

ALFREDO RIZZA

A NEW EPIGRAPHIC DOCUMENT WITH SIDETIC(?) SIGNS

1. The object

1.1. Provenance and dating

The scarab here published comes from the private collection of Ms. Annette Stockton (Kansas, USA). I thank her very much for granting me permission to publish the artefact.

After coming into possession of the object, Ms. Stockton searched the internet trying to find out what was written on its underside. She found on a website¹ the reproduction of several ancient Anatolian scripts and she came to the idea that the scarab bore signs of the Sidetic writing system. She contacted me via e-mail having found my messages about the less-known languages of I millennium – Anatolia in the archive of a mailing-list about Indo-European linguistics,² asking for an opinion on her idea.

I showed the photographs sent to me to Prof. Dr. Onofrio Carruba (Pavia University) and Prof. Dr. Günter Neumann (Würzburg University):³ their opinions were in line with mine:

- the object poses many problems to our understanding;
- the document needs publicity even if there are uncertainties regarding its authenticity;
- it is probable that the signs are part of the Sidetic alphabet although this may not be a conclusive analysis.

Ms. Stockton could not certify the provenance of the scarab, so we lack a piece of information that would have been important in our

¹ Entitled “Alphabets of Asia Minor” so probably <http://indoeuro.bizland.com/project/script/asiam.html> (sic!) – no longer available.

² The discussion group was presented by Rich Alderson at the address indo-european@xkl.com: archives are available at <http://listserv.linguistlist.org/archives/indo-europeana.html>.

³ To both of them I owe sincere gratitude for their suggestions, recommendations and for the encouragement they gave me. I also wish to thank Michael J. Colyer, Daniela C. Merlin and Dr. Dominique Collon. Very special thanks to Dr. Silvia Amigoni.

analysis under many respects; we will try to ascertain the relationship of the object and the inscription with internal evidence only.

As we will see, the scarab is of a fairly common type so that we cannot receive much help from an analysis of the object itself when attempting to define a date for its manufacture. We must also consider that the inscription, which would be reasonably dated within the chronological borders of the diffusion of the Sidetic (if indeed so) writing system, can have been added at a subsequent time; as a consequence, the most recent possible date for the inscription can only be the *terminus ante quem*⁴ for the production of the object.

1.2. Description

Printed digital photographs of the scarab are shown in table 4. Drawings are to be found in table 1. Material: steatite. Weight: 3.612 gr. Size measures: max. width: 20 mm.; max. height: 15 mm. Colour: white. Provenance: Acquired in Turkey.

The material used is the usual steatite⁵ of white colour probably of Egyptian origin (following Moorey 1999, p. 100⁶). Steatite is very soft (1 Mohs) and easy to cut and carve with appropriate tools like needles, scoopers or chisels.

The animal represented is a *scarabaeus* with all constituent parts clearly distinguishable: clypeus, plate, head, eyes, thorax, elytra and legs. All these characteristics are common in scarab design.

The back is of the type with “V-marks” on elytra; the head is squared with eyes on both sides to form a lunate complex that lies on a large plate and ends in a “notched clypeus”. Straight lines divide the thorax from the elytra.

The sides do not show a feather pattern to imitate the hair on the legs. The typical holes drilled for the carrying and holding devices are also present. The hole may have been made with a drill and the handle or the string could have been made of bronze or copper (judging from the green residues concentrated around one of the holes).

On the underside we find signs of writing (see *infra*).

The thin lines on the back might have been made with a needle, the wider and deeper ones on the edges and the underside with a

⁴ Chronological borders of the known Sidetic documentation: from the last part of the 5th to the 2nd century B.C.

⁵ On steatite in ANE cf. Moorey 1999, p. 100–101, *passim*.

⁶ Where he refers back to Lucas 1962, p. 421.

chisel. As regards the lines on the underside, it appears to be better if we distinguish between the ones that are certainly part of the inscription, the ones which are surely independent and those that are doubtful.

After the completion of the object and possibly before the inscription was engraved, a glaze was probably fused on the piece in order to harden the surface. This technique is usual with scarab made of steatite.

2. The inscription

2.1. General remarks, number of signs, unequivocal internal reference (cf. Table 1)

Considering all the different possible orientations and subdivisions it appears that there are three marks, so I call them simply sign 1, sign 2 and sign 3 for unequivocal internal reference starting from the side where the head is.

