

Chapter Title: Frontiers in seventh-century epigraphy: aspects of diffusion and consolidation

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32. Frontiers in seventh-century epigraphy: aspects of diffusion and consolidation

Alan Johnston

Abstract: There are constraints on close dating, even close comparative dating, of inscribed material of the seventh century. A few comments will be made on the topic. A review of the full range of surviving material displays an untidy range of usages of writing. It may be fruitless to attempt to estimate what percentage is preserved for us, whenever and wherever, but the material that we do have can be examined to determine how the skill was deployed in the seventh century, with respect to such matters as alphabetic uniformity, orthography and communication on personal, social and divine levels.

In this chapter I review the record of inscribed texts in the seventh century with particular attention to just a few of its manifold aspects. Relevant material is to be found in Jeffery 1990 and of course *SEG*, while the topic of cult-related texts of our period has been treated by Polignac 2005a.¹

With respect to the closer matter of chronology, I merely observe that all efforts must depend on the dating of ceramics, although towards or just after the end of the period with which we are dealing there are some links between stone-cut texts and absolute chronology in Egypt, through the Abu Simbel texts and Pedon's dedication (Jeffery 1990: 481; Agut-Labordère 2012: 293–4). Otherwise, we have at one end of the period the relatively solid evidence of the Bocchoris scarab from Pithekoussai (Morris 1996a; Ridgway 1999), and at the other the more specific date of 604 BC from Ashkelon (Waldbaum 2011).

Dating texts by letter form or ductus is less secure, though not always without its use, especially when no other evidence is available. In his notice on Ann Jeffery, David Lewis (1987: 510) quoted the mantra written by her in her own copy of *Local Scripts*: 'without other evidence ... chronology ... must still be worked out on each letter's stylistic development till, hopefully, the whole structure can be hooked onto the relevant period by one (or more) links which *have* independent dates'. I illustrate here some pitfalls which concern the period question. Rhys Carpenter (1963: 83–4) suggested for example that the lettering on Nestor's cup (Figure 32.1) could not be earlier than the sixth century by reason of the squatness of the letters (to abbreviate his argument, in which he pushes Jeffery's remarks too far); in this case closer consideration of individual letter shapes, such as delta and mu, would of themselves preclude that possibility, whatever the weight of the 'Bocchoris-related' archaeological evidence for the tomb in which the cup was found. An example of the opposite phenomenon, dating texts earlier than the date of their bearers, appeared with respect to the graffiti on Attic à la brosse storage amphorae from Kamarina, which were dated to the second half of the seventh century on purely epigraphic grounds by Manni Piraino (1987: 104); here the historical evidence for the foundation of the

