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Additions to the Corpus of Greek Erotic Inscriptions

Athanasios Themis has compiled a comprehensive corpus of erotic Greek inscriptions in his University of Athens dissertation, *Ἀπόρρητοι ἐπιγραφαί. Οἱ ἐρωτικὲς ἐπιγραφές στον ἀρχαῖο ἐλληνικὸ κόσμος*, completed in 2013. It is the purpose of the present article to make known several unpublished inscriptions of this genre so that they may be added to Themis' projected publication of the corpus. The new inscriptions are all engraved on superficial bedrock outcrops in undeveloped areas of the modern Attic demos of Vari-Voula-Vouliagmeni. These same areas have also yielded a large number of non-erotic graffiti, some of which occupy the same rock surfaces as the erotic inscriptions treated here.¹ But in no cases are any of the erotic graffiti responses or challenges to other graffiti on the same rock. They stand alone as independent statements. Figure 1 shows the areas mentioned in the catalog.

A. καταπύγων inscriptions.

Fourteen inscriptions contain the word καταπύγων. **1-9** are on Barako/Kapsala hill, which forms the eastern side of the plain of Vari; **10** and **11** are on Bourtzi/Faskomelia, a group of ridges and heights southwest of the Vari plain; **12** is near the Dilopho community; **13** and **14** are near the Kitsi community.

1. Fragmentary retrograde inscription, E to W, on a long, wide shelf of rock 260 m. SE of a large telecommunication tower that stands near elevation 122 m. on the SW part of Barako hill. Figs. 2-3.

L. 33.7 cm.; L.H. 1.3-4 cm.

[-]πον καταπύγων. ←

2. Complete retrograde inscription on the same outcrop as **1**, and just E of it. The inscriber began writing NW to SE, then changed direction to NE to SW and ended by skipping over an already existing graffito and finishing SE to NW.² Figs. 2 and 4.

L. initial alpha to 1st alpha of katapygon, 23 cm.; the rest of katapygon, 21 cm; prophthas, 17.3 cm.; L.H. 2-4 cm.

Αἰσχίας καταπύγων προφθᾶς. ←

The present study has been improved by comments of Angelos Matthaïou and Leslie Threatte.

1. I offer a small selection of the non-erotic graffiti in A. Matthaïou and N. Papazarkadas (eds.), *ΑΞΩΝ: Studies in Honor of Ronald S. Stroud*, Athens 2015, 49-58.

2. The earlier graffito is published in Matthaïou and Papazarkadas eds., op. cit. (n. 1), 52, no. 9. Only the beginning of **2** is included in Fig. 1 there.

3. Fragmentary retrograde inscription, starting E to W, ending N to S, on a large sheet of bedrock, 31 m. SW of Kapsala ht. 47 m. Figs. 5-6.

L. E-W part, 25 cm.; N-S part, 11 cm.; L.H. 1.6-4.2 cm.

Διονύσιος καταπύ[γόν]. ←

4. Fragmentary orthograde (left-to-right) inscription, SW to NE, on a level expanse of rock 461 m. SE of the telecommunications tower mentioned in 1. Figs. 7-8.

L. 56 cm.; L.H. 3.5-4 cm.

[. . .]□□[.] καταπύγόν.

5. Fragmentary undulating retrograde inscription on the same rock as 4 and 30-50 cm. NW of it. The inscription begins SE to NW, turns W to E, then again SE to NW and ends NE to SW. Figs. 7, 9-10.

L. SE-NW part, 35 cm.; W-E part, 21.5 cm.; second SE-NW part, 19 cm.; NE-SW part, 1.19 m.; L.H. 4-5 cm.

Στράτων καταπύγόν νῆ τὴν Ἀφροδίτην. Διονύσιος . . . (traces) ←

Dionysios may be the inscriber. He wrote that Straton was katapygon and then stated "by Aphrodite, Dionysios [thinks so, wrote this, vel sim."]. He began his first sentiment using a loosely controlled retrograde layout, which then becomes quite irregular, with two changes of direction through ten letters before settling down into a long, straight line. There is no apparent reason for the irregular layout of letters, but the straight part is easily explained by noting the long, deep groove that runs parallel to the letters. Clearly the inscriber used the groove as a reference line and set his letters just below it.

This final part of the inscription exhibits a feature that can be observed in numerous other rupestral graffiti in the region, deliberately altered letters. To give all the cut letter strokes equal value, we could read after the definite article: αφροδτιενδχφνυσχος[- -]. By removing several strokes, we find instead what is expected following the asseveration νῆ τῆν: a deity's name, in this case Aphrodite. Note that the second letter of her name is not altered but is written as a boxy phi rotated ninety degrees.³ The fourth and twelfth letters resemble this rotated phi, but they make better sense understood as altered rectangular omicrons. Iota, a simple vertical hasta, is easy to tamper with, and all three here have been altered: the iota of Aphrodite has been made into a tau, while the two of Dionysios, the presumed inscriber, are now chis. It is unclear whether Dionysios himself added the extra strokes or if someone else came along later and changed the letters. In technique the extra strokes are no different from the strokes of the rest of the letters.

6. Fragmentary retrograde inscription, S to N, on a small patch of rock 677 m. S of Barako ht. 224 m. Figs. 11-12.

L. 34.7 cm.; L.H. 2-3 cm.

καταπύγόν εἶ NONO[- -]. ←

If the final letters are part of a proper name, the possibilities are Νόνος, Νόννος, Νῶνος, or Νῶννος.

3. I have found numerous other graffiti in the areas of the catalogued items with similarly rotated phis, both circular and four-cornered.

7. Complete retrograde inscription, SE to NW, 110 m. WSW of Barako ht. 224 m. Many readings are uncertain. Figs. 13-15.

L. 35.2 cm.; L.H. 0.6-1.8 cm.

ἡερμοΚΑΙΟΝ(?) καταπύγον. ←

8. Fragmentary retrograde inscription in two lines, line 1 SW to NE, line 2 NE to SW, on a long shelf of rock 458 m. NW of Kapsala Ht. 90 m. Figs. 16-17.

L. 13.3 cm.; L.H. 2.4-3.5 cm.

Στρατο[- -] | [κα]ταπύγον. ←

9. Complete retrograde inscription, E to W, on a broad shelf of rock 371 m. NE of Kapsala ht. 90 m. Figs. 18-19.

L. 35.6 cm.; L.H. 2-2.7 cm.

Μῦς καταπύ[γ]ον. ←

10. Complete(?) boustrophedon inscription, line 1 retrograde, SE to NW; line 2 orthograde, NW to SE, on a hump of rock 216 m. W of Bourtzi ht. 72 m. Figs. 20-21.

