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EARLY BALKAN 'SCRIPTS'  
AND THE ANCESTRY OF LINEAR A

I. The 'Old European' Culture

The 'civilization of Old Europe' is the name given by Marija Gimbutas to the totality of cultural groups which flourished in south-east Europe (i. e. the Balkan, Adriatic, and Aegean regions) between about 6500 and 3500 B. C. Other writers restrict the scope of their enquiry to the Balkans, and prefer to speak of a 'Vinča' or 'Vinča-Tordos' culture, after the two type-sites.

Apart from specialized publications and excavation-reports, two works form the principal vehicles for Marija Gimbutas' exposition of the Old European civilization: an introductory paper entitled: *Old Europe c. 7000–3500 B. C.: the earliest European civilization before the infiltration of the Indo-European peoples*<sup>1</sup>, and a monograph dealing particularly with religious iconography, *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images*<sup>2</sup>. This book will be cited here simply as 'Gimbutas'.

The salient features of the Old European civilization are set out by the author as follows. It had a complex social organization, used copper and gold for making tools and ornaments, and developed a script of primitive type. The commonest and most suggestive artefacts are the miniature sculptures in clay, stone, bone, gold, and copper. From these and other products, general conclusions can be drawn about the civilization in question: it was autochthonous, owing nothing of significance to the cultures of the Near East; it was agricultural; it was matrifocal, and probably matrilinear; it had at the centre of its worship a creative goddess under various aspects. This civilization was superseded, but not completely submerged, by waves of Indo-European

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<sup>1</sup> JIES 1, 1973, 1–20.

<sup>2</sup> 2nd ed., London, 1982.

speakers, who entered the Old European regions from the Russian steppe between the middle of the fifth millennium and the middle of the third. There took place, to some extent, an interaction between the Old European and Indo-European civilizations, leading (in the mythic sphere) to a mingling of the Old European Great Goddess and the predominantly male deities of the Indo-Europeans (Gimbutas 9–34). Yet, amidst this welter, some Old European elements were transmitted directly to other cultures, where they can be discerned in certain well-known contexts. “The Early Helladic culture of Greece and the Cyclades and the Minoan civilization on Crete, with its wealth of palace art, epitomize the Neolithic and Chalcolithic culture of Old Europe” (Gimbutas 18).

All this amounts to an impressive theoretical edifice, which, however, may not turn out to be so sound in some of its parts as in others.

About the chronological limits suggested there need be no serious doubts; as correctly stated (Gimbutas 13), the objections to the proposed dating have been made according to certain preconceptions about the diffusion of ‘civilization’ from the east. By the same token, it is unnecessary and wrong to seek a Sumerian model for the three inscribed tablets from Tartaria; it has long been clear that several regions besides Mesopotamia witnessed the independent development of some kind of writing.<sup>3</sup>

The date and origin of the Indo-European ‘infiltrations’ are more contentious matters, which I need not consider here, except to call in question the constant reference to an ‘Indo-European culture’, as if this were an entity contained in space and time like the Old European civilization and, like it, susceptible of description from its material remains. It is, of course, a long-standing and vigorously-maintained opinion of Marija Gimbutas that not only was there a distinctive Indo-European culture but that this can be identified with her ‘Kurgan’ culture of the Russian steppe. A detailed account of the economic, social, religious, and technological system of the Kurgan people has been drawn up, on the basis of archaeological evidence.<sup>4</sup> But, although the linguistic evidence is not ignored, no convincing correlation is drawn between it and the monuments. Anyone who remains doubtful

<sup>3</sup> An excellent discussion of the problem is to be found in J. DeFrancis, *Visible Speech*, Honolulu, 1989, 89–90.

<sup>4</sup> Proto-Indo-European culture: the Kurgan culture during the fifth, fourth, and third millennia B.C., in: *Indo-European and Indo-Europeans*, ed. G. Cardona, H. M. Hoenigswald, A. Senn, Philadelphia, 1970, 155–97.

of the premise that an Indo-European culture can be, and has been, identified will naturally find it hard to believe that an amalgamation between this culture and the Old European civilization can be proved by the surviving relics. And the arguments employed in favour of such amalgamation are not likely to impress our sceptic very favourably, since they are based, to a very large extent, on objects of religious import, the interpretation of which calls for a high degree of caution, systematic procedure, and level-headedness.

## II. The 'Old European' inscriptions

Two works, both important but differing considerably in scope and outlook, deal with the prolific inscribed objects of the Old European culture.

