

# The Iconography of the Knossos Snake Goddesses Based on Their Gestures, Stances, Movements and Attributes

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**Abstract** *Among the major works of art from Bronze Age Crete, none epitomize the Minoan civilization more than the three faience statuettes, HM 65, HM 64, and HM 63, known as the Snake Goddesses and none have more intriguing gestures, stances, movements, and attributes. With its arm (HM 66) re-restored to HM 64, it and HM 63 thrust their arms forward on a downward diagonal with elbows locked and snakes virtually identical. New evidence is given for HM 64 holding a single snake with its head in one hand and tail in the other, echoing the gesture of HM 63.*

*The only parallel for snake handlers appears on an Egyptian statuette of Beset (protector of pregnant women, childbirth and babies), with moveable arms holding two snakes, one in each hand. This differs from HM 63 and HM 64, where each holds a single snake. Nevertheless, since Beset appears in Crete already in MM II, it is possible that HM 63 and HM 64 adopted and adapted her snake attributes and iconography. I further suggest that they are possibly the Minoan precursors of Eileithyia, the historical goddess of childbirth who appears at Knossos in Linear B as e-re-u-ti-ja of Amnissos, the cave where she was worshipped from Neolithic through Classical times.*

*The smaller statuette, HM 65, gestures differently. With upper arms stretched at shoulder level to the sides and forearms raised upward holding snakes(?), she gestures as a Mistress of Plants and Animals. Evans' snake reconstructions on HM 65 have been questioned and this study considers their pros and cons. Evidence is put forth for her having hairlocks in front of her ears. It argues for the dismissal of her modern crown as well as a suggestion for its prototype. The study considers previous scholars' alternative suggestions for the snakes including a rope and carries that through with a reconstruction of the figure including a suggestion for its headdress.*

## Introduction

Among the major works of art from Bronze Age Crete, none epitomize the Minoan civilization more than the three faience statuettes found in the Temple Repositories at Knossos, known as the Snake Goddesses, and none have more intriguing gestures, movements, attributes and, above all, questions (Fig. 1). All three, referred to here with their Heraklion Museum accession numbers, HM 65, HM 63 and HM 64, have hourglass figures and erect stances with swayed backs and exposed and pronounced breasts. The two large figurines, HM 63, and HM 64, the latter recently reconstructed with the arm of HM 66 (Jones 2016, 104–109, fig. 8.14), thrust their arms forward on a downward diagonal with elbows locked. The smaller figurine, HM 65, that Evans considered a votary, gestures somewhat as a Mistress of Plants and Animals, but with upper arms stretched at shoulder level to the sides and forearms raised upward. Their gestures, comportment and snake attributes are unique in MM III B, ca. 1640/1630–1600.

## Statuette HM 63

HM 63 was found without its left arm beneath the sleeve and without its skirt which were reconstructed by Arthur Evans and recently re-evaluated (Jones 2016, 96–105). Most important for our topic, however, is the gesture of her forward thrusting arm with its slithering snake. Evans



Fig. 1: Faience statuettes from Knossos: front views of HM 65, HM 63, and HM 64 (courtesy Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports; photo of HM 64 by Ch. Papanikolopoulos, INSTAP-SCEC).

described the figure as having three snakes that I have colored for clarity (Jones 2016, fig. 8.6): the red one, with head (restored) at the top of her headdress moves down her bosom and wraps its tail around her abdomen. The blue one coils its tail around her right ear, moves down her chest and winds its head around her abdomen. The purple one is the most important to us. Evans (1921, 501), described it as follows “The head ... she holds out in her right hand, its body follows the arm upwards, then descends behind the shoulders, and ascends again to the left arm, which held the tail.” Although we give Evans the benefit of the doubt, we must remember that the figure’s right arm below the sleeve was missing and is restored. Also missing at the figure’s back was the part of the purple snake below the waist that he restored as one continuous curve. Thus, she holds the head of a snake in her right hand and its tail in her left. The snake follows the forward thrust of the arm with its head lying at her fingertips.

#### Statuette HM 64

Statuette HM 64 is comprised of a well-preserved skirt with the lower part of a striped bodice and a disassociated arm, HM 66, that Evans attributed to it, based on its size (Figs. 1 right and 2; Evans 1902/3, 79–80, 92, fig. 63; also Panagiotaki 1993, 58–89, fig. B; 2:c above). I had reconstructed it digitally, to scale, based on the size and shape of that of the upper part of HM 63 and the similar striped motif on the bodice of HM 65 (Jones 2016, 104–109, fig. 8.14). Preserved from the sleeve edge to the fingers, the arm is virtually identical to that of HM 63 in its outstretched position with locked elbow and slithering snake (Fig. 2). A bit less curvy, the snake is preserved from the sleeve band to the hand where it lies across the knuckles of the figurine’s clenched hand. Evans (1902/3, 79–80), described the arm as having, “the tail section of a

spotted snake curving along it. The end of this is held in the clenched hand and a bracelet is visible about the wrist.” Later, Marina Panagiotaki (1999, 98–101) described it as “the snake’s head passes into the oddly truncated hand, which is partly closed with only the thumb properly distinguishable.” Based on her description and the fact that there are no snakes indicated on the preserved part of her bodice and the belt both in front and back, I restored the snake as continuing over her shoulder to her back and ending at the break at the sleeve band. I restored the other arm as a mirror image, resulting in the figure holding two snakes with heads in fists (Jones 2016, 108, fig. 8.14).

