

The Writing Tablets and Papyrus from Tomb II in Daphni¹

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Abstract

The author describes the fragmentary writing tablets and papyrus remnants discovered in one of the Daphni tombs in 1981, dating from 430/420 BCE. He offers transcriptions of the legible portions and assesses their possible literary significance.

L'autore descrive i frammenti di tavolette per la scrittura e i resti di papiro rinvenuti nel 1981 in una delle tombe di Daphni, risalenti al 430/420 a.C. Egli presenta le trascrizioni delle parti leggibili e accerta il loro possibile significato letterario.

Keywords

earliest Greek papyrus, writing tablets, Daphni tombs

It is exciting to have found a Greek tomb containing remains of three different musical instruments, together with writing implements and various other articles. It is even more exciting to find in the same tomb written texts of an apparently literary character. In this paper I give an account of these fragmentary documents and of what it has so far been possible to see on them. It amounts to very little, no more than a word here and there: no sensational revelations, nothing like the Derveni papyrus from northern Greece, which yielded many columns of readable text. But the Daphni texts are still of exceptional importance as comprising the oldest Greek papyrus now known (something like a century older than the Derveni papyrus) and the oldest Greek writing tablets. The tomb is dated to 430/420 BCE, and the written materials will not be much older.

¹ See the first footnote to Egert Pöhlmann's paper earlier in this volume.

Almost all surviving Greek papyri and wooden writing tablets come from Egypt, because the very dry climate of that country allowed them to survive, while in Greece, Italy, and other lands where Greek books were current in antiquity they perished. That is why, until fifty years ago, we had no Greek papyri from before the time of Alexander, when the Greeks conquered Egypt. Then in 1962 came the news that a papyrus roll had been discovered in northern Greece, near the Derveni pass, some kilometres north-west of Thessaloniki. It lay on the edge of a funeral pyre and had been carbonized by the heat: that is what had saved it from the decomposition that would have been its normal fate. The Daphni papyrus and tablets, on the other hand, were preserved through being in an enclosed marble sarcophagus in conditions of very high humidity.

The Writing Tablets

Five wooden writing tablets have been preserved or restored (ΜΠ 7452-5 and Α 27047; further fragments are inventoried as Α 27045-6). ΜΠ 7452-5 have been numbered on front and back with white ink as Α 1/2, Β 1/2, Γ 1/2, Δ 1/2. They are rectangular, and quite small. Tablets Β, Γ, and Δ are of matching size, approximately $10 \times 5 \times 0.3$ cm, and no doubt formed a set; they had holes bored on one of the long sides, perhaps two groups of two holes, so that they could be fastened together with a thong or rings to form a *polyptychon*. Tablet Α is larger, approximately $13.5 \times 5.8 \times 0.4$ cm, and has no holes, so it appears to have been a separate single *deltos*. The restored fragment Α 27047, measuring approximately 11.5×6.6 cm, again has no holes. Tablets Α-Δ are shown on plates II 9-10, IV 1-3, and the other fragments on plate IV 4.

On one side of Α and Α 27047, and on both sides of Β Γ Δ, the central part of the surface is chiselled out to leave a writing area surrounded by a raised frame; this protected the writing surfaces from rubbing against each other when tablets were bound together. The writing areas were covered with wax, patches of which remain. The wax on tablet Α is yellowish-brown, that on Β Γ Δ much redder. Remains of the same reddish wax appear also on the fragments Α 27045/46. The difference is further proof that tablet Α does not belong to the same set as the others. No wax remains on the writing area of Α 27047. The fact that this fragment was designed for writing only on one side indicates that it was one of the outer tablets of a *polyptychon*, perhaps belonging to tablet Α.

Some remains of writing can be seen on tablets Α 2 (plates II 9ab, 11ab, 12a), Β 1 and 2 (plates II 10a-c, 12b), Γ 1 and 2, and Δ 1 and 2. It runs parallel to the long

sides of the frame, along the grain of the wood. On B 1, Γ 2, and Δ 1 the lines run downwards from the hinged side of the tablet, while on B 2, Γ 1, and Δ 2 they run towards it. (On A there was no hinge.) The explanation for the divergence is that the user held the *polyptychon* with the hinged side at the top and wrote on the recto tablet downwards; then one lifted the tablet up, wrote on the verso downwards back towards the hinge, continuing down onto the second tablet. In the case of tablet Γ the side numbered 2 was evidently the recto, and 1 the verso.