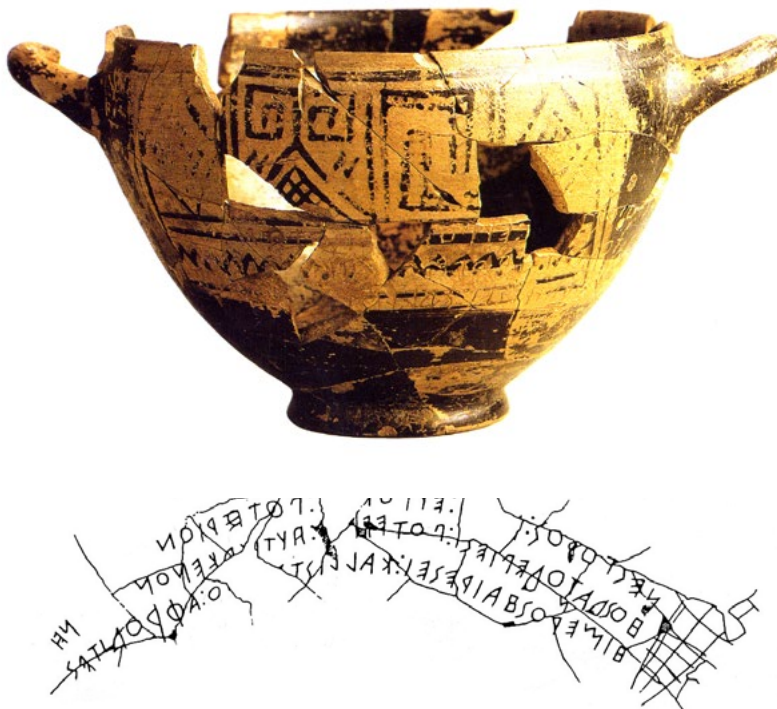


Figure 32.1 'Nestor's cup' from Pithekoussai, c. 720 BC. (Photograph: courtesy of Giorgio Buchner; drawing: A. W. Johnston, after Jeffery 1990: pl. 47,1).

¹ While the picture I draw here purports to be a full survey, the contribution to this volume by Tzifopoulos, Kotsonas and Bessios does create a bulge in the canvas, albeit one with a strong and not unexpected Euboean tinge; see now Bessios *et al.* 2012; Strauss Clay *et al.* 2017.

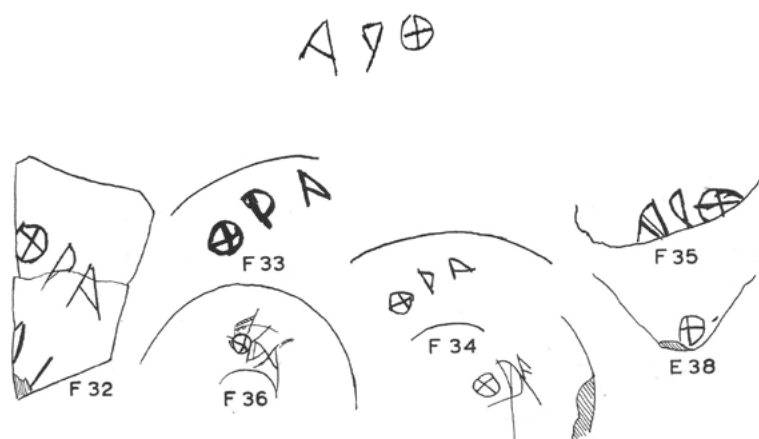


Figure 32.2 Above, graffito on Attic 'à la brosse' amphora from Kamarina, c. 590–60 BC. (Drawing: A. W. Johnston, after Cordano 2004: 785, fig. 2). Below, graffiti on cups from a deposit of c. 500 BC in the Athenian Agora. (Drawing: A. W. Johnston, after Lang 1976: pl. 12).

colony, combined with the typology of the particular type of container, was not taken into account, or at least the publication did not suggest that the amphorae could have been old when imported and that therefore their typology should be re-considered. More relevant (and cautionary) with respect to absolute dating is the close likeness of one of these texts, on an Attic jar, to a group of graffito on late sixth-century Attic cups from the Stoa Gutter Well in the Athenian Agora (Johnston 1994: 166–7) (**Figure 32.2**), perhaps c. 525 at the very earliest, or indeed to the lettering of a red dipinto of 'Thraik' on an architrave backer of the Parthenon (Touloupa 2004: unillustrated, and autopsy). As a final example I note that a fragmentary kore of 'Nikandre type' from the Samian Heraion (Freyer-Schauenburg 1974: pl. 1), with a seemingly contemporary dedicatory text, boustrophedon, employs dotted theta; otherwise our earliest example of the letter is perhaps a generation later than Nikandre;² here it would seem reasonable to date the modest sculptural piece somewhere in the early sixth century; it would form a pendant to the Klaros kore which, on preliminary evidence Gisela Richter had also misplaced early in the kore sequence (Richter 1968: 26, 1a; see now Lejeune and Dubois 1998: 1145).

