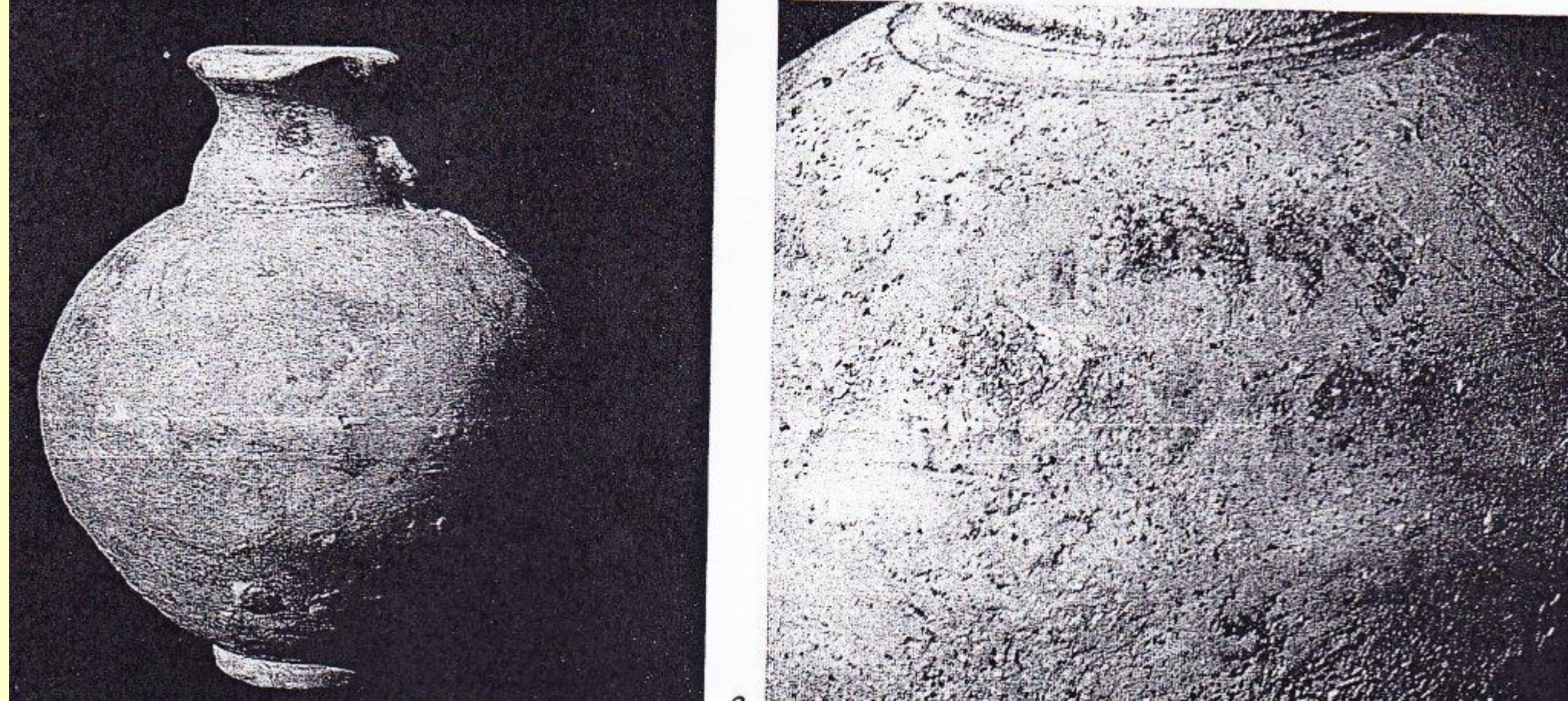


# MINIMA EPIGRAPHICA: THE PROJECT

## “SCRITTURA SU ARGILLA E CERAMICA”

### Everyday Writing in the Phoenician-Punic West

Paola Cavaliere, Danila Piacentini, Massimiliano Vassalli



1 Carthage (Tunisia): oil bottle, painted inscription. 1. *mrrl* 2. *ʕd mlqrt*

#### Summary

Our Project *Scrittura su argilla e ceramica* is intended at collecting Phoenician, Punic and Neopunic inscriptions recorded on clay or pottery and spread over various sites of the central-western Mediterranean area. The objects inscribed are catalogued after both the epigraphic and the archaeological *criteria*, and our Project specifically aims at restoring the unity of inscription and its support. A dedicated on-line database provides the optimal way to arrange and manage all the records collected, and will be soon available on the Internet.

