



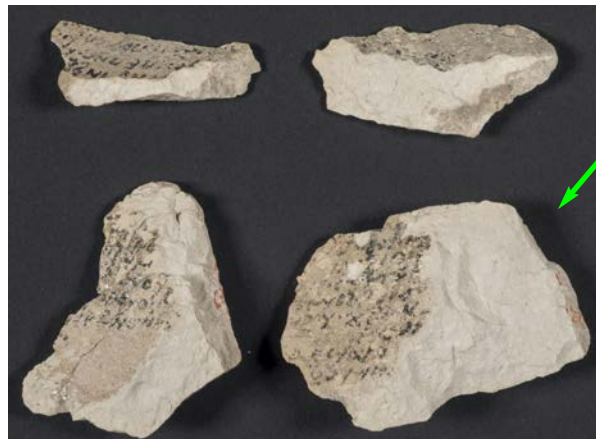
## Art Conservation *and preserving fragments of human history*

*When four small pieces of limestone became a treatment project this year for Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation (WUDPAC) Fellow Katerina Acuna, she was happy for the opportunity to work with them. The pieces date from between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century CE and are covered with words written in Demotic, the cursive Egyptian script derived from hieroglyphs. Kate, an objects major with an interest in archeological materials, felt privileged to be able to touch and work with ancient items made by human hands.*

The limestone pieces are part of an ostrakon, defined as a fragment of ceramic or anything other than papyrus used as an ephemeral writing surface. They were excavated in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by archaeologists from the University of Chicago at Medinet Habu. This Egyptian site, west of the ancient city of Thebes (modern-day Luxor), contains both the mortuary temple of Ramesses III and a town called Jeme that grew up later within the temple complex. Today, the pieces are one of 11 ostraca, and the only one made of limestone, in the collection of the Johns Hopkins Archaeological Museum at Johns Hopkins University.

Kate's plan is to stabilize the fragile ostrakon pieces and reintegrate them as much as possible so they can be used for study and research. She first carefully cleaned the porous limestone by lightly dabbing it with a dry cosmetic sponge. She also worked to determine how best to remove aged adhesive from the back of the fragments without damaging the ink. She believes the writer used a reed, rather than a brush, to write on the stone substrate, due to the smooth, even quality of the lines of each character.

Kate will work the four pieces like a jigsaw puzzle to fit them together. The pieces are so fragile that they are difficult to handle, much less reattach, and she is deciding how best to house them so that they can be used for study. One option is to digitally reintegrate them, while another is to house the pieces in proximity to one another in an archival container so that the text can be read. As she completes her treatment on the ostrakon before returning it to Johns Hopkins, Kate is happy that she has been able to touch, work with, and assist in researching an object from so long ago.



### ARTC Spotlight—February 2020

*The University of Delaware's Art Conservation Department educates and trains professional conservators who are well versed in the treatment, analysis, documentation, and preventive conservation of individual artifact and archive collections. For more news about our students and other department activities visit our web site at [www.artcons.udel.edu](http://www.artcons.udel.edu).*



*Top: Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation Fellow Kate Acuna examining a fragment of the limestone ostrakon. Above: Kate aligning fragments of the ostrakon. Left: Fragments of the ostrakon with Demotic text.*

*Images: Even Krape (top and above) and Katerina Acuna (details at left).*