While focusing on gestures for this paper, I took a closer look at the knuckles and snake of HM 66 (Fig. 2). I realized then with Evans, that there is no discernible snake’s head there, in contrast to what Panagiotaki suggested. The tail of the snake simply lies across her knuckles at front, around the side and ends at the back.

This important observation of the snake’s tail in the preserved left hand of HM 64 necessitated a new reconstruction of HM 64’s right hand to hold the snake’s head and to have her hold one snake instead of two. As it turns out the same situation existed with HM 63 with her purple-colored snake, albeit their opposite arms are preserved. Thus, the right arm of HM 63 is preserved with the snake’s head whereas the left arm with the tail of the snake is preserved on HM 64. HM 63’s preserved right hand holds the head of a snake whose body winds over her shoulder and down her back to rise up on the other shoulder over to her left sleeve. Evans reconstructed HM 63’s missing left arm and hand to hold its tail in front and its body at back to curve around her buttocks. In order to reconstruct HM 64’s snakes, I based her snake’s head and hand on the preserved one of HM 63 and followed its body around her shoulders to the back. I performed two experiments to deal with the snake at her back. Experiment 1 follows the snake at the back



Fig. 2: Faience left arm from Knossos, HM 66 (photos by Ch. Papanikolopoulos, courtesy INSTAP-SCEC and Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Hellenistic Ministry of Culture and Sports).



Fig. 3: Digital reconstructions of upper parts of faience statuette from Knossos, HM 64 with HM 66, front (a), back (b) and side (c) views by C. Mao and B. Jones (photos by Ch. Papanikolopoulos; courtesy INSTAP-SCEC and Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports).

Fig. 4: Digital reconstructions of upper parts of faience statuette from Knossos, HM 64 with HM 66, front (a), back (b) and side (c) views by C. Mao and B. Jones (photos by Ch. Papanikolopoulos; courtesy INSTAP-SCEC and Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports).





Fig. 5: Cretan cat snake, *Telescopus fallax* (after Sakoulis 2008, 31).

*Fallax*), that is marked with the same mottled spots (Fig. 5; Sakoulis 2008, 31). It is the only Cretan snake with venom although the poison, effective on small creatures and lizards, is too weak to significantly affect humans. Nevertheless, the intensity of the stance of the figures, the wide-eyed gaze inherent in the preserved right eye of HM 63, their locked arms, outstretched in front of them with snakes pointed forward surely are not weak, neutral gestures. Lacking parallels in the Aegean and Near East for earlier or contemporary snake wielding figures, we turn to Egypt where snakes are ubiquitous, particularly the cobra, frequently portrayed on headgear as on the diadem of Princess Sit-Hathor-Yunet, daughter of Sesostris II (Aldred 1971, pl. 20; on the Uraeus see Johnson 1990, 5–28). Evans had already connected the restored snake head on HM 63 with the Uraeus on the heads of Egyptian divinities and regarded the Snake Goddesses as taken over from the service of Hathor. He further connected them with the cave of the Goddess of

of HM 63 but curves the snake across the small of HM 64's back, under her long hair, because there are no snakes indicated on her preserved belt and skirt (Fig. 3). Experiment 2 offers an alternative at the back by having the snake move across her shoulders and over her hair (Fig. 4). Thus, the gestures of statuettes HM 63 and HM 64 are virtually identical. Both figures gesture with snakes coiled around arms pointing diagonally forward.

A close look at the snakes on HM 63 and arm HM 66 (restored to HM 64) reveals the same mottled spotted markings that indicate the same species of snake. Luckily, the species is easily found, even close to Knossos today, namely the Cretan cat snake (*Telescopus fallax*). He concluded that the faience figurines' snakes associated them with a chthonic cult (Evans 1902/3, 84–88; 1921, 500).