#### Introduction

The epigraphic material left by the Phoenician-Punic cultures is not abundant, despite the fact that the Phoenicians “invented” the alphabet (Herodotus, V, 58). On the other hand, besides the monumental public epigraphs written, e.g., on stone or metal, we have a lot of remains in the form of scattered writings on pottery. Our Project *Scrittura su argilla e ceramica* aims at collecting such a widespread kind of inscriptions written in Phoenician, Punic and Neopunic, and found at various sites of the central-western Mediterranean basin, even in non-Semitic language areas.

#### Materials and methods

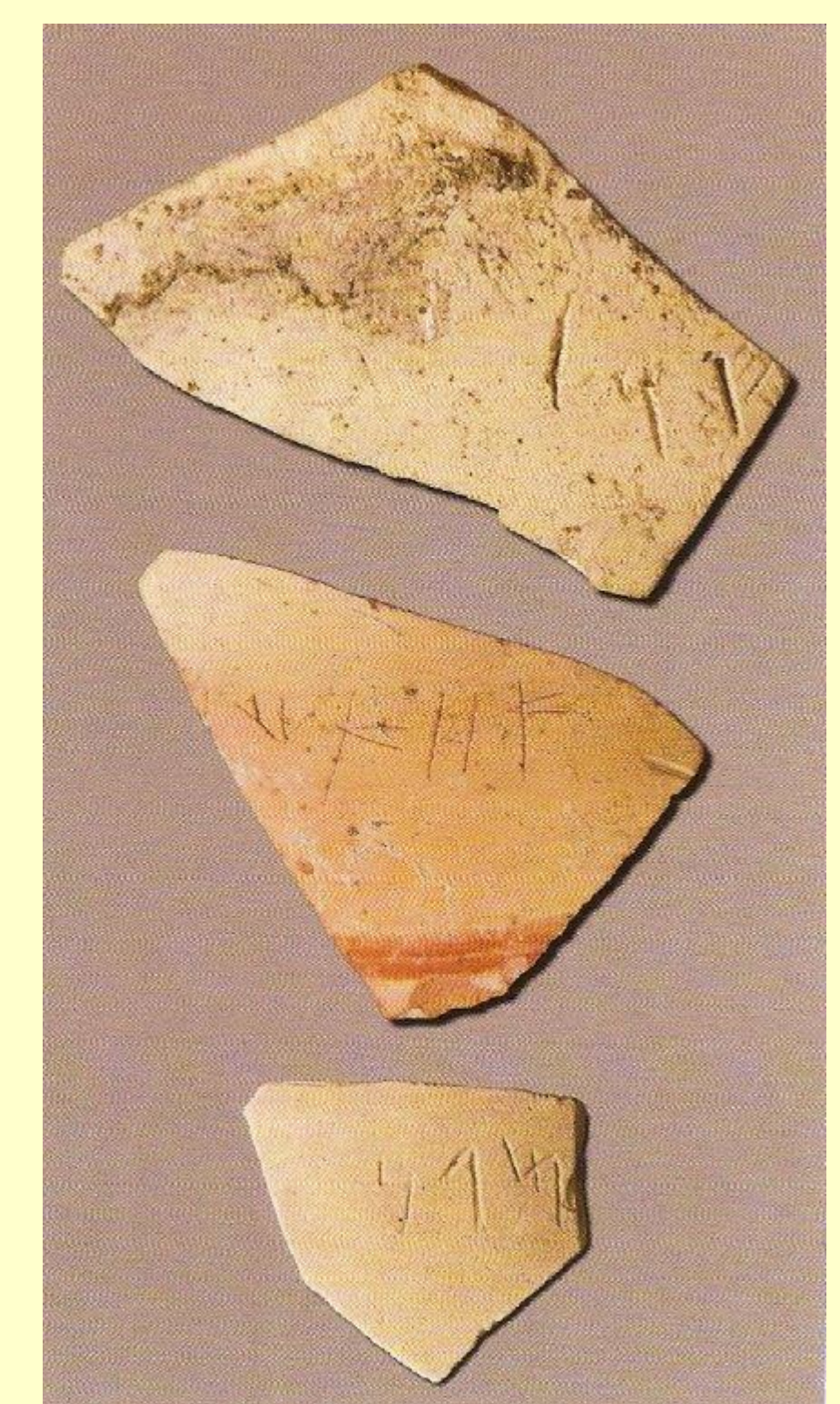
Our material is mainly constituted by pottery (such as transport amphorae, and various kinds of vessels made of coarse or black glazed pottery), and also includes a number of specimens of votive coroplastic materials. Pottery in fact constitutes a cheap and widespread medium to write down *data*.