The first to be published was the comprehensive treatise of S. M. M. Winn, particularly valuable for its collection of material and well-arranged sign-lists.<sup>5</sup> The author also makes a number of searching observations in the theoretical domain. The independent character of Old European writing is again affirmed; the Tartaria tablets, sometimes thought to present analogies with documents from Mesopotamia, are in fact the very items which disprove influence from that quarter.<sup>6</sup> The sign-groups of the Old European system are not repeated so frequently or so systematically as would be the case in true writing; nor is the script fundamentally pictographic, most of its signs being of an abstract or schematized shape.<sup>7</sup> Although the script may occasionally function in a logographic manner, logography can hardly be its determining characteristic, since many of the signs occur uniquely or in isolation.<sup>8</sup> To sum up:

"The Vinča sign system is a semiotic system composed of various elements of differing complexity. Some of the conventions of the system may be wholly fixed, while others may be only partially fixed. In some cases ordering is noted while in many others no ordering is apparent. Nevertheless, many communities apparently ascribed similar meanings to specific sign elements of the system.

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<sup>5</sup> Pre-writing in Southeastern Europe: the Sign System of the Vinča Culture ca. 4000 B. C., Calgary, 1981.

<sup>6</sup> Winn 192—4.

<sup>7</sup> Winn 236.

<sup>8</sup> Winn 238.

That is, the content conveyed by the signs evoked similar responses over a wide area because the signs and messages were conventionalized. The level or stage achieved by the Vinča system can be designated pre-writing.”<sup>9</sup>

This assessment is endorsed by Emilia Masson, the author of the second work on the Old European inscriptions.<sup>10</sup> Like Winn, she identifies the stage reached in Old European as a ‘precursor of writing’; a true script was never realized because of the nature of the civilization itself, which failed to provide the economic and commercial impetus necessary for the creation of writing strictly so called.<sup>11</sup>

### III. Supposed cultural links with Crete

The abstract signs of the Old European culture resemble those in certain other systems, which came into use in the Mediterranean world during the third and second millennia B.C. “Linear A in Crete has many sign correspondences with the Vinča sign system”, pronounced Winn, “but no direct inheritance is plausible”.<sup>12</sup>

This view has lately been contested by Harald Haarmann. In a short paper, which may be taken as having an introductory character, he observes that the number of parallels between the Old European script and Linear A (twenty are illustrated in his table) excludes pure coincidence. This convergence, it is suggested, provides a historical background for the origin and development of the Cretan Linear A script.<sup>13</sup>

Haarmann has also published a longer account of his views: this may be cited as ‘Haarmann’.<sup>14</sup> Here he embraces wholeheartedly all the statements made by Marija Gimbutas regarding the Old European culture, its amalgamation with Indo-European, and the survival of some of its elements in the Bronze Age civilizations of Mycenaean Greece and Minoan Crete. He makes the further claim that among these elements should be counted writing, since both in outward form

<sup>9</sup> Winn 242.

<sup>10</sup> *L’écriture’ dans les civilisations danubiennes néolithiques*, Kadmos 23, 1984, 89–123.

<sup>11</sup> Masson 123; similarly Winn 254–7.

<sup>12</sup> Winn 250.

<sup>13</sup> *Hieroglyphen- und Linearschriften: Anmerkungen zu alteuropäischen Schriftkonvergenzen*, Kadmos 28, 1989, 1–6.

<sup>14</sup> *Writing from Old Europe to ancient Crete — a case of cultural continuity*, JIES 17, 1989, 251–75.

and in function the Cretan Linear A system is sufficiently close to the Old European script to show that it contains remnants of that earlier script. Haarmann's case is presented in three parts: a summary of the typological resemblances between Minoan culture and that of Old Europe (especially in the field of cult and religious iconography); an assertion that the Old European inscriptions manifest a system of true writing; lastly, an examination of the Linear A script under its sacral aspects. After a review of these points in order, I shall give further consideration to the origin of the Linear A script.

To begin, then, with the cultural convergences which Haarmann, bringing evidence exclusively from Gimbutas, discovers between Old Europe and Minoan Crete (Haarmann 253–4).