The rearing Egyptian cobra is a female divine force with powers against the enemies of the pharaoh and malevolent demons (Weingarten 2015, 187). It is in the Middle Kingdom that well over twenty images of a figure labeled ('s3w'), "the one who protects", appear (Wegner 2009, fig. 10; Weingarten 2015, 183, fig. 2a). She is identified as Beset the female counterpart of Bes. Among the finest representations of the Egyptian lioness demon Beset, is the wooden one with moveable arms that hold a bronze cobra in each hand with tail facing backward and head forward (Fig. 6; Quibell 1898, 3, pl. III, no. 12). The 13<sup>th</sup> Dynasty statuette was discovered along with a magician's box in a shaft beneath the storeroom at the Ramesseum at Thebes, near the reign of Sobekhotep III dated either 1740 or 1700 BC. In the box was a papyrus with a medical magical text with a collection of spells connected with



Fig. 6: Wooden statuette of Beset, MM 1790, from Thebes. Views of front, front with arms raised digitally by author, and rear (credit Manchester Museum, University of Manchester).

pregnancy, childbirth and the protection of young children, all part of the role of Beset (Quibell 1898, 3, pl. III, no. 12; Weingarten 2015, 185 with bibliography). Beset and her snakes are the only parallels for our faience figurines, although they differ in that HM 63 and HM 64 hold only one snake in their hands.

Beset's arrival on Crete was documented in 2015 by Judith Weingarten who discovered a Minoanized Beset on contemporary MM II seals from Petras and Malia with humanoid faces and lion ears (Weingarten 2015, 189–192, figs. 1 and 5). Dated by Weingarten to the end of MM II B (ca. 1700–1650 BCE), the Petras example wears a short skirt covering her abdomen. Weingarten identified a snake's head at her left armpit with its body descending below it. The Malia example, dated earlier in MM II, squats in the universal birth-giving position on one side of the prism seal, another side depicts a lion or dog), and the third side portrays her snakes flanking a pithos as if protecting its contents. Both have their arms upraised in the Mistress of Animals gesture, although here with their frontal pose, Weingarten rightly emphasized, they are apotropaic.

Weingarten further pointed out the greater apotropaic effect of the raising of the movable arms of the wooden Beset in front of her in protection with the head of the snake in front. Although Weingarten correctly notes that the Middle Minoan “naked frontal female demon leaves no enduring mark on Minoan art or cult”, and wonders whether the Temple Repository figurines “hark back to the snake – handling skills of imported Beset?” (Weingarten 2015, 193, n. 13; see also Witcombe 2000 who already likened the moveable arms of Beset with the gestures of the Minoan snake goddesses).

In answer to this, I would like to suggest that since the Minoans already had their own goddess of childbirth, historical Eileithyia, who had a cave at Amnissos since the Neolithic period (*Odyssey* XIX, 188; Nilsson 1950, 518, n. 36), and another at Inatos dated to before 2000 BC (Kanta and Davaras 2011), she took precedence over images of the imported demon Beset. Indeed, it is not until the 7<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> century BC that faience figurines of the Egyptian god Bes, the male equivalent of Beset appear in the cave at Inatos (Kanta and Davaras 2011, 179). Thus, I propose that we consider that the Minoan ancestor of Eileithyia may have adopted Beset's apotropaic snakes and may be alluded to in faience figurines HM 64 and 63 from Knossos.

Further, on a Linear B tablet dated to LM IIIA from Knossos, KN Od (2) 714, 715, a Mycenaean scribe recorded wool offerings to *e-re-u-ti-ja* of Amnissos, the Cretan cave where she was worshipped from Neolithic through Classical times (Fig. 13; Chadwick et al. 1986, 271–272; Boloti 2018, 89–90, fig. 3, 98, n. 5, Hiller 1992, 40, 49–50). This was one of four tablets listing *e-re-u-ti-ja*. Tablet KN 206=Gg705 shows her as the recipient of a jar of honey at Amnissos (Hiller 1992, 49–50; Rougement 2005, 332, 365–366; Weilhartner, 2005, 100–102, 183; Ventris and Chadwick 1973, 127, 310). John Killen interpreted the wool as an expression of gratitude of female weavers to Eileithyia, the historical goddess of childbirth, for successful delivery in childbirth (Killen 1964, 1–15; Boloti 2018, 98, n. 5; Weilhartner 2005, 64, n. 136). Is it indeed possible then, that the Mycenaeans at Knossos adopted the Minoan name of the goddess and that the snake wielding figurines from Knossos were indeed *e-re-u-ti-ja*, the Minoan goddess of childbirth? Walter Burkert (1985, 26) believes that Eileithyia was at least a partial continuity from Minoan to Greek. Pausanias (6.19.2), in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, documents the cult of Eileithyia throughout the Greek world including the sanctuary of Olympian Eileithyia in Elis. There, her infant son Sosipolis, who turned into a snake and frightened off the Arcadian army is worshipped as savior of the state. Although it is a very far cry from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD to the Minoan figurines, Andras Zeke (2010) finds it tempting to connect the two and believes that the association of snakes with childbirth seems a genuinely Minoan concept. But, as we have seen, it was initially an Egyptian concept with Beset who arrived with her snakes on Crete, where I propose that they were adopted by the Minoan goddess of childbirth.