As it is quite clear at first glance, the sketch of the inscription is unquestionably less accurate than the thin, schematic but precise lines of the design of the back of the animal. Much consideration can be deduced from this observation.

The most important possibility, I think, is that the inscription could have been added later, for a different tool was used to engrave the underside, apart from the borderlines that may just represent the classical oval delimitation of the field for inscriptions. The letters show wider and deeper incisions and in certain areas the surface shows some damage. Probably this is exactly the case for the large semi-circular area of sign 2. Some problem during the engraving can be seen also in sign 1 where it seems that a line of the letter was amended and a new one re-drawn.

These elements (difficulties in the engraving, use of a wider tool, broken areas) seem to corroborate the idea that the inscription was made at a later date: steatite, in fact, before being glazed, is soft enough not to allow these problems to happen, so I think the object was first cut without any inscription, then it was covered with a glaze and afterwards (we cannot know how much later) somebody traced his/her own inscription.

The exact layout of the signs is also a big problem, especially with sign 3. It can be constituted by the clear arrow-head only, (the <), but it is also probable that the depression between signs 3 and 2 (α)

is part of sign 3 and also the lunate element (β) near the rear of the object can be part of a unique sign.

2.2.1. The writing system (cf. Table 2)

Coming now to the principal question, that is to say which writing system is represented here, I must stress again that a single solution cannot be assured, but, for a number of reasons that I will try to point out during the analysis of the possible ways of reading, the Sidetic hypothesis should represent the best prospect.⁷ No other Anatolian scripts seem to be detectable here. This is not really strange, as the Sidetic alphabet is, with little doubt, the most deviant (and late) example of the introduction of an epichoric system alternative to Greek, or Aramaic. However, to exclude other possibilities (either Semitic or Aegean) would only lead to reduce the actual interest and relevance of the scarab.

In the following sections, we will make an in-depth report of the study undertaken for the definition of the right way to read the document. All options were considered in reading it. The long axis and the head were chosen to stand as orientation points. The inscription has been considered both in “positive” and in “negative”. As long as the only clear unproblematic sign is sign 1, this will constitute our starting point in the interpretations.⁸

2.2.2. Long axis: horizontal. Head to the left

A. Positive

If we consider the inscription as carved in “positive”, sign 1 can easily represent sinistroverse Sidetic N8⁹ “P”¹⁰. Read in this way, sign 1 becomes a fundamental piece of evidence of the Sidetic hypothesis,

⁷ The Sidetic writing system, as it is currently understood, is a proper alphabet in the sense of Daniels 1996, p. 4.

⁸ In reference to signs and inscriptions in the Sidetic writing system we will partially follow Nollé 1993–, p. 629, one of the last sign-lists. It enumerates 26 graphic elements, but no variants are collected (remember, however, that this sign-list is followed by a full edition with drawings and that, in a forthcoming volume, photographs of all known inscriptions in Sidetic script and language will appear). Another helpful sign inventory with concordances and few variants is to be found in Neumann 1978. Cf. as well Ševoroškin 1975 and id. 1968 (with a synoptical palaeographic table of the scripts of Asia minor). Variations among inscriptions and graffiti (Münzlegenden) were recorded from the beginning of the decipherment by Bossert 1950. The most specific study about the shapes and origin of the letters is still that of Brixhe 1969 (with a very useful sign-list). See Table 2.

⁹ N = Nollé 1993–.

¹⁰ The value of sign N8 is certain and was first devised by Bossert 1950.

in fact, this shape is quite peculiar and is found in the Sidetic script alone; Sidetic N8 has got good parallels in all the inscriptions from Side where it appears, especially S8¹¹ and S9 (with long vertical line) and in coin-graffiti¹². Only the vertical line seems to be, here, longer than usual. Similar to sign 1 we can, less convincingly, take into consideration Phoenician/Aramaic “M” (𐤌), specifically the variants from CIS I.1 (Byblos, 5th c. B.C.); KAI 11 (Byblos, 4th c. B.C.); KAI 50 (papyrus from Saqqāra, 6th c. B.C.)¹³ or Saraïdin (Meydancikkale)¹⁴. Not at all convincing are variants of Phoenician “T” (𐤐) like CIS I.3800¹⁵. No other Anatolian script offers shapes similar to this; only old Phrygian G-159 “P” comes a bit closer, but with a unique dextroverse instance.¹⁶ All the aforementioned scripts, apart from Sidetic, would also not provide comparisons for sign 3, so must be excluded.

