

CHAPTER 9

INSCRIPTIONS AND GRAFFITI

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9.1 Introduction

This chapter offers a brief description of 28 inscriptions and 77 letter-like signs discovered in the excavation of ASW2, together with 377 other symbols or graffiti. All but three of the inscriptions are scratched on the surface of potsherds and most are incomplete; none of the inscriptions were found on complete pots. Similarly, almost all the graffiti are from potsherds, only one or two being incised on complete pots. The majority of the scratched sherds are of the coarse ware category 16, black and red ware, which – as we have seen above (Table 6.5) – was one of the most common wares found throughout the early periods of the site, from period K through to G. From the entire series of graffiti and inscriptions it is evident that the signs were applied to the pots only after firing and thus may be taken to have been made by or for the benefit of the owner of the pot.

As we had already been alerted by Dr Deraniyagala's discovery of inscriptions on pottery in his sondages at Anuradhapura, we kept a sharp eye on the pottery as it was washed, and we believe that few pieces escaped our notice. However, a substantial number of graffiti are not included in the catalogue, as they either did not add new types or were largely unrecognizable as types. They are however listed for statistical purposes in Table 9.1. Once a sherd had been identified as bearing an inscription or graffiti, it was placed in a special register and an eye-drawing or tracing was made. Subsequently, rubbings were made of all graffiti, while in the case of all inscriptions of more than one *akṣara* (an *akṣara* is a basic script component, typically a consonant-vowel unit) a photograph was taken. In the accompanying plates of the graffiti and single *akṣaras* we have retained the original re-copies, which we believe are sufficiently accurate for our purposes.

It must be noted that in this chapter all the inscriptions and graffiti are listed and illustrated in six catalogues (Catalogues 1–6). Each reference to an inscription or graffiti involves two elements: the first number is that of the catalogue, the second number (and any further numbers) is that of the item itself. References are given in two forms, extended and concise. For example the extended form is written 'Catalogue 6, No. 6.5.6', while the concise form will be simply No.6.5.6.

Four graffiti are recorded from the interface of period K3/J1, three from J1, twelve from period J2 and sixteen from period J3 (see Table 9.1). It is even probable that the earliest graffiti belong to period K3 (see Volume 1, Chapter 6: Dating the Sequence: 126–7). Of these from period J3, five sherds have scratched marks

that are similar to the single Brahmi *akṣaras* *ka*, *ga* and *ta*. The catalogue numbers of these are listed in Table 9.2 below. In the absence of any complete inscription from this period their presence may be taken as an indication that the use of writing was already current. Similar Brahmi-like letters have occasionally been reported on Megalithic grave pottery from peninsular India. In the next structural phase, J4, the first three inscriptions are found, along with two further single *akṣaras* and fourteen other graffiti (see Table 9.2). From that time forwards, through the final stage of period J and through periods I, H and G both inscriptions and graffiti occur in more or less equal numbers. From period G3 onwards the number of inscriptions and graffiti declines. It is worth noting that the occurrence of inscriptions and graffiti was not evenly spread: certain building periods show a much greater frequency than others. Thus periods I1, H and G2 produced 73, 55 and 47 examples, while periods I5, G1 and G4 produced only 6, 12 and 1 respectively. The reason for this discrepancy is not clear, but several possible interpretations may be suggested.

9.2 Inscriptions

9.2.1 General features and scripts encountered

All the inscriptions appear to be in early Brahmi script, and we cannot recognize any other script. A certain number of single signs are of doubtful character, as they do not appear to belong to a script as such; also some of the single *akṣaras* listed below may perhaps have been graffiti rather than letters. For instance the element of the 'Dominant' sign that we refer to as a *mangala-kalaśa*, urn, coincides with one of the variant forms of the letter *ma*. Most of the inscriptions belong to that variety of script which Dr Iravatham Mahadevan has justifiably characterized as 'Sri Lankan Brahmi', in that they share common characteristics with the script used for the many early rock and cave inscriptions from Sri Lanka (Mahadevan 1995) (see Maps 17 and 18). A single symbol, occurring on one sherd beside what we take to be an arrow sign, appears to be one of the distinctive letters introduced into Tamil Brahmi to represent the Tamil *ṇa* (No.6.5.6, sf 17530). This sherd comes from a very early context (period J2), that is from a period in which there are only meagre and still indefinite indications of the use of writing in our excavation. In these circumstances, and in view of its uniqueness, doubt must remain regarding the reading of the sign as a Tamil Brahmi letter.

The Kharosthi script appears to be absent. A number of the single symbols listed in Catalogue 3 (section 9.2.7.3) appear to be either unusual compound forms of Brahmi letters or even, in some instances, symbols resembling monograms on Indo-Greek or Indo-Scythian coinage. We are inclined to regard these resemblances as fortuitous, or of a general rather than a particular kind, and thus too random for such identification to be given serious attention.

9.2.2 Nature and scope of inscriptions

As we remarked, many of the inscriptions are incomplete, being on small fragments of broken pottery, and all are short, the longest being of eleven and six *akṣaras* respectively. Where it is possible to hazard a meaningful reading, the inscriptions appear to contain personal names in either the genitive or dative cases, or without clear indications of the case. Among the sherd inscriptions, two (Catalogue 1, Nos 19 [sf 25133] and 20 [sf 228A]) contain names combined with the title *abi*, lady, princess, indicating that the named person was a female member of a royal family. The clay sealing (Catalogue 4, No. 2 [sf 10249]) gives not only the name of its owner, Maga or Magaha, but states also that he was a *purumaka*, chief, and the son of Tiśa (presumably a king called Tiśa). It seems clear that the scratched inscriptions on the rims or sides of bowls, lids or water pots are intended as statements of ownership, as already discussed in some depth in Coningham *et al.* 1996.

9.2.3 Stratigraphic evidence for the inscriptions

Table 9.2 lists the stratigraphic position of all inscriptions, including single *akṣaras* and other letter-like signs.

Period J

The earliest occurrence of signs resembling single Brahmi letters is in period J3. They include *ta*, which in one case (Catalogue 2, No. 35 [sf 17521]) is of typically early form, although in another it is somewhat strange (Catalogue 6, No. 15.34 [sf 10675]), being written in reverse, with its longer stroke to the right, terminating in a rounded curve to the left. The letter *ga*, too, is of typically early form (Catalogue 6, No. 15.33 [sf 17523]). In Catalogue 6, No. 5.6 (sf 17530), the Tamil Brahmi form of *na*, occurring beside an arrow sign, is similar to that known hitherto only from later dated contexts in India. It must be recognized that this single example of this letter can scarcely be regarded as an inscription, let alone as establishing the existence at this early date of the modified Tamil Brahmi script. Nonetheless, its occurrence needs explanation and is unlikely to be a mere fluke. At least two of the single letters (*ga* and *ta*) are included in Lal's list of symbols (Lal 1962, symbols 1 and 2), and examples of both the rounded and angular versions of Brahmi *ma* are found on pots from several Megalithic grave sites in peninsular India.

Period J4 produced three inscriptions, all unfortunately incomplete, and two single *akṣaras*. The first inscription (Catalogue 1, No. 15 [sf 17332]) includes

three letters reading *devasa*, the first two letters being of normal early form and the third appearing to be crudely and inexpertly written; the second (Catalogue 1, No. 16 [sf 17308]) includes only the upper parts of three *akṣaras* but may be reconstructed as *go de (n)a* or *go de (v)a*. Several features of the short, incomplete text raise a doubt as to whether it may be out of stratigraphic context, as epigraphically one would expect it to be somewhat later. Its presence may equally suggest a different cause, namely that, while inscriptions Nos 1.15 and 1.17 were written by novices who had not as yet acquired skill in writing, this piece was written by an experienced hand. If this explanation were correct – and we can see no way of proving it – it might lead us to suppose that the evolved Brahmi script was already in existence at this early date but that some writers were as yet inexperienced. This complex pattern is also shared in Deraniyagala's adjacent trench ASW88 (Deraniyagala and Abeyratne 2000). The third inscription (No. 1.17 [sf 17420]) is also problematic: the first letter is almost entirely missing, while the second represents a crudely drawn *lā* and the third *ku*. This is certainly written in an ungainly fashion, which may well indicate its earliness in the development of writing in this locality. The other two single letters (Catalogue 6, Nos 15.28 [sf 17427] and 24 [sf 17428] respectively) are *ka* and *ta*, the latter being in reversed form, similar to that of Catalogue 6, No. 15.34, discussed above. We shall return to the problem of these early inscriptions and their significance in the conclusion to this chapter.

Period J5 produced only one inscription (Catalogue 1, No. 18 [sf 17425]) and a single *akṣara* (Catalogue 2, No. 21 [sf 17093]). The inscription is of three *akṣaras* only: all three are very crudely drawn and it is difficult to offer a firm reading. The first is a crude form of *ma*, the second a crude but by no means unknown form of *ta*, and the third a crude and even doubtful form of *na*, apparently written sideways on. This variant form is occasionally encountered in Sri Lanka in early Brahmi inscriptions of somewhat later date. We conclude that this inscription is the latest in our series to show these crude early forms. Henceforward there is a remarkable uniformity of script and writing ability. The single letter from J5 is *ma*, and it is unremarkable.

Period I

Period I produced four inscriptions and ten single letters. As a group these examples appear to represent a marked change from the script of the previous period. The outstanding symptom of this change is the greater regularity of the letter forms and the neatness and fluency of the writing. These characteristics are particularly marked in three of the inscriptions (Catalogue 1, Nos 14, 20 and 24 [sfs 17330, 228A and 1472A]). It may be remarked that several other inscriptions and single *akṣaras* from this period are written in a similarly neat hand. As it seems unlikely that all are 'out of context', they suggest that at the opening of period I there was a marked advance in the style of writing from that of the preceding periods. The inscribed materials from the succeeding periods show that the neat style was maintained thereafter.

Periods 12–18 produced markedly smaller numbers of inscriptions than their predecessor, but their character remains fairly closely in line with it. Of the two inscriptions from period 12, the first (Catalogue 1, No. 12 [sf 17040]) reads ‘...*piyagata*’, written somewhat carelessly in a fluent but largish script. However, this inscription, when compared with those of period J, shows much greater freedom and control on the part of the writer. The second inscription (No. 22 [sf 139A]) appears to read ‘...*ha kaśapa*’, possibly a Prakrit version of the name Kasyapa, written in a small neat style. Of the following period 13, inscription No. 10 (sf 17025) reads ‘*purāya*’, presumably a personal name, and No. 25 (sf 17095) reads ‘*ravo*’. In the final structural phase of period I (18), two inscriptions (Nos 1 [sf 16472] and 2 [sf 16454]) read ‘*timula*’ and ‘*damāne*’ respectively. These inscriptions introduce a new feature, not hitherto marked in the series, in that the form of *ma* becomes noticeably dumpy, either being markedly squarish in form or else taking on a near-circular body with two short curving arms above. This tendency is subsequently noticeable in the inscriptions of the following period, H.

Period H

The unusual nature of the deposits of period H has been commented on above. For whatever reason, they coincide with the abandonment of this part of the site for normal habitation and its use for some sort of industrial activity. The period also produced a good number of inscriptions, including the clay sealing (Catalogue 4, No. 2 [sf 10249]). Sadly, the other inscriptions are all short and no complete words or names can be recognized. The sealing reads ‘*tiśa puta magaha purumaka*’, which we translate as ‘Magaha (or Maga), the Purumaka, son of Tiśa’.

Period G

In period G there is a marked decline in the number of inscriptions on pottery. Period G2 includes only four single *akṣaras*, G3 only one, and G1 and G4 no inscriptions at all. G5 produced only two inscriptions, one (Catalogue 1, No. 19 [sf 25133]), with the interesting reading *tiśabiya*, ‘the princess Tiśa’, and the other (No. 21 [sf 8190]), of only two *akṣaras*, reading *tima*. The much greater building activity witnessed in this period and continuing into subsequent periods suggests that, already by this time, earlier deposits were being disturbed. Both these inscriptions are in the style of script which prevailed during the third to first centuries BC and may well indicate that the princess referred to is the same as Abi Tiśa, daughter of King Gamini Uti, referred to in inscriptions 34 and 47 from Mihintale (Paranavitana 1970). In this case a date of c. 200 BC appears quite consistent.

Periods F–C

No inscriptions are reported from these periods.

Period B

Only two further inscriptions were discovered during the excavation of the later periods, and both were on a small stone goldsmith’s mould (Catalogue 4, No. 1 [sf 166]),

which bore two nearly identical versions of the same text, the one reading *vacaḍataśa* and the other *vacaḍataha*. The meaning in both cases is clear: ‘of (or belonging to) Vacadata (Vatsadatta)’. The points of interest are the dialectic variation of the genitive case *sa* or *ha*, and the substitution of the ‘correct’ dental *da* for the ‘incorrect’ cerebral *ḍa* of the former version. Both inscriptions are more neatly written than any of the other scratched examples. Their epigraphical age is open to discussion, but we are inclined to date them to the second to first centuries BC.

9.2.4 The development of the script

As we have seen, the stratigraphic sequence of the inscriptions, whose chronology is derived from radiocarbon dating, extends over four centuries or more. There are some points at which this dating sequence does not coincide exactly with postulated epigraphical development. For example, epigraphically it is possible that No. 1.20 (sf 228A) belongs to the late third century or early part of the second century BC on account of the fluency of its script, although stratigraphically it occurs in period I1 and should be dated accordingly to the third quarter of the fourth century BC. Similarly No. 1.19 derives from G5, in a context that is not likely to be earlier than the late first century BC to early first century AD; yet epigraphically it seems to belong to the early second century BC. In this case, the disturbance of earlier strata during one of the periods of construction in the third to second centuries BC may be called in to explain the difference. Difficulties of this kind must be admitted and are perhaps inescapable in the light of the nature of the evidence we are dealing with. However, having noticed such anomalies, we are still left with a main body of data covering the development of the script through the radiocarbon-dated centuries involved. We shall return to a discussion of chronological matters in the conclusion (see section 9.4.1.1).

As already stated, the inscriptions are all in Brahmi script. In one sense they show remarkably little change or evolution during the period represented. However, taken as a group, the examples from period J3, J4 and J5 show a number of features that may indicate their earliness, although those from early levels in trench ASW88 appear more refined (Deraniyagala 1992: 739–50). A number of the letters from ASW2 are crudely written and by comparison with the mean provided by the (much later) Asokan pillar inscriptions show distorted forms. Thus, while *ka*, *ku*, *ga*, *ta*, *da*, *de* and *va* are all clearly recognizable, initial *e*, *ma* and *la* are distorted. Again, in Catalogue 3, Nos 15 (sf 16149), 29 (sf 16372) and 34 (sf 17034), *ta* appears to be reversed. Even more problematic are the second and third letters of inscription No. 24 (sf 142A), the former of which is only doubtfully read as *ta* and the third as cerebral *na*. If the latter reading is correct, it implies that the normal form of this letter is here written sideways on.

Period I offers a much larger selection of letters and inscriptions, and even if we discount inscription No. 1.20, the range of clearly written and easily recognizable letters is considerable. In No. 1.14 (sf 17330) *ja* has already assumed its typically Sri Lankan form; in

No.1.13 (sf 17138) *ya* has already assumed its characteristically deep form, while it still retains its more typically North Indian form in No.1.12 (sf 17040). In Nos 1.10 (sf 17025) and 1.25 (sf 17095) *ra* has its typical 'corkscrew' form. Initial *a* has its characteristically divided curves, as also in Bhattiprolu. The form of *ma* found in the final stage of this period also shows some change from the earlier occurrences. It approaches the typical 'southern' type found at Bhattiprolu, but showing (in inscription No.1.1 [sf 16472]) a marked angularity of the lower part of the letter and also (in No.1.2 [sf 16454]) a dumpy type with exaggerated circular form and short arms attached above.

Summarizing our view of the script during this period, we would remark that from period II forward there is a marked development in the fluency of writing and the regularity of letter forms. A number of letters are closer to the standard forms of Asokan and North Indian scripts, while some aberrancies still occur. For example, the form of *śa* in inscription No.1.22 (sf 139A) appears to be the reverse of normal. We also notice that, in the last phase of the period (I8), the squat and squarish forms of *ma* appear.

Period H plays a pivotal role in clarifying some of the changes we have seen in the earlier periods. The script shows a continuation of the same tendencies as those of the previous period. The script of the Magaha sealing (Catalogue 4, No. 2 [sf 10249]) is closely in line with that of the many single and double *akṣara* inscriptions from the same period. The apparent correspondence of the content of the Magaha sealing to inscription No. 22 at Mihintale (Paranavitana 1970), although the two were almost certainly written by different hands, encourages us to believe that they refer to the same individual.

This brings us almost to the end of the repertoire of inscribed materials from Anuradhapura. From period G1 forwards there is a marked decline in the number of inscriptions: four single *akṣaras* in G2, one in G3 and two inscriptions in G5. The first five of these appear very much the same as those of the previous two periods. So too does the script of the final two. Inscription No.1.19 (sf 25133) refers to the lady Tiśabiya, whom we may suspect to be the same as the Abi Tisa of inscription No. 34 from Mihintale. If, as we are inclined to think, this lady was the daughter of King Uti (Uttiya) her date can be fixed with some confidence to c. 207–197 BC or slightly later. The second inscription (No.1.21 [sf 8190]) tells much the same story epigraphically: the two letters read *tim(a or u)* and recall the text of No.1.1 (above).

Last of all comes Catalogue 4, No.1 (sf 166), from period B. This is stratigraphically the latest inscription of the series and it is so far removed from the date of its find-spot that we may disregard the possibility of error in this case. It must be related to disturbed material which was redeposited in the large-scale rebuilding which took place during the second half of the first millennium AD. We are therefore free to consider its script without concern for this aspect. We suggest below that the two related texts with their interesting minor dialectic variations represent a more North Indian character than do any of the other inscriptions we have been considering. The diagnostic traits for the date of the

inscription in our view point towards a date in the second to first centuries BC.

To conclude this section we wish to draw attention to one firm conclusion. Both in North India and in the Deccan there are marked changes in script which begin to be felt around the middle of the first century BC. These changes become more pronounced through the course of the first and second centuries AD. Karunaratne (1984) has made a broad classification of a body of Sri Lankan inscriptions, dividing them into groups which for one reason or another, partly historical and partly epigraphical, may be assigned to succeeding centuries, if his classification is accepted, and we see no reason why it should not be, even if there may be different views on some minor points or even on chronology, it would provide a useful yardstick against which to measure the dates of the latest of our Anuradhapura inscriptions. This exercise leads us to the conclusion that none of our inscriptions is likely to be later than the beginning of the Christian era. One may also make a similar critical comparison between our corpus and the inscriptions which Karunaratne assigns to the first century BC. The result is this exercise is extremely interesting and again fairly conclusive. Already during this century changes comparable to those taking place in India began to be felt in Sri Lanka. When we look at the nineteen inscriptions Karunaratne lists for this period, we observe that the situation is less clear cut than was the case for the first century AD. Certainly our Anuradhapura inscriptions offer no evidence of the appearance of serifs on letters nor of the general tendency towards overall squareness of some letters; nor do we find any evidence of the lengthening of the vertical strokes on initial *a* or on *ka*. In these terms none of our inscriptions show such 'new' features. The one change which Karunaratne associates with this century and which we do find on two of our inscriptions is the introduction of the dental *sa*. It is perhaps significant that one of these is on the stone mould inscription (Catalogue 4, No. 1 [sf 166]), where one version uses the genitive case ending *sa*, while the second version uses the local form of the Sri Lankan genitive case, *ha*. The second occurrence of the dental *sa* is on the 'early' inscription of Yahasiniyā (No.1.20 [sf 228A]), whose date has already caused us some difficulty. This might tempt one to believe that these two inscriptions belonged (epigraphically) to the first half of the first century BC. It is unlikely that they belong to a later date and they may, in spite of the presence of the dental *sa*, belong to the second century BC. Thus we venture to suggest that Karunaratne may be unduly cautious in his dating of the introduction of the dental *sa*. After all, this letter is already commonly found in the Asokan edicts throughout India and there can be no doubt that, in the interaction between Sri Lanka and North India in the wake of Mahinda's mission, many North Indian influences began to appear.

In the light of this discussion it is now possible to assign an epigraphical age to the two inscriptions which we have argued are stratigraphically 'out of place'. The first is No.1.20 (sf 228A) from period I8. There can be little doubt that epigraphically this inscription belongs to period H. The second is Catalogue 4, No. 1 (sf 166) from

period B: here too the likelihood is that epigraphically this belongs to period H, or at the latest to period G1–G2.

9.2.5 Evidence for the use of writing

The evidence presented by the discovery of inscriptions with single or two or more *akṣaras* suggests that the marking of pottery vessels begins in period J3, somewhat later than the inscribing of pots with other graffiti, which occurs first in K3. The great majority of the inscribed pots are made of one or other of the common, locally produced wares of the period. That is to say: black and red ware; red ware of both coarse and slipped varieties; and grey ware of both dull and fine grey varieties. The predominant forms of inscribed pottery in the black and red ware are small to medium-shallow bowls, used probably mainly for eating and drinking. In the red and grey wares the only inscribed forms recognizable are globular jars that were probably used for the storage of water. All the inscriptions are short and probably contained little more than personal names and titles. Often they are in the dative or genitive cases, implying that their use was to indicate the owners of particular vessels. This suggests that throughout the occupation of the site, from the first introduction of writing in period J3 through to period H, a similar usage prevailed.

In addition to the inscribed pots only two other examples were found: from period H comes the clay sealing (sf 10249) impressed with the name (Magaha), father's name (Tiśaputa) and title (*Purumaka*) of an official of the government. Unfortunately we do not know how this sealing found its way into one of the distinctive pits that were a feature of the site at that time, but the evidence clearly points to a quite different form of usage to that of the inscribed pots. Again, the stone jeweller's mould (sf 166) which had been redeposited in the disturbed materials of period B3, but which must originally have come from period H or the earlier phases of period G, points to a craft activity which fully comprehended the use of writing.

In terms of the number of inscribed potsherds found, we would expect that the practice of inscribing pottery declined fairly rapidly after the end of period H, or at least during the early part of period G. This probably indicates that during the first century BC writing on other materials became common and that the need for inscribing pottery diminished (see Chapter 10: Faunal Remains, section 10.3.1.18, for period G ivory and bone

plaques tentatively identified as manuscript covers). As we noticed above, the changes in script examined by Karunaratne become increasingly apparent during this and the following centuries. In northern India these changes first begin to show during the second half of the first century BC. Dani (1963: 542–53), we believe correctly, associated the changes in North India with the introduction of a new writing tool in the form of a reed pen and ink, perhaps under Indo-Greek influence. We agree that the underlying reason for the developments in script is probably to be sought in the introduction of new writing materials and tools, and in the changing method and status of writing itself.

9.2.6 The language of the Anuradhapura inscriptions

One final matter must be discussed regarding the inscriptions: what language or languages were they written in? The answer is very plain. From the first inscriptions in J4 onwards, the indications are that the language throughout is a form of Prakrit, doubtless of North Indian origin. This is not only apparent in the number of recognizable words or elements of words, for example *deva*, *piya*, *ti* (*tri*), but in the several texts which show what appear to be typical genitive or dative case endings, *aya*, *asa*, *aha*. There is moreover no trace of any Tamil words or elements and, with the single possible exception of one specifically Tamil letter from a very early context, there are none of the characteristic new letters employed in Tamil to represent the special phonetic requirements of Tamil. Even though the sample size is so small, the implications of this are sufficiently to warrant the conclusion that, from c. 400 BC onwards, writing was used at Anuradhapura for a form of Prakrit which was the direct ancestor of modern Sinhalese. For a more detailed discussion of archaeological models for linguistic development in the island, please see Coningham *et al.* 1996.

9.2.7 Catalogues 1–4

Throughout this and the following catalogues in this chapter, the first numeral in each entry signifies the catalogue number and the following number (or numbers) signifies the item referred to. For stratigraphic position please refer to Tables 9.2 and 9.4 and for line drawings to Table 9.3.

