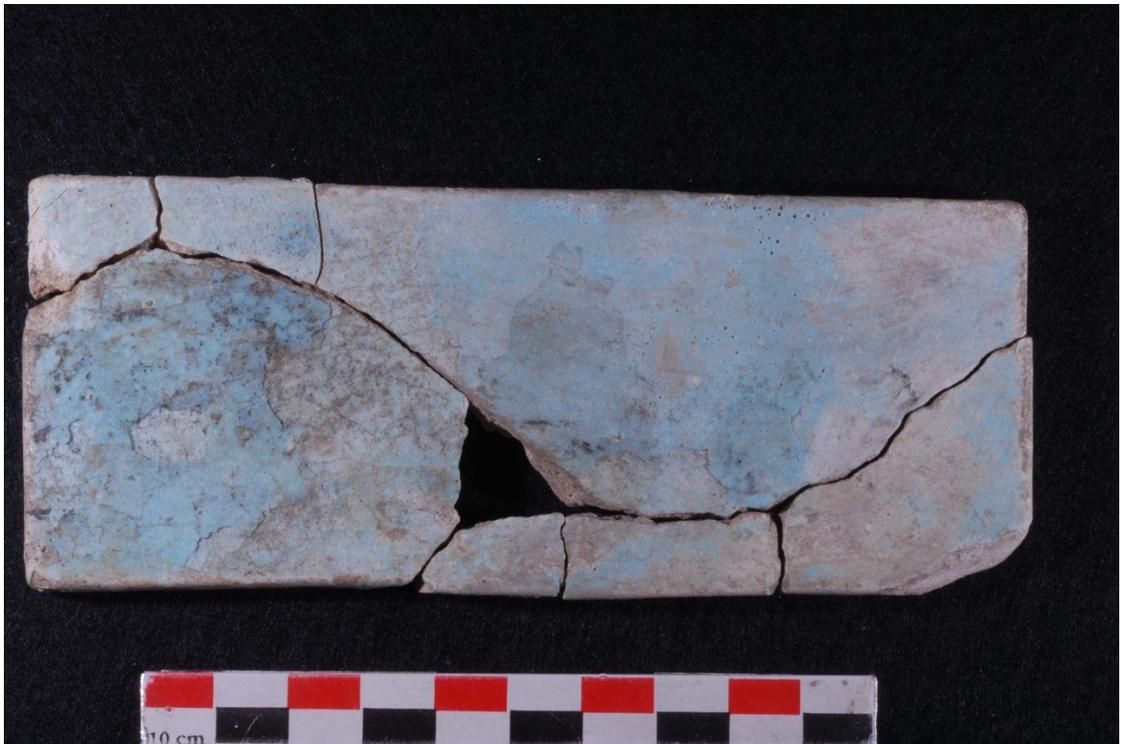
**Fig. 7 b**



**Fig. 8**



**Fig. 9**



**Fig. 10**