"The mask (animal mask) in Minoan and Mycenaean tradition" is said to continue the Old European "use of masks as a ritual requisite". About the latter I have nothing to say; I accept it as an accurate statement made in good faith. The reckless use of evidence on the Minoan side, however, fills me with disquiet (Gimbutas 66, the source of the following quotations). The participants in the ritual dance on the Isopata gold ring are said to "wear insect masks". Not so; it is simply that the women's heads are rendered extremely cursorily, as happens elsewhere in Minoan miniature art.<sup>15</sup> There is no "satyr-like masked man" on the Harvester Vase from Ayia Triada. A ring from Phaistos is said to show a human mask between two goats. A human *head* is certainly shown, but this represents a common device of Minoan iconography, whereby human and animal heads may be detached from their surroundings and employed as motifs in their own right.<sup>16</sup> "Animal-headed demons walking upright ... *must* be humans wearing masks" (my emphasis). That statement ignores the usually-held and easily-substantiated view that the Minoan 'demon' is borrowed directly from Egyptian representations of the god *ta-wrt*.<sup>17</sup> Precisely how the Minoans envisaged their 'demons' is a matter for conjecture; but, in any case, that "must" will have to go. An examination of the relevant Minoan monuments thus reveals no unambiguous use of masks in the entire culture.

<sup>15</sup> "The votaries ... are designed in a very spirited manner, but owing to a not unusual convention in this class of work their heads are abnormally small and summarily delineated", A. J. Evans, *Archaeologia* 65, 1913–4, 10.

<sup>16</sup> M. P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion*, 2nd ed., Lund, 1950, 234 fig. 117, upon which Nilsson remarks, "the detached head had become a motif in decoration, and consequently every head, even the human head, could be used".

<sup>17</sup> See especially M. A. V. Gill, *AM* 79, 1964, 2.

Some other instances of 'cultural convergence' are better documented than the mask. Small shrines, for example, are certainly found in the cult-areas of Minoan palaces; nor would it be easy to deny that the snake possessed some 'religious symbolism' for the Minoans — whether it was the *same* symbolism as in the Old European culture, we naturally cannot tell.

But about the "religious symbolism of the bull (i. e. horns of consecration)" more may be said. There is undoubtedly an outward resemblance between the Minoan 'horns of consecration' and their counterparts in the Old European civilization. But the crucial question concerns the inner meaning of the horns, and whether this remains the same in the two cultural spheres. "The beginning of this symbol probably goes back to the primordial sacrifice with the underlying concept that out of the sacrificed bull's body a new life emerges" (Gimbutas 93). So far as I can see, this 'probability' is ill-founded: it could be substantiated only by a close examination of pertinent analogies, which is not provided. But a more serious problem arises. Despite the seductive name given by Evans to the Cretan 'horns of consecration', these *never* resemble an animal's horns, whether found *in corpore* or represented in art. There is no compelling reason to associate them with horns at all.<sup>18</sup> Nor have we evidence of a specific bull-cult in Minoan Crete.<sup>19</sup> Bull-leaping scenes, depictions of bull-sacrifice, and a predilection for bull-shaped rhyta cannot constitute such evidence. Those who derive the Minoan 'horns of consecration' from Anatolia<sup>20</sup> have to account not only for the wide chronological gap but also for a fundamental difference between the Minoan and the Anatolian phenomena. The 'First Shrine' excavated by Mellaart at Çatal Hüyük contains bucrania and bulls' horns in the context of a bull-cult.<sup>21</sup> Nothing of the sort has ever been found in Crete. That being so, there exists no reason to see an affinity between the Minoan and the Old European 'horns of consecration' beyond a superficial resemblance.

<sup>18</sup> Evans first gave comprehensive expression to his views in: *The Mycenaean Tree and Pillar Cult*, London, 1901, 37–40. At p. 37 he states that the horns of consecration form "a kind of impost or base terminating at the two ends in two horn-like excrescences. At times these terminations have the appearance of being actually horns of oxen". None of the objects illustrated bears out the latter claim.

<sup>19</sup> A good survey is given by F. Matz, *Minoischer Stiergott?*, in: *Pepragmena tou A' Diethnous Kretologikou Synedriou*, Iraklion, 1962, 215–23.

<sup>20</sup> Most recently, W. Pötscher, *Aspekte und Probleme der minoischen Religion*, Hildesheim, 1990, 195–211.

<sup>21</sup> J. Mellaart, *Excavations at Çatal Hüyük*, 1962: second preliminary report, *AS* 13, 1963, 43–103, figs. 8–12.