I believe that if there are threads that connect Olympian Eileithyia to the Minoan goddess, one, of course, is that both are the goddess of childbirth, another of equal importance, especially for our topic is that Eileithyia's snake/son at Olympia was apotropaic, that he warded off her ene-

mies, the Arcadian army. This goes hand in hand, as it were, with the apotropaic nature and gestures of our Minoan figurines as the goddess *e-re-u-ti-ja* who, I propose, thrusts the heads of the serpents forward to spit their venom and odorous fluid at the evil demons that threaten pregnant women and newborns.

### Statuette HM 65

When we turn to statuette HM 65, we are confronted with a multitude of problems. Although also made of faience and proportionately similar to HM 64 and HM 63, it is much different. By contrast, it is around one third smaller, it wears a flounced skirt, and its gesture with forearms extended laterally, elbows bent and forearms raised is that of a Mistress of Plants and Animals. In its preserved right hand it holds part of a curved object decorated in a spiraling stripe that Evans restored as a snake. In the case of this figure it is essential to include its attribute and headdress under the aegis of gesture. We begin by reviewing its preservation and the stages in which Evans published its reconstruction.

### History of Evans' Publication of HM 65

Fig. 7 illustrates its earliest publication at the top row, A–B (Evans 1902/3, figs. 56, 83); to its next publication 18 years later in the center row, C–F (Evans 1921, figs. 360, 377, 362); to its final publication, 9 years later, at the bottom row, G (Evans 1930, fig. 306). The statuette was found with its body largely preserved wearing a flounced skirt costume and holding a curved object above the wrist in its raised right hand. The figure was missing its head, missing its left forearm and missing the lower part of the object under its right wrist. When first published (Fig. 7 A–B), Evans interpreted the curved object preserved in its right hand as a snake's tail and already created the front of a snake beneath her wrist. It is only in the drawing (Fig. 7 E–F) that

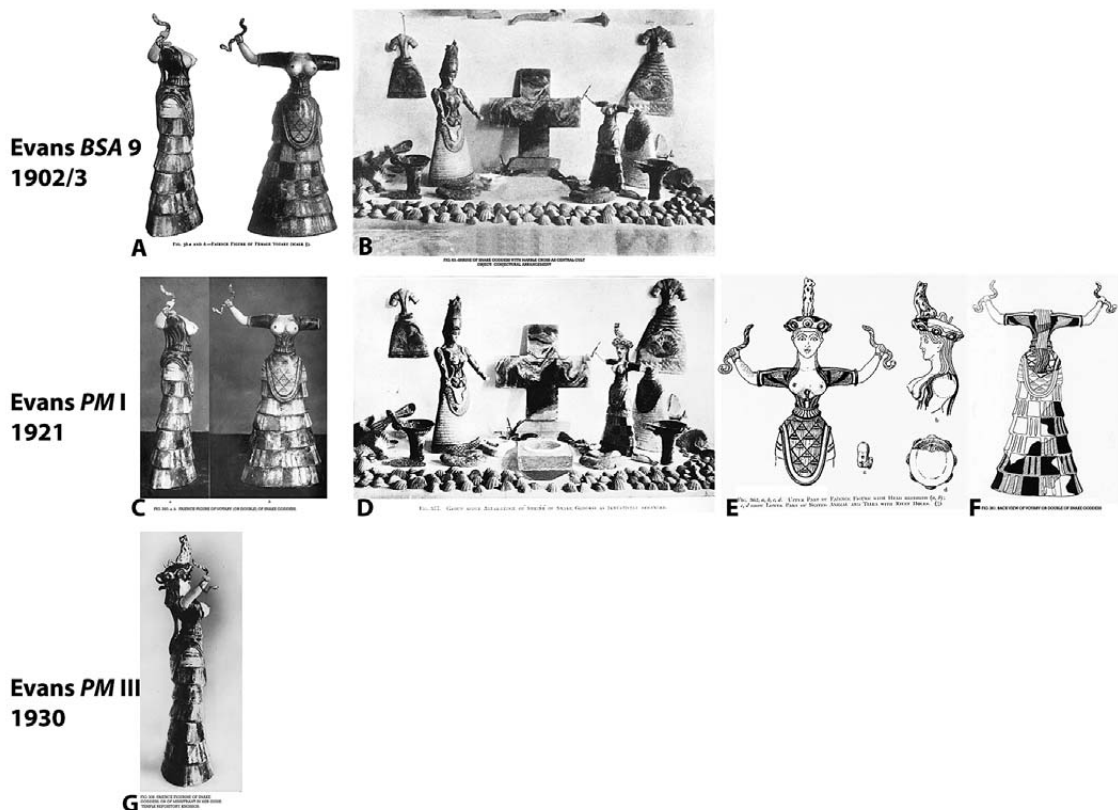


Fig. 7: Chronological publications of statuette HM 65 by A. Evans (after Evans 1902/3, figs. 56, 63; 1921, figs. 360, 377, 362, 361; 1930, fig. 306).