Writing tablets of this sort had been used for centuries in Greece and the Near East, and they continued to be used throughout antiquity. The design did not change. A well-preserved early example was recovered from the Ulu Burun shipwreck, dating from around 1300 BCE. The ship appears to have been sailing from Syria by way of Cyprus and was heading for the Aegean when it sank off the coast of Lycia with its large cargo of metal ingots, tools and weapons, gold and silver jewellery, ivory, glass, pottery, spices, and various other goods.² It is a diptych, just two tablets hinged together at the long side. It has the same rectangular shape as with the Daphni tablets, and the hollowed-out writing areas, which the raised edge protected from rubbing against each other when the diptych was closed.

The Greeks took over this simple invention in the eighth or seventh century from the Phoenicians. Their usual word for such a tablet, δέλτος, or in the Cypriot dialect δάλτος, is borrowed from the West Semitic *dalt* or *delt*; it is feminine because the Semitic word was feminine. This was the ‘folding tablet’, the πίναξ πτυκτός, that is mentioned in the *Iliad* (6. 169) in the story of Bellerophon’s adventures in Asia Minor. Proitos sent Bellerophon to Lycia with a letter written on the tablet.

As for fifth-century Athens, we may recall the famous cup painted by Douris around 490 or 480 and showing school scenes (Berlin 2285). In one of the two scenes (plate IV 5) the teacher is depicted sitting in the centre with his stylus poised over what may look like a laptop computer but is in fact an open book consisting of three tablets bound together, a *triptychon*. The tablets from the Daphni tomb correspond very nicely with this picture, in that the writing, as we normally find it in later tablets, ran parallel to the long sides of the frame, with the hinged side at the top of the unopened book; the user lifted each tablet away from him to expose the next one.

² On the Ulu Burun wreck see Bass, Pulak, Collon and Weinstein 1990. An excellent image of the tablet may be found on the website of the Institute of Nautical Archaeology at Texas A&M University, <http://nautarch.tamu.edu/class/316/uluburun/diptych.jpg>.

Waxed tablets were easily erasable and re-usable, and they were used for writings not intended to be kept for the long term, for example for letters (as in the Bellerophon story) and for school exercises (as on the Douris cup). We have school tablets from the Hellenistic period on which a boy has copied out his assignment in a large, clumsy hand. But this is not what we have in the case of the tablets from the Daphni tomb: here the writing is neat, well-formed, and microscopically small. It is clearly the work of a practised hand, and the amount of text written must have been considerable. Tablet A appears to have had about eighteen lines of writing fitted into its vertical space of 5.3 cm, with perhaps 90 characters to the line. Tablet B had about fourteen lines on side A, seventeen on side B, with about 70-80 characters to the line.

The script used is the Ionic alphabet, with η and ω for long [e:] and [o:]. Although this alphabet was not officially adopted at Athens until 403/2 BCE, it was in frequent use in public and epigraphic texts in Attica in the second half of the fifth century.³ So it is no great surprise to find it being used in written documents dating from around 430. The letter-forms (see figure 1) are similar to those of contemporary inscriptions, with square epsilon and four-barred sigma.⁴

The traces of visible text are disappointingly meagre, and it is hardly ever possible to make out a whole word, let alone two together. The provisional readings offered in *ZPE* 180 (2012), 4-5, are now superseded thanks to an excellent new set of photographs taken by Athena Alexopoulou in July 2012; my best thanks to her for sending them to me. Here is what I now persuade myself that I can see. The line numbers, for fragments not at the upper edge of the writing area, are estimates and I cannot guarantee their accuracy.

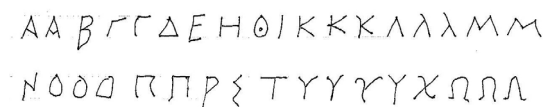


Figure 1. Letter-forms on the tablets.

³ See Threatte 1980, 26-49.

⁴ I withdraw the statement in Poehlmann and West 2012, 4 with n. 23, that an abbreviated, two-bar sigma is also found. From the new photographs I can see that the letter in question was a normal four-bar sigma.

