












WILLIAM C. BRICE

NOTES ON THE CRETAN HIEROGLYPHIC SCRIPT*

VII. The “Seated Bird” Sign, Evans No. 80

The so-called “Libation Formula”, sometimes known as the “Arkha-des Formula”, is a sequence of five signs found in both the Cretan Hieroglyphic Script and Linear A, and is the only recurrent instance of a sign-group common to these two systems of writing.

The Linear A version is now well established, from some twenty examples, as consisting of the following signs:    . In some cases the first sign  is replaced by . In the hieroglyphic version, of which we now know, in its full form, eight examples, the sequence of signs is the double-axe , the “sepia” sign twice  , then in the fourth position the problematic sign which is the subject of this study, and finally a vessel with handle and spout , which is evidently the inspiration for the Linear sign .

In *Scripta Minoa* I of 1909, Evans published two hieroglyphic seals with our formula, P 41 of unknown precise source, and P 49 from Hellenica near Knossos; though he did not record any remark on the similarity between the two. It was, in fact, not until 1952 that attention was drawn to their resemblance, by L. Deroy, in *Minos* 2, 45 ff. On both of these seals, Evans identified the double-axe (No. 36), the twice-inscribed sepia (No. 60), and in final position the “libation vessel” (No. 40). However, the fourth sign on P 41 was classified by him as a “seated bird” (No. 80), while he identified the sign in the corresponding position on P 49 as a “hand in profile” (No. 10). In his catalogue of signs, these are respectively the sole examples recorded under the numbers 80 and 10. (It should be noted that in Evans’s *Catalogue of Signs*, SM I p. 184, No. 10, there is a double misprint: each of the two references to P 47b should read P 49b.)

* The previous contribution in this series appeared in *Kadmos* 31, 1992, 21–24.

In his perceptive posthumously-published study of the subject, *The Minoan Libation Formula* – Again, in *Kadmos* 7, 1968, 7–26, Ernst Grumach was able to add five more examples of the hieroglyphic version of the formula to the two originally recorded by Evans. More recently, one further case (on #313, a seal from Moni Odigitria) is included in the 1996 *Paris Corpus Hieroglyphicarum Inscriptionum Cretae*, compiled by J.-P. Olivier and L. Godart, and hereafter referred to by its customary acronym of CHIC. The convention in CHIC is to prefix the reference numbers by the symbol #.