On these items, at some time in their history different kinds of written records have been inscribed, such as personal names on vessels, or dedicatory inscriptions to gods on votive gifts, or administrative proceedings. The inscriptions are made after different techniques: by incision *ante cocturam*, by scratching *post cocturam*, or by painting or ink writing. Many such written *testimonia* by their very nature were made for a small number of potential readers, sometimes just the author, and so may be defined as *unica* of a sort. By the same token, they follow an everyday style, i.e., constitute *everyday writing*.

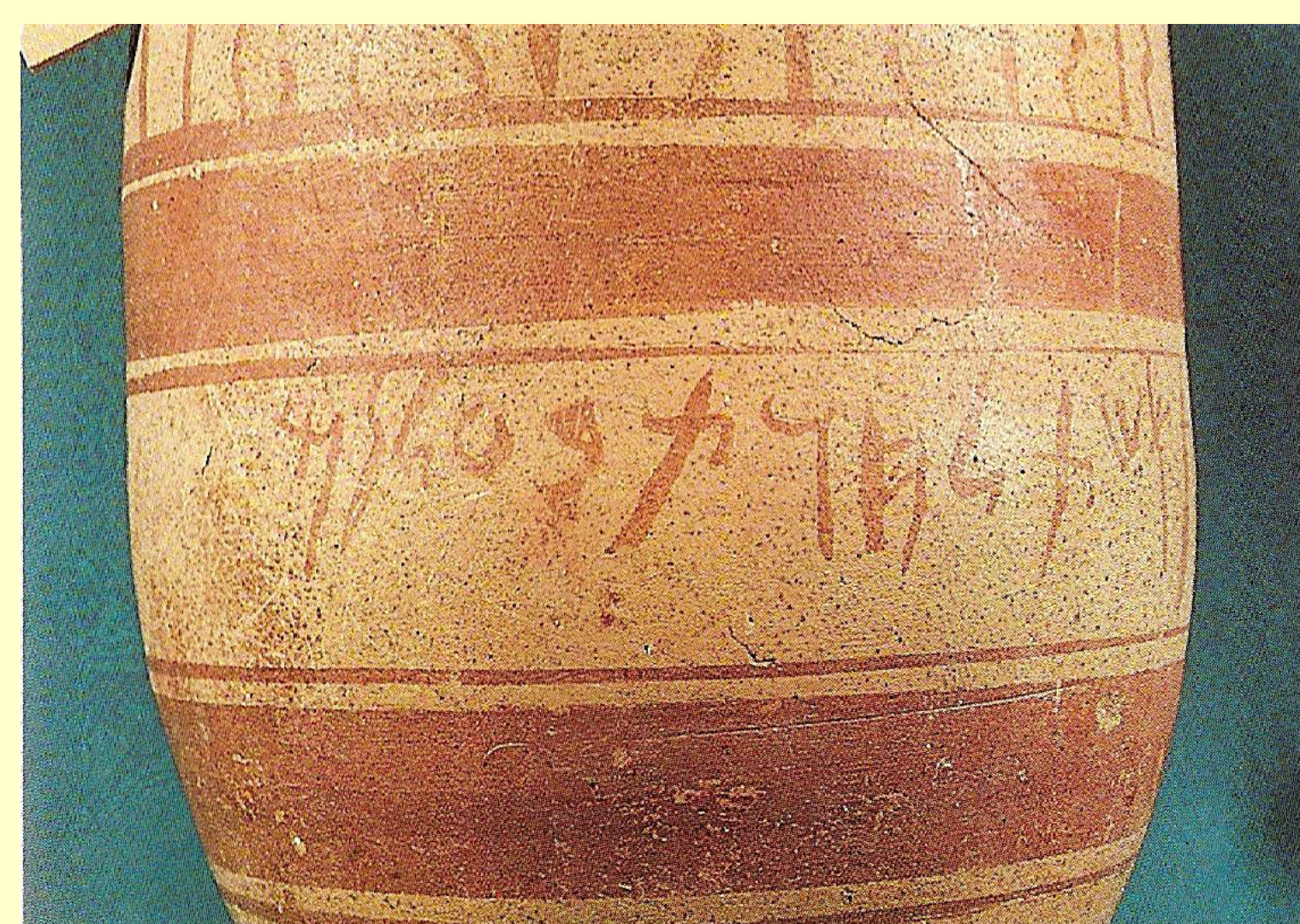
Most studies concerning such a kind of documentation focused on the inscription itself, not considering the support used. The latter instead follows from a precise selection by the author/owner/client, and so it is important to recover its archeological meaning and ultimately its historical value. That is why our Project specifically aims at restoring the unity of inscription and support. In fact, we catalogue not only the inscriptions from an epigraphic standpoint, but also the objects themselves by archaeological *criteria*.