A 2, left and centre (see plate II 11ab)

4	[	c.26 letters	]	φιλ.υ.λ[
5	[.·.]μηλ[			]μβια[
6	[.....][.·(.)]	ροθοροφ		]α[	]λ[
7	[.....]α[...]	ητικ[...]	υ...[
8	[.....]α	τοφ	]υθ[]ι[	]δα[	]λαμ[
9	[	.[			]οιμοφ[
10	[				]ιλ[

In line 4 perhaps φίλου. In line 6 we see perhaps π|ροθορο[ύca or some similar form; or it might be e.g. γὰρ ó θορό[c. As there is a vertical crack through the θ, I cannot exclude a φ, which would open up other possibilities.

A 2, upper right corner (see plate II 12a)

1]δ.μ αν[]... μ α
2]θ ι α γ α θ ω[...]ν[
3]χ λ . ο ς ς α λ ω[]ι ν[
4].[]!α[
5]υ με θ[

In the second line it is tempting to recognize an allusion to the magnificent verse spoken by Herakles in the Hesiodic *Wedding of Keyx* when he arrived uninvited at the wedding feast (fr. 264 M.-W.), αὐτόματοι δ' ἀγαθοὶ ἀγαθῶν ἐπὶ δαίτας ἔνται, 'good men come to good men's banquets of their own accord'. It was a famous line, alluded to by several classical writers.⁵ If the]ν[is rightly read, the verse was not quoted in full. In the next line perhaps κλέροϛ (or 'Ἡρα] κλέροϛ!), or εὐ]κλεῶϛ or ἄ]κλεῶϛ.

B 1 (= recto), left and right edges (see plate II 12b)

1		]$\pi\epsilon$.[
2	]A Λ [()] $\Pi\Pi\Pi$ [(
3)]
4		)]$\nu\rho$.[
5		)]$\eta\mu\omicron\nu$ [(
6	]\mu[()]
7	][...]\varphi[(	)]$\chi\theta\eta$ [(
8	]\alpha][...]\theta\omega\varsigma\delta][...]][(	)]$\nu\pi\omicron\gamma\omicron\iota$ [(
9	]\omega'] ς '] $\tau\omicron\lambda\lambda$[(	)]μ][...]][$\lambda\iota\kappa\omega\nu$][(

⁵ Bacchylides fr. 4. 23; Cratinus fr. 182 K.-A.; Eupolis fr. 315 K.-A.; Plato, *Symposium* 174b.

In the first line possibly βονῖ δ' or βοαῖ δ', with unmarked elision as suggested above at B 1. 9. In line 4 we have presumably either ὦ ὕ[(ὦ 'Υ[) or an Ionic ὦ[τός. In 17 apparently ὀλλυτα[ι.

B 2, right half (see plate II 10c)	
1	]ημιουδε.αριπη[
2]...[
8	]αι. (line-ends)
9	]κα.π[]...[]ι.πω [
10	]τοξ[]ω... [
11]... []... [
12	]ρα[
13	
14	]χυ[
15	]λη.π[
16]... [
Γ 2 (= recto), lines 1-2, two thirds across	
]... [
	]νι[
Γ 2, lines 4 to 2 from the foot, three-quarters across	
	]μα[
	]τοψ.ε.[...]χ[
	]ιπ[

On Δ I can discern only a few letters on each side, just enough to establish that Δ 1 was the recto (hinge at the top) and Δ 2 the verso (hinge at the bottom). In the lower left corner of Δ 1, five lines up from the bottom, I see [. .]. μ.π.ρ.ρ.λ[. and on the penultimate line [. .]. . . ι.ο.τ[. On the left margin of Δ 2 I see λ[in line 3, υ[in line 6, and ι.π[in the third line from the foot.

The Papyrus

I turn now to the papyrus. The story of its condition at discovery and of its restoration at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens is told in Egert Pöhlmann's paper above. The eight frames in which Antonios Glinos mounted the fragments, and which since 1996 have been kept at the Piraeus Museum, are as follows.

Frame 1: A 27091 = ΜΠ 7449; see plate IV 6. Several hundred fragments arranged in rows and graded in size. On a very few of them a letter or two can be made out.

Frame 2: ΜΠ 8517; see plate IV 7. Eight rows of small fragments. On some of them letters or syllables can be made out, but no whole word.

Frame 3: MPI 8518; see plate II 3b. A fairly large piece compacted from more than one layer. Scattered letters can be seen here and there.

Frame 4: MPI 8519; see plate IV 8. Fourteen rows of small fragments. A few contain one letter or so.