Evans drew the missing parts in lighter lines. The drawing of the back view of the figurine also reveals that the figure had long hair (Fig. 7 F). Some clarifications of Evans' reconstructions are given in the radiography published by Walter Müller (2003, pl. XXXV a–b). It clearly reveals the wires that Evans used to restore the figure's left forearm with its snake and the front of the "snake" held in her right wrist. The only authentic element is the curved striped one above the right hand that Evans interpreted as the tail of a snake. The radiography however, is unable to distinguish ancient faience from modern plaster so the modern head is indistinguishable from the ancient torso as is the curved snake tail in the figure's right hand.

### Headdress

Because the feline atop the crown is omitted in the radiography and not discussed by Müller, I would like to take this opportunity to evaluate the headdress, which as Diane Boze (2016, 18) correctly observed, "should receive more scrutiny and scepticism than it usually does". I have thus gathered Evans' descriptions of the headgear in chronological order:

- a) Evans 1902/3, 78: "The ... Votary had unfortunately lost its head, and it is doubtful whether it was surmounted by a tiara like the Goddess." (Fig. 7 A–B)
- b) Evans 1921, 503–504: "This votary ... in its headless state, was eventually found capable of complete restoration. Part of a headpiece had already been brought into connexion with it, showing a series of raised medallions, forming perhaps a conventional rendering of an original crown of roses. A small circular rivet hole on the flat upper surface of this (see fig. 362 d [here Fig. 7 E.d]) was further found to answer to a similar feature on the base of a miniature lioness or spotted pard from the same Repository<sup>1</sup> suggesting the almost certain restoration seen in fig. 362 a–b [here Fig. 7 E]."
- c) Undated notes, obviously after 1903: "Bagge restores with other snake on missing arm & tiara on head" (Panagiotaki 1993, 56–57).
- d) Evans 1930, 440: "... the faience statuette – from the Temple Repository at Knossos, here for the first time reproduced in Fig. 306 as fully restored, with the pard seated on the crown of the head."

In sum, headless in its earliest publication (Fig. 7 A–B), the figure's headdress creation is first published a full nineteen years later (Fig. 7 C–E). At that time, Evans attributed the reconstructions to Halvor Bagge, the creator of the snake front and said that the feline was found in the Temple Repository and that a headpiece fragment was brought into connection with it. The vague description does not even mention its material. Was it faience? The curved fragment with three medal-



Fig. 8: Faience statuette, HM 65, from Knossos altered by author (courtesy Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports).

<sup>1</sup> "This observation was first made by the artist, Mr. Halvor Bagge, to whom the restored drawing in Fig. 362 is due." See Fig. 7 E for Bagge's drawing. Evans 1921, 518, Fig. 377 [Fig. 7 D]), also published a photo of the recreated head and snake head in a montage of the Temple Repository finds.

Except for the additions of the Votary's head and snake and object in front of the cross, the photo is virtually identical, even to the shadows, with the one published in Evans 1903, 92, Fig. 63 (Fig. 7 B).



Fig. 9: (A) Terracotta head from Petsophas, HM 4842; (B) head of statuette HM 65 from Knossos, detail (photos by Ch. Papanikolopoulos; courtesy INSTAP-SCEC and Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports).

lions in front and a dowel hole as seen in the drawing (Fig. 7 E, b–d), is interpreted as the front of a crown with the rest recreated. The feline was said to fit directly into it. Bagge’s 1921 drawing shows a wavy tail on the feline, missing in the 1921 photo at center (Fig. 7 D) but present in the 1930 photo in the bottom row (Fig. 7 G). There is no tail today. Because neither the head-piece fragment nor the feline was mentioned by Evans or Duncan Mackenzie in their earlier notes and descriptions of the finds from the Temple Repositories (Mackenzie 1903), both are highly suspect, and were thus removed (Fig. 8).

I would like, however, to propose a possible prototype for Evans’ headdress. A terracotta head from Petsophas, published by John Myers in the same *BSA* volume as Evans’s publication of HM 65 (Myers 1902/3, pl. XI, top row second from left; Evans 1902/3, fig. 56), was likely known to Evans. With its brim decorated with roundels, the Petsophas crown (Fig. 9 A) bears a striking resemblance to Evans’ headdress (Fig. 9 B). The Petsophas example interestingly has three roundels decorating the front, one at the center with two flanking it, none at the back. Evans’ so-called preserved crown fragment has three similar roundels in the front, one at the center with two flanking it. The rest he added and illustrated with lighter lines as additions (Fig. 7 E). The Petsophas crown, moreover, has a crudely carved object at its top thought to be a plume by Myers (1902/3, 371–372) and a handle by Bogdan Rutkowski (1991, 89). Whether Evans interpreted it as a couchant animal that led to his feline invention we will never know.