Divine epiphanies in the shape of a bee or butterfly are also adduced as features common to Minoan and Old European religious art. But, while Minoan artists do sometimes depict the butterfly and the bee, these insects never function as attributes of a goddess. When a gem from Mycenae is said to show *genii* dressed in bee-skins holding jugs over horns (Gimbutas, caption to her fig. 145), we may suspect that the Minoan type of genius or demon is interpreted differently according to the immediate needs of the argument, for we recall that demons were earlier described as "humans wearing masks". Even if the *genii* at Mycenae were really wearing bee-skins, that fact would have no bearing on the existence of a "bee-goddess". The assertion that on the Isopata ring "the heads and hands are those of an insect" (Gimbutas, caption to her fig. 146) has already been dealt with. Then a sealing from Zakro is described as portraying a goddess with the wings of an eyed butterfly (Gimbutas, caption to her fig. 148). Nothing about this picture indicates that a goddess is portrayed; the figure is merely one of many monsters found among the Zakro sealings<sup>22</sup>. Attention should be drawn to this fantastic aspect of many of the sealings, instead of to a single example which seems to strengthen the case being argued only when it is viewed in isolation.

According to Haarmann 253, both the Minoan and the Old European cultures knew a "symbolism of the spiral (cosmic waters) relating to a water divinity (the Great Goddess)". Apart from the vagueness of this reference, it does not even reflect accurately the account in Gimbutas 124–32, where we read of "the meander symbol of cosmic waters". Meanders are not spirals. The former are as common in Old European art as are spirals in the Minoan; but, whatever may be the state of affairs in the Old European culture, no Minoan spiral or meander-pattern can be related to a 'water divinity'.

These are the principal, and in my view inadequate, grounds upon which Haarmann contends that certain aspects of Minoan civilization represent a continuation of Old European culture. I turn now to the specific proposals which concern the Linear A script.

#### IV. The supposed 'Old European' source of Linear A

Haarmann seeks to prove continuity between the Old European writing-system and the Linear A script on the basis of (1) similarity of function and (2) similarity of form.

<sup>22</sup> D. G. Hogarth, *The Zakro sealings*, JHS 22, 1902, 76–93, esp. 90–3; D. Levi, *Le cretule di Zakro*, ASAA 8–9, 1929, 157–201, esp. 172–9; J. Weingarten, *The Zakro Master and his Place in Prehistory*, Gothenburg, 1983, esp. 91–100.

1. *Function*

It is necessary to establish that both in Old Europe and in Crete we are dealing not only with a system of true writing but with a 'sacral' script. To do this effectively, two different types of argument are required. Nobody doubts that the Old European script had a predominantly religious purpose; but, as we have seen, Winn and Masson have seriously questioned whether it amounts to true writing. Conversely, Linear A is manifestly a species of true writing, whereas its status as a sacral script remains to be demonstrated. Haarmann has therefore set himself the task of showing first that the Old European script is a true writing-system and second that Linear A is a sacral script. How successful is he in doing this?

## a. Is the 'Old European' script a true writing-system?

In reply to the arguments of Winn and Masson, Haarmann makes the following statement:

"What is most essential in the definition of 'writing' is the obvious intention of using signs as symbols of a notational system and the equivalence of 'one sign: one concept' in logographic writing or of 'one sign: one unit of the sound structure' (i. e. syllable, segment, individual sound) in phonographic writing" (Haarmann 260).

Using this criterion, Haarmann finds that the Old European script has no less claim to be called true writing than, say, the earliest known systems of Mesopotamia or China. But, even if one accepts Haarmann's definition of 'writing' (there are, of course, many others), it is easy to detect the flaw in his reasoning; for, such is the paucity of our information about the inner structure of the Old European script (even after Winn's exhaustive study), we cannot tell whether in this script there *is* an equivalence between one sign and one concept, or an equivalence between one sign and one sound-unit, or any intention to represent units of sound at all. These limitations on our knowledge were adequately documented by Winn, and I do not see how they can be transcended, except by bringing to an examination of the Old European script some new method of enquiry, which might enable its inner working to be elucidated. In default of such a method, reliable results cannot be obtained.



## b. Is Linear A a sacral script?

In seeking to demonstrate the sacral nature of the Linear A script, Haarmann relies on two arguments, the particular and the general.

The *particular* argument is that the Old European culture knows the "custom of inscribing figurines as votive offerings in burial rituals", while the Minoans, for their part, know the "custom of inscribing figurines in connection with the cult of the dead" (Haarmann 254). About the Old European custom we need have little reservation, in view of the copious instances collected in Winn and Gimbutas. But, in describing the Minoan custom, Haarmann has seriously misunderstood and misinterpreted Marija Gimbutas' statement: "Various signs are found on the front, back and sides of Old European figurines. Minoan figurines were similarly inscribed, and an idol from the Middle Minoan palace of Tylissos bearing Linear A signs is reproduced here for comparison" (Gimbutas 85). Even this statement is inaccurate, since there was no 'Middle Minoan palace' at Tylissos, nor should one say that Minoan 'figurines' were inscribed; the truth is that among the large number of figurines known in Minoan Crete only that from Tylissos bears any inscription. But, for Haarmann, this unique example from a house<sup>23</sup> is enough to attest a "custom ... in connection with the cult of the dead". But of course a single example does not imply the existence of a 'custom', still less its association with 'the cult of the dead'.