Frame 5: MPI 8520; see plate II 3a. An assembly of miscellaneous fragments, of which ten are put together from smaller pieces. I have assigned numbers 1 to 44 to fragments starting from the left of the frame. Some contain remnants of several lines of text, but not always from the same layer. In a few instances a whole word can be made out or supplemented. In several cases further letters appear between the lines; in the inventory these are taken to be probable musical notes,⁶ but they seem in fact to be fragments of text permeated from an upper or lower layer in consequence of the damp conditions.

Frame 6: MPI 8521; see plate IV 9. Nine rows of small fragments, some bearing one letter or so.

Frame 7: MPI 8522; see plate IV 10. Sixteen rows of small fragments, a few with letter traces.

Frame 8: MPI 8523; see plates II 8ab, IV 11. This is the detached piece that Konstantinos Asimenos photographed in May 1981.

Most of the legible remains of writing are to be found in frames 5 and 8. They do not amount to much. The script is small and neat; the height of the letters is about 2 mm, only slightly larger than on the wooden tablets. The letter forms (see figure 2) show some variation, and it is hard to say positively whether the hand is the same as on the tablets or a different one. As on the tablets, the alphabet used is the Ionic.

Here are provisional transcriptions of those fragments from frames 5 and 8 that are large enough to be of possible interest.

ΑΑΒΓΔΕΖΗ ΙΚΛΛΜΜΝΝ ΟΟΠΠΡΞΤΥΥΥ
ϕχ ωωω

Figure 2. Letter-forms on the papyrus.

⁶ Εύρετήριο p. 182: Σέ δύο μεγάλα σπαράγματα σώζονται μικρά τμήματα 7/8 στίχων μέ σημεία μουσικής πιθανώς σημειογραφίας στά διάκενα, π.χ. ΑΙΣ/ο<|.

Frame 5 = ΜΠ 8520

Fr. 1 (plate II 7a). The fragment has writing extending over about eight lines, but it belongs to more than one layer—perhaps four—so that one sees separate line-sequences overlapping and out of alignment.

Lowest layer	Next	Next	Next
]εζτ[	] . [	]ε[
]ωμ[	]πσν[	]θ[	]Χ
]χο[	]οεπ[	]ε[
	]...ο[
5	]ορεινε[
	]αζαε.[
	]ηλοπιμ[
	]παρις[

Fr. 3 (plate II 5a). The writing is visible only in infrared images. Two layers are combined, giving paired lines.

Lower layer	Upper layer
]ε[]...[
]η.ο...[	]κεητο[
]ξωθ...[	]δ.....[
]εκαλ.σιπ[	]αιμν...γλ[
5]αρκηε.σε[	]ενηα.[.]...[
]ωυχετι[	]νω...[
]ιπωιτ.[	]γο.ιω.ς[
	]αζαπα[
	<i>vacat</i>

In line 5 of the lower layer an adjective in -αρκής is probably to be recognized. Line 6, if rightly read, will have to be supplemented as κ]ωυκέτι, that is, καὶ οὐκέτι contracted as in Ionic, not in Attic; cf. above on tablet B 2. 4 ωυ[. In line 8 of the upper layer the uncommon letter sequence might perhaps be resolved as χάλα]αζα, πά[χνη, as in Aristotle, *Meteor.* 388b11 κρύσταλλος, χιών, χάλαζα, πάχνη. Of course there are other possibilities. We have]αζα also on fr. 1. 6 above.

Fr. 4	Permeated lines from another layer
]ι[	]τοξ.
]τρωελ[	]σε
]νημα[...][ς[	]ωνα.
]ιξα[	]καγε [
5]πασπουδ[
]τοκυδεξ[

In line 6, if the last two letters are rightly read, I think we have to assume an otherwise unattested compound adjective such as κλυτοκυδέες or ἀφθιτοκυδέες. This would be a definite sign of poetic diction (and dactylic rhythm). There is another such sign in fr. 5 (see below), upper layer, line 6]ρανιδης, which is almost certainly a poetic patronymic.⁷ There is a Τευθρανιδης at *Il.* 6. 13, the patronymic of a Trojan named Axylos. But much more likely is Οὐρανιδης, son of Ouranos, which occurs in several places and is used especially of Kronos.