9.2.7.1 Catalogue 1: Inscriptions on potsherds

Serial No.	Special find	Context	(Period, phase)	Description of sherd
1.1	16472	729	(18, LIII)	Side of a black and red ware bowl. There are three <i>akṣaras</i> , all incomplete. They may be read as ... <i>ti mu la</i> (<i>lu</i>). The form of the letters is noticeably squat and squarish. In view of their truncated nature it is also possible to make other readings. [Plate 9.1]
1.2	16454	788 NE	(18, LIII)	Sherd of granular red-brown ware. There are three <i>akṣaras</i> , but the reading is not entirely clear. The first letter may be read as either <i>a</i> or <i>da</i> , the

				second is reasonably clear, but the third is incomplete and may be reconstructed as either <i>ne</i> or <i>na</i> . The reading may thus be either ... <i>a mā ne</i> ... or ... <i>da mā ne</i> . The meaning is not apparent. [Plate 9.1]
1.3	16195	698	(H, LXIV)	Rim fragment of black and red ware. There are two <i>akṣaras</i> , ... <i>ta ya</i> , presumably the end of a Prakrit word or name in the dative case, the beginning being missing. [Plate 9.2]
1.4	16742	961.NE	(14, XXX)	Rim fragment of black and grey ware. There are two <i>akṣaras</i> , ... <i>śa ya</i> , also presumably the ending of a Prakrit name in the dative case, the beginning being missing. [Plate 9.2]
1.5	16620	880	(15, XXXIII)	Rim of a black and red ware bowl. There are sections of the upper parts of what appear to have been five <i>akṣaras</i> . In the light of their incompleteness we are unable to offer any satisfactory reading.
1.6	16595	837.NE	(16, XXXV)	Rim of black and red ware. There is only one complete <i>akṣara</i> and part of another. The reading is ... <i>ba e</i> , or perhaps <i>da e</i> . We should note the possibility that this sherd may originally have been part of the lid for covering a bowl (as we infer to have been the case for serial no. 14 below). In that case the inscription may be read as <i>e ba</i> ... It may also be that this is a recent forgery (comparable to serial no. 11 below). [Plate 9.3]
1.7	16313	698	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black and dull red-brown ware. There are two incomplete <i>akṣaras</i> whose reading is uncertain. The first is probably <i>ka</i> and the second <i>ma</i> . Together they read ... <i>ka ma</i> ... [Plate 9.3]
1.8	16194	698-	(H, LXIV)	Side of black and red ware bowl. There are traces of what appear to have been two <i>akṣaras</i> , but they are too indistinct to make them out possibly ... <i>la ya</i> . [Plate 9.4]
1.9	10517	977 SE.	(13, XXVIII)	Sherd of red and black ware. There are what appear to be two identical <i>akṣaras</i> freshly scored into the surface of the sherd. They read ... <i>pa pa</i> [Plate 9.4]
1.10	17025	977 SW	(13, XXVIII)	Sherd of dull reddish, granular clay. There are three <i>akṣaras</i> lightly scratched on the surface of the sherd. They read <i>pu rā ya</i> , once again suggesting the dative case. This is the only instance of the corkscrew form of <i>ra</i> occurring in our inscriptions. [Plate 9.5]

I.11	17024	964 SW	(14, XXXII)	<p>Rim of black and red ware.</p> <p>There are three complete and one partial <i>akṣaras</i> deeply incised on the sherd. They give the impression of freshness, and this combined with other features leads us to conclude that they are a modern forgery. We shall not, therefore, attempt to read them. [Plate 9.5]</p>
I.12	17040	1101.SW	(12, XXVI)	<p>Body sherd of red slipped ware, probably part of a globular water pot.</p> <p>There are four <i>akṣaras</i>, incised lightly but firmly through the red slip. The reading is quite clear: ...<i>pi ya ga ta</i>... This combines two elements, <i>piya</i> (<i>priya</i>), as in Piyadasi, Piyatisa, and the second <i>gata</i>. However there is a small mark to the right of the letter <i>ga</i> which may be either accidental or intentional. In the second case the <i>akṣara</i> may be read as <i>gu</i>, giving the reading <i>guta</i>, probably the normal Sinhala Prakrit form of <i>gupta</i>. This suggests that the two words are part of a proper name. [Plate 9.6]</p>
I.13	17138	1125.SE	(11, XXIII)	<p>Rim of black and red ware bowl.</p> <p>There are only two <i>akṣaras</i> on the sherd and one of them is incomplete. The reading appears to be either ...<i>ya ta</i>... or ...<i>ya ru</i>... [Plate 9.6]</p>
I.14	17330	1125.SE	(11, XXIII)	<p>Side of black and red ware <i>thalī</i> bowl or – if inverted – the lower rim of a pottery cover for such a bowl.</p> <p>There are three <i>akṣaras</i>, apparently the opening of a word. If we attempt to read it as though on the side of a bowl, two of the three letters are strange and cannot be deciphered. If, on the other hand, it is read as inverted, as it would appear on a lid, the inscription can be read as <i>ja ta ka</i>, or more probably <i>ja ja ka</i>. No restoration is suggested. [Plate 9.7]</p>
I.15	17332	1175-	(J4, XVIII)	<p>Sherd of coarse red slipped ware.</p> <p>The inscription has three <i>akṣaras</i> and reads <i>de va sa</i>. This may therefore represent the Prakrit genitive case and be translated as 'of Deva', presumably referring to the pot or to its contents. The form of the first two letters is in line with the earliest forms found in Sri Lankan Brahmi, while the third letter is crudely and, we may suspect, inexpertly written. It is even possible that the final letter represents a crude form of dental <i>sa</i>, although this seems unlikely in view of the general absence of this letter in Sri Lankan inscriptions prior to the first century BC. The reason for this is not apparent, in view of the dental <i>sa</i> occurring frequently in Asokan inscriptions. [Plates 1.4 and 9.7]</p>
I.16	17308	1216-	(J4, XIX)	<p>Sherd of red slipped ware, from the shoulder of a water pot (?).</p> <p>The upper portions of three <i>akṣaras</i> are visible, but their reading is not straightforward. The first may be expected to read either <i>go</i> or <i>vo</i>, the second may tentatively be read as <i>de</i>, and the third as <i>na</i> or perhaps <i>va</i>, giving a reading of <i>go de na</i> or <i>go de va</i>. It may be</p>

				observed that this reading suggests an epigraphical age somewhat younger than the archaeological context would suggest. [Plate 9.8]
1.17	17420	1290.SE	(J4, XIX)	<p>Sherd of worn red slipped ware.</p> <p>This is a most problematic piece in view of its abraded surface and the indistinctness and ungainliness of the marks it bears. The relevant illustration is an eye-copy. There appear to be parts of three <i>akṣaras</i>: the first is represented by the tip of the vertical stroke and an attached vowel <i>mātra</i> ..a, without the preceding consonant; the second seems to be an ungainly <i>lā</i>; and the third the lower part of <i>ku</i>. The reading would therefore be ...a <i>lā ku</i>... [Plate 9.8]</p>
1.18	17425	1208.NE	(J5, XXI)	<p>Sherd of the wall of a black and red ware bowl.</p> <p>There are three <i>akṣaras</i>. The first is <i>ma</i>, the second <i>ta</i>, and the third may be a rare (but by no means unknown in Sri Lanka) occurrence of <i>na</i>, written on its side. It is also possible that this sign is an inexpertly written <i>pa</i> or <i>pu</i>, but the most convincing reading appears to be <i>ma ta na</i>... [Plate 9.9]</p>
1.19	25133	399	(G5, XCI)	<p>Part of the wall of a small rounded vessel of dull red ware.</p> <p>There are four <i>akṣaras</i> written with a fine point and in a neat, controlled hand. The reading is ..ti <i>śa biya</i>... the princess Tiśa. [Plate 9.9]</p>
1.20	228A	1172	(I1, XXII)	<p>Sherd from the wall of a large water pot in a dull grey ware with areas of striated beating marks on the outer surface. Below the inscription is a large umbrella symbol (see Catalogue 6, No.13.5).</p> <p>The inscription consists of six <i>akṣaras</i> and reads (<i>ya ha si ni yā</i>, 'the lady Yahasiniyā'. The fluency of the script points to a date in the third-second century BC rather than to the archaeological dating (see sections 9.4.1.1 and 9.4.1.2).</p>
1.21	8190	457SW	(G5, LXXXVI)	<p>Rim portion of a carinated dish in a black and red fabric which recalls Rouletted ware.</p> <p>The inscription coincides with a fresh break and is clearly incomplete. There are only two <i>akṣaras</i>, which read <i>śi</i> or <i>ti</i> and <i>ma</i>.</p>
1.22	139.A	1116	(I2, XXVII)	<p>Rim of black and grey ware.</p> <p>There are four <i>akṣaras</i>, lightly incised with a fine point. The first is indistinct and partly worn away and may be read as either <i>ha</i>, <i>sa</i> or <i>pa</i>. It may be the final letter of a now missing preceding word, in the genitive case. The third letter <i>sa</i> is apparently written in reversed form. The fourth letter is partly broken away and may be read as either <i>ha</i> or <i>pa</i>. We may read the text therefore as either ...<i>sa (ha)...</i><i>ka śa pa</i>..., or '... (?of) Kasyapa'.</p>
1.23	176A	698	(H, LXIV)	<p>Rim of fine grey ware with traces of a highly burnished surface.</p>

Two *akṣaras* are lightly scratched with a point. They read *ha ta...*

1.24	142A	1125	(I1, XXIII)	Rim of black and red ware.
				There are two <i>akṣaras</i> , evidently forming the final two letters of a group. They read <i>ta kâ</i> .
1.25	17095	977.NE	(I3, XXVIII)	Sherd of black and brown ware.
				Two <i>akṣaras</i> are visible and appear to read <i>ra vo</i> .
1.26	16348	707.NE	(H, LIV)	Sherd of black and brown ware.
				Two <i>akṣaras</i> are visible, reading ... <i>ba ja...</i>

9.2.7.2 Catalogue 2: Single (and some double) *akṣaras* on potsherds

For stratigraphic position please refer to Table 9.4 and for line drawings to Table 9.5.

Serial No.	Special find	Context	(Period, phase)	Description
2.1	15613	615-	(G2, LXVIII)	Sherd of ill-fired grey ware <i>e</i>
2.2	16503	728.NE	(H, LIV)	Shoulder of black and red pot <i>ka</i>
2.3	16396	744 NW	(I8, LXII)	Sherd of black and red ware <i>ka</i> [Plate 9.10]
2.4	16194	698-	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of red slipped ware <i>ka</i>
2.5	16589	880.NW	(I5, XXXIII)	Rim of black and red ware <i>gu</i>
2.6	15613	615-	(G2, LXVIII)	Sherd of black and red ware <i>ga</i>
2.7	16520	788.SE/NE	(I8, LIII)	Sherd of black and brown ware <i>ci</i> [Plate 9.10]
2.8	16428	698.NW	(H, LXIV)	Wall of bowl of black and red ware <i>to</i>
2.9	16326	698.NE	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black and red ware <i>?</i>
2.10	16314	698	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black and red ware <i>tu ga (?)</i>
2.11	16071	615.NW	(G2, LXVIII)	Rim of black and red ware <i>bu</i>
2.12	16529	714	(H, LIV)	Rim of black and red ware <i>ma</i>
2.13	16462	615	(G2, LXVIII)	Sherd of black and red ware <i>ma</i>

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2.14	16487	698.NE	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black and red ware <i>ma</i>
2.15	16432	692.NE	(H, LXXV)	Rim of small bowl of black and red ware <i>ma</i>
2.16	15603	601-	(G3, LXXII)	Rim of black and red ware <i>ma</i>
2.17	16176	697	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black and red ware <i>ma</i>
2.18	16532	714	(18, LIV)	Sherd of black and red ware, water pot <i>śa</i>
2.19	17032	1101	(12, XXVI)	Sherd of black and brown ware <i>ga</i>
2.20	17050	1125.NE	(11, XXIII)	Sherd of black and brown ware <i>e</i>
2.21	17093	1174.NW	(J5, XX)	Sherd of black and red ware <i>ma</i>
2.22	17131	1125.NW	(11, XXIII)	Sherd of black and red bowl (? reversed <i>u</i>)
2.23	17134	1172.SW	(11, XXII)	Sherd of black and red ware <i>ma</i>
2.24	17136	1125.SE	(11, XXIII)	Rim of black and red ware <i>ma</i>
2.25	17148	1098.SE	(14, XXXI)	Sherd of red slipped ware <i>a</i>
2.26	17151	1125.NE	(11, XXIII)	Rim of red burnished ware <i>ha (hu)</i>
2.27	17152	1125.NE	(11, XXIII)	Rim of black and red ware <i>pa ra</i>
2.28	17156	1125.NE	(11, XXIII)	Rim of black and red ware <i>pa</i>
2.29	17236	1172.SE	(11, XXII)	Side of large pot of black and red ware <i>ke</i>
2.30	16623	880-	(15, XXXIII)	Sherd of pink-grey blotchy clay <i>ka</i>
2.31	10643	1125SW	(11, XXIII)	Shoulder of large pot of brownish fabric <i>ta</i>
2.32	17303	1206NE	(16, XXXVI)	Shoulder of pot of red slipped ware <i>e</i>
2.33	17311	1206-	(16, XXXVI)	Sherd of buff and black ware <i>ga</i>
2.34	17526	1399NE	(16, XXXVI)	Body sherd of coarse red slipped ware <i>ka</i>

2.35	17521	1382-	(J.3, XVII)	Sherd of black and red ware <i>ta</i>
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9.2.7.3 Catalogue 3: Other letter-like graffiti

For line drawings, please refer to Table 9.6.

Serial No.	Special find	Context	(Period, phase)	Description
3.1	16469	715.SE	(H, LXII)	Side of black and red ware bowl
3.2	1652	1729.NW	(18, LIII)	Sherd of red slipped ware
3.3	16364	698.NE	(H, LXIV)	Rim of black and red ware [Plate 9.11]
3.4	16489	720.NE	(H, LIII)	Rim of black and red ware
3.5	16475	729-	(18, LIII)	Sherd of red ware
3.6	16463	686 cut 687	(H, LXV)	Rim of small black and red ware jar
3.7	16405	787.SE	(17, XLIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
3.8	16394	767.NE	(18, LX)	Wall of black and red ware bowl
3.9	16430	715.SE	(H, LXII)	Rim of black and red ware bowl
3.10	16437	735.NE	(H, LXV)	Rim of black and red ware bowl
3.11	16446	729.SW	(18, LIII)	Sherd of black and red ware (the sign may be the letter <i>ra</i>)
3.12	16424	698.NW	(H, LXIV)	Rim of black and red ware
3.13	16444	789.SW	(18, LIII)	Wall of black and red ware jar
3.14	16168	615	(G2, LXVIII)	Rim of black and red ware bowl. (The inscription appears to read <i>ka mna</i> . Such a combination of letters is most unusual in early Sri Lankan epigraphs.) [Plate 9.11]
3.15	16149	615-	(G3, LXVIII)	Wall of black and red ware <i>thali</i>
3.16	16664	839	(G2, LXIV)	Sherd of black ware
3.17	16094	604-	(G2, LXXV)	Rim of black and red ware
3.18	16649	789.NW	(17, LIII)	Rim of black and red ware bowl
3.19	16077	615	(G2, LXVIII)	Part of the base of a black and red ware vessel
3.20	16184	635.NW	(G2, LXXIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
3.21	16315	698.NE	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black and red ware
3.22	16093	604	(G2, LXXV)	Rim of black and red ware
3.23	16631	850.NE	(17, XL)	Sherd of black and red ware
3.24	16629	850.NE	(17, XL)	Rim of black and red ware
3.25	16626	831.NE	(17, XXXIV)	Sherd of black and red ware
3.26	10417	961.SE	(14, XXXI)	Side of heavy <i>thali</i> bowl of black and red ware
3.27	16448	729.SW	(18, LIII)	Sherd of red slipped ware
3.28	16383	726.NE	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black and grey ware
3.29	16372	698	(H, LXIV)	Rim of black and red ware
3.30	16372	698	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of brown slipped ware
3.31	15616	621-	(G2, LXXIII)	Rim of black and red ware bowl
3.32	15614	615.NE	(G2, LXVIII)	Rim of black and red ware
3.33	15614	615.NE	(G2, LXVIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
3.34	17034	1101	(12, XXVI)	Shoulder of black and brown pot
3.35	17033	1101.NE	(12, XXVI)	Sherd of black and red ware
3.36	17164	1125.SW	(11, XXIII)	Sherd of black ware

9.2.7.4 Catalogue 4: Inscriptions other than on pottery

M.1 Special find 166
Context 26 (Period B3, phase CIV)
[Plate 9.12]

Already discussed earlier in Chapter 4 (section 4.6), the inscriptions are on both sides of an oblong stone goldsmith's mould measuring 32 x 8 x 8mm. On the first side there is a circular disc,

c. 19mm in diameter, with a trumpet-shaped opening at the top to allow the entry of the molten metal and a smaller exit hole to allow air to escape at the bottom. The outer edge is decorated with a ring of dots, recalling Graeco-Roman coinage. The field is shared with a Brahmi inscription and three auspicious signs: a *jayastambha* (sometimes referred to as an

Indradhvaja), which is either a victory pillar or an Indra banner, a *pūrnaghata* (full pot) and a *śrīvatsa*. Being a mould the inscription is naturally in reverse, but its reading is clear: *va ca da ta sa* – of, or belonging to, Vacadata (Vatsadatta).

The second side displays another, similar disc, c. 17mm in diameter, and is also surrounded by a ring of dots. The central motif is a lotus flower with embossed calyx and five petals, each bearing a single letter. This inscription reads *va ca ḍa ta ha* and has the same meaning as the previous one, while employing a slightly different form of the letter *ḍa* (incidentally here shown in reverse) and an alternative form of the genitive ending *ha*, in place of *sa*. In early Sinhala inscriptions three variant forms of genitive case occur: *śa*, *sa* and *ha*. In India one is accustomed to think of the first of these as typical of Sauraseni Prakrit and the second and third as indicative of Magadhi Prakrit. There is no reason to regard the variants here as anything extraordinary.

We may remark that the script of these two short texts is written in a neat and controlled style which in some respects seems nearer to the more formal hands of early North Indian inscriptions than to those of Sri Lanka. The piece comes from a mixed deposit assignable to the second half of the first millennium AD, when major architectural activities led to the wholesale destruction of the stratification of earlier deposits. We may thus confidently discount its archaeological date. In these circumstances one must turn to epigraphy for evidence of dating. It is difficult to suggest a firm epigraphical date, but our instinct, based mainly on North Indian parallels, points to one in the second century BC.

- 4.2 Special find 10249
Context 692 (Period H2, phase LXV)
[Plates 1.4 and 9.13]

9.3 Graffiti and symbols

9.3.1 Preliminary remarks

It has been suggested that signs or symbols as graffiti on pottery are expressions of an awareness of the need to indicate such things as ownership and often act as precursors of the emergence of a script (Coningham *et al.* 1996). This seems likely to have been the case on the Indo-Iranian borderlands during the fourth to third millennia BC. The recent Pakistani–American excavations at Harappa have shown that symbols appear in increasing quantities on pottery, probably for several centuries before the first appearance of the mature Harappan script. At the same time the date of the emergence of that script is being progressively more precisely established by a combination of careful excavation and radiocarbon dating. In the light of this development, one may wonder whether the appearance of painted graffiti on pottery in the Jorwe culture in the

This is a clay sealing with an impressed seal inscription on its front and cord impressions on its reverse side, indicating that the sealing had either been attached to some bundle of merchandise or perhaps was employed in sealing a storeroom door. The seal impression is in the form of a disc, c. 27mm in diameter, and like the previous moulds it has a ring of dots around the outer edge. The inscription reads

ti śa pu ta ma ga ha pu ru ma ka

and may be translated as ‘Magaha the Purumaka, son of Tiśa’. We read the name as Magaha, but it is also possible to follow Paranavitana, who reads the same name at Mihintale as ‘of Maga’, treating the final letter as the genitive case ending *ha*. We assume that the name is a dialectic variation of Sanskrit Magha, Māgha. We shall discuss this inscription and the probable identification of Magaha Purumaka with a similarly named official in cave inscription No. 22 from Mihintale in the conclusion (section 9.4.1.1).

In contrast to the previous inscription, this one is in a more typically Sri Lankan Brahmi. The choice of the palatal *śa*, the choice of *ha* (if indeed this is the correct reading of *magaha*) to represent the genitive case and the form of *ma* are typical of this. Regarding the date of the inscription, the epigraphical indications broadly agree with the firm but somewhat imprecise radiocarbon date of its context, and we may confidently assign the piece to the late third or early second century BC. This thus coincides with the probable date of the Mihintale inscription (No. 22), as belonging to a group of inscribed caves associated with the reign of King Uti (or Uttiya), the successor of Devanampiya Tissa, who reigned around 200 BC, and with members of his family or entourage.

Deccan may not have been part of a similar process. The same is equally likely to have been the case with regard to the symbols found on the black and red pottery in settlements and graves of the succeeding Iron Age burial complex throughout much of peninsular India. These observations provide a background to the discovery of symbols or graffiti on potsherds from the excavations at ASW2.

The methods we have used for copying the symbols are broadly similar to those employed for the inscriptions and need not be repeated here. Our method of studying the symbols also follows broadly similar lines. However, there are some significant differences in the nature of the materials and in their interpretation, and this will be reflected in the text. Coming as they do from potsherds, many of the symbols are incomplete. In some cases a

given sign may occur sufficiently frequently to permit a confident reconstruction of missing elements. In our illustrations we have shown such reconstructed elements by dotted lines, reserving full lines to represent those actually visible on any particular specimen. There is also a marked tendency, particularly in the earlier periods of occupation, for the scratched graffiti to be of both a diffuse and a fragmentary kind, so that often not enough remains to give even a tentative indication of what the original motif may have been. In such cases, any attempt to recognize or reconstruct the symbol is impossible. A representative selection of these graffiti is listed in Tables 9.7 and 9.8.

There is a considerable body of literature from India reporting the occurrence of symbols on black and red pottery from a large number of sites. We are not aware of any comprehensive synthesis or comparative study of all this material, and thus any attempt to compare the typology with that of the ASW2 excavations will be necessarily incomplete. In the circumstances, we shall restrict ourselves to more detailed consideration of a small number of fairly well recorded bodies of data, while offering at the outset a few general observations on the age and distribution of what we propose to name the Peninsular Iron Age Symbol System (PIASS).

9.3.1.1 The Peninsular Iron Age Symbol System

The practice of marking pots with post-firing scratched graffiti is very widely distributed throughout peninsular India. Probably its antecedents may be traced in the Jorwe culture in Maharashtra (c. 1300–900 BC), where both painted and scratched graffiti occur (see, for example, Sali 1986: 397–9; Pal 1986: fig. 17). A small number of these graffiti are similar to examples found in the PIASS, but on the whole we consider that the majority of the symbols of the Jorwe complex form a separate group which is unlikely to have been the antecedent of the PIASS. As its name implies, the PIASS is particularly associated with the Peninsular Iron Age and with the Megalithic grave complex which it encapsulates. Unfortunately, in India relatively few grave sites have as yet been dated by absolute methods and the chronology remains somewhat vague. An important early settlement is Takalghat, near Nagpur in Maharashtra. Here radiocarbon dates indicate a period between 750–500 BC. There are black and red burnished ware pots and sherds with scratched graffiti, several of which belong to the repertoire of the PIASS (Deo 1970: 29, fig. 15 and pl. 5). Another early occurrence is at Nagal, opposite Bharukaccha on the Narmada River. This Iron Age settlement has also not been scientifically dated, but the assemblage suggests a date in the first quarter of the first millennium BC (JAR 1961–62). These sites may be taken as roughly defining the northern extension of the complex. North of this line no comparable sites producing symbols of the PIASS are in evidence, and the Ganges Valley in particular belongs to a separate Iron Age complex in which representatives of the PIASS are either rare or notably absent. South of this line the distribution can broadly speaking be defined in terms of

the large number of Iron Age (Megalithic) grave sites and settlements, and be extended into Sri Lanka. The chronological horizons of this extensive area of Iron Age sites cannot be accurately defined at this time but may be broadly seen as extending from the early first millennium BC through to the opening of the succeeding millennium.

We may now turn to the graffiti of ASW2 and thereafter to their place in the wider PIASS complex.

9.3.2 Stratigraphic occurrence of graffiti

Table 9.1 shows the relative stratigraphic position of the various symbols, arranged according to their types, beginning with period J3. As we noticed above, the oldest examples available for study date from periods J1 and J2, but none of these is sufficiently complete for identification of the original symbols of which they formed a part. We shall illustrate and discuss the earliest available evidence in section 9.3.4.1 below. Almost all we can say regarding this material is that it indicates the presence of both single and combined, straight and curved lines. After their early appearance in periods K3/J1 to J2, in the material we have studied, graffiti appear chronologically in parallel with post-firing scratched inscriptions in every phase of occupation from J3 and J4 through to G5. Again in parallel with inscriptions they tail off with remarkable alacrity thereafter, only three examples occurring in G5 and seven, almost certainly unstratified strays, in periods F–B inclusive.