L. line 1, 28.5; line 2, 16.8; L.H. 0.8-3.9 cm.

Θραῖχς εἰμί τῶ κατα- ←
πύγονος →

11. Fragmentary retrograde inscription, W to E, on a small outcrop 350 m. SSE of Faskomelia ht. 112. Figs. 22-23.

L. 20.5 cm.; L.H. 1-1.8 cm.

Λεῶσέας(?) καταπ[ύγ]ον[ν]. ←

In writing his statement, the inscriber chose an area in which he was forced to negotiate a way through two existing inscriptions and the depiction of a warship. Consequently, the readings are difficult, and I am not confident about my reading of the name, whereas the unbracketed letters of katapygon are certain.

12. Complete orthograde inscription, N to S, on a long, inclined shelf of rock, N of the settlement of Dilopho. Figs. 24-25.

L. 91.7 cm.; L.H. 3-7.5 cm.

Νέβρος καταπύγων.

13. Fragmentary orthograde inscription, W to E, on a rock outcrop on the S slope of an unnamed ridge, 240 m. E of ht. 202 m., NE of the Kitsi community. Figs. 26-27.

L. 35.3 cm.; L.H. 1.2-4 cm.

Φι[-3-4-]οσίας καταπύγον.

14. Complete boustrophedon inscription, line 1, orthograde E to W; line 2, retrograde W to E; line 3 orthograde E to W, on the same rock as **13** and roughly parallel to and 50-60 cm. S of it. Figs. 28-29.

L. line 1, 23.1 cm.; line 2, 17.7 cm.; line 3, 6.5 cm.; L.H. 2-4.5 cm.

Σμίκυθος →
καταπύγ- ←
ὄν. →

B. βενέω/βινέω inscriptions.

There are five instances of βενέω/βινέω. Three are cut on Barako hill and two in the area of the cemetery at Panorama (Voula).

15. Complete orthograde inscription, SW to NE, on a rock expanse 114 m. WNW of **6**, in among the walls of a long abandoned group of sheepfolds. Figs. 30-31.

L. 17.9 cm.; L.H. 2-3 cm.

Φυσίας βενῆται.

16. Fragmentary orthograde inscription, beginning NE to SW, turning and ending S to N, on a small patch of rock 206 m. NW of Barako ht. 224 m. Figs. 32-33.

L. NE-SW part, 46.5 cm.; S-N part, 20.5 cm.; L.H. 2-4.6 cm.

Τελέσιος βενῆται □[.]ΚΑΔΙ□[- -]Φ[- -]

17. Fragmentary orthograde inscription, E to W, on a small patch of rock 30 m. NE of **16**. Figs. 34-35.

L. 14.4 cm.; L.H. 1.6-3.2 cm.

[- -]ος βενῆται.

I assume a bit of letter tampering and read the inscription as a personal name followed by the middle/passive of βενέω, as in **15** and **16**. The tampering involved adding a stroke to nu to make it look like a mu and a stroke to the bottom of the tau's vertical hasta so that it resembles a zeta. But since neither BEMEZ . . . nor [- -]ΟΣΒΕΜΕΖ . . . is intelligible Greek, I opt for tampering.

18. Fragmentary retrograde inscription, N to S, at the edge of a steep cliff 85 m. SE of the cemetery of Panorama (Voula). Figs. 36-37.

L. 65 cm.; L.H. 2-4 cm.

[- -]όσυνος βινῆται. ἐρέτῶ. ←

19. Fragmentary retrograde inscription, SE to NW, on a level expanse of rock on a steep slope 445 m. W of the cemetery of Panorama (Voula). Figs. 38-39.

L. 9.3 cm.; L.H. 1.2-3.3 cm.

[- -]ΙΣ βινεῖ. ←

Dating

A terminus ante quem of 403/2 for the graffiti in this catalog is established by the fact that, with the exception of **12**, all are written in the Old Attic alphabet, which was no longer in use after that date. Aspects of their letter forms, layout and orthography allow us to narrow the chronological range and conclude that it would be difficult to push these graffiti beyond the turn of the 6th to the 5th century. Thanks to the detailed investigations of Leslie Threatte and the late Henry Immerwahr,⁴ we are able to assign early Attic inscriptions to the sixth or fifth century with a reasonable degree of certainty by using the aforementioned determinants. Prominent among the letter forms of our graffiti are alpha, mu, nu and pi which balance on one leg; thetas with vertical and horizontal cross-strokes; and squared omicrons. Secondly, their layout is more often retrograde or boustrophedon than orthograde (13 of 19). Finally, double consonants are written in simplex form. These are all characteristic features of 6th-century Attic writing, and this is where these graffiti belong in time. **12** is the only graffito that contains an Ionic gamma, a four-stroke sigma and an omega. It clearly belongs to the 5th century, but several letter forms—nu, pi, upsilon—retain early forms, suggesting a time for its inscribing well before 400 BC.

Erotica

Καταπύγων, an abusive term for one given to anal intercourse, is found in both literary and epigraphical texts. The epigraphical occurrences mostly consist of a short, formulaic statement scratched on clay drinking cups: ὁ δεῖνα καταπύγων (with ἐστί understood). Since these inscriptions are graffiti rather than dipinti, and the cups are like those used in symposia, this has led to the suggestion that they are acts of spontaneous vituperative banter among participants at elite drinking parties.⁵ The degree of insult in calling someone katapygon in these contexts is difficult to judge but is generally taken as more than mild name calling.

The καταπύγων graffiti in the present catalog have no symptotic context. Engraved on bedrock surfaces in the countryside, they may be seen as real slaps in the face, carved by those who frequented rural places and were prompted to insult individuals they did not like by writing on bedrock. The inscriber of **2** adds an adverbial participle to the insult: "Butt fucker Aischias (is) beforehand." He obviously does not like it that Aischias is fast at beating everyone else to the punch. **6**, on the other hand, appears to take on a somewhat lighter tone. Here the verb is expressed: εἶ, second person singular of εἶμι. Yet the name of the person designated as katapygon seems to stand in the nominative case. In using a nominativus pro vocativo, the inscriber may have not intended to convey the strong insult that direct address would express.⁶ As for **10**, the engraver chose not to name his father: "I am Thraix, son of the butt-fucker".

The other term in our graffiti, βενέω or βινέω, is a coarse verb for sexual intercourse in ancient Greek. The active βινεῖ may occur in **19** (readings very insecure), while the middle/passive form βενεῖται/βινῖται is securely read in **15-18**. The most thorough discussion of this verb is that of the late

4. H. Immerwahr, *Attic Script*, Oxford 1990; L. Threatte, *The Grammar of Attic Inscriptions*, vol. 1, Berlin 1980.

5. Ann Steiner, Private and Public: Links between "Symposion" and "Syssition" in Fifth-century Athens, *ClAnt* 21 (2002) 366-368.