Sign 3, as said before, is problematic for what concerns its exact outline which can include lines α and β or not. What seems to me certain is that we can take either the sign with both α and β or without both, but not with either α or β alone. Devoid of α and β , sign 3 has its Sidetic equivalent in N24, perhaps a consonant, but the value is not known: cf. incr. S3, S5, S6, S9.¹⁷ We could compare this shape with Carian (“G” flipped due to the sinistroverse context?) or variants of squared gamma in Greek (e.g. Corinth, Sikyon, Arcadia), here flipped, but then there will be no parallels for sign 1.¹⁸

Now we should consider sign 3 with elements α and β : we obtain something similar to a mirror image of Sidetic “L”, N17.¹⁹ This particular shape is not to be compared with the one attested in inscriptions S1, S2, but with S9 and possibly S6. It should appear also on coins, but the photographs I could use are not useful for a comparison.²⁰ However N17 is never attested in a flipped variant as it is found here.²¹

¹¹ S = Inscription in Sidetic script and language as edited by Nollé 1993–.

¹² Atlan 1968, tab. II, no. 7, no. 8, no. 11; tab. III, no. 2, no. 3, no. 4.

¹³ Cf. Röllig 1995, pp. 206–211, col. no. 21, 23, 26.

¹⁴ Cf. Davesne-Laroche-Traunecker 1998, pp. 330, 338; dépliant VIII.

¹⁵ Cf. Röllig, pp. 210–211, col. 40 and the other instances.

¹⁶ Cf. Brixhe-Lejeune 1984, p. 79.

¹⁷ In S9 it tends to be a little bit more circular.

¹⁸ So we must leave out also Iberian “k/ge” and Northern Italian “G” etc.

¹⁹ The value is assured by the bilingual inscriptions.

²⁰ Quite good pictures can be found in SNG France 3, planche 34, nos. 657–658.

²¹ But obviously we have not enough material to formulate laws about the orientation of the letters. Generally speaking there are only very few possible cases of different orientation for a single sign: cf. sign no. 12 in Brixhe 1969.

Sign 2 is probably broken and we do not understand clearly if the sign is complete or not. From the Sidetic sign-list we can recall N12, specifically the variant horizontally flipped that is to be found on coins, as for Nollé 1993– (N12 = no. 20 and no. 8 in Brixhe 1969).

B. Negative

Sign 1 has now the same problem as sign 3 (with α and β) before: we have an unparallelled mirror image of N8 “P”; for sign 2 we stay in the same uncertainty, where for sign 3 we would find the correct orientation for “L” (N17) or, without α and β , a good example of N10 “M”. We can see here also the square gamma mentioned before, with the same overall problems.

2.2.3. Idem. Head to the right

A. Positive

Also in this case we can find Sidetic parallels for the two well-preserved signs (1 and 3).

Sign 1 should be paralleled, in Sidetic, only by N2²² “E” (unless we would see in it a variant of N12 that equals no. 8 in Neumann 1978 and Brixhe 1969) or, less probably, by N3 “I”. Regarding this last idea, it must be said that there is a tendency for a more squared N3 on coins, but it never happens that lines cross each other (N3 appears many times so we have a sufficient set of instances). For N2, however, there is a problem with its orientation: it should be rotated clock-wise by 35° ca.; but I would stress that the average orientation does not seem to be so pronounced, as different variants of N2 can appear in the same context (e. g. S3), where the single occurrences diverge in shape and in orientation (but without reaching a vertical one) and I have also to remember that N2 does not appear on coins so we lack a quite important group of evidence for its palaeography.

As long as I believe that the crossing lines are an important element of discrimination, I tend to reject the Phoenician variants of “W” (𐤨) that one can find, e.g., in TSSI III, Hispania 14, no. 16 or KAI 30 (from Cyprus)²³ or Aramaic “D” (𐤃), (e.g. in the inscriptions from Xanthos).

²² The value of the sign has been proposed in Darga 1967, pp. 64–65 and in Neumann 1968, p. 87, p. 90.

²³ The examples are taken from Röllig 1995, pp. 205–207.

