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A Brief Note on the Cretan Hieroglyphic Signs 044 and 056

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Abstract. This paper builds further on the persuasive proposal of Ferrara & Cristiani 2016 that the Cretan Hieroglyphic sign 044  represents a seal of the “Petschaft” type. Drawing a comparison with the better understood Anatolian Hieroglyphic material, it tentatively proposes that on seals this sign may have functioned as a logogram with the meaning ‘seal’, and that the Cretan Hieroglyphic sign 056  may have been used in a similar manner.

Keywords. Cretan Hieroglyphs, Anatolian Hieroglyphs, seals, seal legends.

1. Introduction

The publication of the monumental *Corpus Hieroglyphicarum Inscriptionum Cretae* (hence: CHIC) by Jean-Pierre Olivier and Louis Godart in 1996 was a pivotal milestone for the study of the Cretan Hieroglyphic script, which to this day remains undeciphered.¹ Though the volume was very much welcomed, it also faced criticisms, notably because of the exclusion of signs that were rather arbitrarily classified as “ornamental.” In her new sign classification Anna Margherita Jasink (2009) reinstated no less than 30 signs to the sign list that were omitted by CHIC because of their alleged decorative function.

In the last decade the classification of Cretan-Hieroglyphic signs and the problematic partition between “script” and “art” on Cretan Hieroglyphic seals have enjoyed renewed attention.² In the following, I would like to offer a modest addition to this important debate by discussing the possible

¹ I would like to thank Silvia Ferrara and the anonymous reviewers for their helpful remarks and suggestions. Needless to say, I alone remain responsible for the views expressed here and any errors that may remain.

² See, e.g., Ferrara & Cristiani 2016; Ferrara *et al.* 2016; Decorte 2017; Ferrara *et al.* 2021a; Ferrara & Weingarten 2022. For recent studies about the origins of the Cretan Hieroglyphic script, see Ferrara *et al.* 2021b; 2022.

meaning(s) of the signs CH 044  and 056 . Due to the limited state of knowledge of the Cretan Hieroglyphic script, however, the suggestions presented here remain inevitably speculative.

2. The Cretan Hieroglyphic signs 044 and 056

In 2016, Silvia Ferrara and Diego Cristiani proposed a new reading of the Cretan Hieroglyphic sign no. 044 (, see fig. 1). This sign is frequently attested as the first element of the two most common sign sequences or “formulas” on Cretan Hieroglyphic seals; 044–005 ( ) and 044–049 ( ). These two formulas are mostly also accompanied by other signs, omitted in CHIC because of their supposed ornamental function (cf. Ferrara & Cristiani 2016: 32–33; Decorte 2017: 39). Ferrara and Cristiani make a convincing case that the sign 044  does not represent a “trowel,” but rather a seal of the “Petschaft” type, which is well-attested in the archaeological record (see, e.g., Kenna 1966: 134, no. 103; Yule 1979: 86–87, type 31j, pl. 40; Krzyszkowska 2005: 90–91; Ferrara & Cristiani 2016: 27).³ This identification is appealing from both an iconographic and semantic perspective.