In introducing the typology of the graffiti, we may recall that the symbol we have called the ‘Dominant’ sign, along with its variants and elements, occurs with fair regularity from period J3 through to G3. Other, less common symbols are very rare before period I1 and also more or less disappear after period G2. One other feature must be recalled: that the largely unidentifiable signs which we have classified as ‘miscellaneous’ appear to have represented a different style of scratched marks on pottery. Examples of this style occur particularly from period J1 through to I2 and more or less disappear thereafter. The significance of this feature will be discussed below in section 9.3.4.

9.3.3 Typology of the graffiti

Catalogue 5 (see section 9.3.6.1). For line drawings, please see Table 9.7.

The Dominant sign. The starting point for this discussion must be the cluster of apparently related types which, by reason of their frequency in the ASW2 excavations, we named the ‘Dominant’ sign. One may distinguish two principal and several minor varieties. The first, which we refer to as the ‘main type’, is represented by twelve examples listed in the catalogue (Nos 5.1.1–12). Each sign consists in essence of two elements: the lower element is a curved line, varying between a shallow open curve (Nos 5.1.1, 5.1.5) through to a narrower, deeper curve (Nos 5.1.8, 5.1.12). The extremities of the curve terminate in two- or three-fingered, ‘hand’-like features. In one instance (No. 5.1.3),

the curved element is replaced by two straight lines, approximately at right angles to one another.

In the principal variant (Nos 5.2.1–24) the lower element has no hand-like extremities, but consists of a generally narrower, deeper rounded curve, in one case having out-turned flanges at either end (No.5.2.1); this variant gives the impression of a pot, enclosing the second or upper element.

The upper element of the Dominant sign is common to both the main and second varieties, and consists of either a rounded or angular version of what looks like a Brahmi letter *ma*. The angular and rounded forms of *ma* are roughly divided in the ratio of 3:2. In the catalogue there are 21 rounded examples as against 13 angular. There are eight minor variants consisting of one or other of the main lower elements, combined with a number of quite different upper elements: a plain vertical line in three examples; a T-shaped vertical line; a pair of linked *ma* signs; and what appears to be a *triśūla*, or trident (Nos 5.3.1–8). This latter is suggestive in view of the almost universal association of this symbol with Siva.

With regard to the chronology of the Dominant sign and its variants, the main type occurs first in period J3, twice only in period I (I4 and I7), twice in period H and seven times in period G. The principal variant occurs twice in period J (first in J3), eleven times in period I, five times in period H and seven times in period G. The minor variants occur between period I5 and period G3.

We cannot proceed too far in speculating what may have been the significance of the Dominant sign and its variant forms. It is evident to us that it must have been inscribed on pots as an indication of ownership, just as we may speculate that writing names on pots is likely to indicate either their owner or user, or the destination of a gift. But how do we explain the presence of so many graffiti of the same type in a limited area of a settlement? One recalls that, in his excavations at Raigir, Hunt (1924: 140–56) discovered a grave containing some two dozen pots bearing a series of scratched marks, all closely related to each other. Somewhat similar evidence came from the excavations at Sanur in Chingleput District, Tamilnadu (Banerjee and Rajan 1959). In such cases individual ownership might be indicated; although, recalling the archaeological and ethnographic evidence for secondary and multiple burials in stone cist graves in South India, it is just as likely to have had an extended family or kin significance. Several researchers have noted that the same symbols occur on pottery in both graves and adjacent settlements, indicating that they are not the special province of either the dead or the living. A recent discovery comes from the excavations at Kodumanal in Coimbatore District, where Rajan reports the presence of both scratched graffiti and inscriptions in Tamil Brahmi. In four instances the pots carry both written names and graffiti (Rajan 1994: 121–22). What makes this discovery particularly exciting is that in two cases the inscribed pots include the words *kon* and *ko*, 'king', and that in one instance this word is followed by a sign which is very close to the principal variety of our Dominant sign. This leads us to speculate whether the Dominant sign too may have had a wider currency, indicative of a ruling group or family. As our site is

situated near to the centre of the settlement, there is every likelihood that it was in the vicinity of the royal palace.

Before leaving the Dominant sign we may briefly consider what, if anything, the two major elements signify (beyond their contextual significance). The lower element, as we saw, contains two varieties. The main type, with its bifurcating or trifurcating ends, might be regarded as a pair of outstretched arms or as the decorated horns of a bull; however, when the principal variety is considered, the deeply curved form appears to resemble more closely a rounded pot. The upper element, in almost all cases, resembles two of the main varieties of the sign used for the early Brahmi letter *ma*. This sign is often referred to in Indian contexts as a 'taurine', the horned head of a bull. It has been suggested that, where this sign has been found inscribed alongside Asokan inscriptions and in other such significant positions, it carries with it the significance of *mangala*, auspiciousness (Upasak 1960: 179), perhaps on account of its being the opening letter of the word, or for other reasons. In our view, a more likely interpretation of the symbolism is to read the sign as a full pot or auspicious pot (*pūrṇa-ghaṭa*, *mangala-kalāṣa*), that universal symbol of good fortune and auspices, enthroned upon a shallow dish, or set within another larger vessel.

Whatever the internal meaning of the Dominant sign may be, its contextual significance is strikingly suggestive. As we saw above, at Kodumanal a very closely related sign occurs on a broken pot which also carries the written information that it belonged to a Tamil, using 'king' (*ko*, *kṛṇ*) (Rajan 1994: 116–20). The implication is that at Kodumanal this sign was a symbol for the royal family or clan. Unfortunately the sherd in question is incomplete and the place where the name of the king (*kṛṇ*) is referred to is absent. There are, however, other inscriptions from Kodumanal which indicate that the site was associated with the royal Cheras, who also had relations with the Pandyas. We have already seen that there is inscriptional evidence linking the ASW area of the Anuradhapura Citadel with a number of ladies of the local ruling family. The implications of these apparent parallels are intriguing, and we shall touch on them again in the conclusion (see section 9.4.2.2).

Catalogue 6 (see section 9.3.6.2)

6.1 Svastika. The second most common type of sign includes *svastikas*. There are eleven examples in the catalogue (Nos 6.1.1–11). Of these, eight are right-handed and three are left-handed. A single variant of the former has curling ends. One example is shown standing in the middle of a horizontal line, flanked by small vertical strokes. We have referred to this symbol as *svastika* with railing. This seems to be a generally accepted usage. It may be compared with the similar motif of a railing or sacred enclosure to be found in section 6.13 below (Monumental forms). Here the railing is associated with a column or staff crowned by an umbrella. A further example from that section is the *svastika* on column with railing (6.13.1). This comes

from a late disturbed level in period D. In this case the svastika is left-handed.

The *svastika* or *swastika* is a very ancient symbol, already present in the Indus civilization in the third millennium BC. The wider Hindu, the Jaina and the more narrowly Buddhist significance of this symbol in early India is so well known as to need little comment. A useful summary of relevant evidence is given by Senadeera (1992: 154–7). Senadeera briefly mentions the existence of the right- and left-handed forms, but does not comment on their particular significance, if any. (See further discussion below in section 9.3.4.)

6.2 Star. There are three examples of star signs in the catalogue. Of them two are single stars and one is double (Nos 6.2.1–3).

6.3 Snake. There are two examples of snakes: one is a complete figure and the other part only (Nos 6.3.1–2). The head of the former is shown by three dividing lines, reminiscent of the hand-like end of the Dominant sign. It is not apparent whether the incomplete example is actually part of a snake or simply a wavy line. The latter is a fairly frequent symbol on black and red ware from a South Indian context (see Lal 1962: symbol 23).

6.4 Plant. We have, rather arbitrarily, identified three branching examples as plants (Nos 6.4.1–3). A number of plant-like symbols are noted by Lal (1962: symbol 31), but in all cases there must be some doubt regarding the nature of the object represented.

6.5 Arrow. We have, again somewhat arbitrarily, identified six signs as 'arrows' (Nos 6.5.1–6). It may be that we should rather read them as spears, or even perhaps human forms. Particular interest attaches to No. 6.5.6, which stands beside a unique sign (in these collections), in that it was chosen as one of the peculiarly Tamil letters *ṇa* adapted to the Brahmi script.

6.6 Bow and arrow. Less doubt attends the five examples of bows; three are vertical and two are shown horizontally (Nos 6.6.1–5). While the presence of the arrow seems definitely to establish the bow's identity, the two remaining examples are identified because of their similarity to the other examples.

6.7 Balance (or human form). There is a single example (No. 6.7.1), which at first sight suggests a standing figure with outstretched arms. On further consideration it appears that this may be one of the variant forms of a balance or weighing device, as shown in the following section.

6.8 Balance. Two forms (Nos 6.8.1–2) appear to be balances.

6.9 Yantra. We have identified six signs (Nos 6.9.1–6) as *yantras*, mystical diagrams, although this name is, strictly speaking, anachronistic. The common element is that each has an oblong enclosure divided down the middle by a vertical line or pole, on top of which is a plain horizontal line, perhaps an umbrella. Its meaning

must remain obscure. In one example (No. 6.9.1), the reconstructed original appears to be a square ground, crossed by two lines at right angles to each other, and each with a flat line across its extremities. It is this example which calls to mind the *Śrī Chakra Yantra* of later times (a stylized geometric representation of both the universe and the mother goddess).

6.10 House. There are two examples of a small hut-shaped structure (Nos 6.10.1 and 6.10.2).

6.11 Triangular forms and ladder (Nos 6.11.1–3). Two of these strange signs appear to be elongated triangles, one with horizontal steps and the other with a filling of radial vertical lines. Their real significance is unclear, but in the light of comparative examples from Tamilnadu and Karnataka the presence of a horizontal line at the apex of the triangle seems to have some significance. The third sign in this group appears to be a plain ladder with two vertical poles and horizontal steps. Lal (1962) includes several variants of these forms under his symbols 15 and 49. (See discussion below in section 9.3.5.)

6.12 Square forms (Nos 6.12.1–14). This category includes several variants: Nos 6.12.1, 4 and 13 are simple squares; Nos 6.12.8, 9, 11 and 12 are squares divided into four quarters; the others are various part squares (Nos 6.12.5, 6, 14), one with a rounded end (No. 6.12.3) and one with a curious tilted line above the square (No. 6.12.10).

6.13 Monumental forms (Nos 6.13.1–5). Of these signs, No. 6.13.1 is actually misplaced. It has already been mentioned in the above discussion on the *svastika* and might better be treated together with the *svastika* with railing, No. 6.1.11. Numbers 6.13.2, 3 and 4 are pillars surmounted by umbrellas and with surrounding railings, hence we have referred to them as monumental. In this context one would expect these signs to be associated with sacred enclosed spaces, most probably Buddhist *caityas*. A final incomplete example comes from a large water pot and carries an umbrella only, the lower part being missing.

It may be remarked that, while No. 6.13.1 comes from an obviously 'late' context, its style is distinctly different from the remainder, and it may well be somewhat later in date. On either side of the *svastika*-bearing pillar are two small signs which we read as the Brahmi letter *ma* and a circle, probably a sun sign. It is also reasonably certain that Nos 6.13.2–4 are relatively earlier; but whether they can be as early as the stratigraphic date (the opening phase of period I) is less clear, if we are to read them as Buddhist. We may recall that before the mission of Mahinda there were almost certainly representatives of other religious groups already in the island, and probably also Buddhists. The iconographic symbol of the *svastika* on pillar is not exclusively Buddhist: it can also be Jaina or of some other sect whose sacred spot it represents.

6.14 Boat. These three examples (Nos 6.14.1–3) are of very different character. Number 6.14.2 is a large

subject, occupying a major part of the side of a bowl of finely levigated grey clay. The ship has a mast supported by stays and two steering oars at the stern (see Plate 9.19 and Fig. 6.1). Number 6.14.1 is incomplete but is evidently an inshore water craft, without mast or sail. The third example appears to represent a small masted ship, but the detail is much less convincing than in the preceding example.

9.3.4 Stylistic tendencies

Looking at the graffiti from an art-historical viewpoint, we may detect some evidence of a certain developmental sequence. It is also possible to divide the material into a number of 'styles' or 'tendencies'. These tendencies are certainly not absolute or capable of complete distinction from one another, as they often run concurrently and even merge into each other. But it is evident that the first represents a majority of the oldest graffiti from the excavation, while the second belongs essentially to the early urban phase at Anuradhapura, and the third represents a more specifically Buddhist tendency and is somewhat later in inception. Our view is that the three distinct stylistic tendencies encapsulate, as it were, evidence of cultural developments taking place during the occupation of the site.

9.3.4.1 The 'early' style

The earliest graffiti are those which we have mainly classified as 'miscellaneous' and which we propose to describe as belonging to the 'early' style. In this style the designs are usually of large size so that only small parts of them survive on our sherds, and in many cases it is virtually impossible to determine what the original, complete design may have been. The motifs give the impression of being drawn loosely and in a curiously rambling fashion. Graffiti of this style occur at least from the beginning of period J and continue, alongside the other styles, down to period G. In Figure 9.36 we have put together a group of sixteen of the earliest occurrences of sherds decorated in the early style: three come from the interface of periods K5 and J1; one from J1 itself; three more from the interface of J1 and J2; and eight from J2. These therefore are the extent of the evidence available for recognizing the nature of the early style of graffiti in ASW2. Along with other examples from Catalogues 5 and 6, these present a vague but consistent picture. From periods J3, J4 and J5 there are a very few early examples of the types found in the 'urban' style (see below). Principal among these are several examples of the Dominant sign (for example Catalogue 5, Nos 1.12, 2.19 and 2.23, etc.). From this period we have recognized only one other type – the arrow – and the characteristic types of the urban style are absent. Thus the early style constitutes the earliest post-firing scratched additions to pottery in the excavation, and we believe that this may be regarded as forming the basic style, from which in the course of time the second and third styles differentiated themselves. We shall discuss the external affinities of the early style below. Other examples are to be found in Catalogues 5 and 6 (see section 9.3.6).

9.3.4.2 The 'urban' style

A second group of graffiti involves mainly smaller, more compactly drawn symbols, of which many complete examples survive. In this group one may speak of 'types', because recognizable types recur numbers of times. We have named the style 'urban', having consideration to the wide variety of symbols and to the distinctive clarity of their representation. The urban style emerges during period I and reaches its climax in periods H and G. It may be contrasted with the less coherent styles of graffiti associated with the black and red ware found in Megalithic grave sites throughout southern India (see section 9.3.5). For whatever reason the graffiti in the Megalithic grave assemblages are generally more restricted in range of types and are frequently executed in a curiously rambling manner. They are, one may suggest, closer to our early style than to the types of the urban style. One reason for this contrast may be that, within a single grave, the types represented are likely to be associated with an individual kin group. Therefore they are unlikely to represent a wider population such as might be expected in an urban settlement context. Such an urban context moreover is likely to require greater clarity of the family marks than would a grave site. Within our typology, the numerically dominant position of the Dominant sign stands out. This suggests that in the limited area of our excavation a single extended family or clan group may have been in occupation. We shall return to this sign in section 9.3.5 below and again in the conclusion (section 9.4.2). Illustrations of most of the graffiti are given in Catalogues 5 and 6.

9.3.4.3 The 'hieratic' style

A third group of symbols may be treated separately from those of the urban style, although they are intimately linked. These we have called the 'hieratic' style. They are distinguished by the fact that they mainly consist of symbolic formulae for representing holy places, particularly Buddhist holy places, and that many, if not all, coincide with symbols that are included by Paranavitana in his list of 'non-Brahmi signs' (1970: xxvi). They therefore have a special significance in that they occur not only on our pottery but also as adjuncts to dedicatory inscriptions from caves associated with the early Buddhist *Sangha*. The main series of these symbols are the pillars with railing, some surmounted with umbrellas, some with *svastikas*. The separate *svastikas* are another group, which may be accepted as 'hieratic'. In view of the very wide and ancient distribution of this symbol. Two other symbols may also be regarded as doubtfully 'hieratic': these are the *trishūla*, or trident, present in a single variant of the Dominant sign, No. 5.3.5 of period 18, and another among the elements of the sign, No. 5.4.14 from period 17. Another possibly hieratic symbol is the pillar surmounted by the *mangala* symbol, No. 6.15.1 of period H. The other examples are all included in Catalogue 6 below.

9.3.5 Comparative evidence from other sites
As we remarked above, there is a great deal of related material from sites throughout peninsular India and Sri Lanka, mainly in the form of post-firing graffiti scratched

on black and red ware belonging to the Early Iron Age and Early Historic periods. This body of data is widely scattered through the available literature but has not to date, as far as we are aware, been brought together as a systematic and comprehensive corpus. The need for a corpus is apparent. In the absence of such data, it is evident that this is not the place to attempt a thorough comparative study of our materials. Instead we shall consider the evidence provided by a number of carefully selected sites.

The sites we have chosen for this purpose are: first, in Sri Lanka, the excavations in the Gedige area of the Citadel at Anuradhapura, directed by Dr Siran Deraniyagala in 1969 (Deraniyagala 1972). These were important, among other things, because they led to the first clear publication of early Brahmi scratched inscriptions and graffiti on pottery from a properly stratified excavation. The second body of comparative data is the short list of 'non-Brahmi symbols' recorded by Paranavitana in the course of collecting and publishing the monumental corpus of 1,234 early Brahmi inscriptions from caves in Sri Lanka. These are important because in some cases the caves provide a historical, or partially historical, context for the symbols.

We have chosen three other sources from peninsular India, one drawn mainly from sites in Tamilnadu, one from Mysore and one from Coimbatore District. The first of these is B.B. Lal's original study, 'From the Megalithic to the Harappan' (1962). In this Lal noted that a number of symbols occurring on the Megalithic pottery could claim their ancestry in the Indus civilization and that some of them were also present in the Neolithic-Chalcolithic sites of the Deccan. He made a useful list of 61 symbols in the course of his study. The second source is Seshadri's report on excavations at T. Narasipur, Mysore (1971). Here a settlement covering three periods, Neolithic, Transitional and Megalithic, was excavated, along with a number of graves belonging to the latter period. Seshadri reports that at this site the graffiti are found only in the Megalithic period, where they occur in both the settlement and in graves. The final source is Rajan's excavations at Kodumanal in the Coimbatore District, Madras (1994). This site is as yet only partly published and further excavations are expected. Its importance is that it provides not only corroborative evidence to that of T. Narasipur but also important data on the adaptation of the Brahmi script for writing Tamil, along with evidence associating the site with the Cera dynasty, whose archaeology has hitherto been almost nil.

In our comparative study we shall briefly discuss the evidence from each of our sources and seek to understand their broad significance in relation to those from ASW2 (see Table 9.8). In this study we shall compare each source with the 21 major types identified in our excavations. We shall return to this subject briefly in the conclusion.

9.3.5.1 Gedige, Anuradhapura

The first, and most obvious, place to compare with ASW2 is the excavation at the Gedige site. The comparison is very convincing, in spite of there being some differences. The main type of the Dominant sign is

not present, although there is a good representative of the principal variant, and there are several occurrences of elements of the sign. There is an example of one left-handed *svastika* and what appears to be an incomplete *svastika* with railing. In all there are nine common types, plus three probable correspondences (marked in Table 9.8 with a question mark). Perhaps the most striking difference between the two series is the absence of the Dominant sign. This may have significance in terms of its probable association with a clan or family and of their presence in one part of Anuradhapura and absence in another part. Otherwise, the Gedige symbols show predominantly similar signs to those of our urban style, with one or two examples of the hieratic.

9.3.5.2 Paranavitana's non-Brahmi signs

The second source for comparison is Paranavitana's list of non-Brahmi symbols. This is particularly valuable since all the inscriptions he lists relate to cave complexes associated with the Buddhist *Sangha*, and the non-Brahmi signs occur in association with inscriptions, usually at the beginning or end. For this reason it may be fairly confidently assumed that the whole range has a *terminus ante quem*, in that none is likely to be earlier than Mahinda's mission to Sri Lanka in c. 250 BC. The Dominant sign is absent; the *svastika* is present, and so are several variants of *svastika* with pillar and railing, and one of what we have called a 'monumental form', the pillar with umbrella and railing. There are also several variants of the Brahmi *ma* sign. One other significant sign is a masted ship. Altogether the types from this source seem to point towards a Buddhist, or at least hieratic, association. In all there are five comparisons and one probable comparison between these signs and our 21 types.

9.3.5.3 B.B. Lal's list

The third source is Lal's list of symbols occurring on Megalithic pottery from mainland South India, mainly from Tamilnadu and Karnataka (Lal 1962). Here the situation is very different, in that no less than ten comparisons and three probable comparisons with our types are included. The comparisons are interesting, as too are the absent elements. The Dominant sign is absent and so is its principal variety. The Brahmi letter *ma* occurs in its angular form (Lal's symbol 51), as do other symbols resembling Brahmi letters, *ga* and *ta* (Lal's symbols 1 and 2). This is perhaps related to the early occurrence of these letters in our series, appearing in our period J3. The *svastika* occurs both in its left-handed version and in the curling variety of the right-handed (Lal's symbol 18, Nos 1-6). The star sign occurs (Lal's symbol 16); so too does the wavy line, but not in the related form of the snake (Lal's symbol 25); our plant form is represented by Lal's symbols 41 and 42. The distinct but related signs of the arrow or arrowhead and the bow, both with and without arrow, are represented by Lal's symbols 5 and 32. Our balance and ?balance/?human form symbols are apparently represented among Lal's Megalithic symbols by his symbol 13; the symbols we described as *yantras* are not represented, nor is our house symbol (but compare Lal's

symbol 44). Our triangle symbol is absent from Lal's list, although his symbol 49 approaches it; the ladder is represented there (Lal's symbol 15). Our various square forms are not all represented, but some at least are (Lal's symbols 12 and 40). Significantly, neither the *svastika* nor the umbrella on pillar with railing are represented in Lal's list; nor is there any boat.

9.3.5.4 T. Narasipur

The signs present in Seshadri's T. Narasipur excavations are on the whole very roughly drawn and many appear to be variants of a small number of basic designs. They constitute an extreme example of the 'rambling' style of representation that we believe characterized our early style. Some of the symbols are close to types from Lal's list. If we compare them with our Anuradhapura series there are only a small number of related types. Our Dominant sign in its varieties is absent. There are no *svastikas*, nor any of our monumental types. The star, the

wavy line, the bow and arrow, and many variants of the triangles or ladder-like sign occur. Only 5 of our 21 types can be recognized.

9.3.5.5 Kodumanal

This site provides an interesting contrast to our other sources. The Dominant sign is present in its principal variant form, generally with an angular *ma* inside a pot form. It also occurs inside a square frame. Both right- and left-handed *svastikas* occur. So too do the star, the bow and arrow, the ladder and variants of our triangle form, square forms and the trident. As we mentioned above, the symbols are found on pots, some bearing inscriptions in Tamil Brahmi. In particular, the Dominant sign occurs alongside an inscription *kon*, king. In all, 11 of our 21 signs occur here. The character and style of the Kodumanal graffiti are also highly suggestive of a different aspect of the rambling character of our early style.