On the basis of the inscribed figurines from Tylissos, and (I presume) on that of the inscribed 'libation-tables' found at several Minoan sites, Haarmann develops his *general* argument along these lines:

"Contrary to the stereotyping view that writing in Minoan Crete emerged out of the economic needs of palace administration, the tradition of Minoan Linear writing is seen in the light of its association with religious affairs. Linear A, most probably, was the writing system of the Cretan priesthood for more practical purposes, while the Hieroglyphic script had a sacral function and was used in rituals" (Haarmann 266).

One may agree with Haarmann to this extent, that it would be a mistake to insist that writing emerged in Crete solely in order to meet the

<sup>23</sup> It came from Hazzidakis' 'Bâtiment Ouest': J. Hazzidakis, *Tylissos à l'Epoque Minoenne*, Paris, 1921, 71–3. The text itself is discussed, not without a certain personal animus, by J.-P. Olivier, *Inscription en linéaire A sur une statuette en terre cuite de Tylissos* (HM 6585), *AntCl* 50, 1981, 621–7.

requirements of the palatial administration. Such insistence would be misplaced, if only because we are not yet able to state definitely when, where, or in what circumstances Cretan writing began. It remains true, however, that the great majority of Linear A documents are directly concerned with administration; and the administrative use of the script can now be placed at an earlier date than previously, thanks to the discovery of Linear A tablets in the first palace of Phaistos.<sup>24</sup> But the Phaistos tablets can hardly represent the beginning of Minoan writing, or even a very early stage of it; their elegant ductus and careful arrangement indicate that a long period of development had preceded. *How* long a period, we do not know.

A new dimension was given to the problem by the publication of two Hieroglyphic seals from an ossuary in the Phourni cemetery at Archanes (Fig. 1).<sup>25</sup> Although the seals cannot be dated on stratigraphical grounds, the pottery associated with them gives a terminus ante quem of Middle Minoan Ia. The inscriptions on both seals contain two sequences of signs previously known on the rectangular bead-seal P. 41b (Fig. 1) and elsewhere. The groups, comprising libation-vessel + bird(?) + 'sepia' and double-axe + 'sepia' [+ a third sign], make up the so-called 'libation-formula'.<sup>26</sup> Bringing together the relevant elements, we seem able to conclude that this sequence of sign-groups, attested in other inscriptions as well (both Hieroglyphic and Linear A), was written at a time not precisely ascertainable, but in all likelihood before the establishment of an administrative apparatus in the palace of Knossos.

On present evidence, therefore, we may well share Haarmann's belief that Cretan writing could have been applied, in the first place, to other than purely administrative purposes. Can we go farther and embrace his views on the use of the developed Hieroglyphic and Linear A scripts? This is a difficult matter to discuss, because Haarmann offers no grounds for his statement that Linear A was 'probably' the writing-system of the Cretan priesthood, and gives no reasons (save one) for thinking that the Hieroglyphic script was used in rituals.

With regard to the Linear A script and its postulated use by a priesthood, I must emphasize the purely hypothetical nature of Haar-

<sup>24</sup> First edited by G. Pugliese Carratelli, *Nuove epigrafi minoiche di Festo*, ASAA n. s. 19–20, 1957–8, 363–88.

<sup>25</sup> E. Grumach and J. Sakellarakis, *Die neuen Hieroglyphensiegel vom Phourni (Archanes) I*, *Kadmos* 5, 1966, 109–14.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. W. C. Brice, *The Minoan 'libation formula'*, *BJRL* 48, 1965, 56–68 and E. Grumach, *The Minoan libation formula — again*, *Kadmos* 7, 1968, 7–26.