### Hairlocks

Careful scrutiny of the figure shows thick raised stripe-like elements next to the thin slightly raised stripes at the front edges of her bodice (Fig. 10 A marked with X). These are differentiated from the flat stripes that pattern her bodice. They are identifiable as the lower part of hairlocks that were in front of her ears, similar to those on the Dancing Girl Fresco from Knossos (Jones 2015, fig. 6.28). Thus, I have added them in front of the ears of the figure’s modern head and connected them to where they lie preserved on her bodice (Fig. 10 B). These and the long tresses at her back that descend to her buttocks (Fig. 7 F), must have emanated from hair on top of her head which I have restored (Fig. 8).





Fig. 10. (A) Right and left side views of the upper parts of statuette HM 65 with hairlocks marked with X and arrows pointing to a repair/break. (B) right and left side views of the upper parts of statuette HM 65 with hairlocks in front of ears restored by B. Jones (photos by Ch. Papanikolopoulos; courtesy INSTAP-SCEC and Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports).

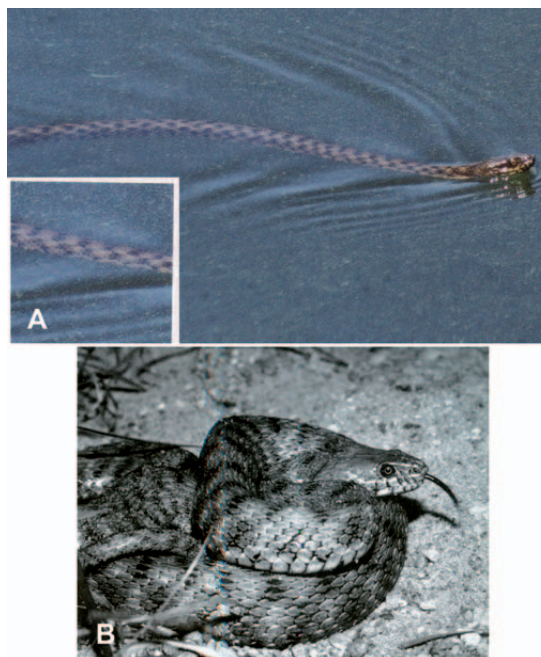


Fig. 11: Dice snake (*Natrix tessellate*). (A) after Sakoulis 2008, 30; (B) after Mattison 1992, pl. 85.

## Attributes

### Snake

Evans interpreted the curved object with spiraling stripes held above the figure's right fist as the tail part of a snake and added below the fist its extended body and head, thus creating a creature held upside down (Fig. 10; Jones 2016, 94). This is opposite from the usual depictions of animals held upright by Mistresses of Animals and Plants (Jones 2016, 95–96). Close inspection of the object reveals what looks like a break just above the curve (Fig. 10 A, marked with arrows). The surface from the hand to the 'break' is rough, whereas it is smooth above the 'break' to the rounded tip. One therefore wonders whether the smooth 'tail' was also created by Evans, prompting me to 'ghost' it in my reconstruction (Fig. 8).

Nevertheless, if HM 65's attributes are striped snakes, to what species do they belong? The dice snake (*Natrix tessellate*) is indigenous to Crete and although it has checkerboard markings, when it is seen from above it somewhat resembles the bands on HM 65 (Fig. 11 A: Sakoulis 2008, 30; Fig. 11 B: Mattison 1992, 153, pl. 85). It is, by no means, a perfect parallel as the Cretan cat snake (*Telescopus Fallax*) is to HM 63 and HM 64.

The Egyptian banded cobra (*Naja Annulifera*) comes to mind in association with Beset but that snake is indigenous to Southern Africa ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snouted\\_cobra](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snouted_cobra)), not Egypt where the cobras are not banded, and thus unlikely to have reached Crete. Thinking that the 'snake' of HM 65 has a "paddle-shaped tail", Anne Chapin and Marie Pareja (2020, 219) have compared it with the bands and paddle-tails of the yellow-lipped sea krait (*Laticauda Colubrina*) and Persian Gulf sea snake (*Hydrophis Lapemoides*). However, their habitats are even much further afield in the Indian and Western Pacific Ocean, and, as the authors admit, would be "an intrepid traveler" that found "its way to the Aegean as an exotic import."



Fig. 12: Sealing from Ugarit, R. S. 9.889 (after Schaeffer 1983, 37).



Fig. 13: Gold finial on silver pin from Shaft Grave III, Mycenae (courtesy National Archaeological Museum, Athens).

Despite all of these problems, there is no way of dismissing the possibility of Evans' snake attribution. Although HM 65's "striped snakes" have no contemporary parallels, conjectured prototypes appear on an EM II figurine from Koumasa (Jones 2015, 14), and two striped snake successors slither on an LH III C anthropomorphic ring rhyton from Tiryns with Minoan prototypes, one from Myrsini-Aspropilia possibly also having a striped snake (Kardamaki et al., 2023, 211, 215). If she wielded snakes, HM 65 would presumably share the iconography of HM 63 and HM 64/HM 66 discussed above.