Based on such premises, we produced a specific record format that considers all archeological and epigraphic aspects that are relevant to frame and understand the items collected. Such a complex format went through quite some elaboration, and we show below an example of compiled form in its final version.

The natural medium for our Project is constituted by a digital framework on the Internet. At variance with many other epigraphic projects already present on the Web, ours is marked by the importance given to the data concerning the inscribed support, and by the specific features of the Semitic alphabet and its transliterations. These features required the elaboration of a specific software for cataloguing, handling and search of our material. We use the HTML language for the basic interface, MySQL to store data, and PHP5 for the interaction between user and digital archive.



2 Mogador (Morocco): ceramic sherds, graffiti. (from above) a. *lhwf* b. *ʔʕm mgn*



3 Cagliari (Italia): amphora, painted inscription *ʕm ʔ ʕt lhwf bʕnm*

Scheda epigrafica: AeC00003 - modifica - elimina

Dati sul luogo di ritrovamento

Collocazione geografica: Italia - Sardegna

Luogo di ritrovamento - toponimo antico: Cagliari

Luogo di ritrovamento - specifiche toponimo antico: S. Avendrace, tomba 91

Luogo di ritrovamento - toponimo moderno: Cagliari

Luogo di ritrovamento - specifiche toponimo moderno: S. Avendrace, tomba 91

Data di ritrovamento: 1900

Nr. d'inventario di scavo: 1900

Cronologia del contesto di ritrovamento: 1900

Tipologia contesto di ritrovamento: funerario - necropoli

Dati sul luogo di conservazione

Luogo di conservazione: Italia - Sardegna - Cagliari

Luogo di conservazione - specifiche: Museo Archeologico Nazionale

Nr. d'inventario museale: 1900

Dati sul supporto

Categoria artigianale: Istrumentum domesticum

Supporto: Classe: ceramica comune - Forma: anfora - Tipo: anfora a punta conica

Cronologia del tipo: V-IV a.C.

Stato di conservazione: integro

Dimensioni del supporto: ab. 0.00 - larg. 0.00 - spes. 0.00

Impasto: -

Superficie: -

Area di produzione: - incerto? No

Dati sulla posizione epigrafica

Posizione epigrafica: corpo del vaso -

Testo epigrafico

Testo: *ʕm ʔ ʕt lhwf bʕnm*

Traslitterazione: *ʕm ʔ ʕt lhwf bʕnm*

Traduzione: *ʕm ʔ ʕt lhwf bʕnm*

Note: Due anfore a punta conica, uguali, su ciascuna delle quali era dipinta la medesima iscrizione. Le lettere sono dipinte in rosso, come la decorazione a linee orizzontali e a linee verticali ombelico. Cfr. scheda AeC00004

Bibliografia: Taramelli 1912; Lippold 1950, 15; Hoffner 1963, pp. 337-339; Garbini 1965; Garbini 1967, n. 25, p. 104, tav. XXXVII; Garbini 1982, pp. 461-465; Amadasi Guzzani 1990, n. 3, pp. 73-74, fig. 3; Pesce 2000, pp. 110-111, fig. 117

*Scrittura su argilla e ceramica*: the form adopted for data recording (details)

#### Discussion

The main problems in storing such data relate the alphabet characters; in fact, both the data storage in the database and the displaying to the public are affected by the features of the Semitic letters. The solution of the first problem is to use the Unicode UTF-8, and to configure MySQL properly. As to the second, the solution is to have the site look for availability of the character on the local computer; in the absence, the site allows the user to view the inscription in the available writing system, so that everyone can read the text sidestepping the local font installation.