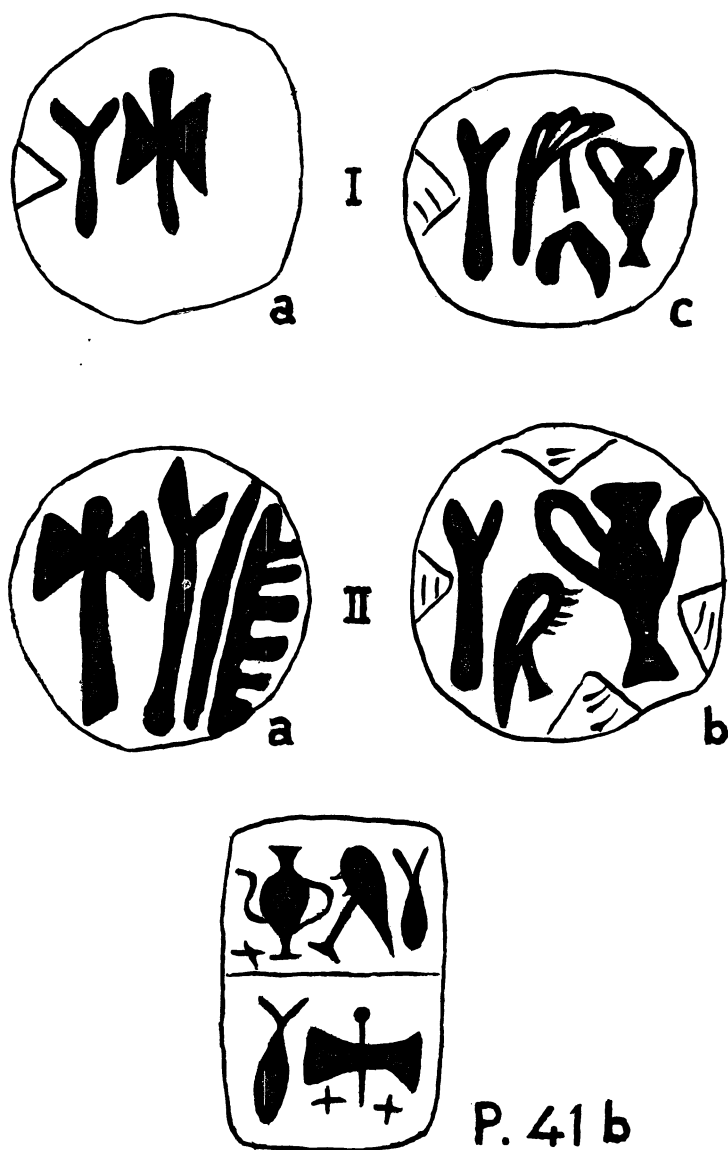


Fig. 1. The 'Libation-formula' on Hieroglyphic seals from Phourni (I and II), and of unknown provenance (P. 41b)

mann's suggestion. No evidence is available to show that, at the time when Linear A was current, a Minoan 'priesthood' even existed, in the sense of a body of persons regularly and professionally engaged in acts of sacrifice and other cult-performances. It is true that the later, Linear B records refer to 'priests' and 'priestesses' and even convey a slight idea of their functions.<sup>27</sup> The transposition of this priestly body back to the earlier period is perhaps theoretically justifiable, but needs to be argued with far greater rigour than Haarmann employs.

Since we lack any direct attestation of a priesthood in the Linear A period, we must enquire why Haarmann should think that "Linear A, most probably, was the writing system of the Cretan priesthood for more practical purposes". Priests, as such, are not necessarily able to write, nor have they necessarily any interest in writing, nor any need of a script. Which of the extant Linear A documents would Haarmann put forward as the products of the Cretan priesthood? I can think of only one class which might possibly be brought under this head, namely the inscribed 'libation-tables' and allied objects. The corpus of these has recently been augmented by discoveries at the rustic shrine of Kato Syme and the peak-sanctuary of Iuktas.<sup>28</sup> It is now possible to draw up a comparative list of inscriptions of this type, which (we may assume) contain formulae relating to the dedication of the inscribed objects themselves.<sup>29</sup> These formulae, in turn, are made up of two elements, one displaying only slight variations and one which never takes the same form twice. The first element may be identified as expressing constant features of the dedication (e. g. divine name, feast-name, place-name), while the second contains the name of the dedicator or his family, which might naturally be different on different occasions.<sup>30</sup> If this analysis be correct, it points to a series of private dedications and excludes public offerings, with an attendant priesthood. If persons with priestly functions were at hand, their presence seems not to be attested on the libation-tables which, more than any other class of objects, might be expected to exhibit the writing of a priestly caste.

<sup>27</sup> Some superficial remarks on this subject will be found in: Pagan Priests, ed. M. Beard and J. North, London, 1990, 159–74.

<sup>28</sup> Respectively: P. Metaxa-Muhly, Linear A inscriptions from the sanctuary of Hermes and Aphrodite at Kato Syme, *Kadmos* 23, 1984, 124–35; A. Karetsou, L. Godart, J.-P. Olivier, Inscriptions en linéaire A du sanctuaire de sommet minoen du mont Iouktas, *Kadmos* 24, 1985, 89–147.

