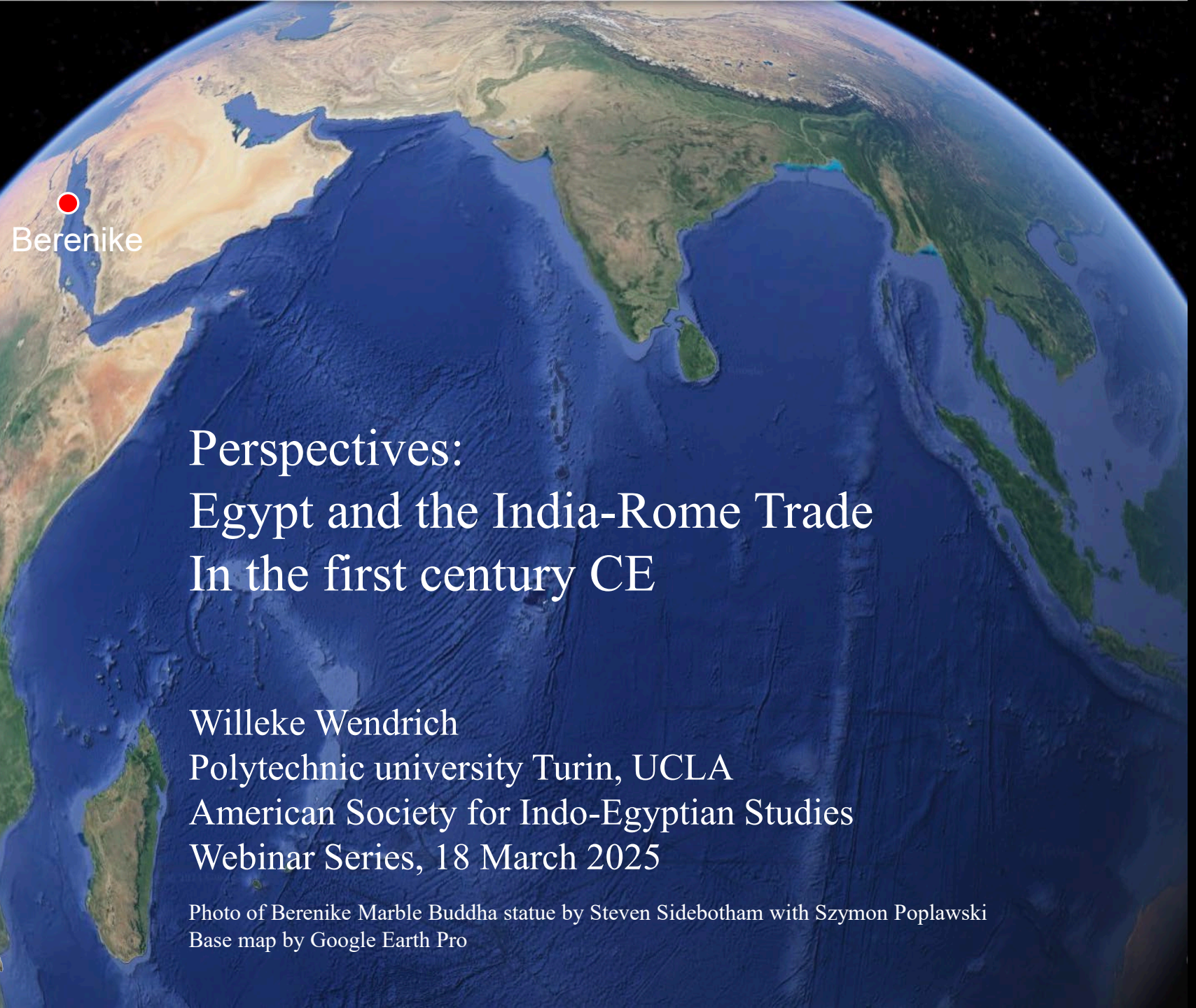


Perspectives:
Egypt and the India-Rome Trade
In the first century CE

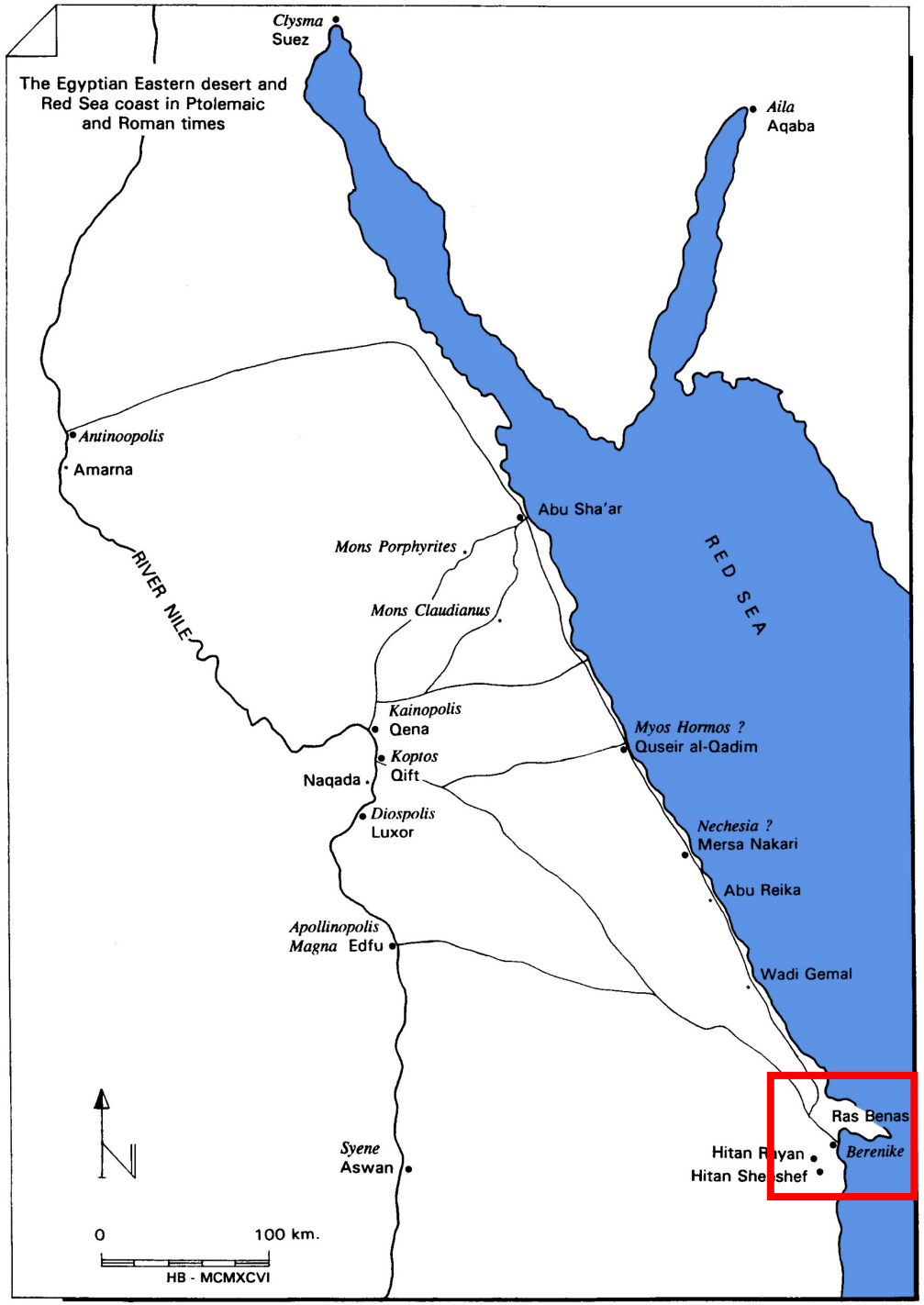
Willeke Wendrich
Polytechnic university Turin, UCLA
American Society for Indo-Egyptian Studies
Webinar Series, 18 March 2025