9.3.6 Catalogues 5 and 6

9.3.6.1 Catalogue 5: Graffiti and symbols on potsherds: the Dominant sign

Serial. No.	Special find	Context	(Period, phase)	Description of sherd
<i>1. Main type</i>				
1.1	16674	615NW	(G.2, LXVIII)	Side of black and red <i>thali</i>
1.2	16674	615NW	(G.2, LXVIII)	Base of same vessel
1.3	16429	692NE	(H, LXV)	Side of a vessel of black and red ware
1.4	16064	615NW	(G.2, LXVIII)	Rim of a vessel of black and red ware
1.5	15791	692NE	(H, LXV)	Base of small jar of black and red ware
1.6	16153	670NW/SW	(G.2, LXIV)	Wall of black and red <i>thali</i>
1.7	16653	834-	(I.7, XXXVII)	Rim of black and red ware
1.8	16152	670 NW/SW	(G.2, LXIV)	Rim of red slipped ware
1.9	15613	615-	(G.2, LXVIII)	Sherd of water pot of gritty fabric
1.10	16150	615-	(G.2, LXVIII)	Rim of black and brown ware
1.11	17054	962NW	(I.4, XXX)	Sherd of gritty buff ware
1.12	17495	1381SW	(J.3, XVII)	Body sherd of black and red ware
<i>2. Principal variant</i>				
2.1	16397	729NW	(H, LIII)	Sherd of water pot of deep red and black ware
2.2	16147	615NW	(G.2, LXVIII)	Rim and side of red bowl
2.3	16191	635NW	(G.2, LXXIII)	Side of black and red <i>thali</i>
2.4	16174	697-	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of red-brown ware
2.5	16162	615NE	(G.2, LXVIII)	Sherd of large vessel in red slipped ware
2.6	16346	767NE	(I.8, LX)	Sherd with grey-brown surface [Plate 9.14]
2.7	16197	663	(G.1, LXVI)	Side of black and red <i>thali</i>
2.8	16640	791NW	(I.7, XLVII)	Sherd of black and red ware
2.9	16666	837SE	(I.6, XXXV)	Sherd of red slipped ware
2.10	16477	729-	(I.8, LIII)	Sherd of black and brown ware
2.11	16460	714SE	(H, LIV)	Wall of black and red ware
2.12	16506	729-	(I.8, LIII)	Sherd of black and red water pot
2.13	16375	715SE	(H, LXII)	Sherd of black and brown burnished ware
2.14	15201	602NW	(G.3, LXXII)	Sherd of black and red ware
2.15	16464	659NE	(G.2, LXXII)	Rim of black and red ware
2.16	16442	789SW	(I.8, LIII)	Sherd of red slipped ware
2.17	16923	961SE	(I.4, XXX)	Rim of black and red ware bowl
2.18	16422	715SE/NE	(H, LXII)	Side of black and red <i>thali</i> bowl

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2.19	17422	1216SW	(J.4, XIX)	Rim of black and red ware
2.20	17023	977NE	(I.3, XXVII)	Sherd of black and red ware
2.21	17038	977SE	(I.3, XXVII)	Rim of black and red ware
2.22	17246	1125SW	(I.1, XXIII)	Rim of black and red ware
2.23	17519	1382	(J.3, XVII)	Carinated body sherd of black and red ware
2.24	17243	1119SW	(I.3, XXIX)	Sherd of dull black and red ware

3. Other variants of the Dominant Sign

3.1	16060	605NW	(G.2, LXXXIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
3.2	16637	837NW	(I.6, XXXV)	Rim of black and red ware
3.3	16427	698NW	(H, LXIV)	Wall of black and red ware bowl [Plate 9.14]
3.4	16436	790NW	(I.7, XLVII)	Wall of black and red ware bowl
3.5	16385	767SE	(I.8, LX)	Sherd of black and red ware
3.6	16592	880NW	(I.5, XXXIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
3.7	16441	789SW	(I.8, LIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
3.8	15202	602NW	(G.3, LXXII)	Sherd of red slipped ware

4. Elements of the Dominant sign: 1. Hands

4.1	16652	860NE	(J.6, XXXVI)	Sherd of coarse grey-brown ware
4.2	15607	605NE	(G.2, LXXXIII)	Sherd of black and brown ware
4.3	16062	615-	(G.2, LXVIII)	Rim of black and red <i>thali</i> bowl
4.4	16241	701NE	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black-grey gritty ware
4.5	16590	831SE	(J.7, XXXIX)	Sherd of black and red ware
4.6	16142	632NW	(G.2, LXXXIII)	Sherd of black burnished ware
4.7	16657	831NE	(I.7, XXXIX)	Rim of black and red ware
4.8	16329	648NE	(G.2, LXIX)	Sherd of coarse black-brown fabric
4.9	16418	698NE/NW	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black and red ware
4.10	16325	698NE	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black and red ware
4.11	16377	726NE	(H, LXIV)	Wall of black and red <i>thali</i>
4.12	16066	601NW/SW/SE	(G.3, LXXII)	Sherd of red slipped water pot
4.13	16639	791NW	(I.7, XLVII)	Sherd of red slipped ware
4.14	16651	850NE	(I.7, XL)	Sherd of black and red ware
4.15	16628	837NE	(I.6, XXXV)	Rim of small black and red ware jar
4.16	16317	698NE	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black and red ware
4.17	16196	663-	(G.1, LXVI)	Sherd of black and red ware
4.18	16926	977NE	(I.3, XXVII)	On base of heavy black and grey <i>thali</i> bowl
4.19	16592	961NE/SE	(I.4, XXX)	Sherd of red slipped ware
4.20	16481	714SE	(H, LIV)	Sherd of water pot of red slipped ware
4.21	17522	1382	(J.3, XVII)	Body sherd of large coarse ware vessel, with exterior red slip
4.22	17529	1293NE	(J.3, XVI)	Rim of black and red <i>thali</i>
4.23	17162	1125SW	(I.1, XXIII)	Rim of black and red ware
4.24	17165	1125SW	(I.1, XXIII)	Sherd of red slipped ware

4. Elements of the Dominant sign: 2. Mangala-kalasa (auspicious urn)

4.25	16081	604-	(G.2, LXXV)	Sherd of gritty red slipped ware
4.26	16482	701NE	(I.8, LXIV)	Rim of black and red ware
4.27	16439	692-	(H, LXV)	Side of black and brown ware
4.28	16596	831-	(I.7, XXXIX)	Sherd of black and red ware
4.29	17020	1119SW	(I.3, XXIX)	Sherd of black and red ware
4.30	17049	1101SE	(I.2, XXVI)	Sherd of red slipped ware
4.31	17137	1125SE	(I.1, XXIII)	Rim and neck of black and brown ware bowl
4.32	17157	1125SE	(I.1, XXIII)	Rim of gritty red ware
4.33	17314	1216-	(J.4, XIX)	Sherd of black and brown ware

9.3.6.2 Catalogue 6: Graffiti and symbols on potsherds: other signs

For line drawings, please refer to Table 9.8.

Serial No	Special find	Context	(Period, phase)	Description of sherd
1. a) Svastika				
1.1	16635	837SW	(I.6, XXXV)	Rim of black ware
1.2	16367	670	(G.2, LXIV)	Sherd of black and red ware
1.3	15787	604	(G.2, LXXV)	Sherd of black and red ware
1.4	15792	698NE	(H, LXIV)	Side of black and red bowl
1.5	16588	791-	(I.7, XLVII)	Rim and black and red ware
1.6	15792	698NE	(H, LXIV)	Side of a black and red <i>thali</i> (perhaps the same vessel as 1.4 above)
1.7	10476	977NE	(I.3, XXVIII)	Rim of gritty black and brown ware [Plate 9.15]
1.8	16504	728NE	(H, LIV)	Rim of black and red ware bowl
1.9	15616	621-	(G.2, LXXIII)	Rim of black and red ware
1.10	17150	101SW	(I.4, XXXI)	Rim of gritty red ware
1. b) Svastika with railing				
1.11	16185	635NW	(G.2, LXXIII)	Rim of black and red ware bowl
2. Star				
2.1	16738	962NW	(I.4, XXX)	Sherd of coarse black and red ware
2.2	15784	682NE	(G.1, LXVII)	Sherd of red slipped ware
2.3	16661	837SE	(I.6, XXXV)	Sherd of red slipped ware
3. Snake				
3.1	16156	635-	(G.2, LXXIII)	Sherd of large vessel of red slipped ware [Plate 9.15]
3.2	17149	1098SE	(I.4, XXXI)	Sherd of black and red ware
4. Plant				
4.1	15790	698NE	(H, LXIV)	Side of black and red <i>thali</i>
4.2	16648	837NW	(I.6, XXXV)	Sherd of black and red ware
4.3	16084	615NW	(G.2, LXVIII)	Sherd of brownish ware
5. Arrow				
5.1	16088	615NW	(G.2, LXVIII)	Wall of black and red <i>thali</i> bowl
5.2	10168	635NW	(G.2, LXXIII)	Shoulder of dark brown water pot
5.3	16437	715SE/NE	(H, LXII)	Carinated side of black and red vessel
5.4	15604	601-	(G.3, LXXII)	Sherd of black and red ware
5.5	17528	1293NE	(J.3, XVI)	Body sherd of gritty red ware
5.6	17530	1476NE/SE	(J.3, XVII)	Rim of black and red ware
6. Bow and arrow				
6.1	16928	977NE	(I.3, XXVIII)	Sherd of black and grey ware
6.2	16927	977NE	(I.3, XXVIII)	Rim of black and grey ware (perhaps the same vessel as above)
6.3	17018	1119SW	(I.3, XXIX)	Rim of black and brown ware
6.4	16144	638NW	(G.2, LXXIII)	Rim of black and red ware [Plate 9.16]
6.5	17048	1101SE	(I.2, XXVI)	Rim of bowl of red ware

Inscriptions and Graffiti

7. Balance (or human form)

7.1	16443	789SW	(I.8, LIII)	Sherd of black and red ware [Plate 9.16]
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8. Balance

8.1	16056	729	(I.8, LIII)	Side of black and red <i>thali</i>
8.2	15614	615NE	(G.2, LXVIII)	Sherd of black and red ware

9. Yantra

9.1	16456	788NE/SE	(I.8, LIII)	Side of black and red <i>thali</i> bowl [Plate 9.17]
9.2	16527	714	(I.8, LIV)	Rim of black and red ware
9.3	16239	632NE	(G.2, LXXXIII)	On outside of base of black and red <i>thali</i> bowl
9.4	15793	698NE	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of black and red ware
9.5	15623	615	(G.2, LXVIII)	Side of coarse black and red ware bowl
9.6	17297	1125SE	(I.1, XXIII)	Rim of black and red ware

10. House

10.1	16145	615	(G.2, LXVIII)	Sherd of black and grey ware
10.2	17531	1407	(J2, XIV)	Terracotta cone [Plate 9.17]

11. a) Triangular forms, b) Ladder

11.1	16449	729SW	(I.8, LIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
11.2	16369	670-	(G.2, LXIV)	Part of heavy jar of black and red ware
11.3	17018	1119SW	(I.3, XXIX)	Beside bow and arrow on 6.3 above

12. Square forms

2.1	16097	615	(G.2, LXVIII)	Sherd of red slipped ware
2.2	16642	791NW	(I.7, XLVII)	Rim of black ware
2.3	16636	837SW	(I.6, XXXV)	Sherd of gritty brown ware
2.4	15613	615	(G.2, LXVIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
2.5	16593	880 NW	(I.5, XXXIII)	Sherd of red slipped ware
2.6	16488	698NE	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of dull red ware
2.7	16483	698NE	(H, LXIV)	Sherd of red slipped ware
2.8	10413	961SW	(I.4, XXX)	Rim of heavy <i>thali</i> bowl in black and red ware [Plate 9.18]
2.9	15613	615	(G.2, LXVIII)	Sherd of buff-brown ware
2.10	16154	635-	(G.2, LXXIII)	Sherd of black-grey ware
2.11	17240	1119SW	(I.3, XXIX)	Rim of black and red <i>thali</i> bowl
2.12	17153	1125NE	(I.1, XXIII)	Rim of black and brown ware pot
2.13	17239	1119SW	(I.3, XXIX)	Sherd of black and brown ware
2.14	17238	1172SE	(I.1, XXII)	Sherd of black and brown ware

13. Monumental forms

3.1	2155	301	(D, XCV)	Thick sherd of red ware with grey interior; the edges have been ground and rounded; the subject is engraved on the inner surface [Plate 9.18]
3.2	17141	1125SE	(I.1, XXIII)	Belly of a black and red bowl [Plate 9.19]
3.3	17160	1125SE	(I.1, XXIII)	Belly sherd of black and red bowl
3.4	17167	1206NE	(I.6, XXXVI)	Rim and body of large pot of red slipped ware

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13.5	228A	1172	(I.1, XXII)	Wall of water pot of dull grey ware (see 9.2.6.1, Inscription No. 1.20)
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14. Boat

14.1	17232	1125NE	(I.1, XXIII)	Rim of red and brown bowl
14.2	10548	977NW	(I.3, XXVII)	Bowl of finely levigated grey clay [Plate 9.19]
14.3	17133	1125NW	(I.1, XXIII)	Side of black and red ware bowl

15. Miscellaneous and unidentified

15.1	16434	739-	(H, LXIII)	Sherd of gritty brown ware
15.2	17037	1101SE	(I.2, XXVI)	Rim of black and red ware jar
15.3	17132	1125NW	(I.1, XXIII)	Sherd of beaten red slipped ware
15.4	17031	1101NE	(I.2, XXVI)	Rim of black and red ware
15.5	17051	1125NE	(I.1, XXIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
15.6	17047	1101SE	(I.2, XXVI)	Sherd of black and red ware
15.7	17140	1125SE	(I.2, XXIII)	Large sherd of deep red burnished ware
15.8	17139	1125SE	(I.1, XXIII)	Rim and neck of black water pot
15.9	17155	1125NE	(I.1, XXIII)	Neck of black and red ware pot
15.10	17235	1172SE	(I.1, XXII)	Rim of black and red ware bowl
15.11	17234	1208-	(J.5, XXI)	Underside of dull brown-red <i>thali</i>
15.12	17237	1172SE	(I.1, XXII)	Sherd of black and red ware
15.13	17242	1119SW	(I.3, XXIX)	Rim of pale pink-black ware
15.14	17240	1119SW	(I.3, XXIX)	Rim of black and red <i>thali</i>
15.15	17244	1119SW	(I.3, XXIX)	Upper part of water pot of gritty ware
15.16	17247	1125SW	(I.1, XXIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
15.17	17309	1236NW	(J.4, XIX)	Sherd of black-brown ware, on outer surface
15.18	17309	1236NW	(J.4, XIX)	On inner surface of the same sherd
15.19	17310	1206-	(J.5, XXXVI)	Sherd of red slipped ware
15.20	17307	1216-	(J.4, XIX)	Sherd of red slipped ware
15.21	17306	1216-	(J.4, XIX)	Rim of black and red ware
15.22	17304	1206NE	(J.5, XXXVI)	Sherd of black and red ware
15.23	17305	1206NE	(J.5, XXXVI)	Sherd of beaten black and red ware
15.24	17417	1216-	(J.4, XIX)	Sherd of brown ware
15.25	17421	1191-	(J.5, XXI)	Rim of black and red ware
15.26	17423	1175SE	(J.4, XVIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
15.27	17426	1103-	(I.2, XXVII)	Rim of black and red ware
15.28	17427	1175NE	(J.4, XVIII)	Side of black and red ware bowl
15.29	17428	1175NE	(J.4, XVIII)	Sherd of black and red ware
15.30	17429	1292SE	(J.4, XIX)	Sherd of black and red ware
15.31	17527	1399NE	(I.6, XXXVI)	Sherd of coarse gritty ware with external red slip
15.32	17517	1293SW	(? -, XVI)	Sherd of black and red ware
15.33	17523	1473	(J.3, XVII)	Coarse ware sherd, black and red
15.34	10675	1382	(J.3, XVII)	Black and red burnished ware, 'pot 1' from 'burial' pit
15.35	19678	1382	(J.3, XVII)	Black burnished 'pot 4' from same pit as 15.34

16. Sealings

16.1	342	104NW	(D, XCV)	This is a clay sealing with an impressed scene on its face and cord impressions on its reverse side, indicating that the sealing had either been attached to some bundle of merchandise or perhaps was employed in the sealing of a storeroom door (Plate 9.20). The seal impression is in the form of a disc, 3.2cm in diameter, containing three objects. The central object is a flowering plant in a globular pot, flanked by two tall, thin oil lamps. Parānavitana has suggested that such scenes date to between the tenth and fourteenth centuries AD (1936: 9). The scene may represent the vase of plenitude.
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This is a clay sealing with an indistinct impression on its face and vague cord impressions on its reverse side, indicating that the sealing had either been attached to some bundle of merchandise or perhaps was employed in the sealing of a storeroom door.

9.4 Discussion and conclusion

9.4.1 The inscriptions

In the first part of this chapter we considered the evidence provided by the ASW2 excavations regarding the introduction and subsequent use of writing in Anuradhapura. Our aim has been to maintain this perspective throughout and to resist the temptation of straying into wider questions, such as the origins of the Brahmi script (Coningham *et al.* 1996). For this reason, comparative material has been used where it may be helpful in throwing light on the material under discussion and on the settlement and its inhabitants, rather than in touching on these wider themes. The inscriptions in themselves raise questions of considerable importance which are difficult to solve. In reaching our conclusions we shall revert to one or two of these matters and indicate our views on some of the questions they raise. Finally, it must be accepted that the total body of inscriptional data at our disposal is very slight and needs to be reinforced by further excavations leading to the discovery of further dated samples.

The small pits excavated by Siran Deraniyagala at Anuradhapura drew attention to the existence of early Brahmi inscriptions in many parts of the site and for the first time supported them with systematic radiocarbon dates (Deraniyagala 1992: 739–50; Deraniyagala and Abeyratne 2000). Until all these materials are fully published they cannot be satisfactorily used to compare with our evidence. It may however be remarked that the evidence from both series appears closely to coincide and thus to support the general chronology and interpretation we have both drawn from our data.

9.4.1.1 Problems of chronology

The excavations offer an exciting challenge by making it possible to compare several categories of chronological evidence. Obviously the first and major of these is archaeological dating, involving the accurate excavation of the site, with sound stratigraphy linked with properly collected radiocarbon dates, calibrated by the OxCal program (see Volume 1, Chapter 6: Dating the Sequence). As these dates can be firmly linked to the sequence of building periods discovered in ASW2, they ensure an accurate structural chronology for the site and for the finds in each period.

The second category of dating for the inscriptions is what we have called 'epigraphical'. This is obtained by careful observation of the letter forms, looking for significant changes taking place through time, and where possible making comparison with dated materials from other sites. This method cannot as yet be applied to the earlier half of our sequence. This is because nowhere, since the initial discovery and reading of the Asokan

inscriptions by James Prinsep more than a century and a half ago, have any inscriptions been discovered which can be either dated or proven to be earlier than those of Asoka. Thus there is no way of comparing the epigraphical sequence of our earlier inscriptions with other dated examples, since there are none known. There are plentiful materials for such comparison for the later half of the sequence, and it is these that permit us to speak of the 'epigraphical age' of some of the inscriptions.

A third category of dating may be called 'historical'. This too is only possible for the later part of the sequence and arises from the fact that several named and titled persons mentioned in our inscriptions appear to be identical to persons bearing the same names and titles who are mentioned in cave inscriptions from Mihintale and elsewhere. In some instances the named persons are also described in the cave inscriptions as being related by kin to a ruler, whose dates may be more or less certainly ascertained. We do not regard ourselves as competent to carry this study to any great depth. The early cave inscriptions provide some difficult and problematic data. For instance, are the many kings they mention, with titles combining such elements as *maharajha*, *devanampiya*, *gamini*, *tiśa* (incidentally commonly written without the lengthening of the vowels *a* and *i*), one and the same person, or several people? We refer the reader to the wise words and careful analysis of this matter by Paranavitana (1970: xlv–lxiii). We are inclined to accept his conclusion that the names of a number of the royal personages associated with the Buddhist cave donations are those of Devanampiya, the junior contemporary of Asoka, and of his successors for the next two or three generations. If this is the case, they belong to a period of less than a century following the arrival of Mahinda's mission in Sri Lanka – roughly equivalent to Period H at trench ASW2 (Volume 1, Chapter 6: Dating the Sequence: 128). It is also conceivable that a substantial part of the massive output of early Buddhist dedicatory inscriptions found all over Sri Lanka may belong to this same period. As we have already remarked there is, to date, in our excavations a complete absence of inscriptions datable, either epigraphically or by radiocarbon, to the first century AD or later. Karunaratne (1984) has convincingly demonstrated that inscriptions showing evidence of the new style of writing which began around that date also often contain references to appropriately dated rulers.

We believe the exercise of comparing the different categories of dating evidence is well worth pursuing and likely to provide significant new light on the early history of Sri Lanka, as well as providing an objective yardstick against which the accuracy of the chronicles may be

assessed. The archaeological dating of the use of writing at Anuradhapura seems reasonably firm in outline, although less firm in detail (see Table 9.3). The earliest letter-like graffiti resembling Brahmi occur in period J3 (phase XVII), i.e. between c. 450 and 400 BC. The earliest crude inscriptions occur in J4 (phase XVIII), between around 400 and 340 BC. From period I1 onwards (phases XXII to XXIII) more regular, standardized Brahmi letter forms are found, suggesting perhaps a further extraneous influence, probably from the direction of North India (although of course no dated inscriptions of this period are so far reported from there). From period I3 (phases XXVIII to LIII) onwards (i.e. from c. 300 to 200 BC), there is a tendency for the letter sizes to become smaller and the neatness of writing more marked. These tendencies continue through period H (phases LIV to LXIV) and the early part of G (phases LXVII to LXXII), i.e. from c. 200 to 150 BC. Thereafter the custom of scratching inscriptions on pottery seems rapidly to have declined and even disappeared, and the few examples from later periods of the excavation may well be strays redeposited in the course of building operations.

With regard to the epigraphical dating there is little more to add. The crude, ungainly letters found in several of the few inscriptions of period J speak for themselves and raise the question whether a single more regular inscription (No.1.16 [sf 17308]), of which in any case the letters are all incomplete, is not stratigraphically out of place. This may also be the case in one example from period I1 (No.1.20 [sf 228A]). It should be noted, however, that a very similar situation was also observed in adjacent trench ASW88 (Deraniyagala and Abeyratne 2000), suggesting that our own models for the adoption of writing may be oversimplistic, given the complex dynamics involved. During the course of periods I and H the frequency of inscribed material permits us to observe some small developments in the script. This is particularly clear in the case of the form of *ma* which we have called 'dumpy'. Another interesting indication of change is the appearance of two examples of the dental *sa* (in Nos 1.20 [sf 228A] and 4.2 [sf 10249]). Apart from the stratigraphically doubtful No.1.20, this letter is absent from our inscriptions. The date of its first usage can only be estimated on the basis of epigraphical evidence. This suggests that the two occurrences should be dated to the late third to early second centuries BC. However, the most striking fact of the later range of inscriptions is not so much the presence of change as its absence. As we remarked above, none of the letter forms which distinguish the first centuries BC or AD, or indeed thereafter, are in evidence among our materials. Presumably this does not mean the disappearance of writing, but rather the abandonment of the custom of inscribing pottery with the name of its owner or user. Writing by this time must have become more common, but employing different, more transient materials such as ola leaf which have disappeared, as suggested by the presence of ivory and bone plaques discussed in Chapter 10: Faunal Remains, section 10.3.1.18.

We noticed above that changes in the style of script begin to exert themselves across North India from the middle of the first century BC, and more clearly from the

first century AD. Yet these features are scarcely visible in our materials. Dani convincingly argued that the changes were to a large measure related to the introduction of a new writing tool, the reed pen, with square cut tip (Dani 1963). Such pens must have been used in conjunction with ink and depended on the availability of a suitable material for writing. We believe that the main changes visible in the Sri Lankan inscriptional record from the first century AD forward are related to these causes. Thus it may be suggested that the absence of evidence for change in our excavations demonstrates that the decline of the scratching of inscriptions and graffiti on pottery coincides in a general way with the rise of these new features. Henceforward writing was presumably done on other, more transient materials which have not survived.

The cross-dating evidence provided by Buddhist cave inscriptions is, as we have remarked above, very challenging, and its study certainly deserves to be carried further. No.1.20 (sf 228A) mentions the name of (A)bi Yahasiniyā, but it is not possible to ascertain whether she may be identified with the lady of the same name, but bearing the title *upāsikā* (lay worshipper), who donated a cave at Rajagala (Paranavitana, No. 422), and possibly also with a *samanikā* (nun) of the same name mentioned in a Vessagiri inscription (Paranavitana, No. 39). Similarly, it is impossible to judge whether the Abi Tisa of inscription No.1.19 (sf 25133) may be identified with the lady of this name, daughter of Maharajha Gamini Uu, who donated a cave at Mihintale (Paranavitana, No. 34). The donors at Rajagala and Mihintale may be expected to have flourished during the last decades of the third and early part of the second century BC (our period H), while the lady associated with sf 228A belonged to period I1 and the lady associated with sf 25133 to period G1. Given the clear continuity of many names such as Gamani and Tissa in the island, there is the strong possibility that (A)bi Yahasiniya and Abi Tisa were also popular names, frequently used during the long Early Historic period in Sri Lanka. From this point of view, the most satisfactory of our inscriptions is the clay sealing (No.4.2 [sf 10249]) of Tisaputa Magaha Purumaka, who appears to equate with the official of the same name found at Mihintale (Paranavitana, No. 22). Here archaeological, epigraphical and historical dating all coincide.

9.4.1.2 The wider implications of the inscriptions

We noticed above (in section 9.2.6) that such evidence as was available in the inscriptions pointed to their being written in a language akin to a North Indian Prakrit and that to date none of our inscriptions (with the possible exception of a single letter) is in Tamil. This observation, linked with the dates assigned to the earliest inscriptions, c. 400 BC, is obviously of great significance in that it appears broadly to support the traditional account of the *Mahavamsa* regarding northern contact with Sri Lanka from a date traditionally coinciding with the *Mahaparinirvana*, or 'great passing away' of the Buddha. It thus appears that archaeology is now able to throw an important new, objective light upon the

traditional account of the history of the island as well as on the developmental sequence of the early Brahmi script, although we are still uncertain as to the dynamics involved in such a linguistic shift (Coningham *et al.* 1996).