In the Carian sign-list, there is letter no. 45²⁴ that can be a variant of no. 43.²⁵ The shape is similar to ours but its occurrence is unique (Kaunos 30*)²⁶ and we do not find the angular variant of Carian letter no. 3 in the alphabet of Kaunos (it appears only in alphabets from Egypt), that should be our sign 3 (without α and β).

On sign 2, again, I have nothing to add here.

Sign 3 can be Sidetic N10 “M”. If we consider also α and β , the only thought, in my opinion, we can make is that we are, in this case, following the wrong direction of reading. Without α and β , the shape is common in archaic Greek alphabetic scripts (with a few western outcomes) from e. g., Corinth and Arcadia: it is *gamma*. This form, with probable value /g/, is present, as said before, in some Carian scripts from Egypt.

B. Negative

In this way of reading, sign 3 and also sign 2 can have Sidetic matching counterparts, but it is now sign 1 that obstructs our investigation: I could not find any convincing reading for this sign in the Sidetic documents. A variant of N15 (= Brixhe 18) “S”? On some coins²⁷, N15 appears somehow similar but never with crossing lines. Sign 3 without α and β , is N24; sign 2 can be N12 (= Brixhe 8) “D”²⁸, broken on the right side.

Nevertheless, also in this situation it is Sidetic that is the only script that comes closer to our evidence.

2.2.4. Long axis: vertical. Head up

A. Positive

In no way is it possible to speak of Sidetic signs if we read the inscription in this way. Sign 3, without α and β , can recall the shape of archaic Greek “Y” without the vertical line under the V-sign: it appears in Phokis, Achaia, Aitolia, Epeiros, Melos, in the Ionic Dodekapolis; we have a V-sign in Carian as well, Faliscan, Latin,

²⁴ Cf. Giannotta et alii 1994, p. 13.

²⁵ So Adiego 1994, tab. 1, pp. 29–30, p. 47, p. 63.

²⁶ For the numbering of Carian inscriptions from Asia Minor and Greece see M. Meier-Brügger, Labraunda. Swedish Excavations and Researches vol. II part 4, Stockholm 1983, pp. 10–11.

²⁷ Cf. Atlan 1968, Taf. II, no. 12 and Taf. III, no. 2; BMC Lycia ..., tab. XXVI, no. 10.

²⁸ Nollé considers signs nos. 8, 15 and 20 in Brixhe’s sign-list as three different allographic realizations of the same grapheme. Signs nos. 8 and 15 (Brixhe) are already put together in Neumann’s sign-list (Neumann 1978).

in northern and southern Italian scripts, but also in Iberian (with value “*ñ*”). None of the mentioned writing systems, then, gives an equivalent for sign 2 or sign 1. From the linear scripts of the Aegean area we may find a match for sign 3 (e.g. Cypro-Minoan and Cypriot-syllabic “*sa*”), but not for the other two.

This way of reading should consequently be rejected.

B. Negative

What has been said above is substantially valid also here.

2.2.5. Idem. Head down

A. Positive

We can repeat almost identically what has been said in 2.2.4 above. Only sign 3 (without α and β) can represent a letter in one or other of the writing systems taken into consideration until now; I will give only some examples: Sidetic N21 “*R*”; some Aramaic versions of *ghimel* (λ) like the ones from Xanthos or Bahadırli or Meydancikkale (all with a quite wide angle)²⁹; Phrygian “*D*” from Vezirhan³⁰ (with wide angle); Greek gamma at Delos, Paros, Naxos, Crete etc.; the other two signs, however, always lack an equivalent.

B. Negative

Should it be considered as a “negative”, nothing will change.

2.3. Transliterations of the Sidetic alternatives (cf. table 3).

Long axis: horizontal (all readings are sinistrovers, ←).

	Head to the left	Head to the right
Positive	N24 (/L!) - D? - P	E - ? - M
Negative	P! - D? - M (/L)	N24 - D? - ? (S! / E!)

Long axis: vertical: Incorrect orientation.

The preceding table confirms my belief that the best prospect when attempting an interpretation of the document is to see here an example of the Sidetic (or some kind of a “para-Sidetic”) writing system. The object then should be read keeping its long axis horizontal, from right to left either as “positive” (which seems to be better) or “negative”.

²⁹ Cf. Davesne-Laroche-Traunecker 1998, p. 338; dépliant VIII.

³⁰ Neumann 1997, p. 15.