Fr. 5 (plate II 6ab). The text on the right-hand side of the fragment (upper layer) overlaps that on the left. I disregard interlinear letters (permeated text).

	Lower layer	Upper layer
		]δυςπ[
		]..περη[
	]..ινοπ[	]ξε.[
	]εχ[	]δαισιτ[
5	]αφ[	]..ιμον[
	]ω[	]ρανιδηςπ[
		]κατ[
		<i>vacat</i>
Fr. 8	]αππε[
	<i>vacat</i>	

The reading of fr. 8 is quite clear and unambiguous. The uncommon sequence of letters again points strongly towards a poetic text, more specifically an epic or lyric one. In prose it would, I think, occur only in ὦ πάππε, ‘O grandfather’, which is indeed found a number of times in Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* but is in general unlikely to be encountered. In poetry there would be several possibilities. Much the most frequent forms containing these letters are κάππεες, κάππεσον, ‘fell down’. There is also the phrase κάπ πεδίον ‘in the plain’ (twice in the *Iliad*); there are forms of ἀππέμπω ‘send away’ (*Od.* 15. 83, Sappho fr. 27), and there are a couple of other Lesbian forms in Alcaeus that contain this letter sequence.

Frame 8 = ΜΠ 8523

Here again we have parts of more than one layer of papyrus. The photographs taken by Asimenos in Athens in May 1981 (plate IV 11) show the item as it was

⁷ Ἰδης is excluded in a text of this date by the absence of iota. Ἰδης is theoretically possible; cf. below on ΜΠ 8523 E 3.

before restoration, with parts of as many as five layers overlapping and stuck together. In the course of restoration the layers were loosened, some pieces changed position, and there was some slight damage at the edges. There was gain as well as loss, as the operation revealed parts of the text on a lower layer that had been hidden, while covering up part of the top surface that had been visible. For the present appearance of the fragment see plate II 8ab.

Once again the inventory notes the presence of interlinear letters, in particular in the third line from the top, and speculates that they might be musical notation.⁸ In actuality they represent permeated text from other layers, something that is to be seen all over the fragment, especially in infrared images.

Here is an attempt to distinguish and transcribe the various layers, based on comparison of the 1981 photographs with those taken in the Piraeus Museum in 2010 and 2011.

A: top layer⁹

5].c[
]ωδ[
]..[
]λ.[
]..[]..[
]...[
]οιτογὰδ[
]λετοπρ[

C: third layer¹¹

]αιδεμο[
]εμ[
]αρχαιουτι[
]επτὰ.[
]ε[

B: second layer¹⁰

]ζαινο[
]ιοζον.[
]δαγεπρ[
].ωστὰ.α[
5]παιπ[

D: fourth layer¹²

]ρησα[
]τοαν[
]εσιαγ[
].λ[

⁸ Εύρετήριο p. 182: Διαβάζονται τμήματα 7/8 ἐπαλλήλων στίχων, μέ στοιχεῖα μουσικῆς πιθανότατα σημειογραφίας στά διάκενα. "Υψος γραμμάτων περί 0.001 μ. Δειγματολογικά ἀναφέρεται: 3ος ἐκ τῶν ἄνω στίχος: ΑΥΙΑ\ΟΣΧ\ΣΙΑ.

⁹ Plate IV 11, bottom centre; no longer present in the more recent photos.

¹⁰ In the 1981 photos (plate IV 11) this occupies most of the lower left quadrant, being overlapped by A. Now (see plates II 8b, IV 11) it is broken into two pieces, one of which appears as a detached fragment to the left of the main papyrus, while the other covers the bottom right corner.

¹¹ Lower left quadrant; formerly mostly hidden behind B.

¹² Upper right quadrant.

E: fifth layer¹³

].[
].!τρεπ[
]πολυιδα[
]ρεχωμε[
].ρ.[

Permeated text appearing between lines

].[
]ολωα. .[
]θοαα[
]νηναμε[
]ηνπο[]μα[

One can recognize one or two words and possible word divisions, for example in C 3 the whole word ἀρχαίου. I will comment only on E 3,]πολυιδα[. There is no compound word or name that it fits, so we must presumably divide πολὺ ἰδα[, and then it looks as if we are somehow concerned with Mt Ida, either the name Ἴδα in Doric / Aeolic form, or the adjective Ἰδαῖος, or the Trojan herald Idaïos. In any case a poetic theme is suggested.