I forego here any mention of the early days of alphabetic writing in Greece, save in one important respect: when we say 'Greece' we are grossly distorting the picture. Preserved material for most or all of the period either does not, or only scarcely, exists from many parts of the Greek world (or, strictly speaking in the absence of linguistic evidence, the presumed Greek world); Achaia even lost some material between the two editions of *Local Scripts*. Here of course we run into the problem of the *argumentum e silentio*, which has become something of a scholastic plaything; I would agree with François de Polignac (2005a: 16), that it should guide, though not control us. We can at least point to very large amounts of non-inscribed pottery – not least before c. 760, and until much later in some parts of the Peloponnese – to suggest a slow take-up of the skill. Such pseudo-statistics cannot of course be deployed for writing on other, perishable media. A result of the state of our evidence is that any nicely defined map of epichoric scripts can only be based on material of the sixth century. One matter which I take up below in that respect is to what extent this consolidation had occurred at an earlier period (see also Johnston 2012).

We can note the current blanks and hot-spots of material – different people will recall different sets no doubt, but possibly early Cretan laws and labels on vases represent the ends of the spectrum of the use of alphabetic signs, united merely by their being placed on a surface. Crete I will treat briefly here, partly since I deal with the material in Johnston 2013. I repeat, from my own and de Polignac's words, the strikingly non-Cretan appearance of many of the graffiti on cups – and a plain hydria – from Kommos, despite the aggressively Cretan 'stone' text on a strange pithos fragment (Csapo *et al.* 2000: especially 118, 30). François de Polignac notes (2005a: 23), as Csapo (1991) before him, the 'off-shore' nature of the settlement, more striking than the picture seen previously at Pithekoussai – and now Methone. A very separate phenomenon is to be seen in the 'dedicatory' texts on the armour from Afrati, conforming not at all to the templates for such texts in the rest of the literate Greek world (recently Brisart 2011: 264–8). An interesting social perception, with a Hesiodic echo, is the pithos-maker naming himself, one assumes, as 'kerameus' on a recently published jar from Prinias (Rizza 2008: pl. 42; Marginesu 2010: 88–90).

One set of marks from Kommos is worth further comment. A large percentage of our early texts privilege the name of the owner or writer, and we can compare the usage of non-alphabetic signs to indicate possession, known perhaps from Homer, *Iliad* 3.324–5, where the Trojan heroes' lots in Hector's helmet were somehow marked, and from some

² I assume, with others, that the theta in Mantiklos' dedication of 700–675 BC was not completed (Jeffery 1990: 94,1; also 29). In Etruria, where O was not used as a vowel, the simplified form appears slightly earlier than in Greece (Bagnasco Gianni 1996: 390–2).