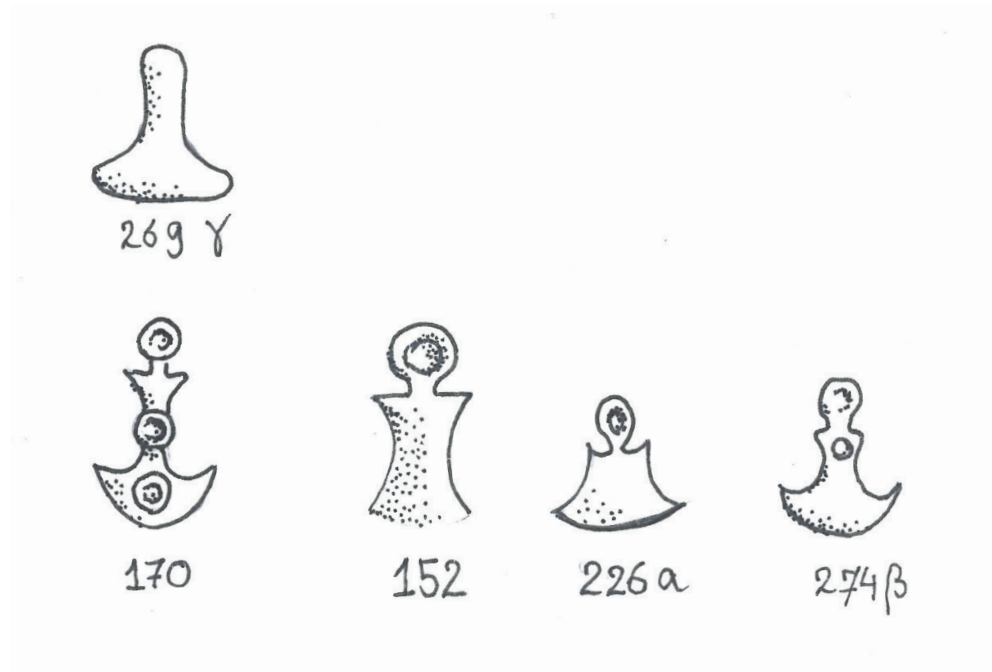


Fig. 1. Cretan Hieroglyphic sign 044 (drawing: Jorrit Kelder after CHIC).

The most recent discussion of the possible meaning(s) of the sign 044  is provided by Silvia Ferrara and Judith Weingarten 2022. Following earlier proposals (e.g., Jasink 2009: 128; Ferrara & Cristiani 2016: 28–30), they argue that the above-mentioned formulas 044–005   and 044–049  , which are interpreted as syllabic writing by CHIC, are in fact to be understood as logographic

3 For the relation between animate and inanimate objects from the natural and human environment and Cretan-Hieroglyphic signs and, see, e.g., Karnava 2015.

writing.⁴ Since the sign 044  is almost always separated in some way from 049  or 005  mostly by the presence of “decorative” signs (cf. Ferrara & Cristiani 2016: 32–33; Decorte 2017: 39), they suggest that the sign sequences should be decoupled and treated as logograms. As for its meaning, they propose that the sign 044  “seems a pan-Cretan way of stamping transactions” and that it “indicates an area of administration or possibly an act of administration of the basic kind” (Ferrara & Weingarten 2022: 117).⁵ As they point out, the combinations 044–005   and 044–049   can appear on different faces of the same seal,⁶ which suggests to them that the seal owner could oversee “both tasks at different times” (Ferrara & Weingarten 2022: 117).

Since it is indeed plausible that the sign 044  is somehow connected to administrative procedures, it is attractive to consider the possibility that the sign 044  on seals is to be read simply as a logogram meaning “seal.” In this interpretation, the other elements might indicate the title and/or perhaps the name of the owner (“Seal of...”). Considering the frequent occurrence of the signs 049  and 005  together with 044 , these signs could represent a common type of title. The multi-faced seals mentioned above, which have both the combinations 044–005   and 044–049   would then be used by more than one individual, or perhaps one individual with different functions and responsibilities. The signs accompanying the formulas 044–005   and 044–049   might represent (part of) the names of the seal owner, or perhaps a further specification of the title.⁷ Whether these signs function as logograms, phonetic complements, fully phonetic spellings, determinatives or a combination hereof, is impossible to establish.⁸ In addition to the fact that the script is not deciphered, the picture is complicated by other factors. Considering the limited available space on seal surfaces, the signs may reflect conventional abbreviations and/or incomplete spellings, and the sign order may have been adjusted to create an aesthetically more pleasing spatial arrangement. Moreover, of course, not all symbols on the seals necessarily always reflect writing.