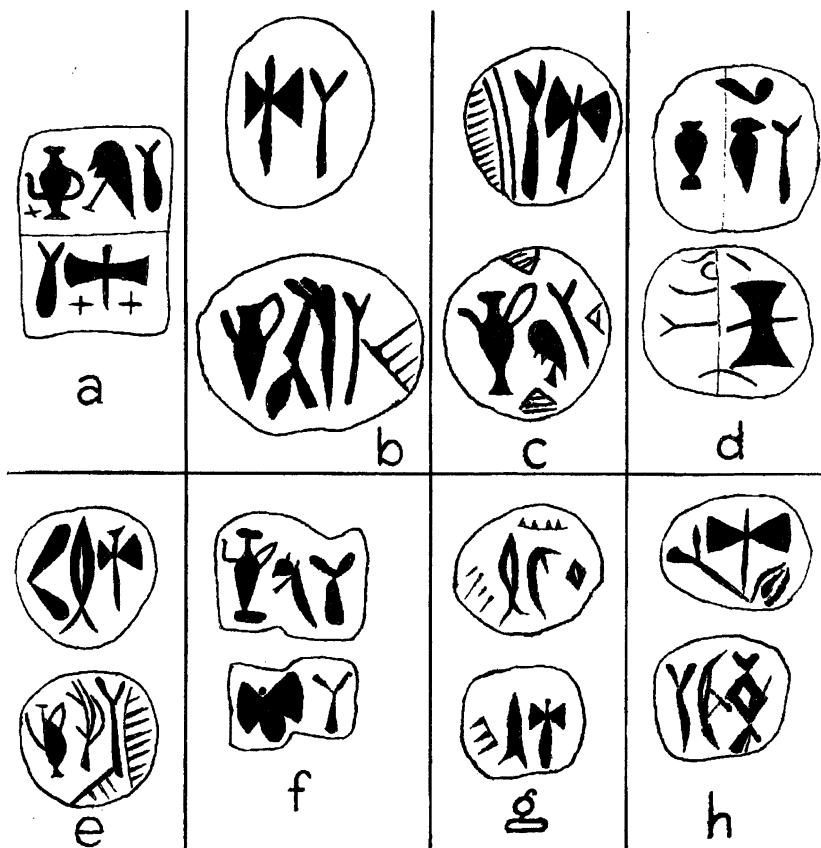


Figure 1

- a. Crete #205
- b. Arkhanes (Phourni) #252
- c. Arkhanes (Phourni) #202
- d. Arkhanes (Phourni) #315

- e. Knossos #203
- f. Gouves Pediados #292
- g. Arkhanes #251
- h. Moni Odigitria #313

All eight examples are drawn in outline as Figure 1. In addition to the “formula” of five signs, it will be noticed that some of the designs include border patterns of hachures or steps, and a “bilobate” figure (♾, Evans No. 139*) on different parts of the field. Grumach, in his study referred to above, discussed the possible significance of these features; but they are not here our concern. There can be no doubt that the final sign is the libation vessel, though in two instances (Fig. 1 g and h) it is simplified into a lozenge pattern.

However, the fourth sign is certainly written in more variable forms than is any of the others. All eight examples are here redrawn in an experimental stylistic sequence in Figure 3. The only feature common to all is the long “tail”. Five show either one or two “beaks”. Four have the leg and foot. The most eccentric case is in Fig. 1 e, Evans’s sign No. 10, ♪ “hand in profile”, where the two side-strokes to the left may be vestiges of the beak and leg of the “bird”, and the three “fingers”, of Evans’s interpretation, a version of the wing.

If these eight designs had occurred in quite different contexts, one would almost certainly not class them together; but, in the corresponding position in this single recurring group, the presumption must be that they are variants of the same sign; and Evans’s sign No. 80, the “seated bird”, seems to fit best the general pattern, and to be the most likely prototype. The corresponding Linear A sign, L 53 𐀓, may be understood as preserving, from left to right, the beak, leg, foot and body of its hieroglyphic ancestor ♪.

At this juncture, it may be worth referring to two further possible examples of the same hieroglyphic sign. CHIC #141, a seal from Knossos (Fig. 2 a), though carrying a very different sign-group, includes a sign which might qualify as a variant of the “seated bird”. The second case (Fig. 2 b) is the seated bird in the middle of the fourth row of signs in CHIC #314, the unique eight-sided seal from Neapolis.

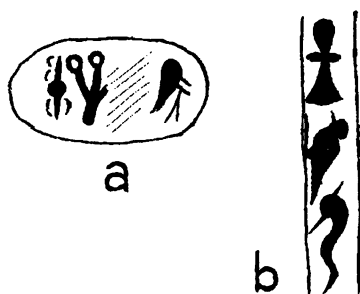


Figure 2

a. Knossos #141



b. Neapolis #314 (fourth side)



Figure 3
Forms of the "Seated Bird" Sign in Figures 1 and 2

In CHIC neither of these two signs is admitted into the sign-list, and each is recorded in the transcription by a mark of exclamation between brackets, the significance of which is explained in CHIC p. 14, 11.6–7. However, it is difficult to understand why at least the bird-sign on the eight-sided seal (Fig. 2 b) should be excluded from the list of signs. Its shape is quite clear, it is certainly not a decoration, nor an ornamental duplicate, nor a "signe explétif"; and the seal on which it appears, more than any other in the entire corpus, is evidently meant to be read continuously as a whole.

For the rest, in CHIC all the eight instances of our fourth sign in the libation formulae are transcribed as the syllabic sign CHIC 095, which is a direct copy of Evans's sign No. 10, "hand in profile". Only the sign in #203 (here Fig. 1 e) however is so identified with certainty, the other seven examples being marked as doubtful.

In conclusion, it is tentatively suggested that Evans's sign No. 10  (the "hand in profile") be deleted, and the example he gives (from seal P 49), together with all the others mentioned in this note, be transferred to the category of his sign No. 80  ("seated bird").