6. See the discussion in J. Louw, Linguistic Theory and the Greek Case System, *Acta Classica* 9 (1966) 79-80.

David Bain,⁷ who expressed doubt that βενῆται/βινῆται could ever be interpreted as the middle voice. He insisted that every occurrence is passive. The four examples in the present catalog could be construed in the way Bain argues, but they could as easily be translated as middle reflexives. So, **15**, which is complete, could be translated "Physias screws himself," as easily as a passive, "Physias is (i.e. allows himself to be) screwed." The other three, though fragmentary, could also be taken either way. Ultimately, however, these texts are too short to count as decisive evidence for Greek idiom in this particular matter. What does seem clear is that our inscribers intended to insult the persons named in their graffiti by using a verb of low register. This is made most clear in **18**, which has the additional imperative remark ἐρέτω (ἐρρέτω in Ionic), "Away with him!"

Onomatology

Sixteen personal names occur among the graffiti, eleven complete and five fragmentary. Four of the complete names occur often in Attica: Διονύσιος, Μῦς, Σμίκυθος, and Στράτων, and to these the fragments Στρατο[-] and [-]όσυνος should be added. Two names are less common in Attica: Αἰσχίας (one example, 4th cent. BC), Θραῖχος (3 examples, 6th-4th cent. BC), while another two, Νέβρος and Τελέσιος, occur elsewhere in Greece, but not before now in Attica. Two names are not attested anywhere: Λεοσέας and Φυσίας. I am confident of my reading only of the latter of these, but I print the other as a name because at least it begins with a common nominal prefix, Λεο-. As for **7**, it should begin with a personal name, and ἡρμο- is a good starter. I am unable, however, to resolve the name's ending in a credible manner.

Appendix. A masturbating satyr

A satyr shown in frontal pose and masturbating, and a retrograde inscription, both oriented N to S, are engraved on a small patch of rock approximately 170 m. NE of Bourtzi ht. 49 m. Figs. 40-41.

satyr: 18.1 cm. H.

L. inscription, 6 cm. below satyr: 6 cm.; L.H. 4.3 cm.

EV ←

Though much more schematized, the satyr's squatting frontal pose is similar to that of masturbating satyrs depicted on two Black Figure Attic vases: an aryballos in New York by Nearchos (ABV 23.4) and an amphora in the State Historical Museum, Moscow by the BMN Painter (formerly in Berlin, cf. ABV 226.2), both painters active in the 6th century.⁸ The two letters under the satyr are the only ones that were inscribed, as the surface of the rock is well preserved and uninscribed both before and after

7. D. Bain, Six Greek Verbs of Sexual Congress: βινῶ, κινῶ, πυγίζω, ληκῶ, οἴφω, λαικάξω, *CQ* 41 (1991) 54-62.

8. For depictions of this type, see F. Lissarrague, The Sexual Life of Satyrs, in D. Halperin, J. Winkler, and Froma Zeitlin (eds.), *Before Sexuality: the Construction of Erotic Experience in the Ancient Greek World*, Princeton 1990, 55-57. In Moscow a number of modern restorations have been removed from the amphora: cf. D. Zhuravlev and G. Lomtadza, Ancient Vases in the State Historical Museum: History of the Collection and Some Problems of Restoration, in M. Bentz and Ursula Kaestner (eds.), *Konservieren oder Restaurieren. Die Restaurierung griechischer Vasen von der Antike bis Heute. Beihefte zum Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum* 3, Munich 2007, 98, fig. 9. An example by a 6th-century Etruscan artist in Tarquinia, the Paris Painter, may also be cited: cf. *LIMC* 8, 1121, no. 114.

them. They could be explained as an unfinished label that names the satyr, as there are several known satyr names that begin Εὐ- . Alternatively, this may be the adverb εὖ, which is the choice that I prefer. I do not believe that the satyr is commenting favorably about his action, else we should expect the word to be placed next to his head, as on the Nearchos aryballos mentioned above and on a fragment of a Red Figure hydria in Malibu.⁹ Instead, it is the engraver who adds the word as an approbative observation about this kind of activity.

9. For the dipinto on the Malibu fragment, see F. Lissarrague, A Sun-Struck Satyr in Malibu, in G. R. Tsetschlade, A. J. N. W. Prag and A. M. Snodgrass (eds.), *Periplous: Papers on Classical Art and Archaeology Presented to Sir John Boardman*, London and New York 2000, 191-197. For the inscriptions on the Nearchos Aryballos, see Emma Stafford, Clutching the Chickpea: Private Pleasures of the Bad Boyfriend, in S. D. Lambert (ed.), *Sociable Man: Essays on Ancient Greek Social Behaviour in Honour of Nick Fisher*, Swansea 2011, 344-346.

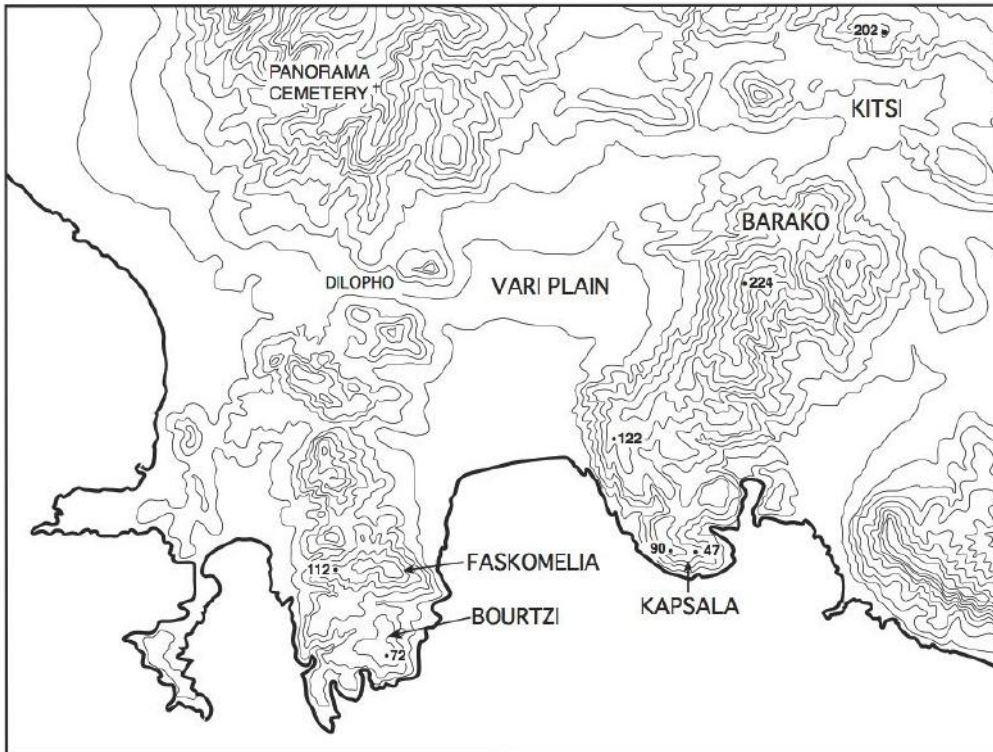


Fig. 1. Map showing areas with erotic graffiti.