<sup>29</sup> Karetsou, Godart, Olivier 128–46.

<sup>30</sup> Y. Duhoux, Le linéaire A: problèmes de déchiffrement, in: *Problems in Decipherment*, Louvain, 1989, 59–119, esp. 85–6.

Neither can any confirmation be found for the suggested use of the Hieroglyphic script 'in rituals'. The sole example cited is the Phaistos Disk, "which contains an invocation of the ancestors on the occasion of a funeral ceremony" (Haarmann 266). Not everyone will agree that this is the burden of the text, or even that the text has been, or ever can be, deciphered in the absence of any other example of the script. For the script is not, as Haarmann implies, identical with the Hieroglyphic system found on clay bars, tablets, labels, seals, and sealings.<sup>31</sup> It is well known that there are some divergences in sign-use between the 'archival documents' (tablets, bars, labels), on the one hand, and seals and sealings on the other;<sup>32</sup> even so, certain groups of signs can be shown to occur in both types.<sup>33</sup> The administrative function of the 'archival' documents is confirmed by their close resemblance to the corresponding documents written in the Linear A and Linear B scripts. The purpose of the Hieroglyphic seals and sealings is much more obscure.<sup>34</sup> These, or at least some of them, may have had a ritual use beyond their more obvious function as markers of identity or rank; and it is possible that the early seals from Archanes, mentioned above, already exemplify such a use. But these must remain mere possibilities, so long as the script itself cannot be read.

In short, there exists little justification for the statement that "early Cretan literacy, that is from the end of the 3rd millennium B.C. into the 2nd millennium B.C., was characterized by its association with religious practices, either practical (Linear A) or ritual-ceremonial (Hieroglyphic script)" (Haarmann 266).

## 2. *Form*

Turning from the functions of the Linear A script to the external form of its signs, I take account of Haarmann's table of fifty "sign convergences in the Old European script and Cretan Linear A" (Haar-

<sup>31</sup> The signs of the Disk show closer affinities with those of the Linear A script: D. Schür, *Der Diskos von Phaistos und Linear A*, *Kadmos* 12, 1973, 6–19 and W. Nahm, *Vergleich von Zeichen des Diskos von Phaistos mit Linear A*, *Kadmos* 14, 1975, 97–101.

<sup>32</sup> E. Grumach in: *Allgemeine Grundlagen der Archäologie*, ed. U. Hausmann, München, 1969, 235–40.

<sup>33</sup> J.-P. Olivier, *The relationship between inscriptions on Hieroglyphic seals and those written on archival documents*, *Aegaeum* 5, 1990, 11–19.

<sup>34</sup> J.-P. Olivier, *Les sceaux avec des signes hiéroglyphiques. Que lire? Une question de définition*, CMS Beiheft 1, Berlin, 1981, 105–15.

mann 255—9). Are these “convergences” so striking as to point irresistibly to Haarmann’s conclusion that the Linear A signary contains relics of the Old European system of writing? Our answer will raise two points of method. The first concerns Haarmann’s procedure in drawing up a comparative table of this kind. The second is still wider, and is involved with the creation of scripts in general and the selection of a stock of signs.

#### a. The procedure

One cannot prove an affinity between two scripts simply by juxtaposing a number of arbitrarily chosen signs, any more than one can prove an affinity between two cultures by the comparison of a few external manifestations (as by Marija Gimbutas, III above). Just as, in the latter case, we need to look at the whole range of cultural phenomena (paying attention to the motives which underlie religious observances, as well as to the observances themselves), so in the case of writing we need to take thought for the internal structure of the scripts under examination, especially the way in which they represent the spoken language and the inter-relations of the various types of signs. To institute such a comparison between Linear A and the Old European script might well seem a desperate undertaking, in view of our complete ignorance of the structure of the latter system (see II above) and our imperfect understanding of the principles which govern the Linear A script.

#### b. The sign-repertory

A number of features in Haarmann’s table require comment. Some of the Old European signs are too distant in shape from those of Linear A to have any evidential value, e. g. Winn’s nos. 14, 48, 73, 98, 109, 110, 152, 159, 177; others do bear some resemblance to Linear A signs, but the resemblance depends on the assumption (not theoretically impossible, when one recalls the history of Sumerian writing, but nowhere expounded systematically) that the character in question has been turned through ninety degrees, e. g. Winn’s nos. 24, 41, 42, 117, 143, 199; others, again, are of so banal and obvious a shape as to deprive the comparison of any significance, e. g. the vertical stroke (Winn’s no. 1), the Y-shape (no. 3), the T-shape (no. 4), the hook (no. 7), the Z-shape (no. 8), the cross (no. 66), the cross enclosed by a circle (no. 87), the lambda-shape (no. 95), the dot (no. 123).