Photo of Berenike Marble Buddha statue by Steven Sidebotham with Szymon Poplawski
Base map by Google Earth Pro

Berenike excavations:

1994-2001	University of Delaware Leiden University UCLA
2001-2005	Hiatus
2005-2025	University of Delaware, Polish Academy of Sciences Leiden University

Steven Sidebotham, University of Delaware
Eid Mohamed
Mohamed Eid


The Egyptian Eastern desert and
Red Sea coast in Ptolemaic
and Roman times
Clysma
Suez
Aila
Aqaba
Antinoopolis
Amarna
RIVER NILE
Abu Sha'ar
Mons Porphyrites
Mons Claudianus
RED SEA
Kainopolis
Qena
Koptos
Qift
Naqada
Myos Hormos ?
Quseir al-Qadim
Diospolis
Luxor
Nechesia ?
Mersa Nakari
Abu Reika
Apollinopolis
Magna Edfu
Wadi Gemal
Ras Benas
Berenike
Hitan Rayan
Hitan Shenshef
Syene
Aswan
N
0
100 km.
HB - MCMXCVI

Crete
CYPRUS
SYRIA
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
LEBANON
IRAN
ISRAEL
IRAQ
Mesopotamia
ZAGROS MOUNTAINS
JORDAN
LIBYAN PLATEAU
QATTARA DEPRESSION
SINAI
KUWAIT
PERSIAN GULF
NAFUD
EASTERN DESERT
BAHRAIN
QATAR
WESTERN DESERT
SAUDI ARABIA
U. A. E.
EGYPT
RED SEA HILLS
GILF KEBIR PLATEAU
ARABIAN PENINSULA
UWEINAT
NUBIAN DESERT
RUB' AL-KHALI
GEBEL ABYAD PLATEAU
RED SEA
BAYUDA DESERT
YEMEN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
YEMEN ARAB REPUBLIC
HADRAMAWT
SUDAN
Kordofan
Eritrea
GULF OF ADEN
DJIBOUTI
SAHEL
ETHIOPIAN HIGHLANDS
Punt?
ETHIOPIA
SOMALIA
Sudd
OGADEN
ZAIRE
UGANDA
KENYA
INDIAN OCEAN

ΔΩΡΙΩΝΤΕΚΤΩΝ
ΤΩΝΜΕΤΕΥΜΗΔ ΟΥΑΝΑ
ΙΕΥΞΑΣΕΠΙΤΗΝΘΗΡΑΝ
ΤΩΝΕΛΕΦΑΝΤΩΝ
ΚΑΙΕΣΩΘΗΝ
ΕΙΣΑΙΓΥ
ΠΤΟΝ

Berenike exceptional because:

Little disturbance
Good preservation
Special function

CM

CM

Archaeological sources

Ceramics, gemstones,
botanical remains
textiles, basketry

Textual sources

Texts found in Berenike
External textual sources

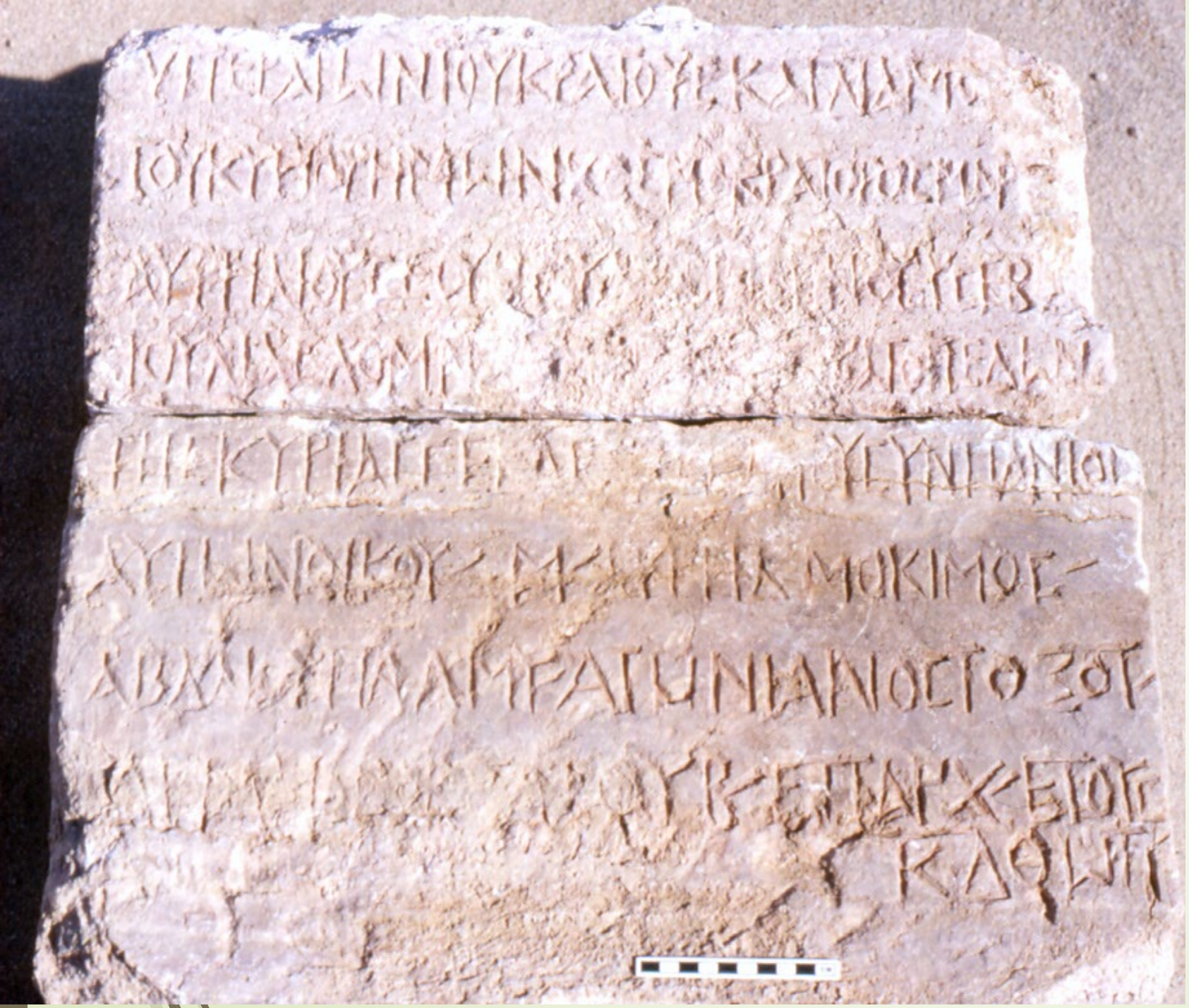
Texts found in Berenike

Ostraka, Papyri, Inscriptions

Texts found outside Berenike

Original archives (Nikanor)

Literary, historical geographical traditions
(Strabo, Pliny, Periplus of the Erythraean Sea)



Inscription dedicated to:

Marcus Aurelius Severus Antonius Pius Augustus (Caracalla)

And Julia Domna
(Mother of Caracalla)

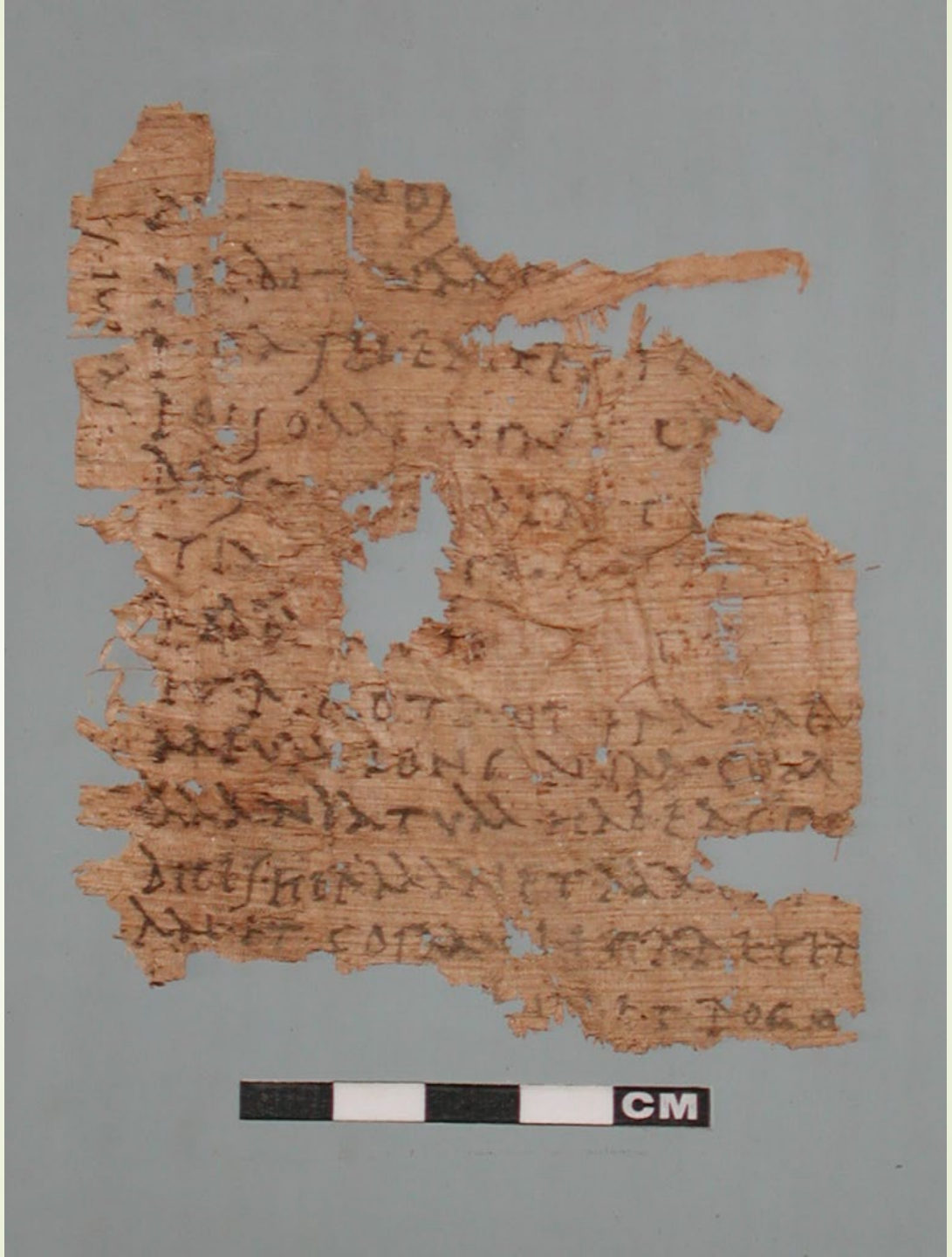
By Marcus Aurelius Mokimos, son of Abdaeus