9.4.2 The graffiti

We have seen above that the earliest inscriptions appeared on pottery around 400 BC (period J4), but that during the preceding half century a small number of signs resembling Brahmi letters began to make their appearance. It is difficult to decide whether these should be treated as mere graffiti or as 'proto-inscriptions'. The earliest graffiti occur around or slightly before 500 BC, but they are for the most part fragmentary and rarely reveal enough to establish the character of the symbols of which they once formed a part. Nevertheless, they lead us to the conclusion that the incising of post-firing graffiti on pottery antedates the first appearance of writing at Anuradhapura by between fifty and one hundred years. Once the inscribing of pottery has begun, it marches side by side with the graffiti, although inscriptions outnumber graffiti in every period, and both seem to fall into desuetude at about the same time. It should be noted that Deraniyagala has reported the presence of graffiti and inscriptions in trenches AMP and ASW with even earlier dates (Deraniyagala 1992: 739–50).

9.4.2.1 Stylistic tendencies of Anuradhapura graffiti

We argued above (see section 9.3.4) that the graffiti from ASW2 may be regarded as exemplifying several stylistic tendencies. The first of these we referred to as the 'early' style. This is represented by a substantial number of sherds, of which few are sufficiently complete to allow the identification of the original symbols of which they formed a part. Such evidence as there is points to the early style being closely related to a common style found in many peninsular Iron Age sites in India and extending into Sri Lanka. This we have named the PIASS (Peninsular Iron Age Symbol System). We also noticed that from around 350 BC there was a shift from the more rambling style of the older graffiti to a more compact and concisely drawn style in the later. This second style we named 'urban'. Most of the recognizable symbols listed in the catalogues date from the fourth century BC and later. A number represent motifs that are found also in early Iron Age settlements and Megalithic grave sites in peninsular India, though there too they are often depicted in the rambling early style. A third style, which we named 'hieratic', was apparently introduced in the third century BC and is very much a part of the great expansion of Buddhism in Sri Lanka at that time. This we see as a specialized extension of the urban style, and it is represented at ASW2 by only a small number of specimens.

Quite apart from the stylistic change between the early and urban styles, there is also an interesting difference between symbol assemblages derived from grave sites and those from settlements. On excavation, some individual graves in India have been found to

contain many close variants of single symbol-types. In some instances these may have been individual owner's marks; but in view of the fact that Megalithic cist graves often contain multiple burials, they may be not so much the marks of individuals as of a family or clan (Coningham *et al.* 1996). A good example of the restricted nature of the sign repertoire found in graves is afforded by the excavations at Sanur, in the Chingleput district of Tamilnadu (Banerjee and Rajan 1959), and another by the excavations at Kodumanal (cited above). Both these and many other groups suggest parallels to what the Anuradhapura early style may have resembled, had any complete pots survived in the settlement.

9.4.2.2 The wider implications of the Dominant sign

One of the most interesting symbols from ASW2 is the Dominant sign (see Table 9.7). This appears first in period J3 (i.e. c. 450–420 BC), both in its main type and principal variety, and continues thereafter fairly regularly through to period G3. In all there are 43 examples of the main type and its principal varieties, and a further 31 examples of 'elements' of the type, either 'hands' or, more rarely, auspicious pots. The sign is thus far more common than any other symbol-type and bridges the change from the early to urban styles that seems to have taken place around periods J5 and I1.

The growing body of evidence deriving from excavations makes it look increasingly likely that the scratched graffiti are not individual owner's marks, but more probably signs signifying family, kin or clan. We may well ask ourselves what was the significance of a symbol such as the Dominant sign, of which so many examples were discovered in this small area of the city. As we saw above, several inscriptions mentioning the names of royal ladies and a royal official were also found there. There is a strong case therefore for regarding the Dominant sign as the symbol of a major extended family or clan living in that vicinity.

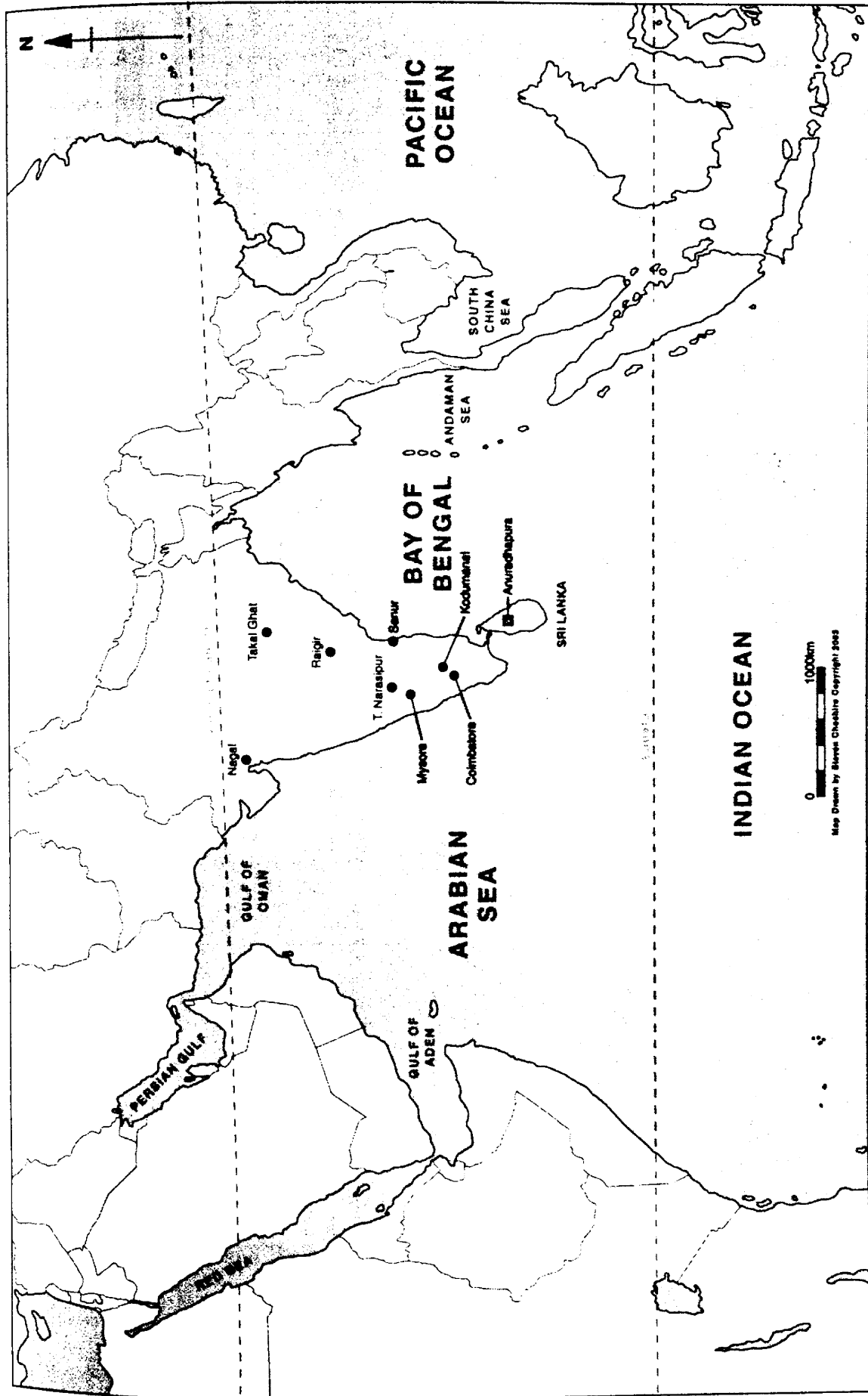
9.4.3 Inscriptions and graffiti: cultural complexity and interaction

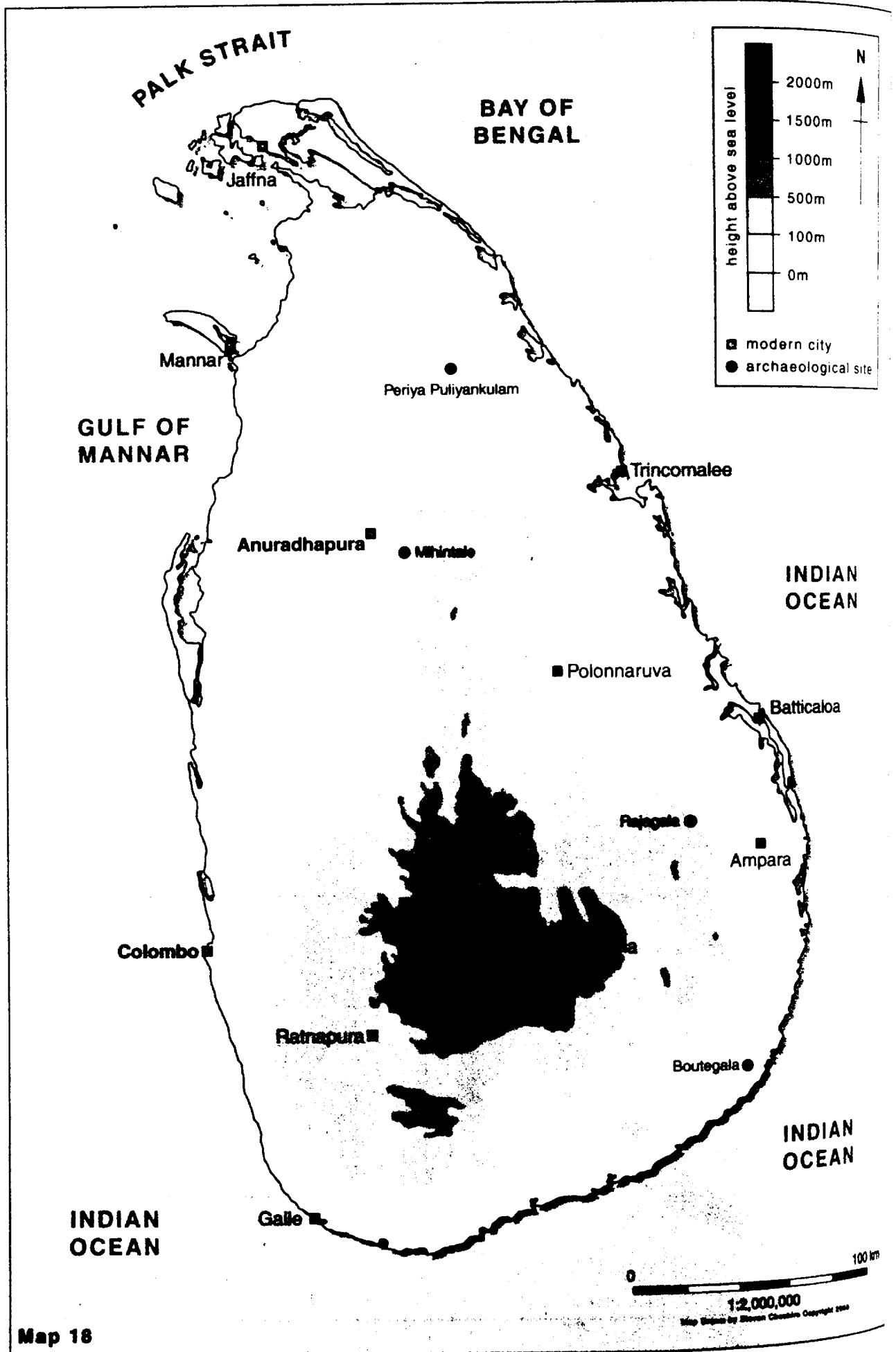
The graffiti and inscriptions are mainly known to us from their occurrence on pottery. One may enquire why it should have been found necessary to employ two parallel symbol systems in this context and how the systems relate to each other. Consideration of this question leads to some interesting contrasts and problematic conclusions. The graffiti appear almost from the beginning of the Iron Age occupation at Anuradhapura, and just as the material culture of this site shows a broad affinity to that of contemporary Iron Age cultures throughout South India and the Deccan; so too does the symbol system of Anuradhapura appear to be one of the constituent parts of the Peninsular Iron Age Symbol System (PIASS). By contrast, the inscriptions, when they appear at a slightly later date (c. 400 BC), introduce distinctly North Indian elements in terms of the language in which they are written, the names they use and, hypothetically, the Brahmi script itself. One way in which this contrasting evidence might be interpreted is as follows:

1) That during the early part of the first millennium BC an iron-using, agricultural population spread on the coastal plains of Sri Lanka. Such a development would be broadly parallel to the growth of population on the coastal plains of southern India. As a result, the Early Iron Age cultures of both coastal South India and Sri Lanka shared many common features. One of these was the complex of burial practices and funerary monuments which is commonly spoken of as Megalithic or – as we prefer to call it – the South Indian Iron Age burial complex. The Iron Age agricultural population of Sri Lanka at that time must also have spread into the interior, carrying with it its own distinctive lifestyle. Doubtless this population maintained links with the apparently related tribal groups and emerging kingdoms which contemporarily flourished on the mainland. It seems therefore entirely reasonable to postulate that these people would have developed their own regional version of the PIASS, which was at that time employed for distinguishing the ownership of pottery vessels and probably other possessions (Coningham *et al.* 1996). The type we call the Dominant sign is in keeping with a PIASS symbol and could well belong to the ruling family or clan in the newly established settlement that was subsequently to be called Anuradhapura. The presence of a variant of the Dominant sign on a pot from Kodumanal, in Coimbatore District, Tamilnadu, alongside an inscription in Tamil Brahmi referring to a 'king', may even lead us to wonder whether there might have been some sort of heraldic or family linkage between the population of the two regions.

2) To understand the context in which inscriptions were written in a North Indian Prakrit language, ancestral to Sinhalese, in what was probably in origin a North Indian Brahmi script, one must postulate that at some date before 400 BC a group speaking and writing that language gained a position of social or economic dominance in some part of Sri Lanka, and in due course extended their power to Anuradhapura. Around 350 BC, an already mature and well-written series of short inscriptions occur on pottery and appear to coincide with the establishment of an altogether new level of urban culture there. This leads to one other point: that the use of Brahmi inscriptions to establish the names of individual owners of pottery vessels probably also indicates that the earlier symbol system, while able to convey information regarding extended family or clan ownership, was inadequate to signify the names of individual owners. This change appears to be in keeping with growing urbanism and with the emergence of the idea of individual property as against an earlier concept of clan ownership (Coningham *et al.* 1996).

The relationship and interaction of the symbol system and the inscriptions may well encapsulate something of the relationship of the two communities from which they derived. In this way archaeology and the topics dealt with in this chapter may be helpful in pointing towards a new perspective on the relations between language, script and archaeology in Early Historic Sri Lanka.





Map 18

Table 9.1 Inscriptions and graffiti

Category Period	Inscription	Single akṣaras etc.	Total inscriptions	Dominant sign graffiti	Other graffiti	Misc. graffiti	Total graffiti	Totals
A								
B5								
B4								
B3								
B2								
B1								
C, D & E	1		1			7	7	8
F								
G5	2		2			3	3	6
G4					1		1	1
G3		2	2	3	1		4	6
G2		12	12	17	17	1	35	47
G1				3	1		12	12
H	6	21	27	15	10	3	28	55
I8	2	8	10	7	4	1	12	22
I7		5	5	7	2	21	30	35
I6	1		1	3	5	14	22	23
I5	1	3	4	1	1		2	6
I4	2	2	4	3	3	37	43	47
I3	3		3	5	11	7	23	26
I2	2	3	5	1	6	26	33	38
I1	4	11	15	3	14	41	58	73
J6	1	3	4	1	6	13	20	24
J4	3	2	5	2	9	3	14	19
J3		5	5	4	7	3	14	19
J2						12	12	12
J1						3	3	3
K3						1	1	1
K2								
K1								
Total	28	77	105	75	98	204	377	482

Table 9.2 Inscriptions on potsherds

Period	Category	Special find no. (catalogue no.)	Total
A			
B5			
B4			
B3			
B2			
B1			
C, D & E			
F			
G5		25133(1.19), 8190(1.21)	2
G4			
G3			
G2			
G1			
H		16195(1.3), 16313(1.7), 16194(1.8), 176A(1.23), 16348(1.26)	5
I8		16472(1.1), 16454(1.2)	2
I7			
I6		16595(1.6)	1
I5		16620(1.5)	1
I4		16742(1.4), 17024(1.11)	2
I3		10517(1.9), 17025(1.10), 17095(1.25)	3
I2		17040(1.12), 139A(1.22)	2
I1		17138(1.13), 17330(1.14), 228A(1.20), 142A(1.24)	4
J6		17425(1.18)	1
J4		17332(1.15), 17308(1.16), 17420(1.17)	3
J3			
J2			
J1			
K3			
K2			
K1			
Total			26

J3	6.15.33 Λ	2.35 Λ	6.15.34 λ	6.5.6 ↑↓											
J4	6.15.28 +	6.15.29 λ						1.15 30	1.16 π	1.17 J					
J5	2.22 δ							1.18 δ							
I1	2.22 L	2.20 Δ	2.29 7	2.31 λ	2.27 U	2.28 U	2.23 δ	2.24 δ	1.13 U	1.14 E	1.24 λ	1.20 □			
I2	2.19 Λ							1.12 ↓		1.22 L					
I3	1.9 U							1.10 Y		1.25 δ					
I4	2.25 H							1.4 L							
I5	2.30 +		2.5 Λ	2.21 δ											
I6,7	2.32 Δ							1.6 □							
I8	2.3 +		2.7 δ	3.11 }				1.1 L		1.2 J					
H	2.2 +	2.4 +	2.10 Λ	2.8 λ	2.9 λ	2.10 λ	2.12 δ	2.17 δ	2.14 δ	2.18 λ	1.3 L	1.7 +	1.8 L	1.23 L	1.26 □
G1											4.2 L				

Table 9.3 Inscriptions of catalogue 1

G3	Δ	
G4		𑀕𑀓𑀕𑀺𑀲, 𑀕𑀓
B		𑀧𑀧𑀢𑀓𑀺, 𑀧𑀧𑀺𑀓𑀺

Table 9.3 (continued)

Table 9.4 Single and double aksaras on potsherds

Period	Category	Special find no. (catalogue no.)	Total
A			
B5			
B4			
B3			
B2			
B1			
C, D & E			
F			
G5			
G4			
G3		15603(2.16)	1
G2		15613(2.1), 15613(2.6), 16071(2.11), 16462(2.13)	4
G1			
H		16503(2.2), 16194(2.4), 16428(2.8), 16326(2.9), 16314(2.10), 16529(2.12), 16487(2.14), 16432(2.15), 16176(2.17)	9
I8		16396(2.3), 16520(2.7), 16532(2.18)	3
I7			
I6		17303(2.32), 17311(2.33), 17526(2.34)	3
I5		16589(2.5), 16623(2.30)	2
I4		17148(2.25)	1
I3			
I2		17032(2.19)	1
I1		17050(2.20), 17131(2.22), 17134(2.23), 17136(2.24), 17151(2.26), 17152(2.27), 17156(2.28), 17236(2.29), 10643(2.31)	9
J5		17093(2.21)	1
J4			
J3		17521(2.35)	1
J2			
J1			
K3			
K2			
K1			
Total			35

Table 9.5a Other graffiti signs

Period	Category	Special find no. (catalogue no.)	Total
A			
B5			
B4			
B3			
B2			
B1			
C, D & E			
F			
G5		25133(1.19), 8190(1.21)	2
G4			
G3			
G2			
G1			
H		16195(1.3), 16313(1.7), 16194(1.8), 176A(1.23), 16348(1.26)	5
I8		16472(1.1), 16454(1.2)	2
I7			
I6		16595(1.6)	1
I5		16620(1.5)	1
I4		16742(1.4), 17024(1.11)	2
I3		10517(1.9), 17025(1.10), 17095(1.25)	3
I2		17040(1.12), 139A(1.22)	2
I1		17138(1.13), 17330(1.14), 228A(1.20), 142A(1.24)	4
J5		17425(1.18)	1
J4		17332(1.15), 17308(1.16), 17420(1.17)	3
J3			
J2			
J1			
K3			
K2			
K1			
Total			26













2.1 	2.2 	2.3 
2.4 	2.5 	2.6 
2.7 	2.8 	2.9 
2.10 	2.11 	2.12 

Table 9.5b Inscriptions of catalogue 2 - single and double aksaras






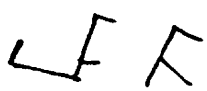






2.13 	2.14 	2.15 
2.16 	2.17 	2.18 
2.19 	2.20 	2.21 
2.22 	2.23 	2.24 

Table 9.5b (continued)



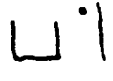






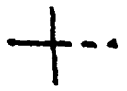

2.25 	2.26 	2.27 
2.28 	2.29 	2.30 
2.31 	2.32 	2.33 
2.34 	2.35 	

Table 9.5b (continued)


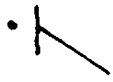










3.1 	3.2 	3.3 
3.4 	3.5 	3.6 
3.7 	3.8 	3.9 
3.10 	3.11 	3.12 

Table 9.6 Inscriptions of catalogue 3 - other letter-like graffiti






















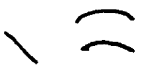


3.13 	3.14 	3.15 
3.16 	3.17 	3.18 
3.19 	3.20 	3.21 
3.22 	3.23 	3.24 

Table 9.6 (continued)

3.25 	3.26 	3.27 
3.28 	3.29 	3.30 
3.31 	3.32 	3.33 
3.34 	3.35 	3.36 










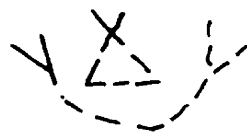


<p>5.1.1</p> 	<p>5.1.2</p> 
<p>5.1.3</p> 	<p>5.1.4</p> 
<p>5.1.5</p> 	<p>5.1.6</p> 
<p>5.1.7</p> 	<p>5.1.8</p> 
<p>5.1.9</p> 	<p>5.1.10</p> 
<p>5.1.11</p> 	<p>5.1.12</p> 

Table 9.7 Inscriptions of catalogue 5 - dominant signs












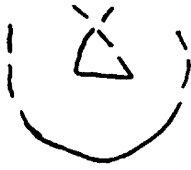





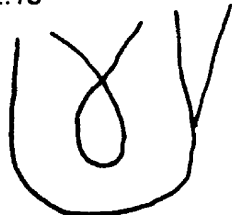
5.2.1 	5.2.2 	5.2.3 
5.2.4 	5.2.5 	5.2.6 
5.2.7 	5.2.8 	5.2.9 
5.2.10 	5.2.11 	5.2.12 
5.2.13 	5.2.14 	5.2.15 
5.2.16 	5.2.17 	5.2.18 

Table 9.7 (continued)











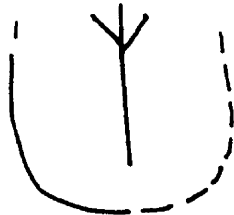



5.2.19 	5.2.20 	5.2.21 
5.2.22 	5.2.23 	5.2.24 
5.3.1 	5.3.2 	
5.3.3 	5.3.4 	
5.3.5 	5.3.6 	
5.3.7 	5.3.8 	

Table 9.7 (continued)









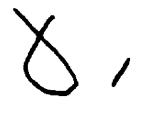



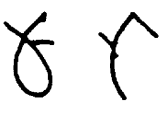
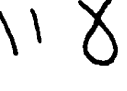

5.1.19 	5.4.20 	5.4.21 
5.4.22 	5.4.23 	5.4.24 
5.4.25 	5.4.26 	5.4.27 
5.4.28 	5.4.29 	5.4.30 
5.4.31 	5.4.32 	5.4.33 

Table 9.7 (continued)



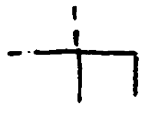

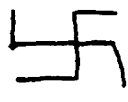
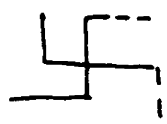

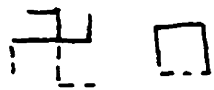

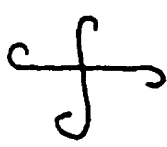
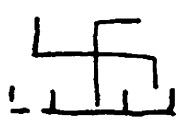


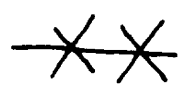


6.1.1 	6.1.2 	6.1.3 
6.1.4 	6.1.5 	6.1.6 
6.1.7 	6.1.8 	6.1.9 
6.1.10 	6.1.11 	
6.2.1 	6.2.2 	6.2.3 
6.3.1 	6.3.2 	

Table 9.8 Inscriptions of catalogue 6 - other signs



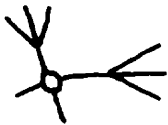












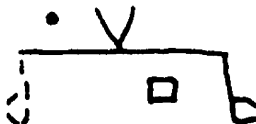

6.4.1		6.4.2		6.4.3	
6.5.1		6.5.2		6.5.3	
6.5.4		6.5.5		6.5.6	
6.6.1		6.6.2		6.6.3	
6.6.4		6.6.5			
6.7.1		6.8.1		6.8.2	