With regard to the last-mentioned matter, I think that Haarmann shows insufficient awareness of the small number of signs that are

readily available to a writer who has to scratch his texts on stone or incise them on damp clay. Circular forms *can* be drawn, but there is naturally a preference for straight lines and an avoidance of elaboration. Where only a limited number of signs is called for, say about a hundred (as in Linear A) or about two hundred (as in the Old European script), it becomes inevitable that certain shapes recur in many scripts which, for historical or geographical reasons, cannot possibly be related to one another. When writing-systems have been invented in modern times, they also make use of a very limited range of shapes, even though the nature of their medium is not so constricting as with the Old European and Linear A scripts. Good examples may be seen in the revised Cree syllabary<sup>35</sup> and the Chukchic script of Siberia.<sup>36</sup>

#### V. Linear A autochthonous

In his eagerness to demonstrate the Old European ancestry of Linear A, Haarmann never pauses to consider the possibility that the Minoans developed this script (as they developed others) out of their own resources and for their own ends. The one matter which above all demands attention is scarcely mentioned: the relationship between Linear A and the Cretan Hieroglyphic script. When Evans wrote his great treatise on the subject, he gave good reasons for regarding the three major systems of Cretan writing, Hieroglyphic, Linear A, and Linear B, as succeeding one another chronologically.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, he was aware of some overlapping among the three signaries, and the consequent likelihood that at least two of them sometimes co-existed. This situation seemed to be explained best by supposing that, at each of the three stages, a different selection was made of the available stock of signs.<sup>38</sup>

In my own belief, Evans' assessment retains much of its validity to this day. Subsequent discoveries, especially at Phaistos and Mallia, enable his account to be refined, but do not change it fundamentally. For instance, the presence of Linear A tablets in the first palace of Phaistos means that the use of this script has to be carried back to an

<sup>35</sup> H. Jensen, *Die Schrift in Vergangenheit und Gegenwart*, 2nd ed., Berlin, 1958, 228–9 figs. 206–7.

<sup>36</sup> Jensen 232–4 fig. 214; J. Friedrich, *Zu einigen Schrifterfindungen der neuesten Zeit*, ZDMG N.F. 17, 1938, 183–218, esp. 209–18.

<sup>37</sup> *Scripta Minoa*, Oxford, 1909, 18.

<sup>38</sup> *Ib.* 38.

earlier time than was envisaged by Evans; but the order of succession is not itself disturbed, since the Archanes seals show that the developed Hieroglyphic script was in use still earlier (IV above). And the co-existence of two scripts, contemplated by Evans as a strong possibility, is now confirmed by the use of both Hieroglyphic and Linear A to write the archives at Mallia. This digraphy has been studied by Godart. He sets out the facts in a lucid manner, but in seeking to explain the phenomenon he makes a proposal which I find hard to accept: namely that at some time within the early palace period the Minoan scribes developed two scripts in parallel, a cursive system for writing accounts (Linear A) and a monumental, diplomatic type (Hieroglyphic).<sup>39</sup> But the suggestion does not fit the facts, for at Mallia both scripts were used for archival purposes, while if either of them has a right to be called 'monumental' it is Linear A, the system used for all the known texts of a public (or semi-public) character, with the sole exception of the Hieroglyphic stone found in the neighbourhood of Mallia.<sup>40</sup> A more sophisticated explanation seems to be called for here.

The relevance of these questions to Haarmann's theory is that any account of the Linear A script, and in particular of its origins, needs to take account of the Hieroglyphs as well. According to our present information, Linear A was of later growth than the Hieroglyphic system, although the precise relationship between the two scripts is far from clear. In any event, Hieroglyphic was not immediately, or for a long time, superseded by Linear A, but was used in conjunction with it. Haarmann draws a direct line of descent from the Old European script to Linear A and only mentions the Hieroglyphic system, in an aside, as having a 'sacral function'. But the entire situation is far too involved to be susceptible of so simple an explanation.

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<sup>39</sup> L. Godart, *Écritures et comptabilités*, in: H. van Effenterre, *Le Palais de Mallia et la Cité Minoenne II*, Rome, 1980, 579–98.

<sup>40</sup> F. Chapouthier, *Inscription hiéroglyphique minoenne gravée sur un bloc de calcaire*, BCH 62, 1938, 104–9.