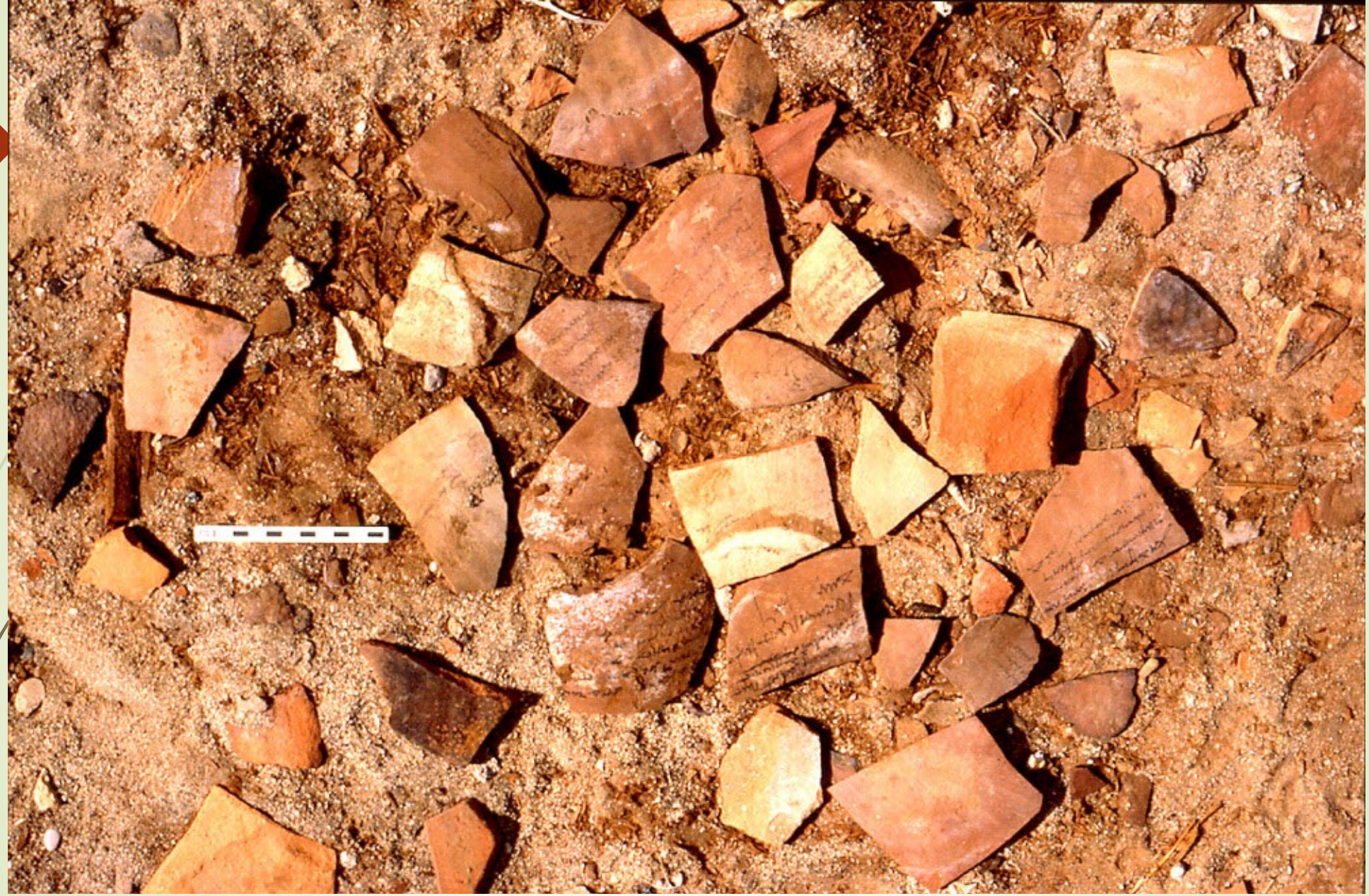
Dated: 24th year of Caracalla, Kappa Delta month of Thoth

= 8 September 215 n. Chr.

In Palmyrene:
“(statue or Altar)
belonging to Yarchibol
made by Bariki, the sculptor”

In Greek:
“To Palmyrene good fortune
on behalf of Aemilius Celer,
prefect of Berenike
and of the Ala Heracliana and
(on behalf of)
Valerius T Germanion
chiliarches of the same ala
Berichei, the artist has made
the greatest god Hierobol”