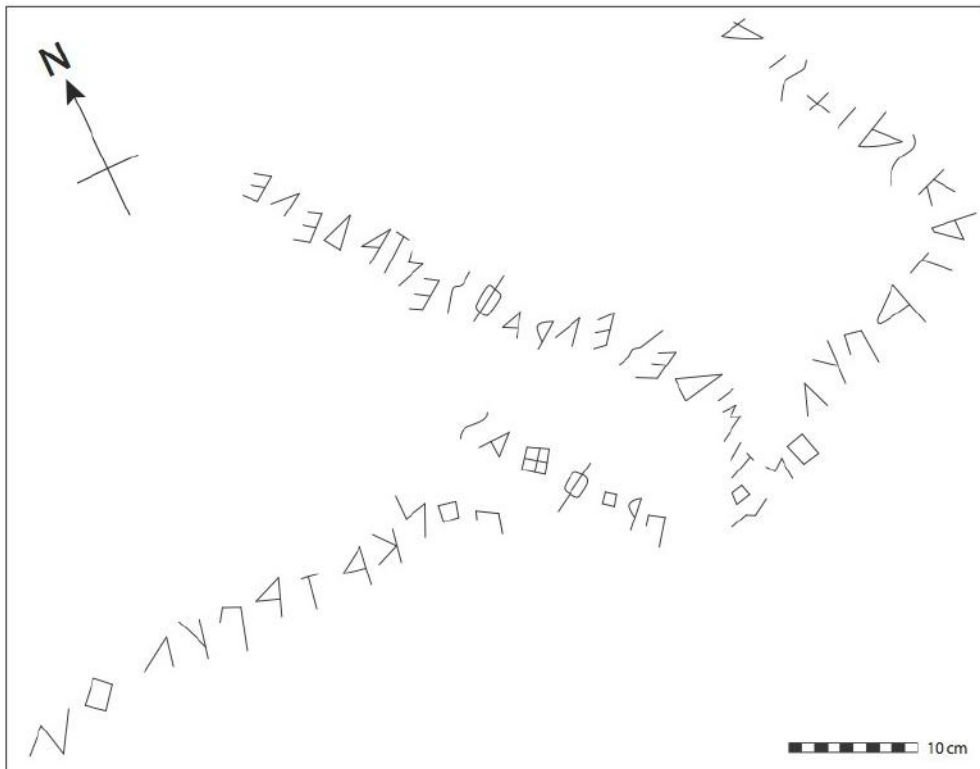


Fig. 2. Cat. 1-2.



Fig. 3. Cat. 1.



Fig. 4. Cat. 2.

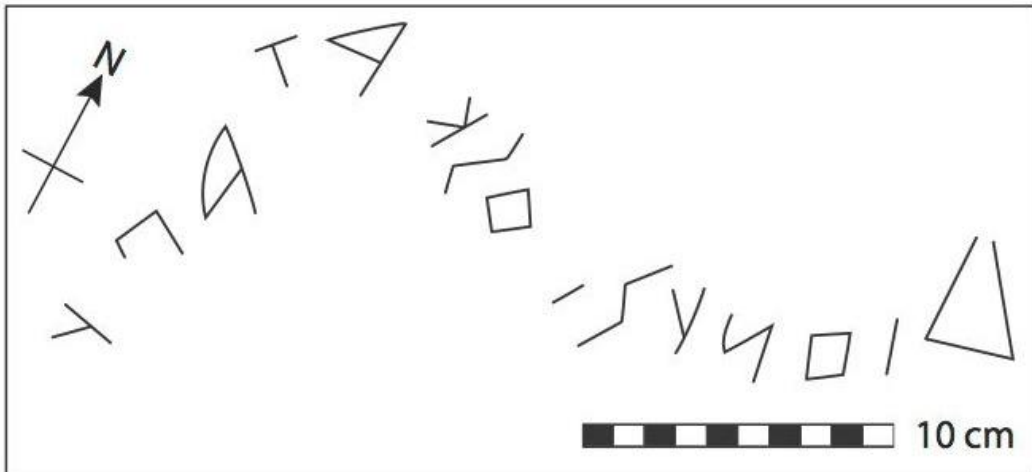


Fig. 5. Cat. 3.



Fig. 6. Cat. 3.



Fig. 7. Cat. 4-5.

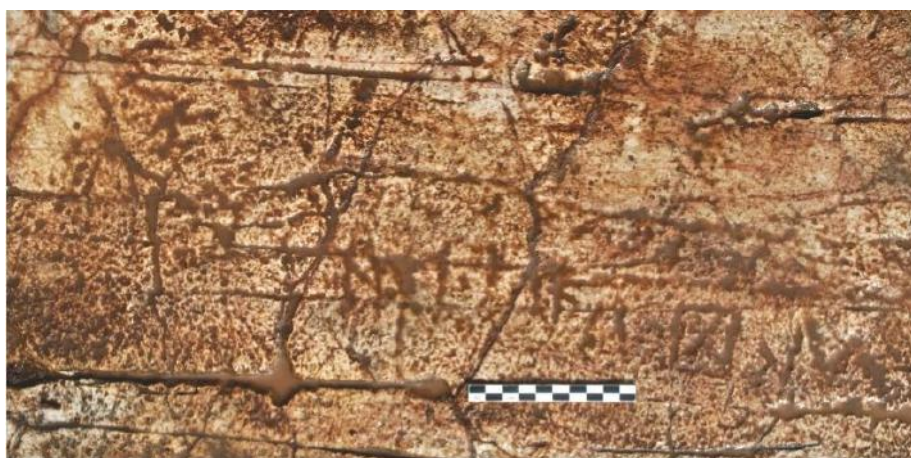


Fig. 8. Cat. 4.



Fig. 9. Beginning of Cat. 5.



Fig. 10. Latter part of Cat. 5.

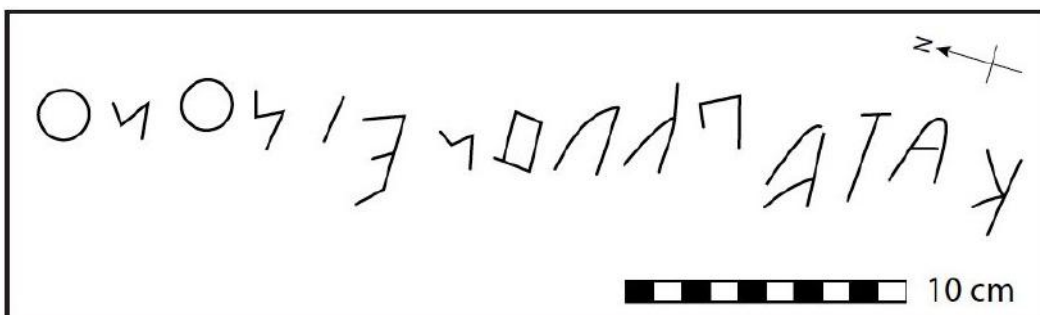


Fig. 11. Cat. 6.



Fig. 12. Cat. 6.