It is safer to remember here that a definitive palaeography of the Sidetic alphabet, which is still not clearly understood, is not possible at the moment, in all respects: shapes of characters, total number, variation through time and space, graphematic value. We move in a field so sensitive to any new documentation that records with uncertainties as to their origin should be published but constantly kept suspect.

3. Final considerations

Three issues drawn to our attention by the inscription on the scarab were:

- 1 – The exact shape of sign 3.
- 2 – The writing system represented.
- 3 – The contents and the aims of the inscription.

With regard to the first point, what are the constituent lines of sign 3, my analysis came to the conclusion that the shape of the sign should probably be considered without α and β ; in fact the angular element has larger and deeper drills and β is semi-circular, as if it were part of the borderline. Yet, the answer is far from certain because there is a similar line closer to the rear that almost certainly is also part of the border. β , as well, crosses the borderline at one side, but seems to be a direct continuation of it at the other side. However, in my opinion, with α and β , sign 3 gives more problems of reading: I do not think that Sidetic “L” (N17) is well represented here. Unfortunately, without α and β , the shape of sign 3 is a very common one in many writing systems, so it loses all of its diagnostic strength.³¹

Nonetheless, despite this reduction in the quality of the information, I think that the best answer to the second question that our object poses, that is to say, which writing system is represented, should be Sidetic.

In the shapes of the letters of this Anatolian alphabet, we find the best parallels for all (or almost all) signs in every way of reading.

The third matter, i.e. what has been written and why, could not be solved due to the very nature of the inscription, so scanty in quantitative as well as qualitative respect. We may usefully remember a few important facts that concern the uses of sealing tools. A seal is a document per se rich in information that is conveyed by its shape

³¹ If we consider sign 3 with α and β , then we must take it as an example (even if problematic) of Sidetic N17; consequently we must accept as certain the interpretation of all the three signs as Sidetic.

and/or by the material it is made of and by what it “carries” in terms of visual representation and epigraphic evidence. For this reason, seals are among the most important documents of art history, philology, linguistics and history. The impressions left on different typologies of historical and archaeological documentation (tablets, *cretulae*, etc.), testify to the administrative applications of seals, but they can also have a “socio-cultural” importance, mostly as an amulet or a “status symbol” or for other religious or fashionable aims.

If the seal displays an inscription we can understand much of its particular functions, even if we are not able to translate the text. In fact, if we succeed in determining if the inscription is engraved in “positive” or in “negative”, we can then interpret the object with a good grade of certainty. An inscription engraved in negative is suitable for an administrative service because it can be used as a proper sealing device leaving its “positive” image on the impressed object. If the inscription is engraved in positive, it is inadequate in an administrative context, so we can take into consideration a more “private” use, tied to fashion or to popular tradition or religious beliefs.

In our scarab, we have many possible ways of reading, in positive as well as in negative; if in future we will have the possibility to discover the right solution, we will also have some unequivocal evidence for a complete understanding of the object.

For the moment we can only add that the most probable contents of the inscription are a proper name, or an acronym for a proper name, patronymic and papponymic, but also an abbreviated formula of dedication *vel similia* may be kept in mind.

Finally, a closing remark of great importance: the inscription can become a valuable witness for the palaeography of the Sidetic alphabet. Of course, in this sense, it will become officially important only after we will have found other documents that can confirm its full validity. A sound study of all epigraphic evidence, especially coins, is now, I think, one of the most important goals in the study of the Sidetic documentation.

Addendum

When this work was already written Santiago Pérez Orozco contacted me with two articles on the matter of the Sidetic alphabet: Pérez 2003 and Pérez 2005. These two contributions have been considered in the making of the sign-list. I would like to thank Santiago for letting me read his articles and I would also like to thank again the late lamented

Prof. G. Neumann and Prof. O. Carruba who drew my attention to Santiago Pérez's works.

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Abbreviations

- BMC: A catalogue of Greek coins in the British Museum, 1873–. Catalogue of the Greek coins of Lycia, Pamphylia and Pisidia, by G. F. Hill, Arnaldo Forni reprint, Bologna, 1964.
 CIS: Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum, Paris, 1881–.
 KAI: Donner H., Röllig W., Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften. Mit einem Beitrag von O. Rössler, Wiesbaden, 2., 1966–.
 SNG France 3: Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum. France 3. Cabinet des médailles. Pamphylie, Pisidie, Lycaonie, Galatie, Zürich 1994.
 TSSI: Gibson J. C. L., Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions, Oxford, 1975.