CM



Ko[r]ra Pu man

Korran the Chieftain

Archaeological sources

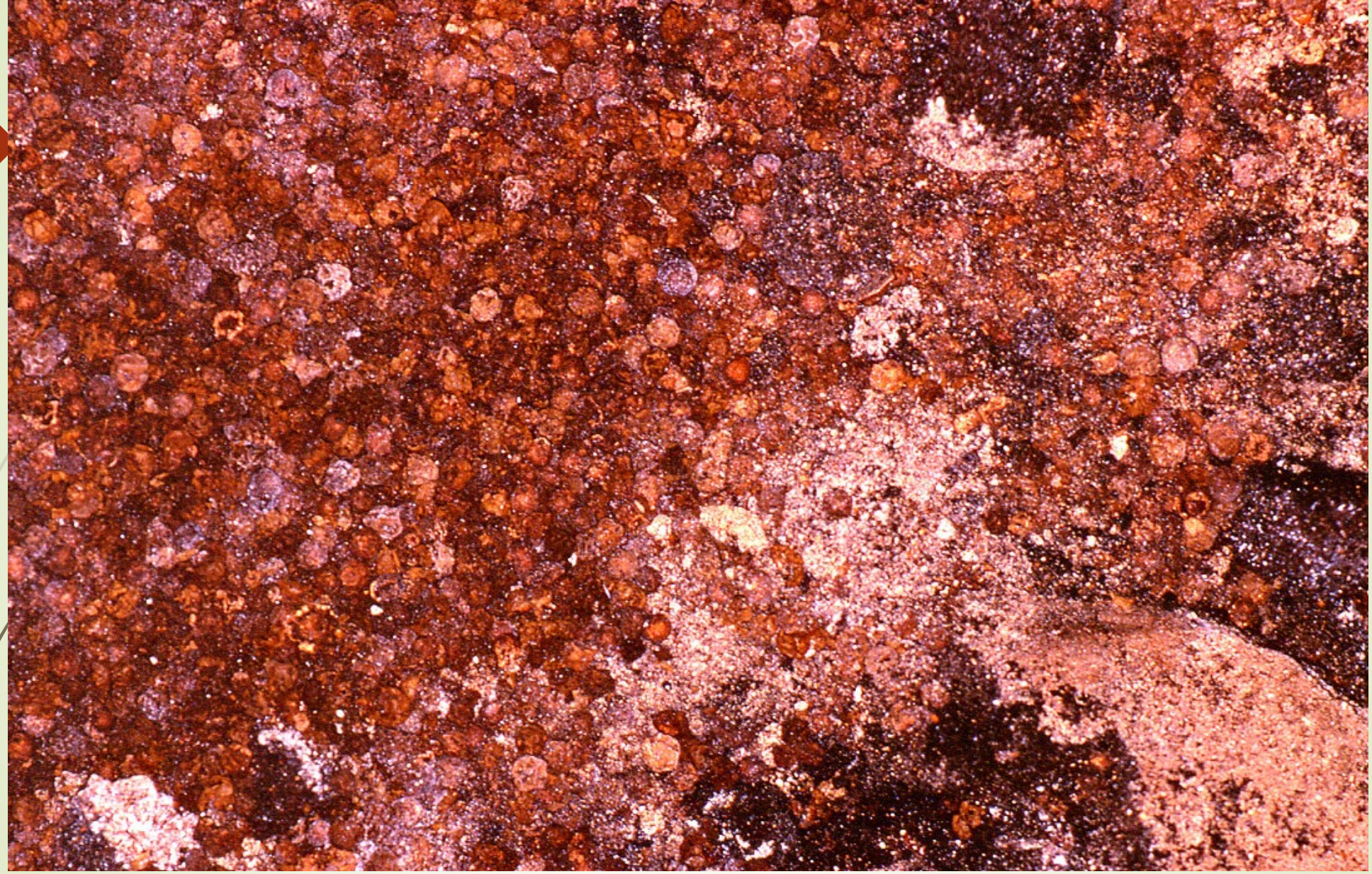
Ceramics, gemstones,
botanical remains
textiles