#### Conclusions

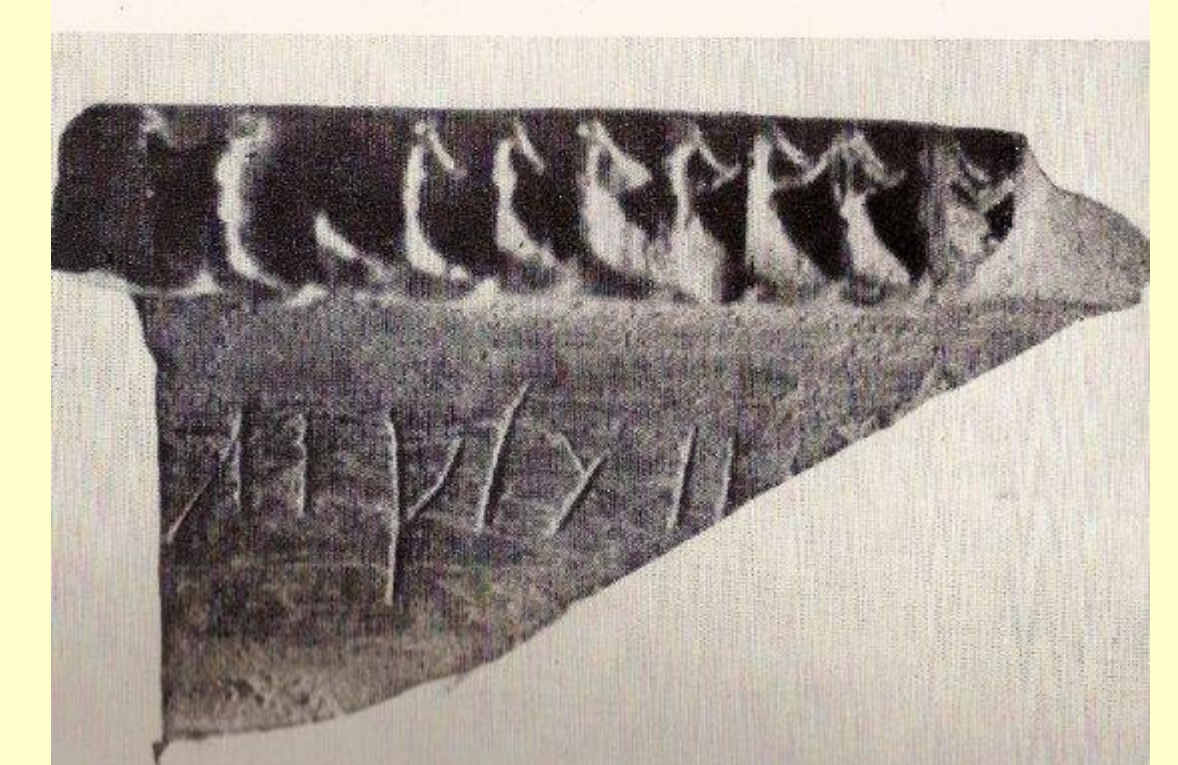
We have presented a new side of Phoenician-Punic epigraphy, namely, the inscriptions on ceramic objects. The specific relationships between inscriptions and their support, and their variability required to elaborate specific criteria for cataloguing and studying such items. To optimally collect, compare and study the available documentation we arranged all edited materials in a single *database*. As of today, the census of Phoenician-Punic documents found in Italy has been completed. A preliminary overview of our materials shows a clear trend towards inscriptions made of single letters, abbreviations, names, very rarely longer expressions.

Project site and search of the collected data will be soon accessible on the Internet. Two levels of scanning are envisaged: the 1st level is simply accessed via the URL; the 2nd level allows accessing the full documentation stored in our archive.

**Keywords:** Phoenician and Punic epigraphy; writings on clay and pottery; database; data storing; digital archive for humanities.



Sic. Npo 2 A.



4 Sicily (Italia): vase fragment, neopunic on both sides. (ante cocturam incision, inside) *qʕnʔmqm* (post cocturam graffito, outside) *[ʕbdmlqrt]*



5 Malta (Tas-Silg): cooking ware, ante cocturam incision *lʕtr*

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