Conclusion

The tomb from which these texts emerged has been referred to since its discovery in 1981 as the Tomb of the Poet. It is certainly a reasonable assumption that the accumulation of manuscripts, writing implements, and musical instruments indicates that the deceased was a musician and probably a poet. The instruments, at any rate, will surely have been instruments that he or she played.¹⁴ The manuscripts will have contained texts that he or she owned; perhaps read, perhaps copied, possibly composed. To illustrate their inclusion in the tomb I may quote an epigram written many centuries later by the satirical epigrammatist Lucillius (*Anth. Pal.* 11. 133). It is about a tiresome poet called Eutychides who had his musical instruments and lyric compositions cremated with him:

τέθνηκ' Εὐτυχίδης ὁ μελογράφος. οἱ κατὰ γαῖαν,
 φεύγετ'· ἔχων ᾠιδὰς ἔρχεται Εὐτυχίδης·
 καὶ κιθάρας αὐτῶι διετάξατο συγκατακαῦσαι
 δώδεκα, καὶ κίστας εἰκοσίπεντε νόμων.
 νῦν ὑμῖν ὁ Χάρων ἐπελήλυθε. ποῦ τις ἀπέλθῃ
 λοιπόν, ἐπεὶ χαῖδην Εὐτυχίδης κατέχει;

Eutychides the song-writer has died! You there below the earth,
 run for it! Eutychides is coming with his songs!

¹³ Upper left quadrant, overlapped by D on the right and by C below.

¹⁴ I say 'he or she' because we do not yet have a definitive statement of the sex of the skeleton. The harp may point to a woman. In any case it was a young person aged about 18 or 20.

He gave instructions for twelve citharas to be burned with him
 on his pyre, and twenty-five boxes of nomes.
 Now Charon has come to join you. Where can one go
 in future, now that Eutychides is all over Hades too?

We have seen two or three indications of poetic diction in the texts from the Daphni tomb. It looks as if at least some of them were in verse, though it is unsafe to assume that they all were. It is also very doubtful whether there was really any musical notation on them, as the description in the museum inventory in three cases presumes. Musical notation probably did exist by this time, and if it were going to appear anywhere, it would be most likely to be found on the private texts owned by a professional musician. In the Daphni texts, however, I have not found any clear example of it, whereas I have found many places where the permeation of text through layers of papyrus has produced the appearance of letters written between the lines.

I have also noted traces of Ionic dialect. This might be due to the author's being of Ionian provenance; Ion of Chios may be recalled as an Ionian poet and lyricist living at Athena at this period (though it cannot be his tomb). But it is at least as likely that the Ionicisms are due to the use of an Ionian literary genre, whether verse or prose. For the time being we must be content to speculate.

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Plate IV 1a. Tablet B 1 (ΜΠ 7453). Photo E. Pöhlmann.

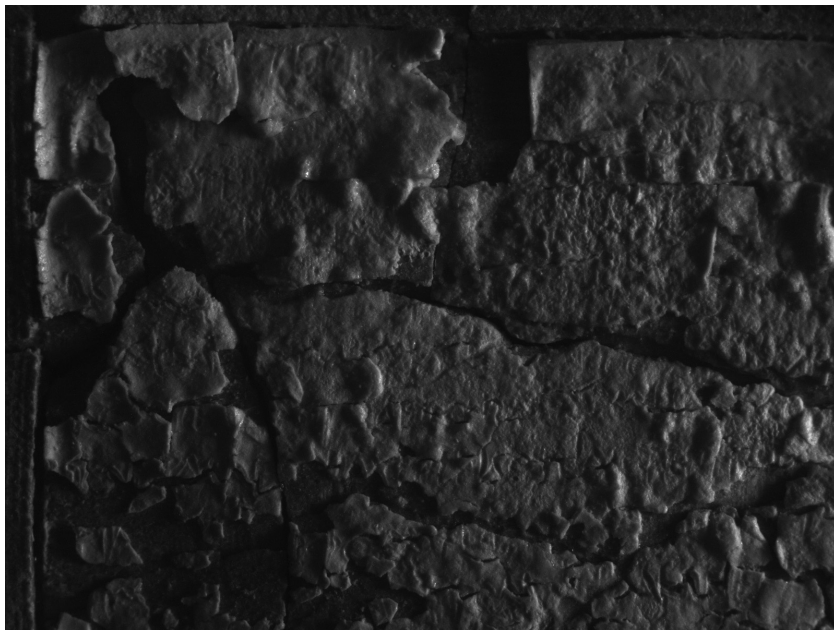


Plate IV 1b. Tablet B 2, top left (ΜΠ 7453). Photo A. Alexopoulou.