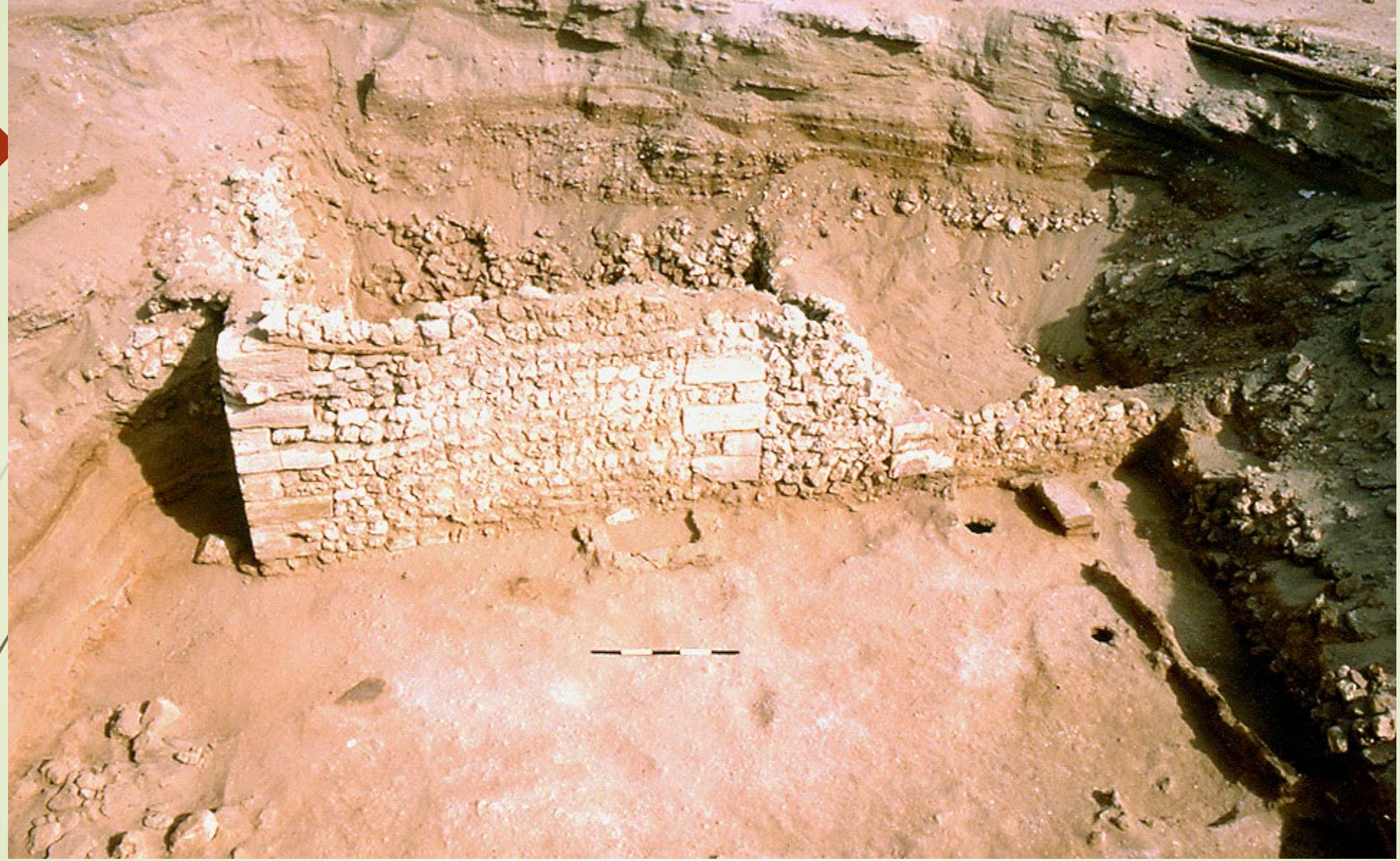
Textual sources

Texts found in Berenike
External textual sources

Black pepper (Piper nigrum) in Roman contexs:

Europe:		
Oberaden	8	peppercorns
Hessen	15	peppercorns
Straubing	52	peppercorns
Egypt:		
Mons Claudianus	5	peppercorns
Shenshef	16	peppercorns
Berenike (1998)	1.600	peppercorns
Berenike 1999	133.000	peppercorns



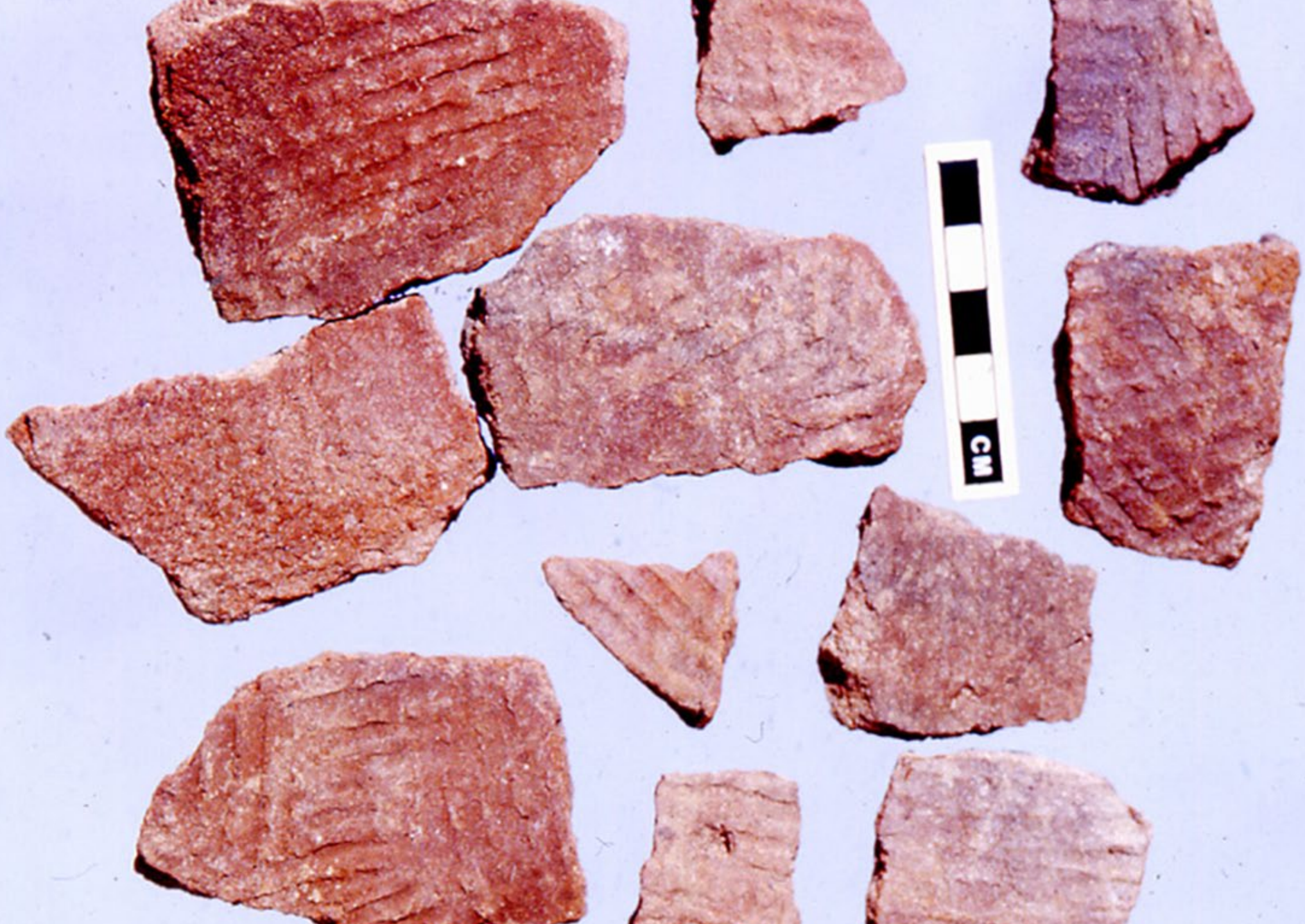


Plants:	Periplus	Berenike
Black pepper	x	x
Long pepper	x	
Indigo	x	
Cinnamon	x	
Costus (fragrant root)		x
Coconut		x
Job’s tears		x
Teak wood		x
Sesame		x
Rice		x

Black pepper from Muziris
Long pepper from Barygaza

Berenike
Barygaza
Muziris
Data SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO
Image Landsat / Copernicus
Image IBCAO