#### *Rope and other possibilities*

MacGillivray (2000, 223) was the first to question Evans' identification of the striped element as a snake's tail, noting that "no natural snake has peppermint stripes, which should have been well known to Evans, who had played with the reptiles since childhood." He suggested that the figure "held a curling length of twine in her right hand." Lapatin (2002, 62, 87) followed, calling it the head of a "snake" with "candy cane" stripes or grain or necklaces. Dated later and lacking stripes, they are unrelated. Although similarly curved, the king's attribute on a Ugaritic seal (Fig. 12; Schaeffer 1983, 35, 37) lacks stripes and is thus discarded.

Bonney followed MacGillivray's suggestion of rope or cord. She suggested that HM 65's prototype is the U-shaped rope-like object held by the Old Syrian naked goddess that is usually interpreted as a cloak or skirt-lifting gesture meant to expose her sexuality (Bonney 2011, 180, fig. 10 right; Winter 1983, fig. 271). Bonney concurred with early writers who believed that the Syrian naked goddess's U-shaped garment border survived in the double U-shaped object held by the gold female figurine finial on a silver hairpin from Shaft Grave III at Mycenae (hereafter SG finial goddess), dated LH I (Fig. 13: Karo 1930, 54–55, pl. XXX), but became thereon a "ritual decoration" that "lost its meaning" and "represents nothing" (Bonney 2011, 180–181; Holland 1929, 195–196). Bonney stated, "The Votary also likely held 'something like a rope' or a garland, because the artisan, like the goldsmith who made the pin, modified the motif of the goddess opening her skirt. Since Cretan women are never depicted nude, the artist could have felt compelled to clothe the figure completely, thereby obscuring the source for the image" (Bonney 2011, 180–181).

These arguments are untenable for the following reasons. One is that the meaning of any work of art is never lost to the artist. It can and very often is, however, lost to those looking

back through millennia and vast space. Another is that although both the nude Old Syrian goddess and the SG finial goddess gesture with arms extended holding curved tubular objects, their narratives and objects are completely different. The nude old Syrian goddess exposes the front of her body by opening her skirt, indicated by tubular borders, as she holds its corners in her hands so that its upper and/or lower borders curve behind her (Winter 1983, 272–283, figs. 268–295 and more naturalistic renderings on figs. 273 and 297). By contrast, the SG finial goddess is clothed, and her hands overlap the tapered ends of a double tubular object that curves in front of her.

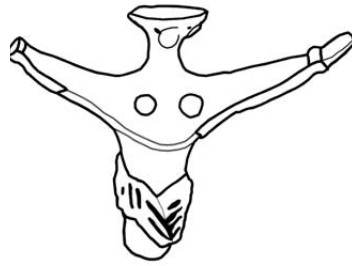


Fig. 14. Terracotta female figurine from Vrysinas, Rethymnon Museum no. 26 (drawing by author).



Fig. 15: Faience statuette from Knossos, HM 65, altered by author (courtesy Heraklion Archaeological Museum, Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports).

Although I had previously doubted the rope theory (Jones 2016, 96), an unpublished MM II terracotta female statuette, kindly brought to my attention by Robert Koehl and excavated by Iris Tzachili from the peak sanctuary of Vrysinas, Rethymnon Museum no. 24, provides new evidence that allows us to reconsider Bonney's suggestion that connects HM 65's gesture and attribute with that of the SG finial goddess. With the kind permission of Dr. Tzachili, I describe the statuette as follows and await its full publication and photo, forthcoming in the Vrysinas volumes (Fig. 14). The upper part of the once standing figure is preserved from its flat cap to its wide belt, decorated with diagonal incisions with its right side overlapping its left, a slight part of an underlying skirt and a tenon that would have fit into its otherwise missing skirt. Two round pellets mark its breasts and there is no indication of an upper garment. A blob nose, hollowed eyes, and a flat pellet left ear, mark its features. Both arms and left hand are fully outstretched laterally and slightly raised, spanning a width of 8 cm. With its missing right hand, presumably also extended laterally, it would have reached a span of 8.5 cm. A raised bracelet decorates each wrist. The figure's height from cap to tenon is 5.7 cm and the museum estimates its original height at ca. 8.5 cm, making it among the largest statuettes from the site. Most important for our topic, however, is the undecorated raised tubular object that extends across the figure in a crescent-shaped curve from one hand to the other, a prototype for that of the SG finial goddess and possibly for HM 65. The object abuts and follows the curves of the figure from one hand to the other except for a missing part, curved across and beneath the breasts, indicated by a white u-shaped stripe. The raised part extends from over the bracelets to below the armpit at the torso on the figure's left side and to the elbow area on its right. The white curved stripe marks the line across the chest where the object once was. Although the raised part is not preserved beyond the bracelet, a line that extends to the end of the figure's left hand suggests that it once existed there. Nevertheless, it provides a fine, albeit single prototype for the double tubular object held with overlapping hands by the SG finial goddess. It also offers some degree of confidence for something similar held by HM 65, although clenched in her hands. Thus, to envision the possibility of HM 65 holding a single object, I have reconstructed it accordingly and ghosted the ques-