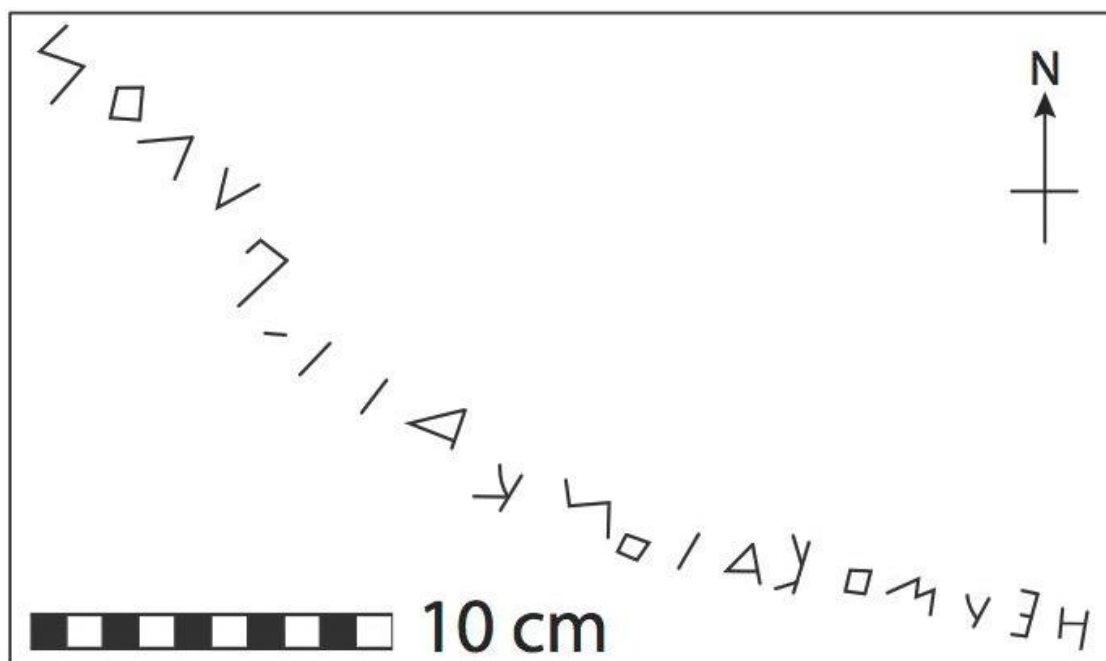


Fig. 13. Cat. 7.



Fig. 14. Beginning of Cat. 7.

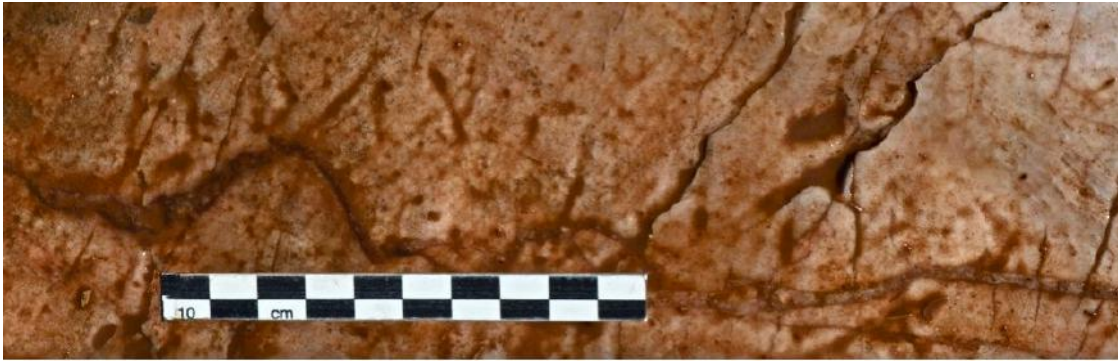


Fig.15. End of Cat. 7.

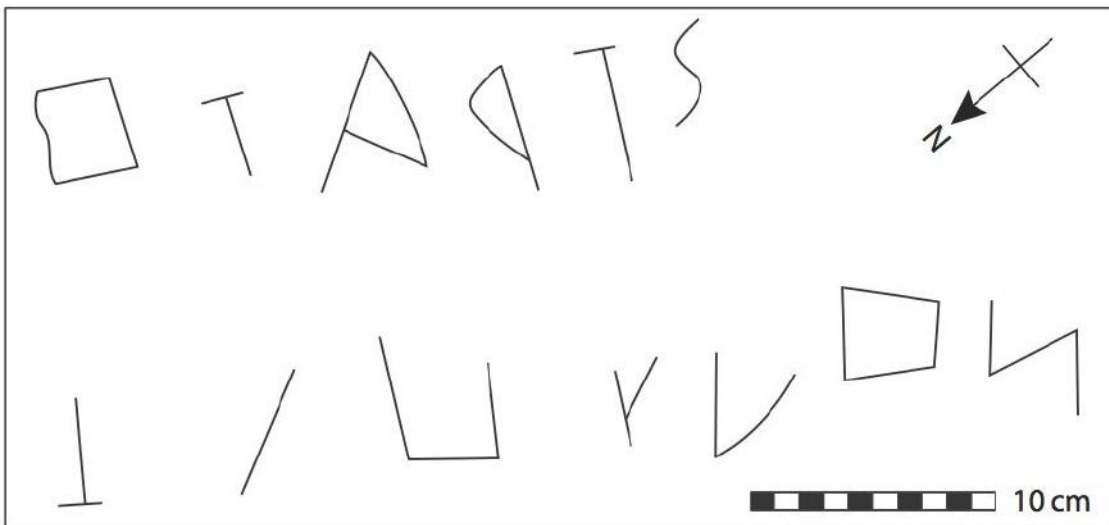


Fig. 16. Cat. 8.



Fig. 17. Cat. 8.



Fig. 18. Cat. 9.

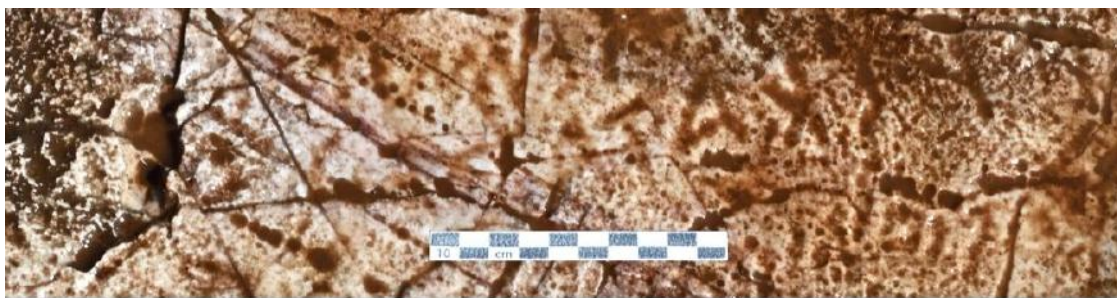


Fig. 19. Cat. 9.