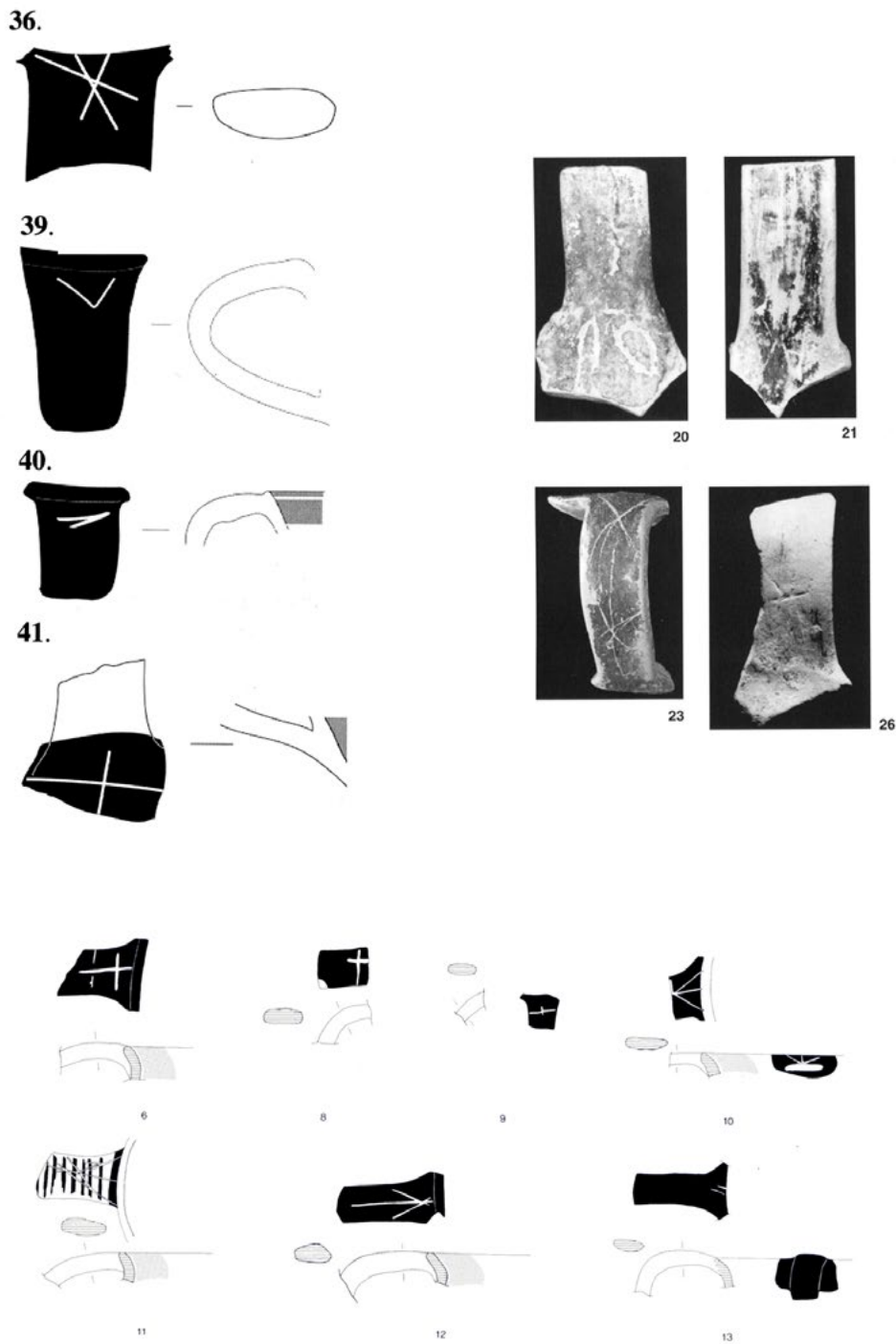


Figure 32.3 Mainly non-alphabetic marks on black cups: upper left from Eretria (© Swiss School of Archaeology in Greece); upper right from Kommos (© J. Shaw); below from Kalapodi (© R. C. S. Felsch).

Early Iron Age pottery; indeed it is a usage continuing through our period into the Classical. Striking is the frequent placing of a sign, normally not obviously alphabetic, on the handle of drinking vases (Figure 32.3); such graffiti appear already in Protogeometric Athens (Papadopoulos 1994: B1) and eighth-century Eretria (Kenzelmann Pfyffer *et al.* 2005), and sporadically later - not on Mt Hymettos, but occurring at Torone (on handmade ware; Papadopoulos 1994: B4-7) and Itanos (A. Tsingarida, *pers. comm.*), and common at Kalapodi (Palme-Koufa 1996) and Kommos. I would not press that further connection between Central Greece and Kommos too hard, but it may not be fortuitous.

With regard to the matter of local consolidation of epichoric scripts, it may be worth mentioning a few well-known pieces that could be termed eccentric: the Chigi jug, whose inscriptions chime in with a number of areas other than



Figure 32.6. Graffiti on rocks on Thera, including one within a frame. (Drawing: A. W. Johnston, after Inglese 2008: 483).