Table 1. Scarab bottom (drawing by Alex Cucchiaro)



Fig. 1

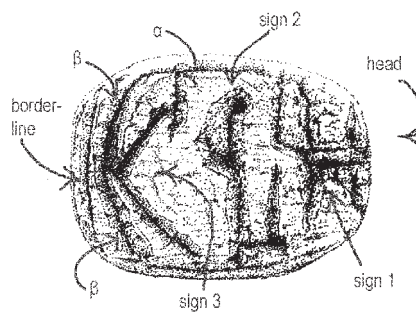


Fig. 2

Table 2. Provisional Sidetic sign-list

A	B	C	D	E	F	G
1	10	11	𐤁 𐤂	𐤃	a	
2	25	14	𐤄		e	
3	5	5	𐤅	𐤆 𐤇	i	
4	2	2	𐤈	𐤉 𐤊 𐤋	o	
5	14	19	𐤌	𐤍 𐤎	u	
6	26	17	𐤏		j	w
7	6	6	𐤐		w	j
8	1	1	𐤑	𐤒 𐤓	p	
9	28	24	𐤔			s
10	11	13	𐤕 𐤖		m	
11	18	10	7		t	
12	15,8	8,21	𐤗 𐤘		d	
13	16	9	0	0 0	𐤙	
14	9	15	1	1	s	
15	12	18	N	𐤚 𐤛 𐤜 𐤝 N	ś	
16	4	4	𐤞		n	
17	3	3	𐤟 𐤠	𐤡	l	
18	13	20	𐤢	𐤣		t
19	24	16	𐤤		g	
20			𐤥			χ
21	7	7	𐤦 𐤧		r	
22	17		𐤨			
23	27	23	𐤩			k
24	29	25	𐤪			b
25	39,24,17	26	3	𐤫 𐤬 𐤭 𐤮		
26			𐤯			z
*27	21	22		𐤰 𐤱		
*28	22			𐤲		
*29	23			𐤳		

Legenda:

A: Numbering by Nollé (N), a + before number means addition to Nollé's list

B: Numbering by Brixhe

C: Numbering by Neumann

D: Signs as attested in inscriptions (as edited by Nollé)





E: Signs as attested on coins (based upon Neumann and Brixhe)

F: Value of signs (based upon Neumann)

G: Proposals by Pérez 2003; Pérez 2005.

Table 3. The readings

1. Long axis: horizontal

	head to the left	head to the right
positive		
negative		

2. Long axis: vertical





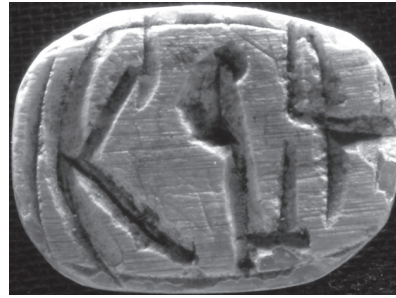
	head up	head down
positive		
negative		

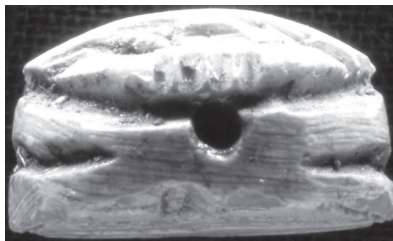
Table 4. Photographs



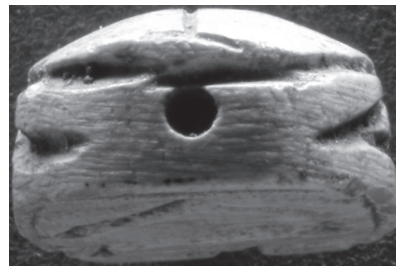
Back



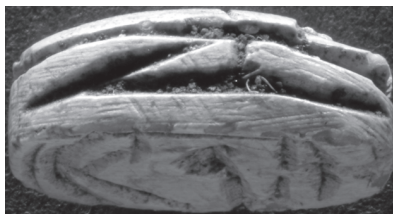
Underside



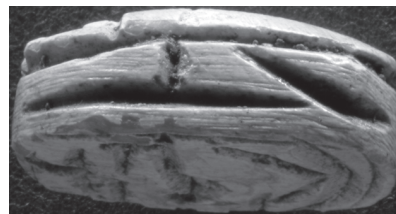
Head



Rear



East



West