A comparison with Anatolian seals, which in some respects present similar challenges, may be informative. From the beginning of the second millennium onwards, seals with symbols are attested in Anatolia. If, and to what extent, these symbols can be related to the Anatolian Hieroglyphic

4 Note that Ferrara & Cristiani 2016: 28–30 propose that the sign 044  functions as a syllable when it is an integral part of the two above-mentioned formulas, and as a logogram when the sign is disconnected from the other sign of the formulas by means of decorative fillers, the insertion of additional signs, or rotation.

5 Cf. Ferrara & Cristiani 2016: 33. See also Weingarten 1995: 303 who has suggested that 044–005   and 044–049   refer to two branches of palatial administration.

6 See, e.g., CHIC #247, #253, #255, # 259, #261, #264, #266, #274, #277, #283 (on the same face), #287, #295, #297, #299, #301, #305, #308, #311. In addition, the sign 044  is attested on different faces of CHIC #314, #255, #300, #302, but in combination with other signs.

7 With respect to the attestations of 044  in inscriptions, they could either be read logographically, in the meaning “seal,” or perhaps more metaphorically “approved” or “authorized,” or function as a syllabogram with an unknown phonetic value. For a suggestion of their possible phonetic reading, see n. 20 below.

8 For their possible functions, see also Decorte 2017: 49.

writing system is tied to the much-debated date of the origin of this script. According to some, the Anatolian Hieroglyphs were already in use from the early second millennium onwards, but written on wooden documents that are no longer extant, whereas others date the origin of this script just before or around the first secure examples of phonetic writing, around the fourteenth century BCE.⁹ From the Old Hittite period (ca. 1650–1400 BCE) onwards, three symbols figure prominently on seals: *369  (VITA), *370  (BONUS₂) and *326  (SCRIBA).¹⁰ The meaning and function of these signs, which may occur together or in isolation, is unclear; they are usually taken to represent some kind of “auspicious symbols,” but this is by no means certain.¹¹

A handful of Anatolian seals contain the formula “(This is the) seal of PN (+title),” expressed with the Anatolian Hieroglyphic sign *327 ( SIGILLUM, fig. 2),¹² which would form a nice parallel to the here proposed interpretation of 044  as “seal.”¹³ Needless to say, one should in general be careful to extrapolate too eagerly from (later) parallels from neighboring societies, and in this case there is additional reason for caution. The formula is attested on only a very limited number of seals; the majority of the Anatolian seals and seal impressions feature the name and/or title of the owner, without being preceded by the remark “(This is the) seal of...” Bearing these *caveats* in mind, the use of this formula on Anatolian seals is nonetheless instructive for our interpretation of the Cretan Hieroglyphic seal inscriptions. The small sample at our disposal shows a variety of spellings; the Anatolian Hieroglyphic sign *327 ( SIGILLUM) may function as a logogram without any phonetic complement,¹⁴ it may be accompanied by a phonetic complement (SIGILLUM-*za/i*),¹⁵ or it

9 For the first view, see most recently Waal 2022; for the second view, Van den Hout 2020: 24–34, 120–134, both with references to previous literature. For evidence of phonetic spelling in Anatolian Hieroglyphs already in the late 19th–18th century BCE, see now Poetto 2018.

10 For the problematic dating of the early Hittite seals, see Weeden 2018. The sign numbers of the Anatolian Hieroglyphs are according to Laroche 1960.

11 The sign *369 VITA is supposedly derived from the Egyptian sign *ankh* (cf. recently Weeden 2018: 58), but a closer inspection of the two signs shows that their resemblance is not very strong. The sign *326 SCRIBA is usually taken to refer to the profession “scribe.” However, as remarked by Weeden (2018: 52 n. 1), its co-occurrence with the signs “goodness and “life” make it unlikely that it refers to a scribe, and recently Van den Hout 2020: 341–374 has persuasively demonstrated that this interpretation is indeed no longer tenable.