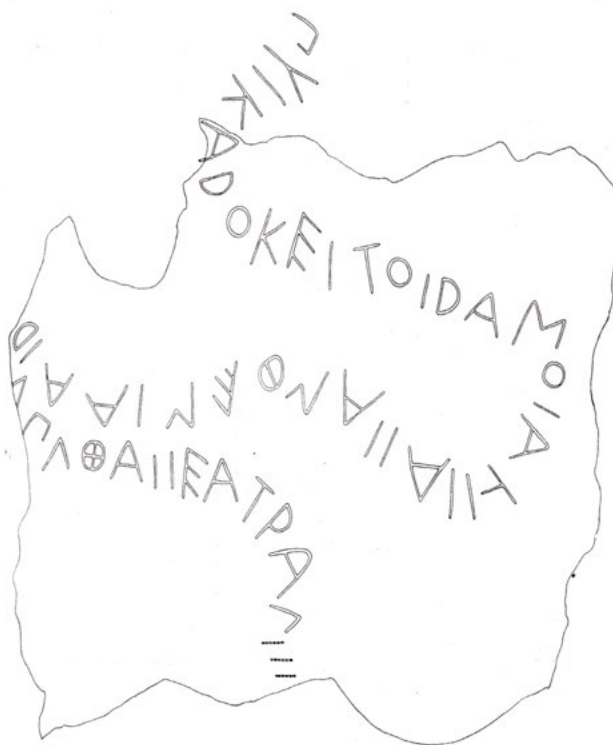


Figure 32.7 Part of sacral regulations on Cyclopean stones of the Unterburg at Tiryns. (Drawing: A. W. Johnston, after Verdelsis *et al.* 1975: 168, fig. 25).

Figure 32.8 Author's note of graffiti on a later seventh-century Attic SOS amphora from Monte San Mauro, Museo Paolo Orsi, Syracuse. (Illustration: A. W. Johnston).

Attic SOS amphorae are striking among contemporary jars for the large number of longer, onomastic, texts that they bear (Johnston 2004: 738-9). The script of the texts is almost always Attic, whatever the provenance of the

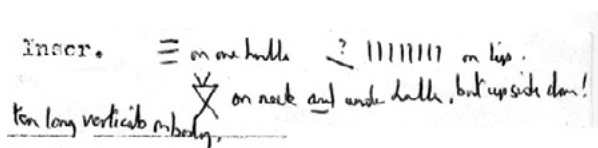


Figure 32.8 Author's note of graffiti on a later seventh-century Attic SOS amphora from Monte San Mauro, Museo Paolo Orsi, Syracuse. (Illustration: A. W. Johnston).

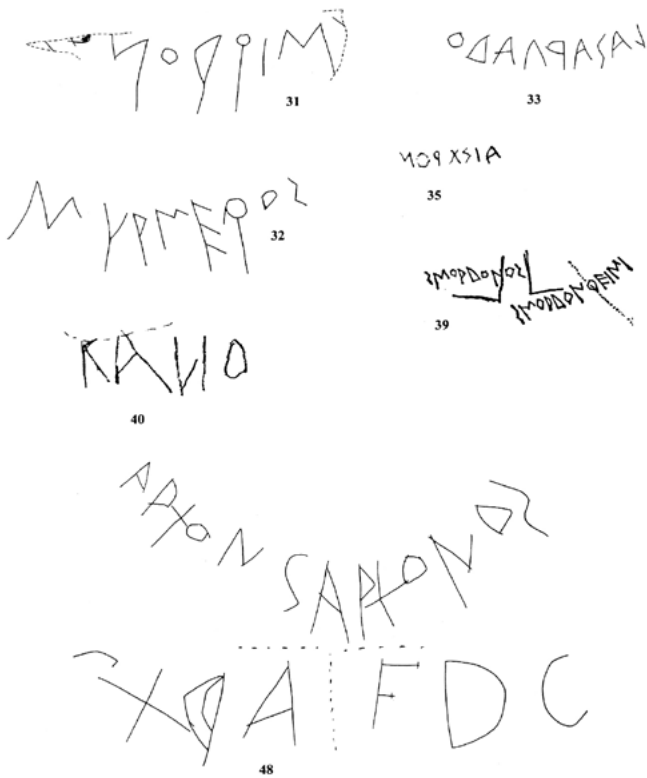


Figure 32.9 A selection of ‘owner’s names’ on Attic SOS amphorae, c. 625-575 BC. (Drawing: A. W. Johnston, after Johnston 2004: 757).