Table 9.8 (continued)

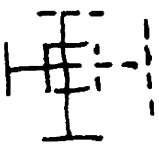
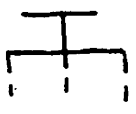
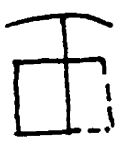
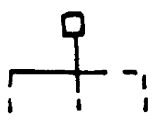
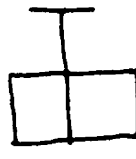
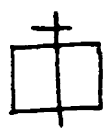


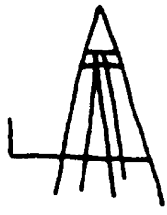

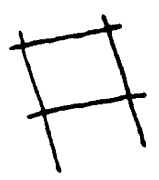
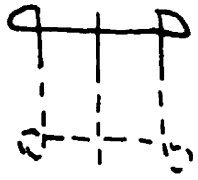
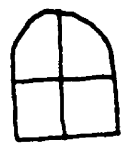
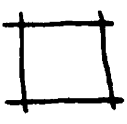
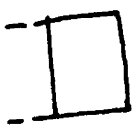
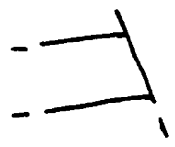
6.9.1 	6.9.2 	6.9.3 
6.9.4 	6.9.5 	6.9.6 
6.10.1 		
6.11.1 	6.11.2 	6.11.3 
6.12.1 	6.12.2 	6.12.3 
6.12.4.1 	6.12.5 	6.12.6 

Table 9.8 (continued)


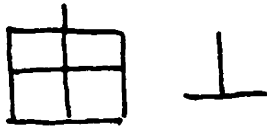
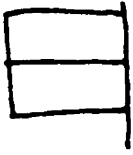
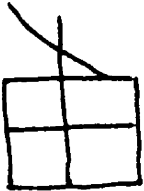
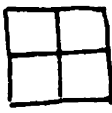

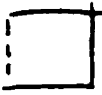

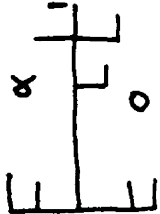
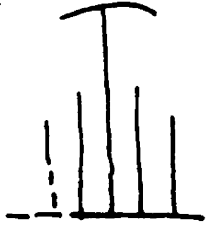

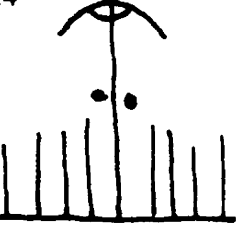
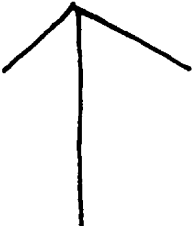
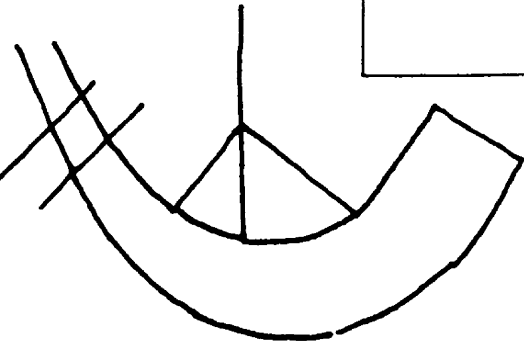


6.12.7 	6.12.8 	6.12.9 
6.12.10 	6.12.11 	6.12.12 
6.12.13 	6.12.14 	6.13.1 
6.13.2 	6.13.3 	6.13.4 
6.13.5 	6.14.2 	6.14.3 
6.14.1 		

Table 9.8 (continued)





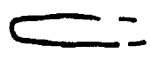

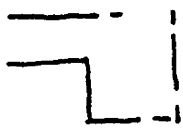







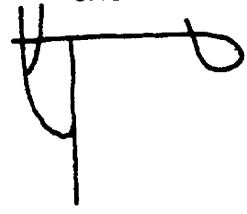



6.15.1 	6.15.2 	6.15.3 
6.15.4 	6.15.5 	6.15.6 
6.15.7 	6.15.8 	6.15.9 
6.15.10 	6.15.11 	6.15.12 
6.15.13 	6.15.14 	6.15.15 
6.15.16 	6.15.17 	6.15.18 

Table 9.8 (continued)






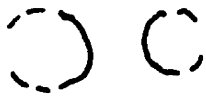


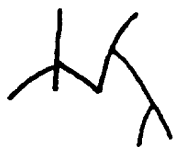








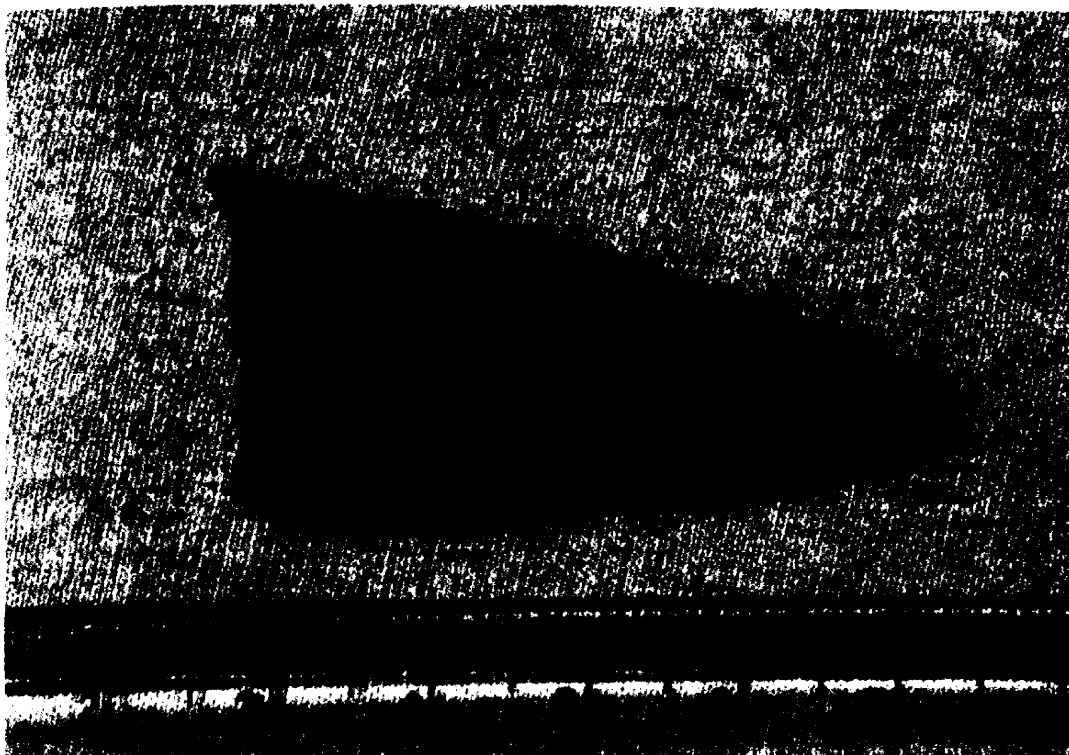
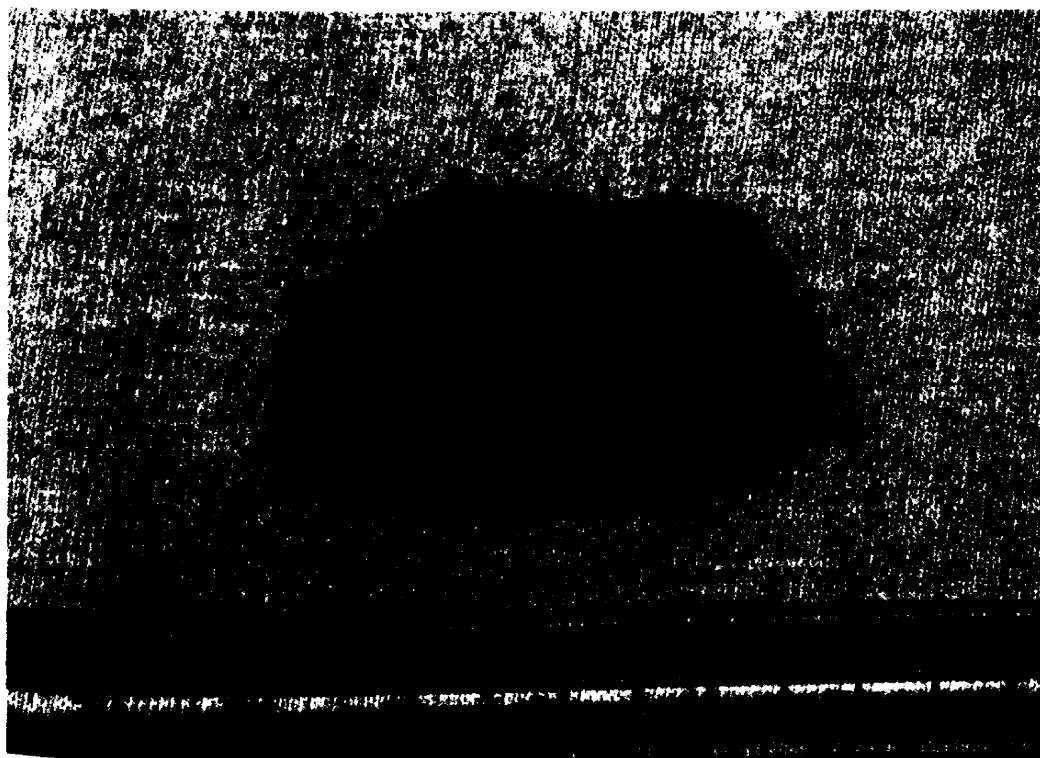
6.15.19 	6.15.20 	6.15.21 
6.15.22 	6.15.23 	6.15.24 
6.15.25 	6.15.26 	6.15.27 
6.15.28 	6.15.29 	6.15.30 
6.15.31 	6.15.32 	6.15.33 
6.15.34 	6.15.35 	

Table 9.8 (continued)

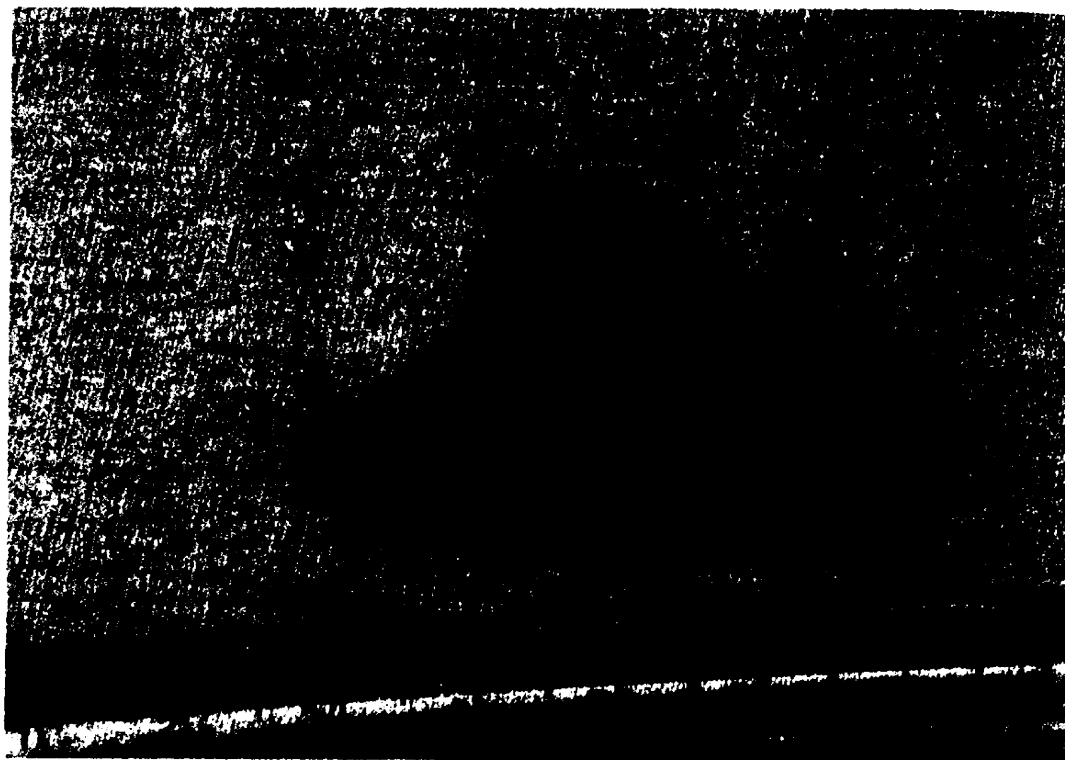


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 16472)

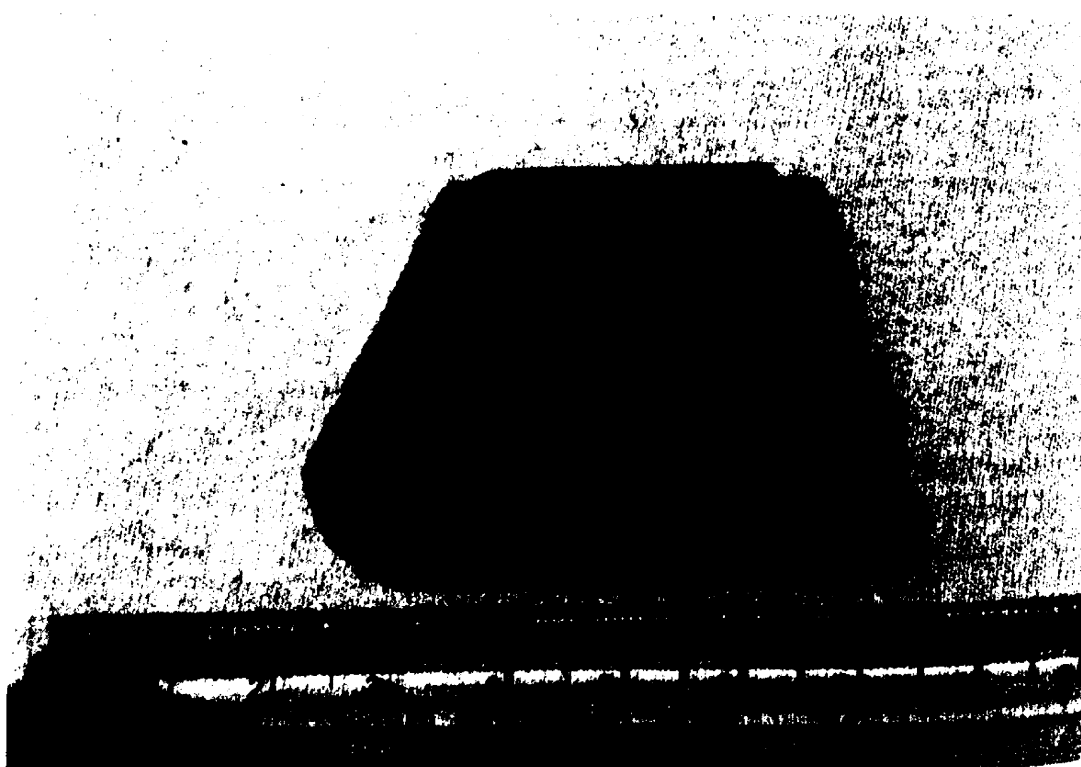


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 16454)

Plate 9.1: Inscriptions and graffiti

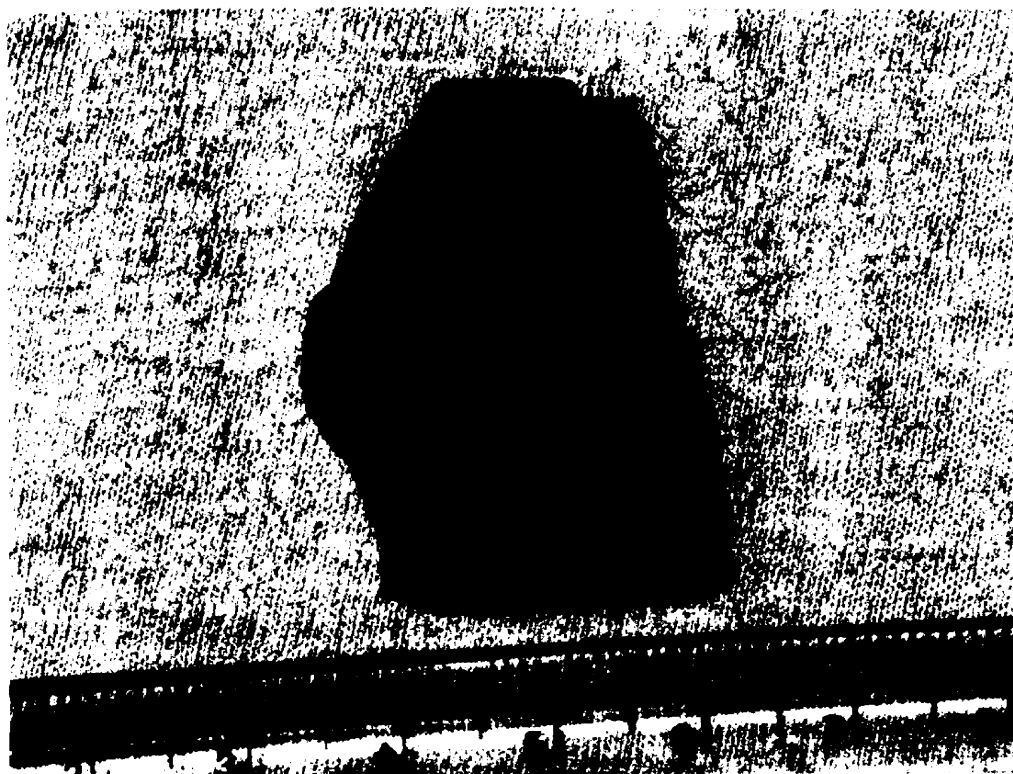


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 16195)

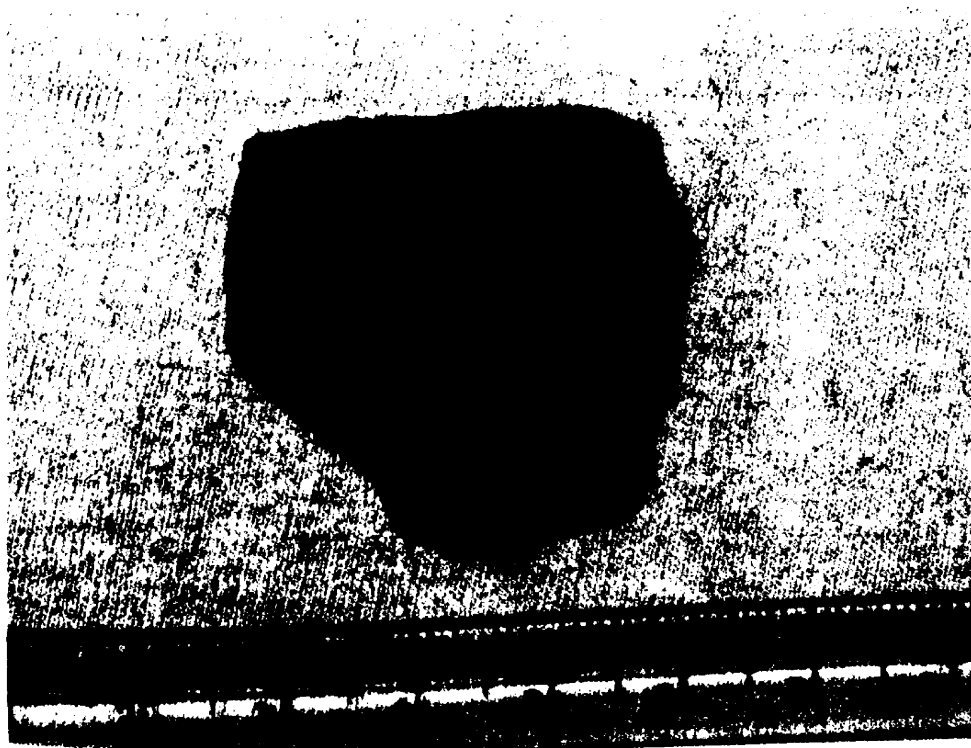


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 16742)

Plate 9.2: Inscriptions and graffiti

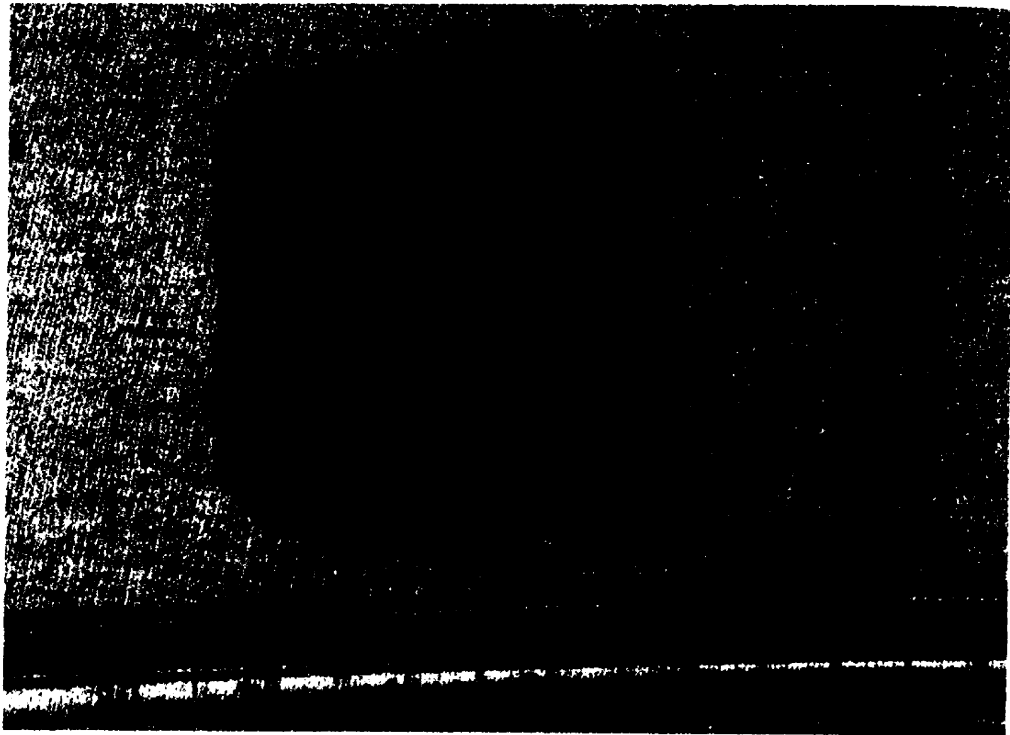


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 16595)

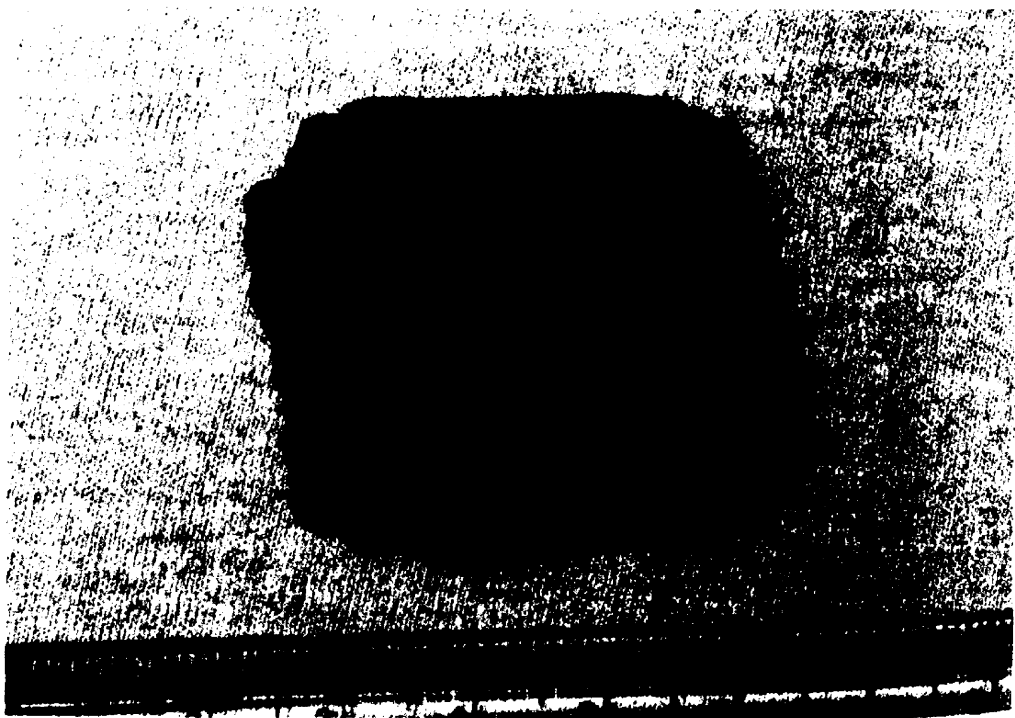


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 16313)