CM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CM

CM

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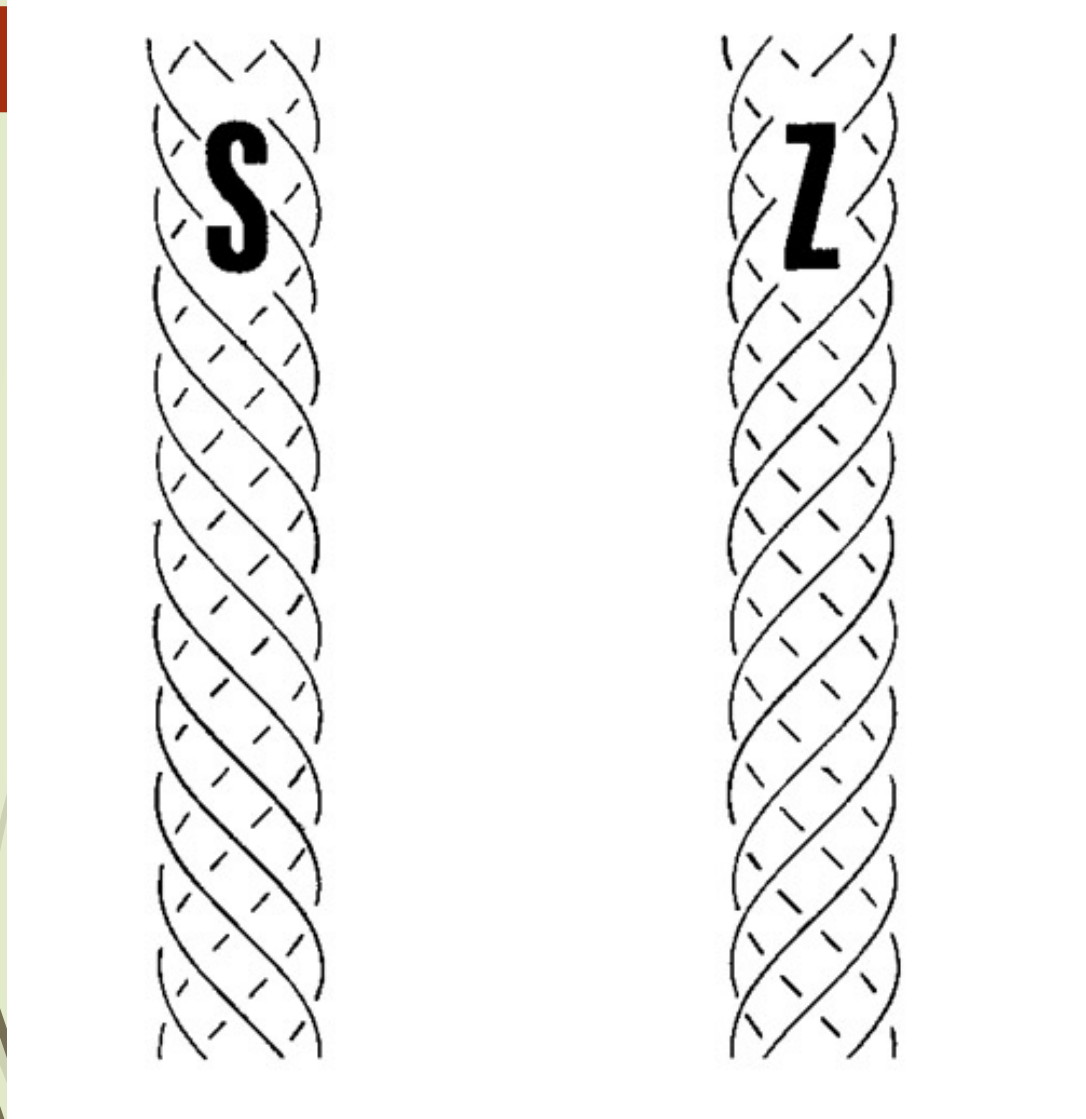
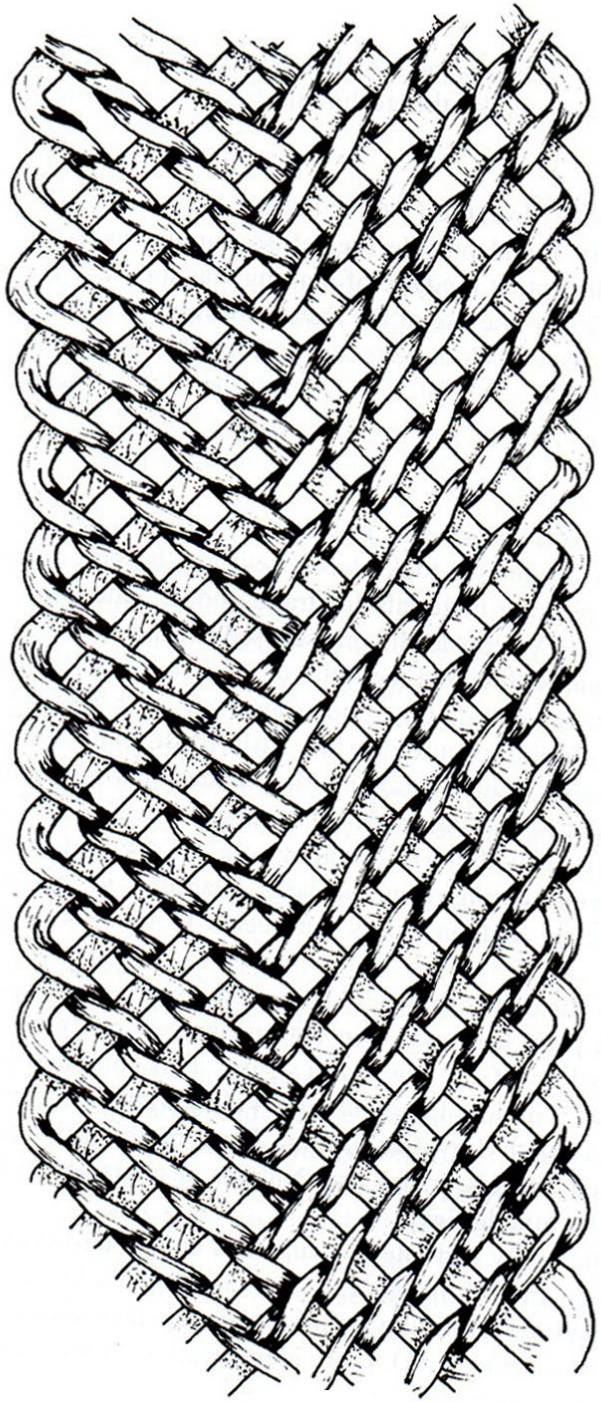