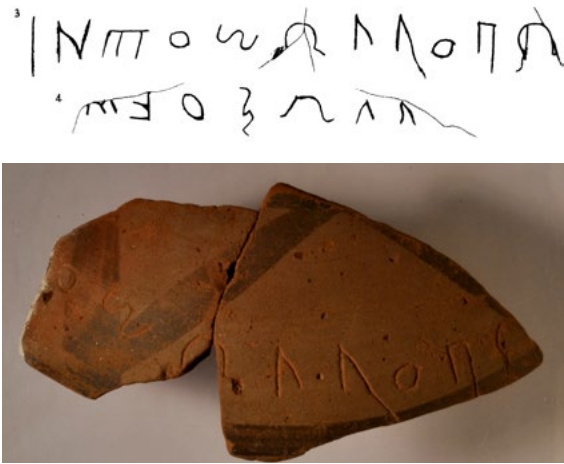


Figure 32.10 Graffiti on two hydriae from Naukratis, c. 600 BC, British Museum GR 1886,0401.83 and 84.

(Drawing: Sir Flinders Petrie; photograph: courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum).

piece. Why are they so inscribed and no other early amphorae? (To employ a minor exaggeration, since the use of full names is not wholly absent from other fabrics.) And how do we explain the range of names (**Figure 32.9**), running from the grandiose to the apparently servile? The material spans the whole of the seventh century, even if more abundant to its end, and into the sixth. Here is not the place to investigate the prime contents of the SOS jar; without residue analysis the matter will remain open, depending on the weight given to the SOS jar carried by Dionysos on the François vase, as against the typological link between the SOS, à la brosse and Panathenaic amphora types (recent statements are by Lund 2004: 213-14; Moore 2011; and Lawall 2011: 297-8). Whatever that case, we certainly have here another patch of local usage.

Naukratis was visited and sojourned in by Greeks in the seventh century on the chronological evidence of near eastern sites. The early epigraphy of the site gives no clear indication of a ‘commercial’ nature, save perhaps some marks on Cypriot and Samian amphorae (Johnston 2006: 26-7). I make two comments here on the rest; one is historiographical: Ernest Gardner (1886: 57), in a careful report on the material, seems to imply that he saw the birth of the Greek alphabet – ‘far earlier than the Abu Simbel inscriptions’ – in a couple of dedicatory texts, his numbers 3 and 4 (**Figure 32.10**), which we would now see as merely off-beat; they are cut on the shoulder of a pair of similar, locally made hydriae (Gardner notes they were found in a well) and were clearly inscribed by the same hand, a hand that was unusually poorly practised in comparison with the rest of the corpus from Naukratis (British Museum GR 1886,0401.83 and 84; Gardner 1886: pl. 32, 3 and 4; Schlotzhauer and Villing 2006: 55, Nauk 83 for the former). The second remark concerns the oddity of the Cypriot material, bearing no Cypriot but various Greek texts: on amphorae, which are of course to be noted but of no high epigraphic interest (Johnston 1982: 35-7), and on mortars, which are a far more peculiar set, sitting uneasily with the mercenary or trading-venturer roles of Greeks at Naukratis, but annoyingly never giving the dedicator’s name (Villing 2006: 33).⁴ I assume that these Cypriot products were given for use in the cult of Apollo by Ionian Greeks, as can be better documented from some cult paraphernalia dedicated by one -esios at a slightly later date (Johnston 2008: 117).

⁴ As regards alphabetic texts on Cypriot pieces I detected a possible Knidian hand in one of the amphora graffiti, to go with the later tombstone in both syllabic and Knidian alphabetic script from Marion. The recent finds of alphabetic texts from Archaic Amathus should perhaps give us some pause (Aupert 2003), but are not clearly earlier than c. 600 BC, unlike the mortars and amphorae which have a greater likelihood of dating before then.