Plate 9.3: Inscriptions and graffiti

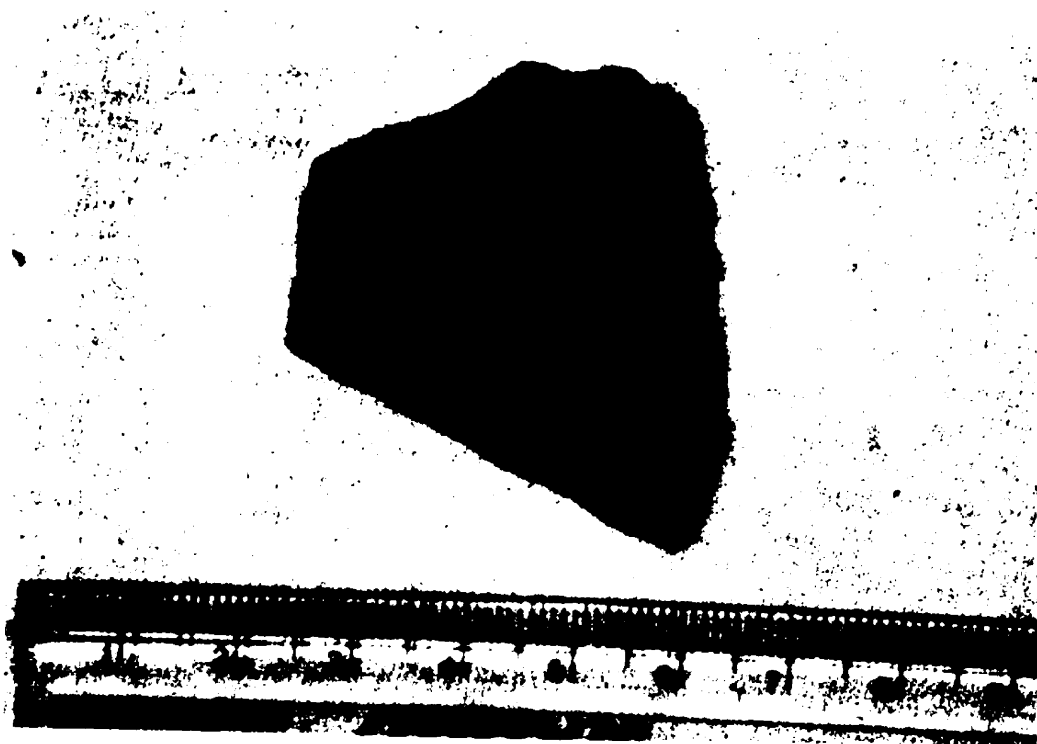


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 16194)



Inscription on pot sherd (sf 10517)

Plate 9.4: Inscriptions and graffiti

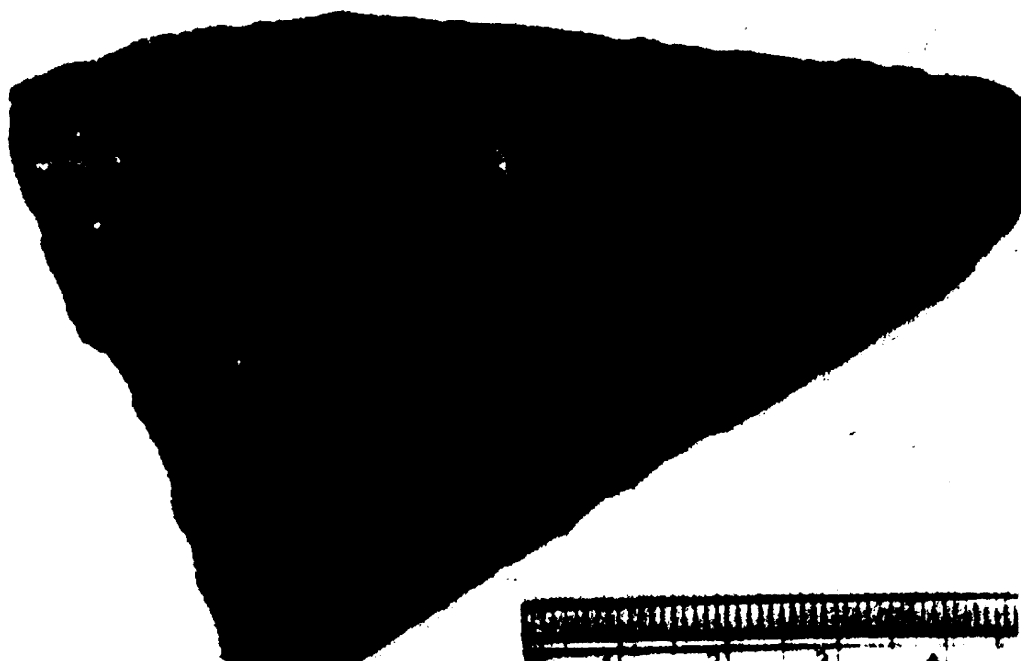


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 17025)

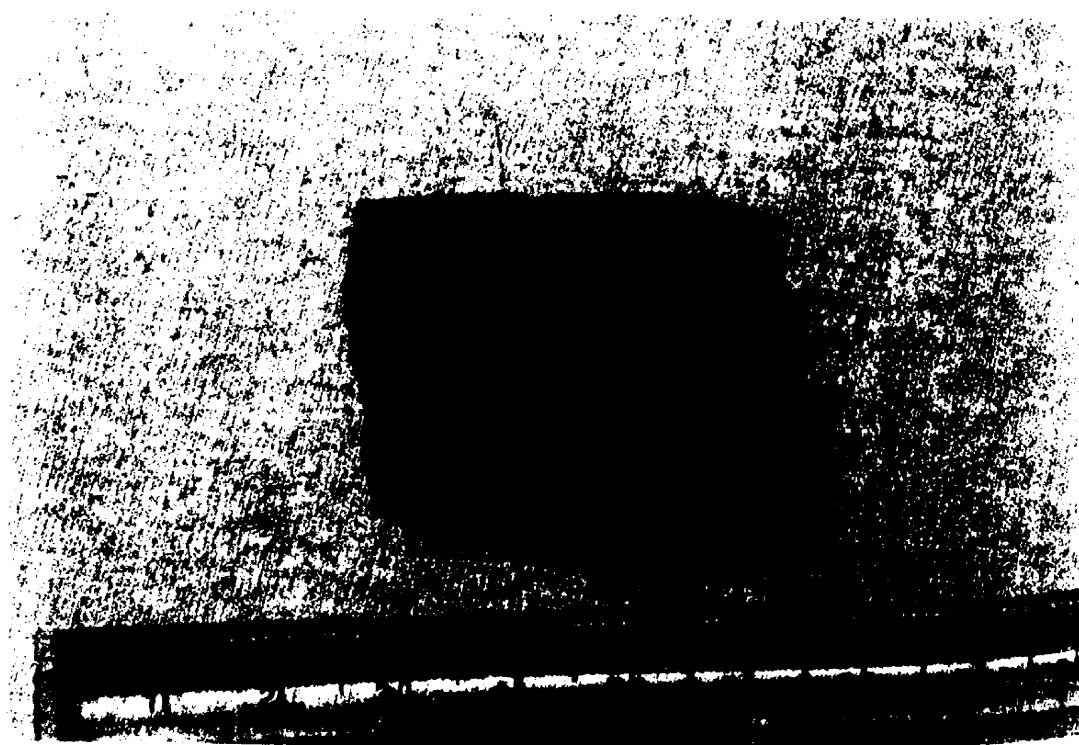


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 17024)

Plate 9.5: Inscriptions and graffiti



Inscription on pot sherd (sf 17040)



Inscription on pot sherd (sf 17138)

Plate 9.6: Inscriptions and graffiti

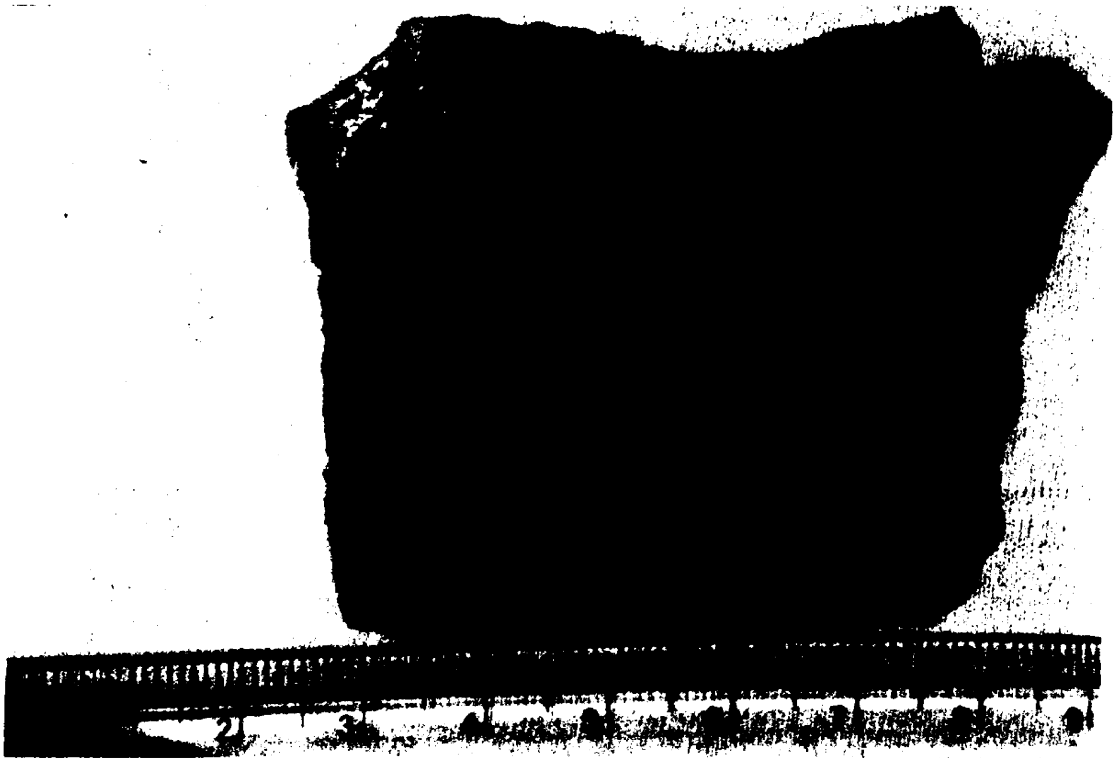


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 17330)



Inscription on pot sherd (sf 17332)

Plate 9.7: Inscriptions and graffiti

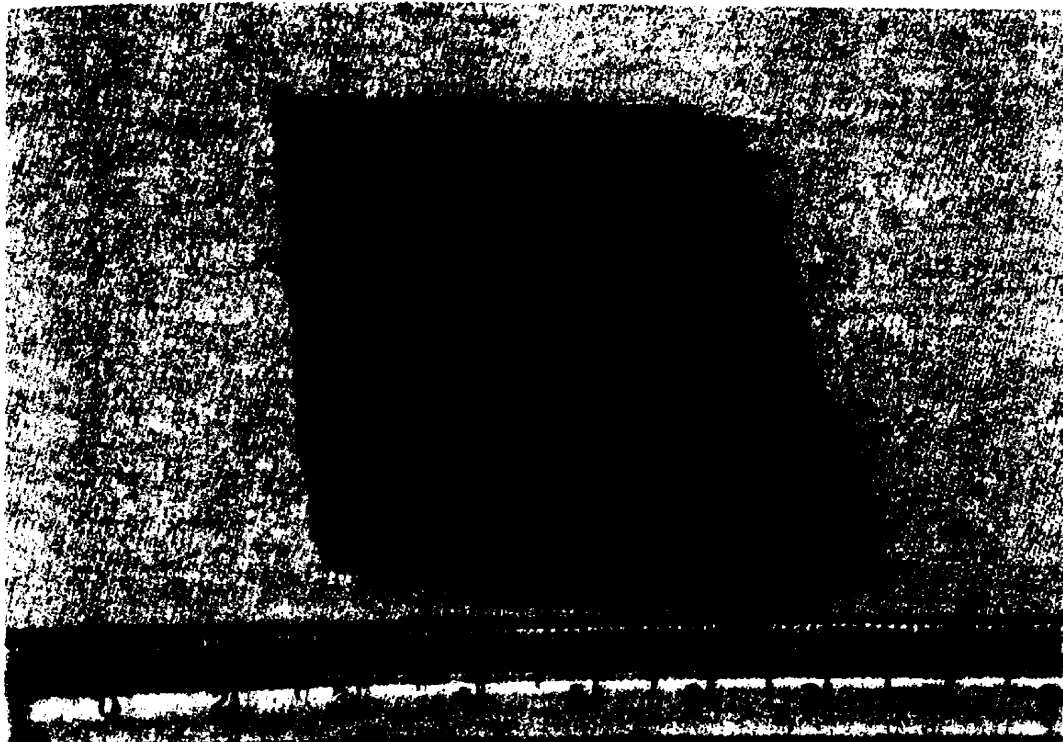


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 17308)

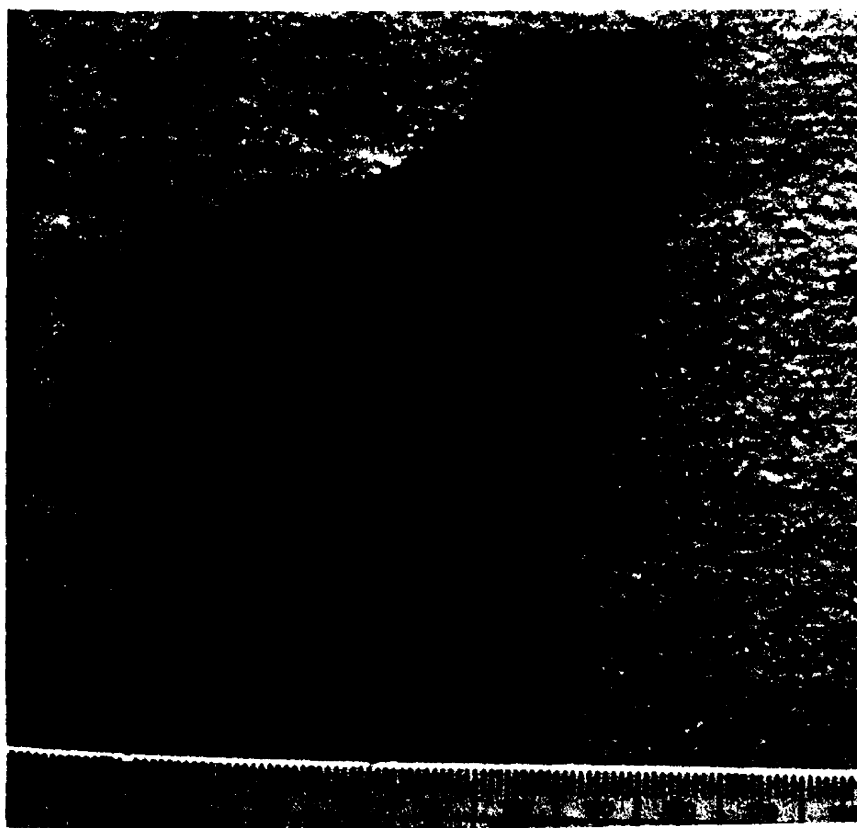


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 17420)

Plate 9.8: Inscriptions and graffiti

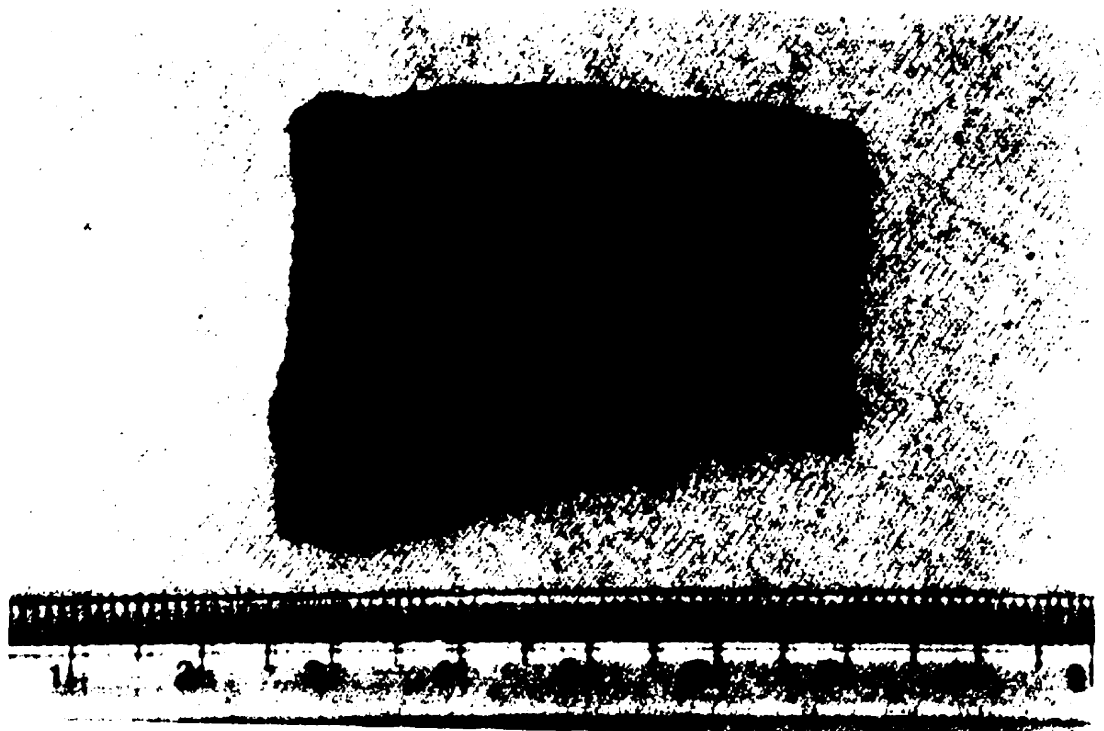


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 17425)

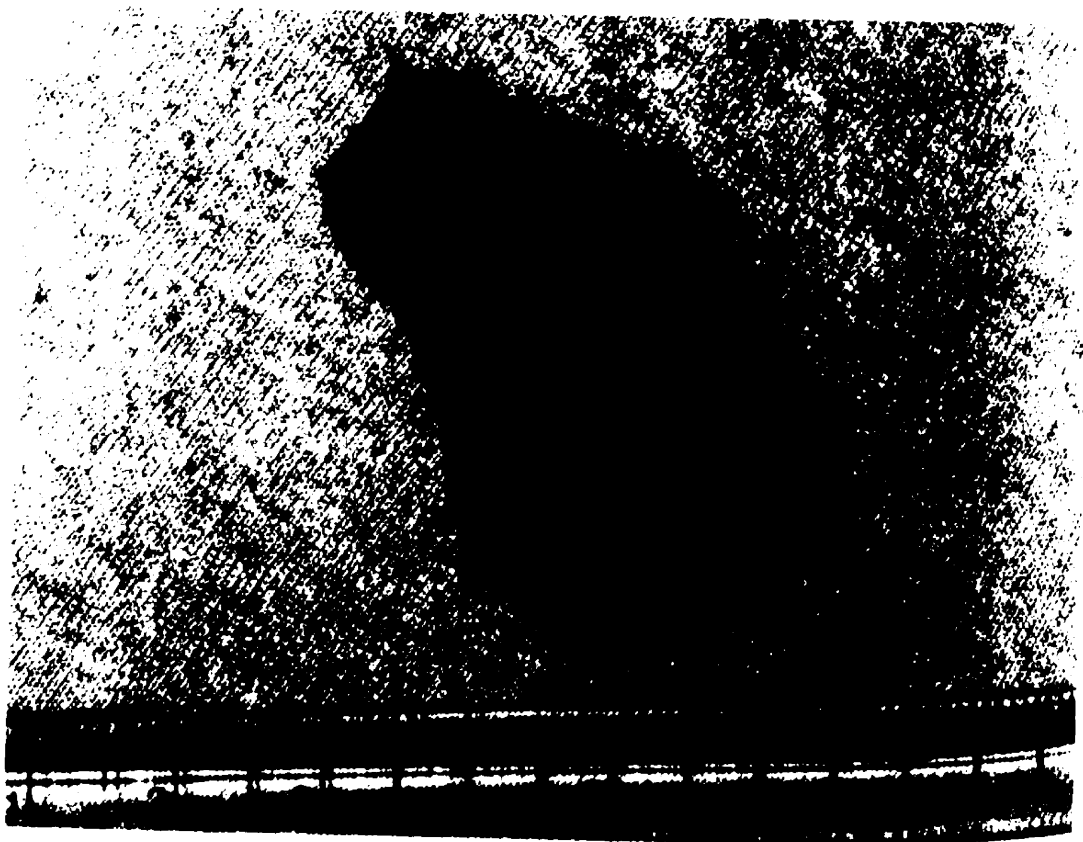


Inscription on pot sherd (sf 25133)

Plate 9.9: Inscriptions and graffiti

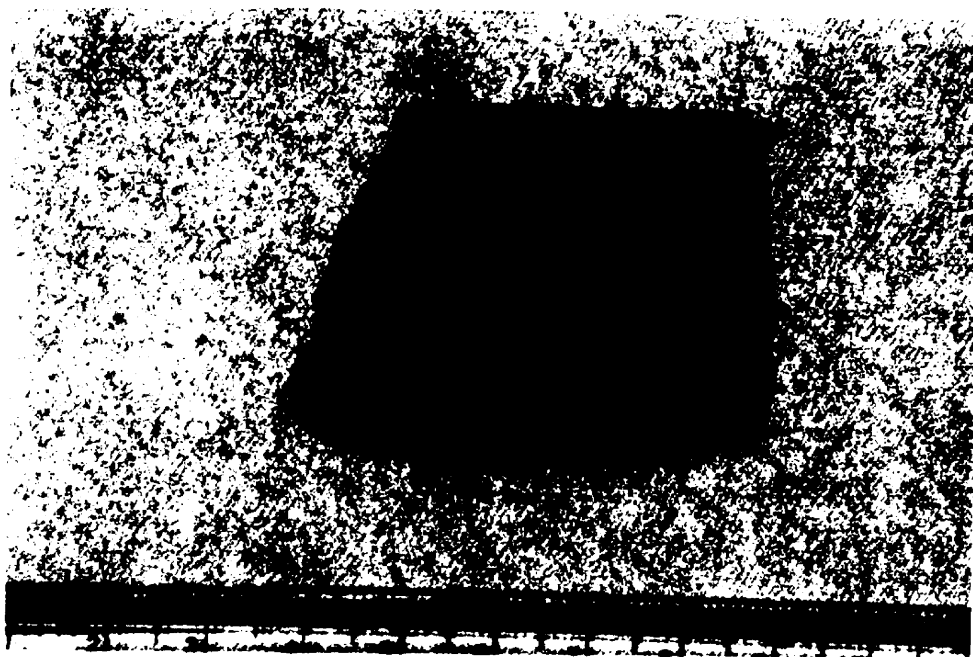


Single *akṣara* on pot sherd (sf 16396)

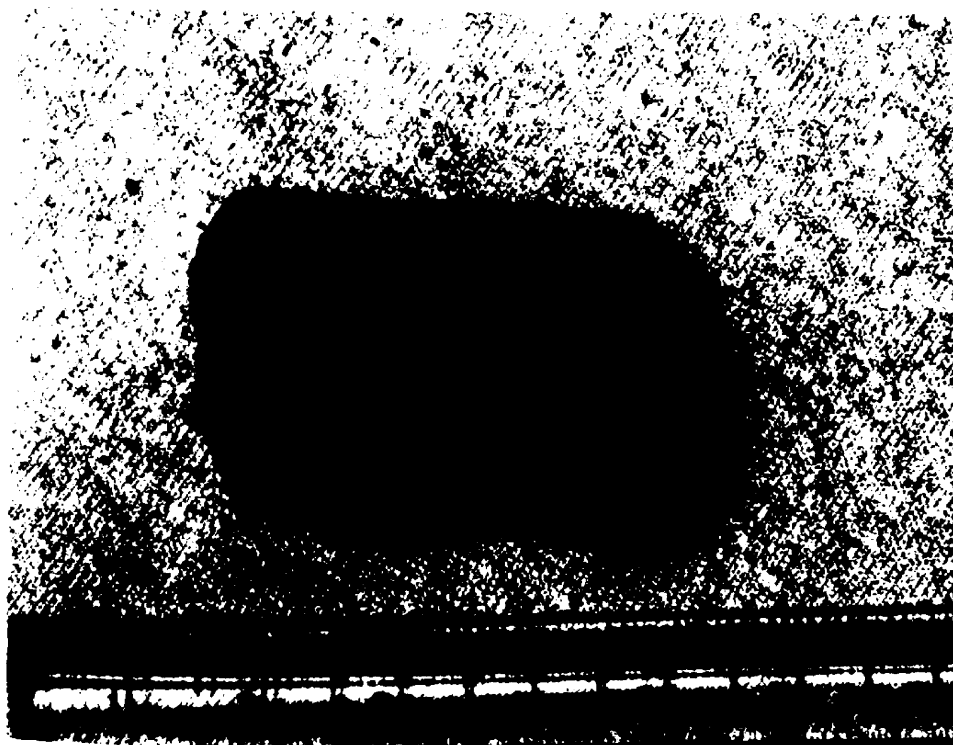


Single *akṣara* on pot sherd (sf 16520)