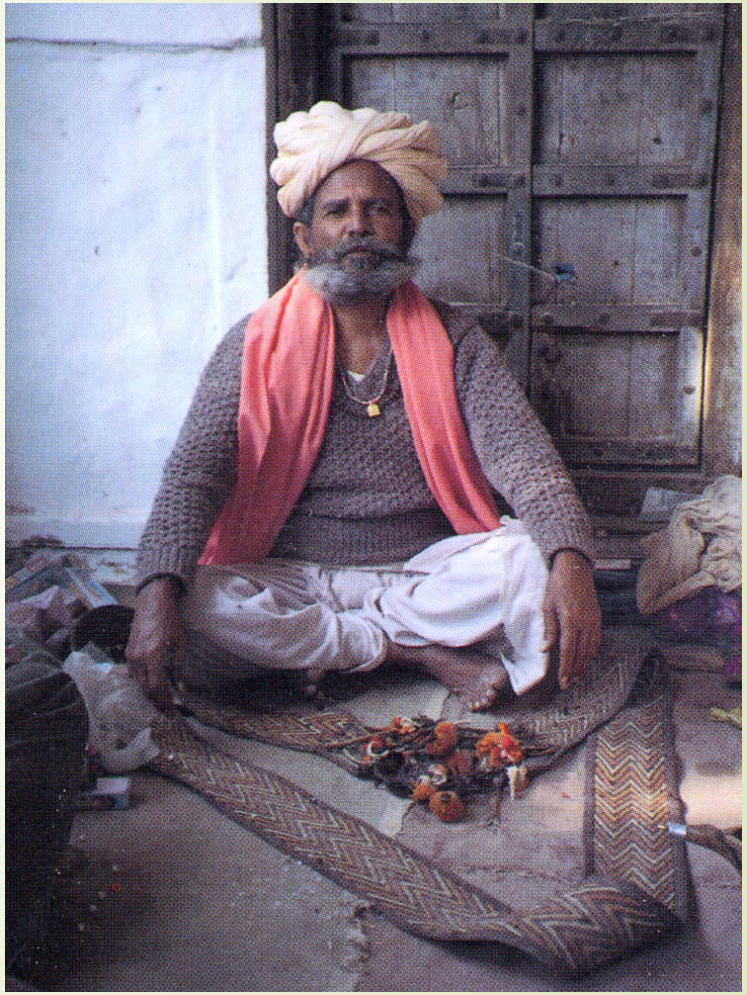
Cotton:

s spun Nubia

z spun India



Ply-split braiding

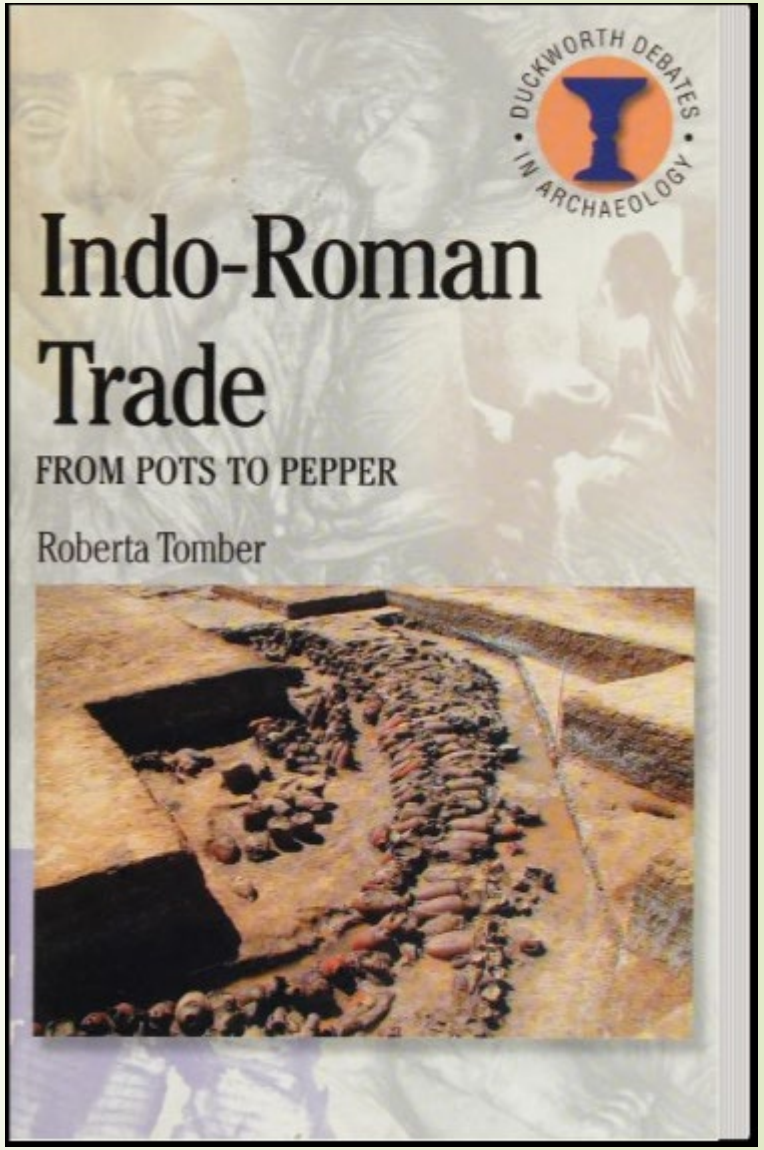


From: "The Techniques of Ply-split Braiding", Peter Collingwood

Marble
Made in Alexandria

Head of Serapis, teak wood
Berenike Buddha, marble
Relief with three Hindu gods

“Roman-Indian trade”

Indo-Roman trade

Roberta Tomber, 1954-1922