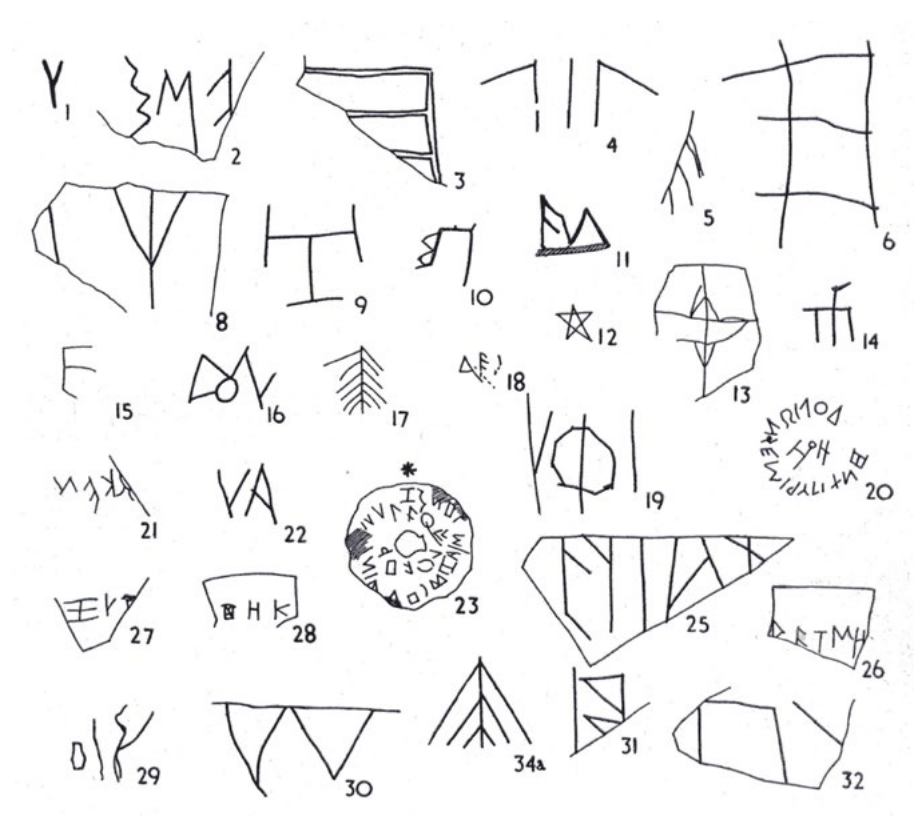


Figure 32.11 Seventh-century graffiti on sherds from Smyrna (Bayraklı).
(Drawing: A. W. Johnston after Jeffery 1964: 41, fig.1).

A few conclusions can be appended when we consider the record of material (**Figure 32.11**) from Old Smyrna (Bayraklı) as the background - a 'typical' haul from a habitation site plus sanctuary (Jeffery 1964, and Akurgal 1983). We find the use of the local script, the basic writing tool, now seemingly fixed, even though many 'written' signs are still non-alphabetic (e.g. **Figure 32.11**, nos 4, 9, 10), and so in essence comprehensible to only the writer and to a no doubt small range of others involved in the message. There are also early masons' marks (Akurgal 1983: pls 168-71), possibly our earliest Ionic numerals, employed to aid the building process in a corporate venture; then a remarkable dedication with a text with a local flavour (Akurgal 1983: pl. 124a-c), employing the term ἄρην, however accented, to describe the character of the offering; such local preferences can be detected here and there in dedications later;⁵ there are owners' marks of various kinds - a staple of early writing, an artisan's signature on an imported dinos (Jeffery 1964: 45, no.1; Akurgal 1983: pl. 124f) - together with some graffiti on Chian and SOS amphorae, **Figure 32.11**, nos 5-11, 30-34a), showing our 'broadly commercial' use, and last but not least a probable non-Greek element (**Figure 32.11**, no. 23 and perhaps others), a small token of the interactions taking place on a larger scale, if we trust our later historical sources, in Greek Asia Minor.

⁵ Lazzarini 1976 remains a basic source. Local choices revolve mainly around the choice of word to describe the dedicatory nature of the object offered, ἄπαρχή, δεκάτη etc.