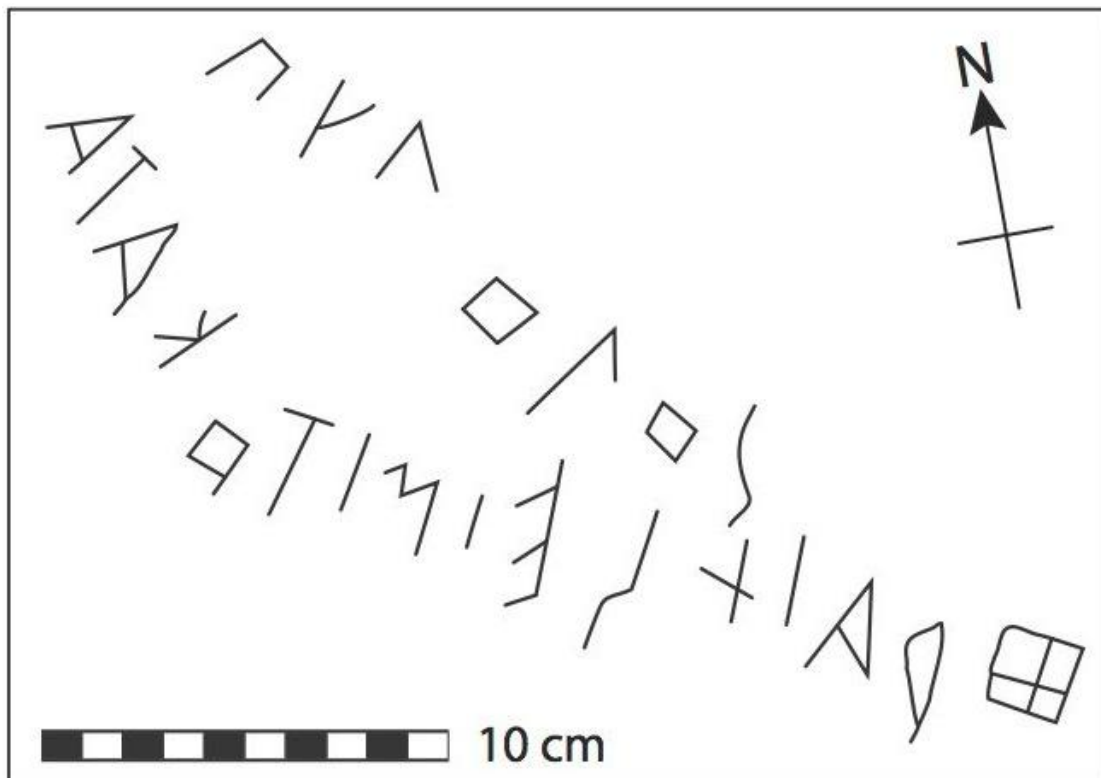


Fig. 20. Cat. 10.



Fig. 21. Cat. 10.

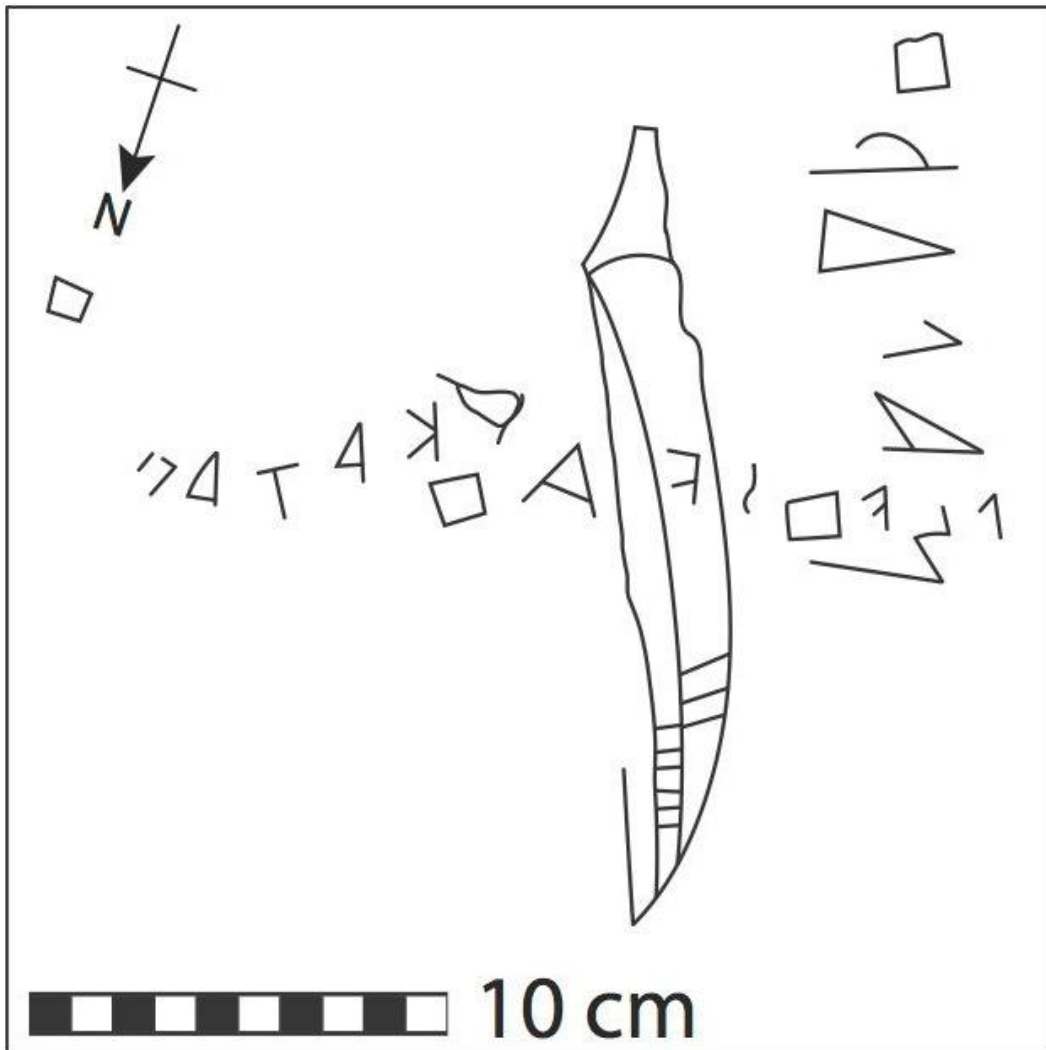


Fig. 22. Cat. 11.



Fig. 23. Cat. 11.



Fig. 24. Cat. 12.



Fig. 25. Cat. 12.



Fig. 26. Cat. 13.