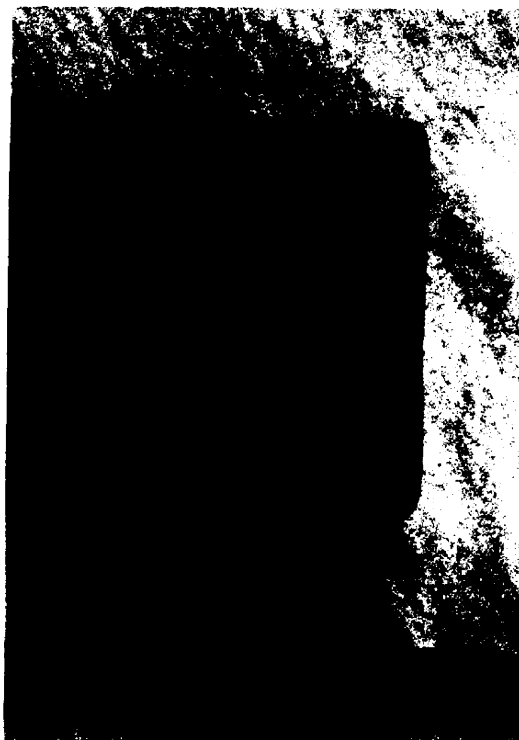
Plate 9.10: Inscriptions and graffiti



Other letter-like graffiti on pot sherd (sf 16364)



Other letter-like graffiti on pot sherd (sf 16168)

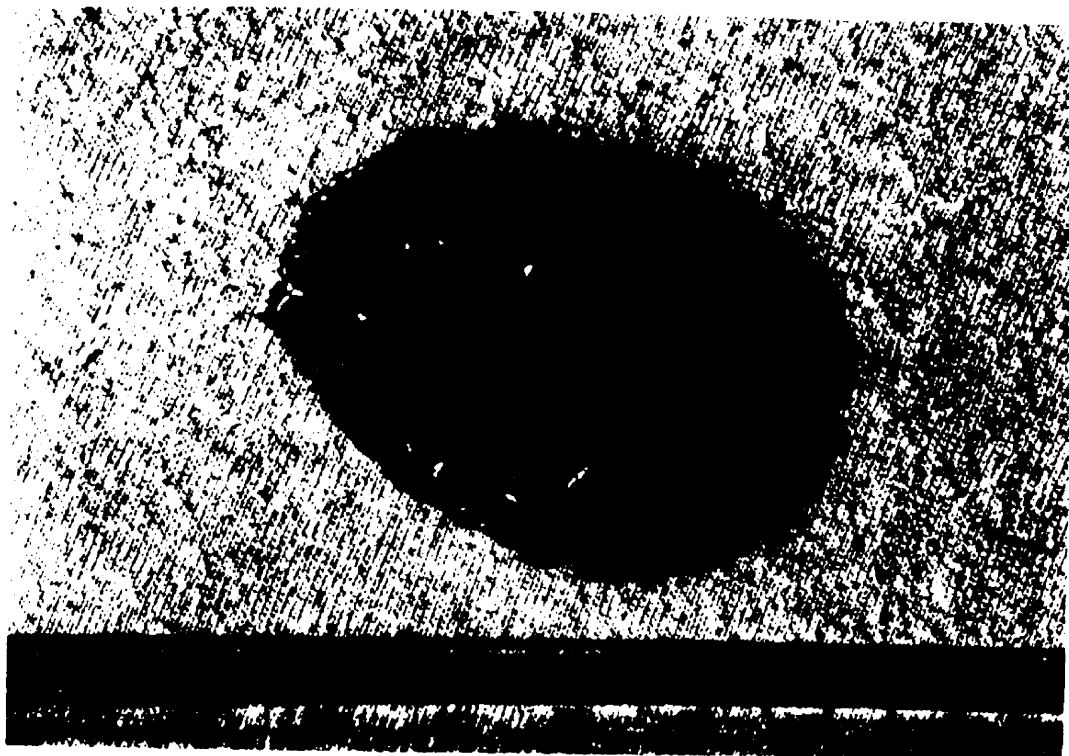


Goldsmith's mould with inscription (sf 166)

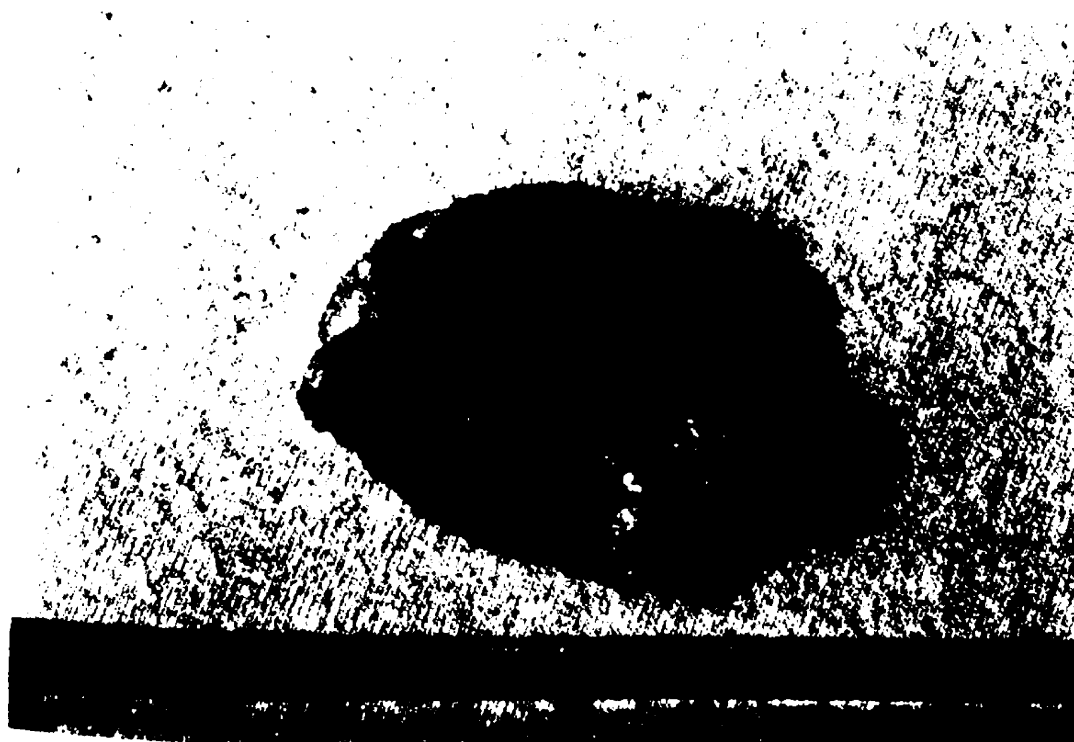


Goldsmith's mould with inscription (sf 166)

Plate 9.12: Inscriptions and graffiti

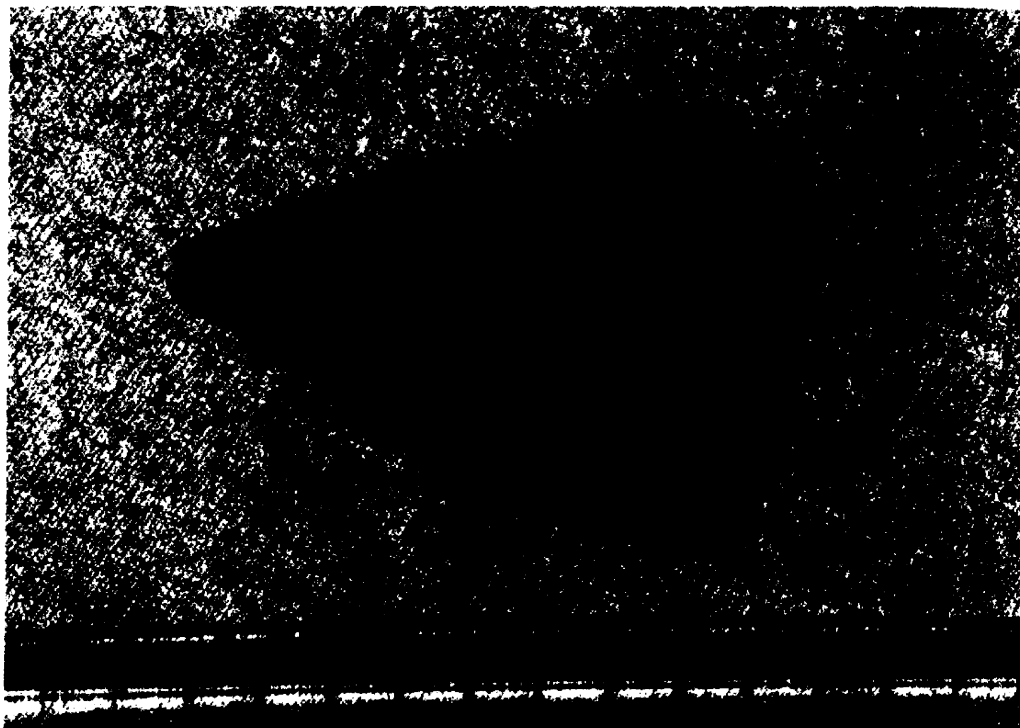


Clay sealing with text (sf 10249)



Clay sealing with text (sf 10249)

Plate 9.13: Inscriptions and graffiti

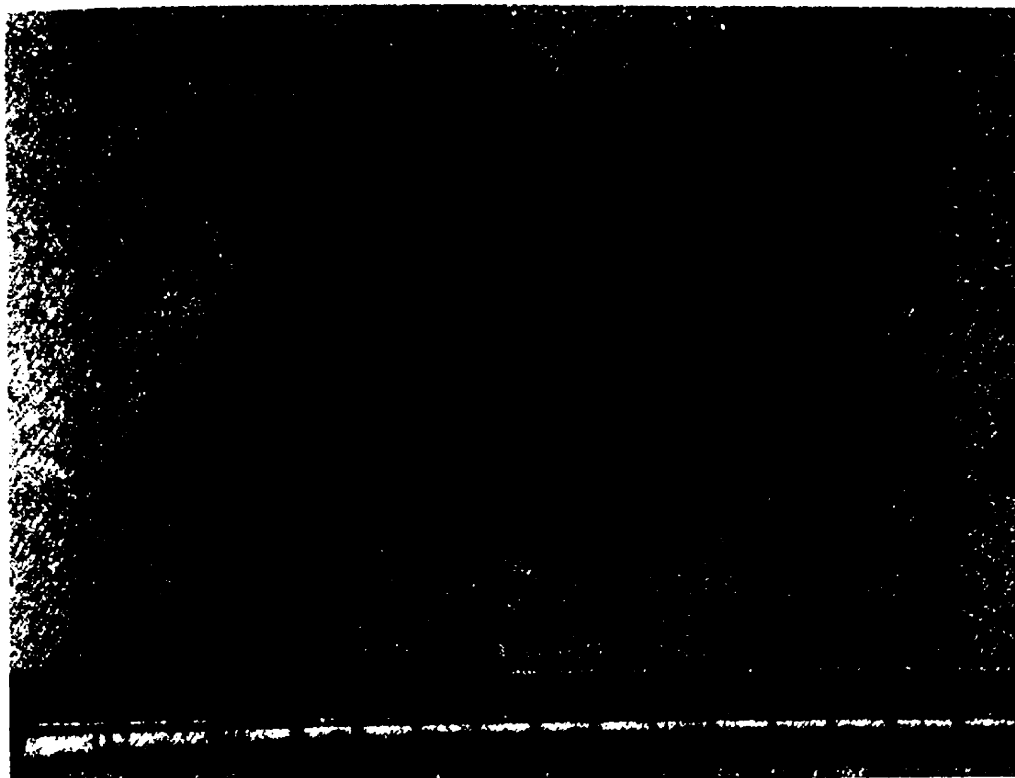


Principal variant of Dominant sign on pot sherd (sf 16346)

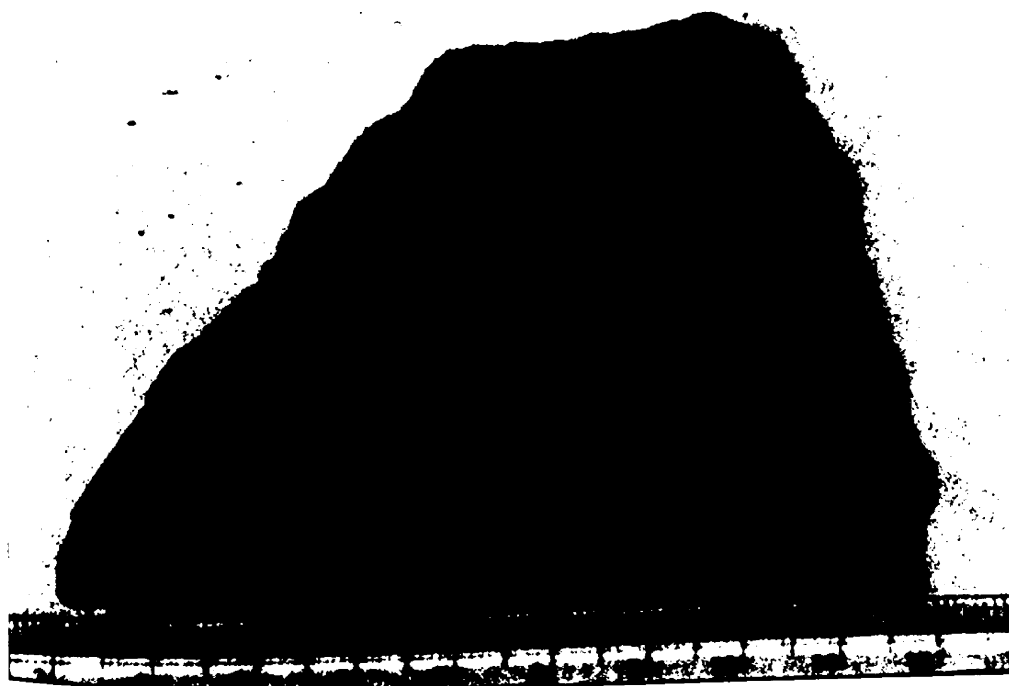


Variant of Dominant sign on pot sherd (sf 16427)

Plate 9.14: Inscriptions and graffiti

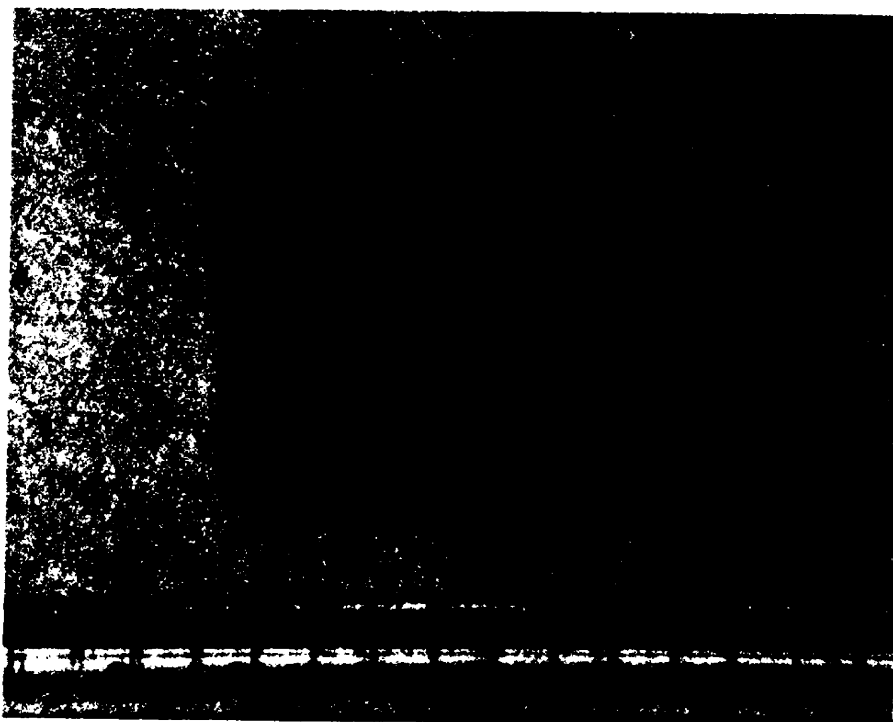


Svastika sign on pot sherd (sf 10476)

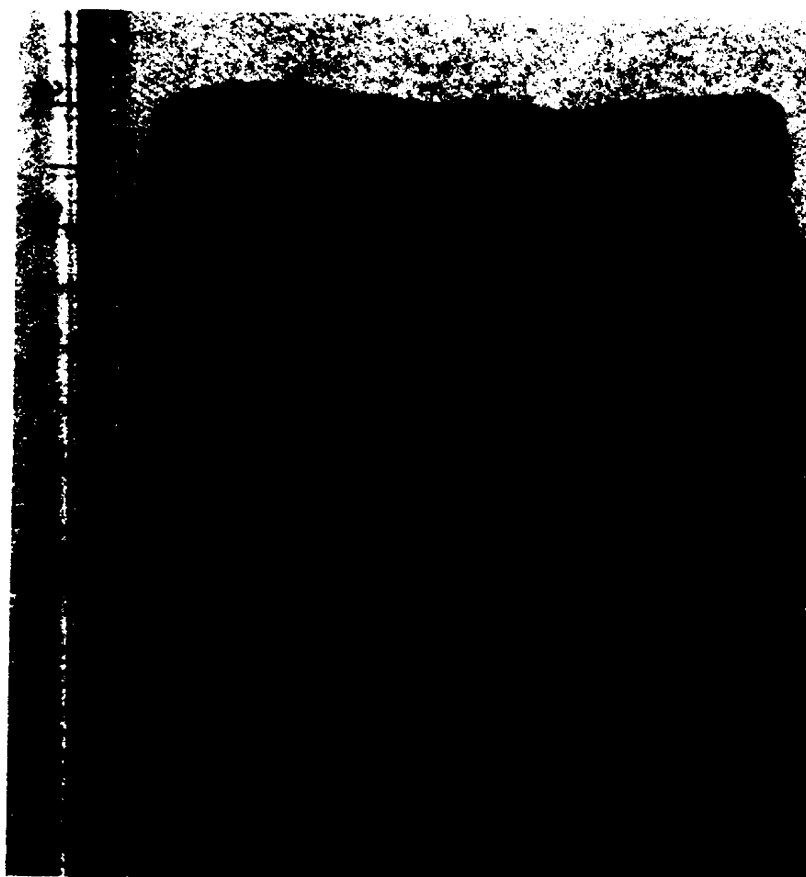


Snake sign on pot sherd (sf 16156)

Plate 9.15: Inscriptions and graffiti

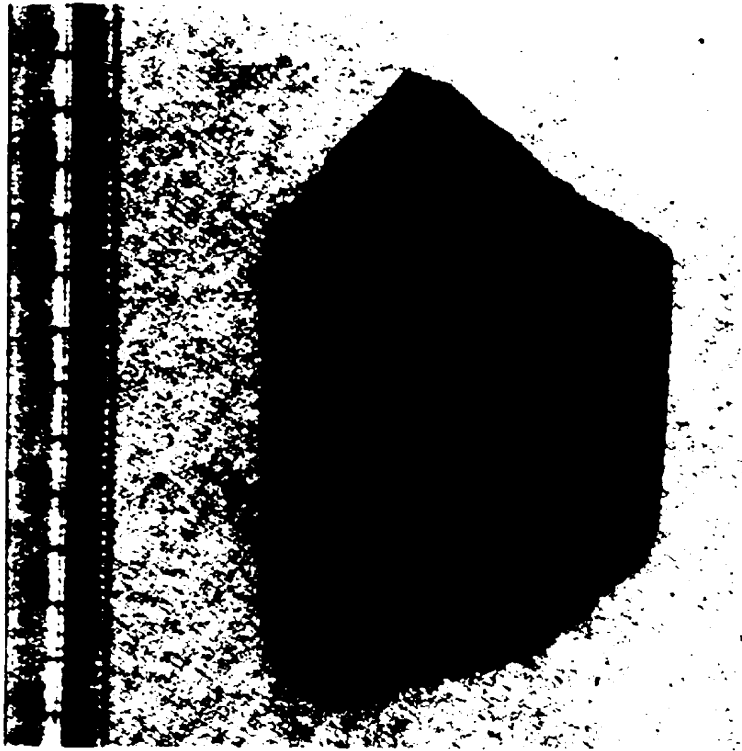


Bow and arrow sign on pot sherd (sf 16144)



Balance or human form sign on pot sherd (sf 16443)

Plate 9.16: Inscriptions and graffiti

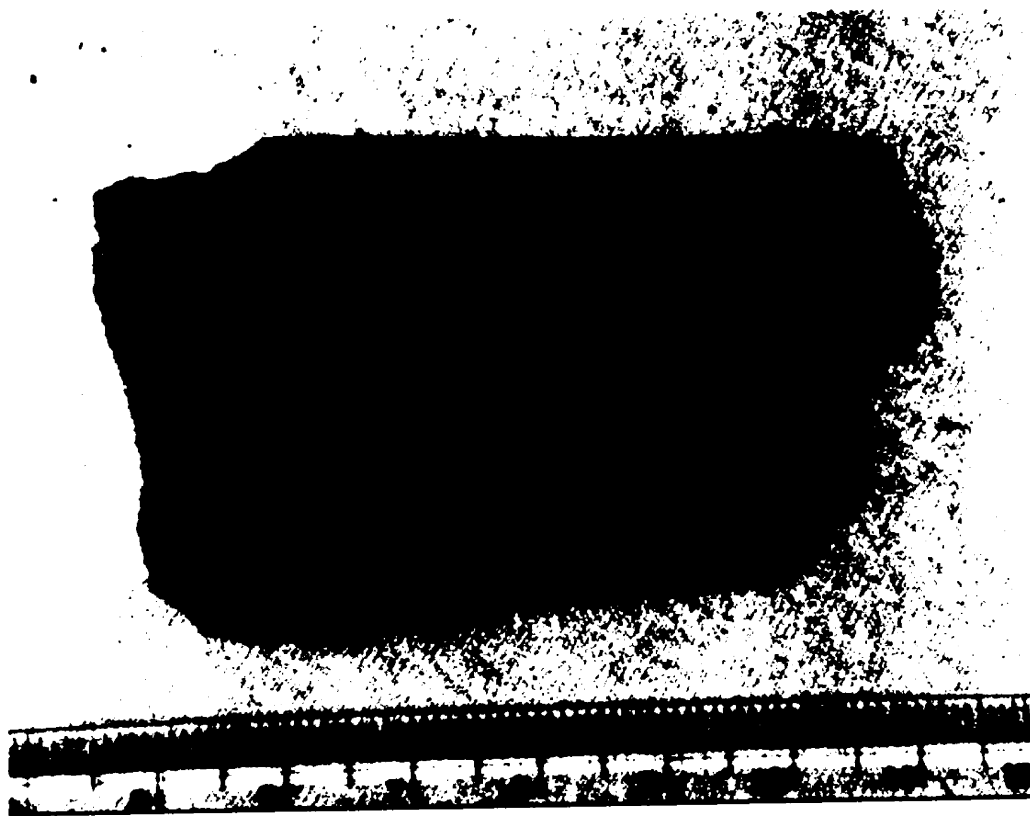


Yantra sign on pot sherd (sf 16456)



House sign on pot sherd (sf 17531)

Plate 9.17: Inscriptions and graffiti



Square form sign on pot sherd (sf 10413)



Monumental form on pot sherd (sf 2155)

Plate 9.18: Inscriptions and graffiti



Monumental form on pot sherd (sf 17141)



Single-masted ship sign on pot sherd (sf 10548)



Clay sealing (sf 342)



Clay sealing (sf 342)

Plate 9.20: Inscriptions and graffiti