

Place Date Language Material Number of texts Type Collections Find/Acquisition	Temple of Soknobrais
	Arsinoite nome, Bakchias AD 116-212 Greek Papyrus 23 Temple archive Cairo Museum, Cairo; Beinecke Library, Yale; Lund University, Lund; Firenze; Michigan Bought from antiquities market in 1930

Description

In the 1930's several papyri appeared on the antiquities market, which clearly came from a clandestine find in the temple of the crocodile god Soknobrais in Bakchias. The texts ended up in at least six collections: the collection of king Fouad (now in the Cairo museum), the Beinecke Library in Yale, the private collection of E. von Scherling (two items, bought by Yale in 1958) and the university of Lund; two individual texts are now in Florence and Michigan.

Most texts are yearly reports in which the government is informed about the sacred objects in the temple and the number of priests (γραφὴ ἱερέων καὶ χειρισμοῦ)¹, and covering letters accompanying these reports². The reports, usually written at the very end of the year, were addressed to at least five different officials: *strategos*, royal scribe, *bibliophylax*, and once to the *eklogistes* (SB VI 9322) and to the inspector of the *idios logos* (SB VI 9335), the common denominator being the priests³. The 34 texts in the archive range from AD 116 to 212; one memorandum, preserved in two copies (P.Fouad 14 and P.Lund IV 7) refers to the situation in the time of Augustus (AD 7), but the texts themselves are certainly written much later. Fifteen texts are preserved for the years 171-204, which is the period best represented; when complete this part of the archive alone must have contained at least 198 documents. For the earlier and later periods the loss is even greater. A third type of texts are petitions addressed by some priests to different officials, usually about exemption or partial exemption of manual work for irrigation⁴. In some cases the priests of Soknobrais act in common with those of Sokonokonneus, the brother crocodile god⁵. The two temples were clearly closely related. The graph below presents the distribution of the three types of documents in time.

The documents of this archive are outgoing documents, which are expected in the archives of the officials involved, not in that of the temple. The easiest solution would be that the priests kept a copy of their reports and the covering letters in their archives. This seems to be confirmed by the fact that the backs have no addresses and that sometimes copies of the same text occur side by side (P.Fouad 14 = P.Lund IV 7; SB VI 9339 = P.Fouad 13; Lund IV 3 = SB VI 9338). But several covering letters have an annotation in a second hand⁶, which shows that in some cases at least the originals were returned to the priests after being filed by the authorities. Most of these petitions are no doubt copies, kept by the priests as a kind of law-suit dossier; P.Lund IV 1 has an official subscription by the prefect, in a different hand (ἀπόδοϛ) and looks like an original, which was returned to the petitioners.

¹ P.Lund IV 3, SB VI 9319-9321, 9335—9338, P.Turner 28.

² P.Fouad 11-12, SB VI 9322-9326, 9332-9334, SB XII 11149.

³ For a study of this type of documents, with full bibliography, see T.KRUSE, *Der königliche Schreibertradition*, pp.711-716.

⁴ P.Fouad 13; P.Lund IV 1, P.Mich. XI 618, SB VI 9328-9329, 9331, 9339.

⁵ P.Turner 27; SB VI 9319-9320, 9337.

⁶ SB VI 9323 (*strategos*), P.Fouad 11-12, 9324-9326, 9333-9334 (royal scribe), 9332 (*bibliophylax*).

The protagonists of this archive are the priests of the Soknobraisis temple in Bakchias, usually represented by their *presbyteroi*. Since the *presbyteroi* were chosen year by year the senders of the reports and covering letters are numerous. A prosopography of 109 priests in Roman Bakchias is given by E.Knudtson in P.Lund. IV, pp.83-93.

Though it is not impossible that P.Lund IV 9 (a memorandum from priests of Souchos and Ammon in Bakchias about the burial of the Apis bull) and 11 (an account for a cult guild of the Dioskouroi) belong to the same group, this remains beyond proof.

Appendices

Fig.1: Chronological range of texts in the archive of Soknobraisis