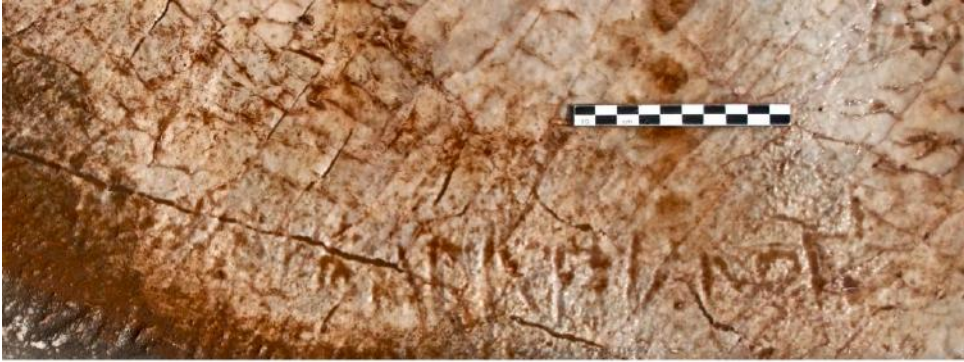


Fig. 27. Cat. 13.

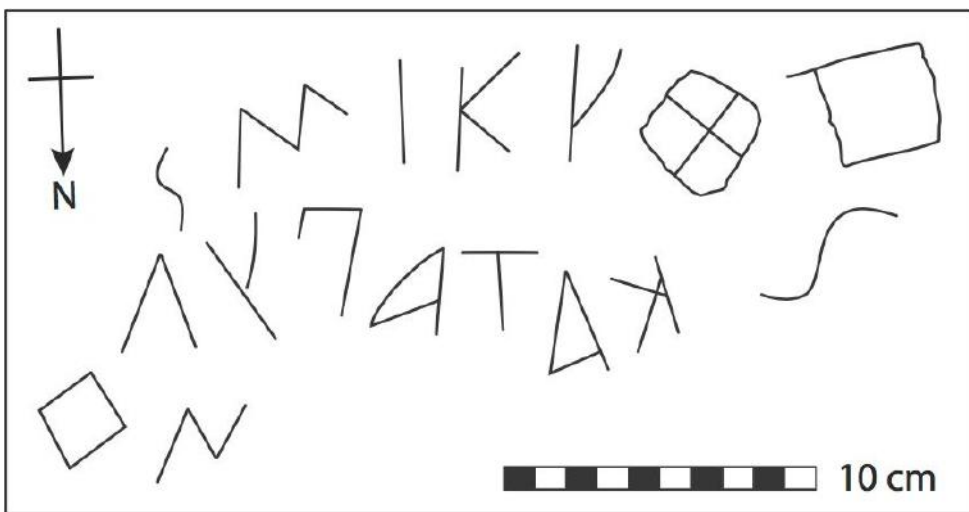


Fig. 28. Cat. 14.



Fig. 29. Cat. 14.



Fig. 30. Cat. 15.



Fig. 31. Cat. 15.

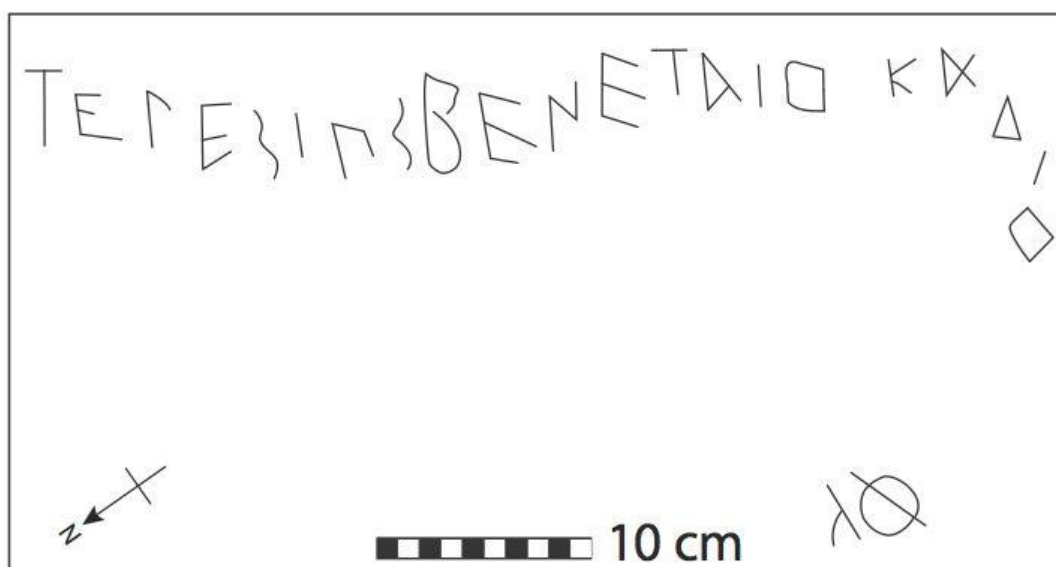


Fig. 32. Cat. 16.



Fig. 33. Cat. 16.

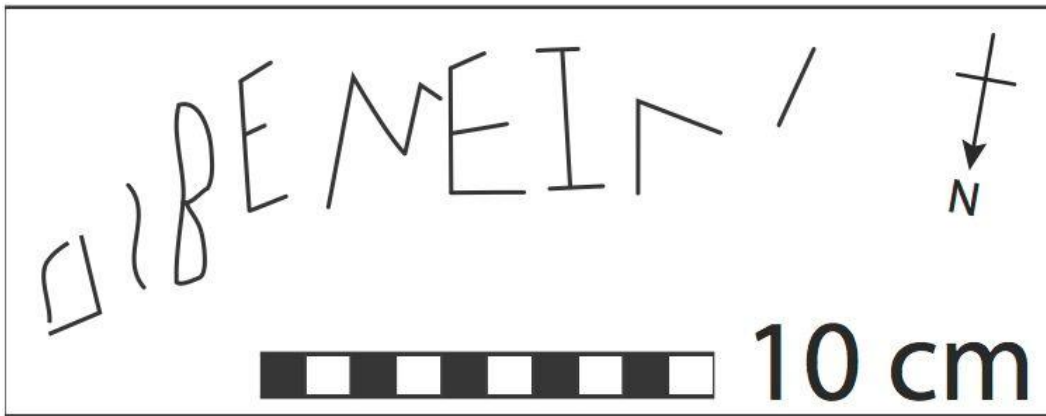


Fig. 34. Cat. 17.



Fig. 35. Cat. 17.

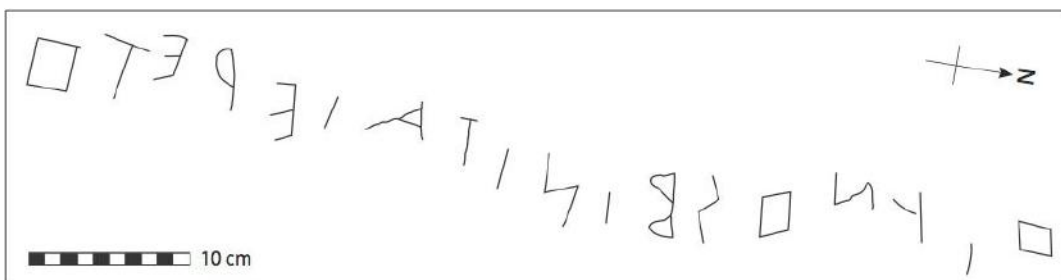


Fig. 36. Cat. 18.