12 For the identification of this sign as “seal,” see Gelb 1949.

13 The sign *327 SIGILLUM can also function as a syllabogram, representing the phonetic value *sa₅*.

14 See, e.g., the *bullae* found in Khorsabad and Nineveh (see Hawkins 2000: 581–583), and probably BO 21 (see Alp 1950: 49). The sign is further possibly attested on seal impressions on two tablets from Ugarit, RS 17.371+18.20 (see Mora 1987: 247, plate 69) and RS 18.263 (see Schaeffer 1956: 55–57, 63–64, figs. 88–89; Laroche 1956: 157).

15 See, e.g., Gelb seals *a–b* (Hawkins 2000: 580–581), the cylinder seal KH.11.O.65 (see Dinçol *et. al.* 2014) and the cylinder seal Istanbul no. 6948 (see Dinçol & Dinçol 1986: 83).

may function as a determinative, marked by logogram markers 𐀓¹⁶, followed by the Luwian word for “seal” spelled out phonetically (“SIGILLUM” *sa-sa-za*).¹⁷ This eloquently shows how a “standard formula” can be spelled in various ways, and it should not be excluded that similar processes were at play in the Cretan Hieroglyphic seal inscriptions, thus clouding our view.



Fig. 2. Anatolian Hieroglyphic sign 327 (drawing: Jorrit Kelder after Laroche 1960).

On a final, conjectural note, it is of interest that some of the variants of the Anatolian Hieroglyphic sign *327 𐀓 (SIGILLUM) bear a visual resemblance to sign 056 𐀔 (fig. 3) in Cretan Hieroglyphic, which was identified as a “mallet” by Arthur Evans and listed in the category *écriture, musique* by CHIC.¹⁸ Intriguingly, the sign 056 𐀔 sometimes appears to behave in a similar manner as sign 044 𐀓. We find, for instance, the formula 056–049 (𐀔 𐀓), which may be considered a variant of 044–049 (𐀓 𐀓). Of special interest is the inscription CHIC #302a, which consists of the following signs: 057–034–044–049 (𐀓 𐀓 𐀓 𐀓). As observed by John Younger 1998: 399, this appears to be a conflation of the sequence 056–034–057 (𐀔 𐀓 𐀔), which is attested several times,¹⁹ and the well-known formula 044–049 (𐀓 𐀓). In #302a, the sign 056 𐀔 is omitted and replaced by the sign 044 𐀓, which would imply that the signs 044 𐀓 and 056 𐀔 could be used interchangeably.²⁰ There are, however,

16 It would be interesting to explore to what extent some of the symbols which are used to—in the words of Ferrara and Weingarten 2022: 116—formally emphasize sign 044 𐀓 may have served a similar purpose.

17 See Gelb seal c, see Hawkins 2000: 580–581.

18 By comparing these two signs, I am not implying a direct connection between the Cretan and Anatolian hieroglyphic writing systems, or that this sign was somehow borrowed; the resemblance rather results from the fact that similar seal types were used in the Aegean and adjacent Anatolia. As kindly pointed out to me by one of the reviewers, the sign CH 056 𐀔 may represent a cylinder seal, a seal type which does not appear to have been very common in the Aegean. For incidental examples, see, e.g., Pini *et al.* (no. 485) and Krzyszkowska 2005: 55. It is, however, also possible that CH 056 𐀔 is a schematic representation of a generic stamping device.