Plate IV 2a. Tablet Γ 1 (MPI 7454). Photo E. Pöhlmann.



Plate IV 2b. Tablet Γ 2 (MPI 7454). Photo E. Pöhlmann.



Plate IV 3a. Tablet Δ 1 (MPI 7455). Photo E. Pöhlmann.



Plate IV 3b. Tablet Δ 2 (MPI 7455). Photo E. Pöhlmann.



Plate IV 4. Tablet fragments (MΠ A 27045-46-47). Photo E. Pöhlmann.

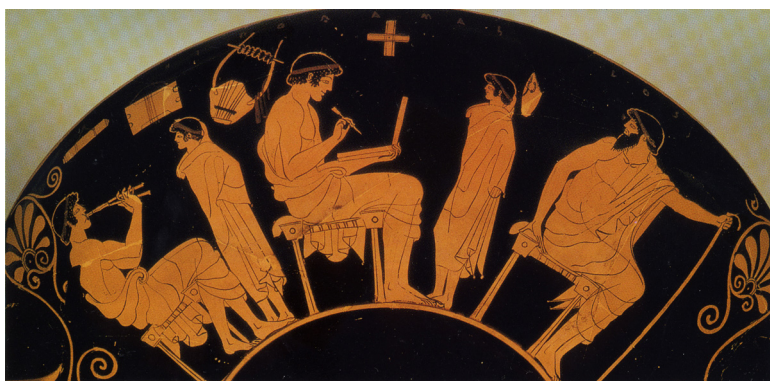


Plate IV 5. Douris Cup (Berlin 2285). Photo J. Laurentius.



Plate IV 6. Papyrus, frame 1 (A 27091 = MII 7449). Photo E. Pöhlmann.



Plate IV 7. Papyrus, frame 2 (MII 8517). Photo E. Pöhlmann.



Plate IV 8. Papyrus, frame 4 (MPI 8519). Photo E. Pöhlmann.



Plate IV 9. Papyrus, frame 6 (MP 8521). Photo E. Pöhlmann.



Plate IV 10. Papyrus, frame 7 (MII 8522). Photo E. Pöhlmann.

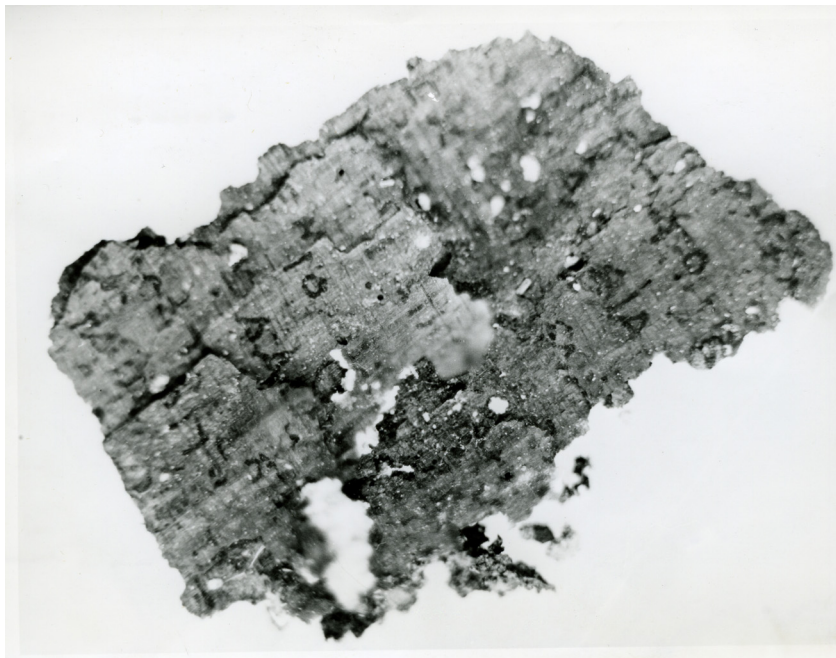


Plate IV 11. Papyrus, frame 8 (MII 8523). Photo Asimenos.