Fig. 37. Cat. 18.

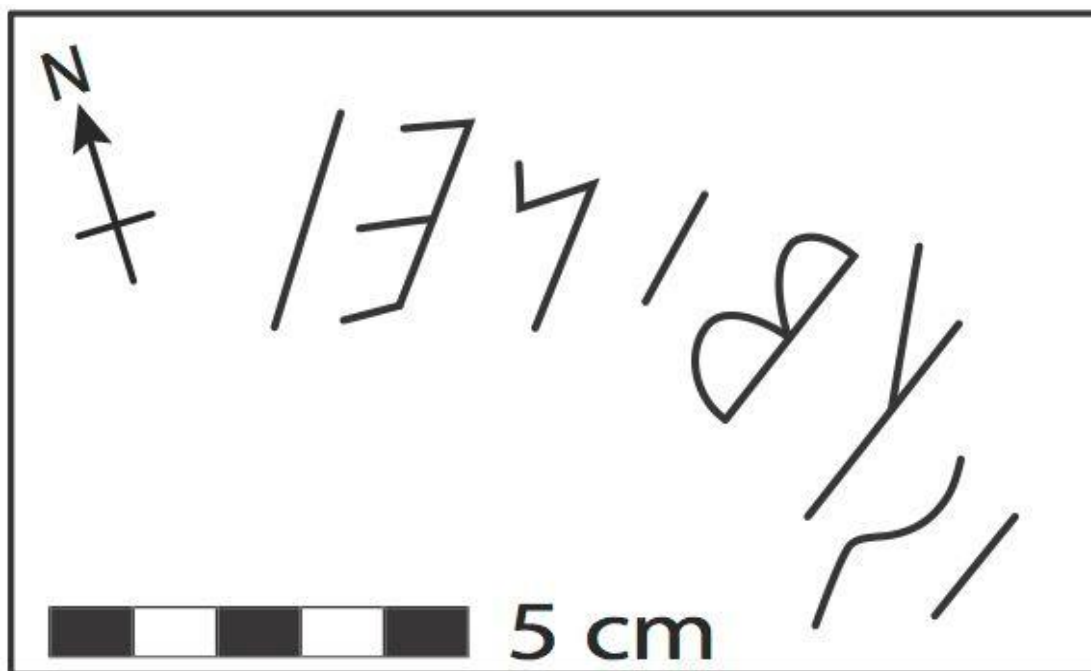


Fig. 38. Cat. 19.

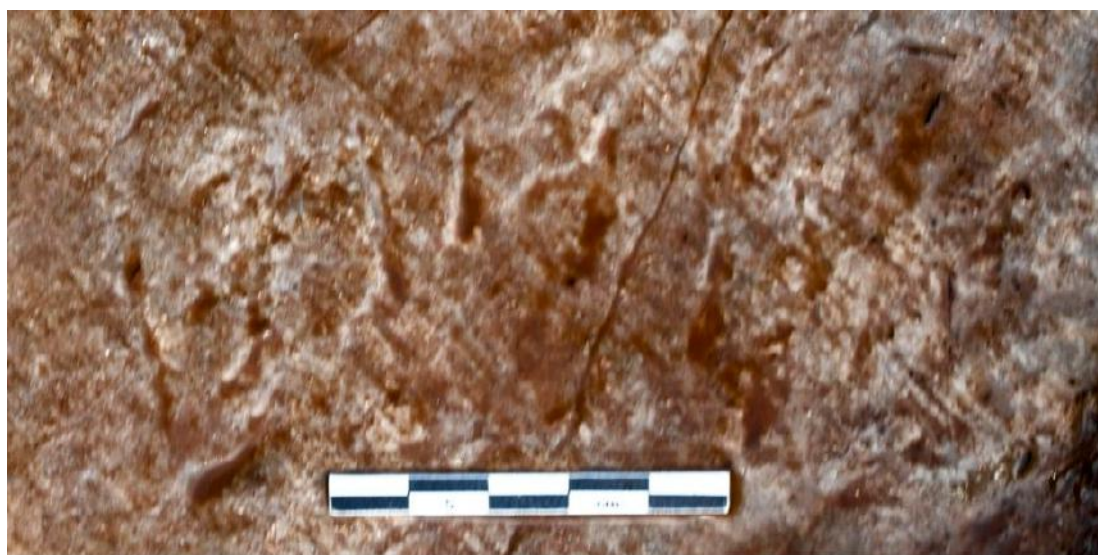


Fig. 39. Cat. 19.

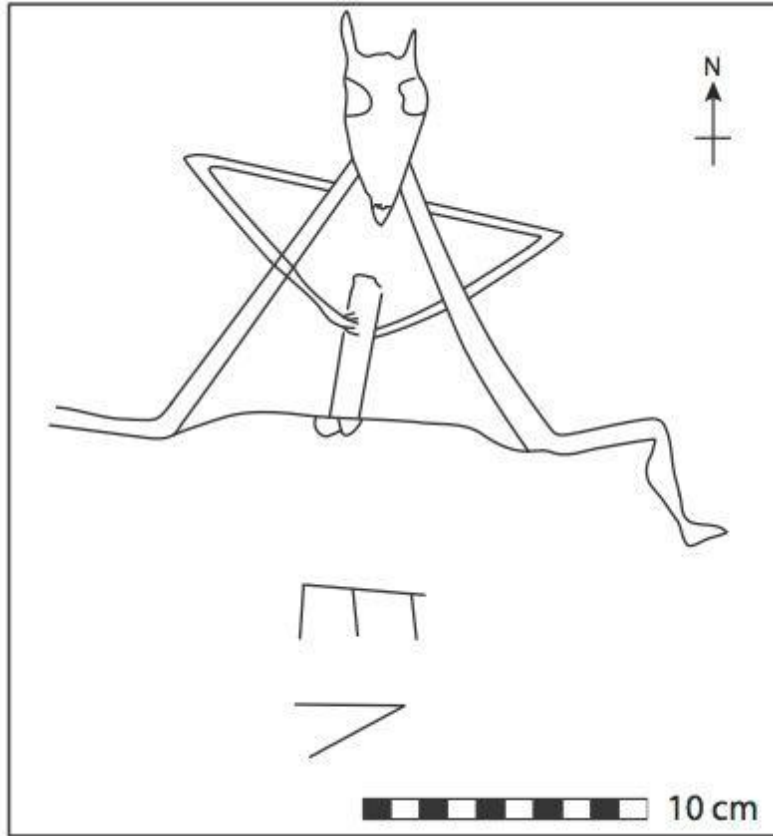


Fig. 40. Appendix.



Fig. 41. Appendix.