19 For attestations, see CHIC: 362.

20 John Younger has suggested that the signs 056 𐀔 and 044 𐀓 “have similar phonetic structures.” He sees a morphological resemblance of both signs to the inverted Linear A no. 70 KO, proposing a phonetic reading KO for 044 𐀓 and KU for 056 𐀔 (see <https://people.ku.edu/~jyounger/Hiero/SignNotes.html> s.v. 044 and 056, consulted d.d. 29-04-2023). Note that Weingarten 1995: 301, fig. 7.2 also seems to make a connection between the signs 044 𐀓 and 056 𐀔. The assumption that the signs are to somehow comparable further appears to be confirmed by the fact that the two signs may appear in similar positions on seals, see, e.g., CHIC #260, #283, #295, #297 and #307, but this is by no means always the case.

also instances in which the two signs appear together within the same inscription, which suggests that they are not identical. In one, possibly two, cases we are dealing with two separate inscriptions that were written down on the same surface,²¹ but once they appear to be used within the same inscription in a (relatively) long sign sequence.²² The co-occurrence of the signs 044  and 056  means that scribes were familiar with both and that their use was not mutually exclusive. Though this does not entirely exclude the possibility that 056  also refers to a seal, either as an allograph of 044 or as a distinct sign with a different function, it does make the identification less appealing.²³ The sobering conclusion is that this contribution has raised more questions than it has answered, but, as remarked by Ignace Gelb 1949: 72 when he identified *327 ( SIGILLUM), as the sign for “seal” in Anatolian Hieroglyphs, “such is the fate of scholarship: the more we learn the less we know.”

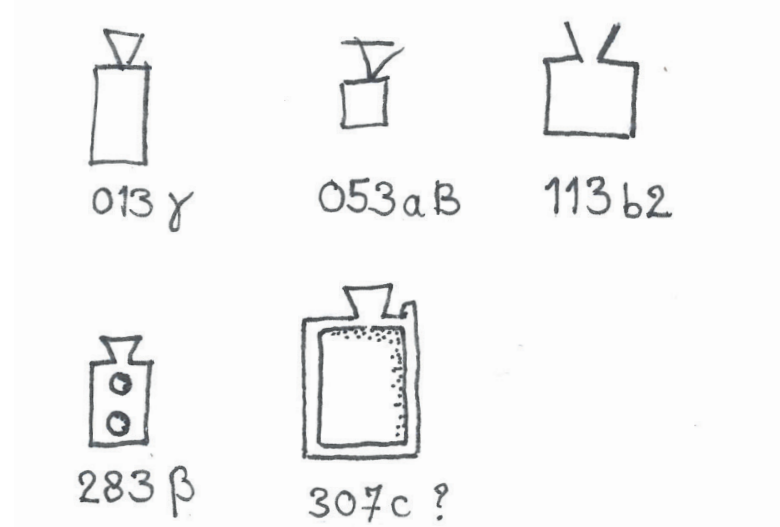


Fig. 3. Cretan Hieroglyphic sign 056 (drawing: Jorrit Kelder after CHIC).

- 21 On CHIC #013, an inscribed clay nodule from Knossos, both the signs 044  and 056  are present. They are, however, clearly separated by means of a straight vertical line and treated as two separate inscriptions by CHIC. On a round steatite seal (CHIC #180), we find the sign combination 044–049–050–056 (iane), together with several “ornamental” signs, which in all probability form part of the inscription. As also suggested by CHIC, the signs may have to be divided into two inscriptions: 044–49   (including several “ornamental” signs and 056–050   (likewise including several “ornamental” signs). Not included here are CHIC #271γ and #056 as the identification of 044  and 056  respectively is uncertain. In addition, the two signs may appear on the same document, but on different sides, such as the nodule #018 and the bars #049 and #056. For their co-appearance on different faces of the same seal, see below n. 23.
- 22 See face β of the four-sided prism made of white steatite CHIC #294, though it cannot be entirely excluded that the sign identified as 050  functions as a divider here. For other examples of seals with more than one “inscription” on a single surface, see, e.g., CHIC #283a.
- 23 If we do accept that 056  refers to a seal, this would mean that CHIC #255, #283, #295 and #297 were used by three different persons, cf. n. 6 above. Further, the seals CHIC #244, #260, #296, #298, #307 and #310 feature 044  and 056  on different faces.

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