*Fig. 16. The left sphinx of the Sphinx Gate, Hattusa, Turkey, detail (photo by Bernard Gagnon, CC BY-SA 3.0, via Wikimedia Commons: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sphinx\\_Gate,\\_Hattusa\\_03.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sphinx_Gate,_Hattusa_03.jpg)).*

Gawass were made of papyrus so strong that they were used in ship building (Borojevic and Mountain 2011, 131–141). Thus, I would like to suggest that she holds a double rope made of papyrus. In this reading, the SG finial goddess with her papyrus headdress holding papyrus ropes compares well with other vegetation goddesses such as the one from Xeste 3, Thera who holds saffron and is seated in a field of saffron crocuses, and the goddess on the Mochlos pyxis who is seated by an olive tree and appears to hold an olive branch as I have argued (Jones 2023, 484).

Furthermore, if HM 65's attribute was a rope that echoed both the Vrysinas figurine and those of the SG finial goddess we should consider their corresponding headdresses for HM 65. If, on the one hand, she follows the Vrysinas figurine, HM 65 could have worn a flat cap, which brings us back to Evans' recreated headdress, possibly dependent on the one from Petsotas (Fig. 9). If, on the other hand, she wore a papyrus/volute headdress as the SG finial goddess, we might consider that she wore a similar crown, simplified here with only three vertical papyrus stalks emerging from the volutes, although lateral ones are also possible (Fig. 15). The Ugaritic goddess, already likened in her flounced garment to that of the SG finial goddess and to HM 65, also shares a volute attribute in the stylized tree in front of her. The volute crown also appears a bit later, on the Sphinx from Bogazköy (Fig. 16; Orthmann 1975, pl. 338a, c. 1400–1200).

tionable tip of the object (Fig. 15). Buttrussing this evidence is that the surface of HM 65's apron was broken and repaired, missing its cross-hatched decoration, exactly where the tubular object lands (Figs. 8, 15), suggesting that it was broken away from it.

That the SG finial goddess and HM 65 shared a similar attribute would be fitting since they have everything in common except for the apron. They are proportionately similar and take the same upright stance. They wear the same Minoan heanos and flounced skirt costume. Both skirts have seven flounces. They, alone in the Aegean, wear flounces decorated with the distinct "metope and triglyph" pattern, that is, alternating triple striped and plain blocks of cloth (Jones 2015, 168–171). The pattern, particular to Syrian deities as the goddess on an old Syrian seal from Ugarit, c. 1900–1750 (Fig. 12; Schaeffer 1983, 34–37) and the god on an Old Syrian seal (Jones 2015, fig. 5.21a–b), was ultimately adopted by the Minoans and identify the wearers as divinities or priestesses. Both have hair cascading down their backs reminiscent of Mesopotamian coiffures (Babcock and Tamur 2022, 170–173, 219). Both gesture with arms outstretched laterally from the shoulders. Most important for our topic are their comparable attributes, tubular with similar designs: stripes painted on HM 65 and incised on the pin figure.

What these attributes are remains a mystery. Tzachili believes that the Vrysinas object is a snake while her collaborators interpret it as a belt (Pers. comm. 23 Sept. 2023). Without its ends preserved however, its identity remains an open question. The SG finial goddess's attribute has been interpreted by Karo as a double chain or garland (Karo 1930, 54–55, pl. XXX). With its tapered tips, it is clearly not a snake. Because her headdress that comprises papyrus plants sprouting from volutes appears to mark her as a vegetation goddess, we might consider that her double attribute is related to papyrus. Indeed, recent evidence proves that ropes from the 12th dynasty "Rope Cave" at Mersa/Wadi

## Conclusion

In sum, the paper provides new evidence that the gesture and attribute of statuettes HM 64/HM 66 and HM 63 are the same: both hold a single snake with tail and head in each hand. As a result, it presents a new reconstruction of HM 64/HM 66. With identical mottled markings, the snakes are identifiable as the indigenous Cretan cat snake (*Telescopus Fallax*). Based on the presence of Egyptian snake wielding Beset on Crete and her iconography, it suggests that they are possibly the Minoan precursors of Eileithyia, the historical goddess of childbirth. Indeed, Geraldine Gesell (1985, 43–44, fig. 43) noted descendants of HM 63, especially in the statuette from Kannia (ca. LM III B?) with snakes slithering on both arms and on her tiara.

For statuette HM 65, the paper has evaluated the evidence for its gesture with Evans's snake attribute and has pointed out problems with its possibly restored tip, for its headdress, and for finding ancient and live parallels for the striped "serpent". It has discovered evidence for it having hairlocks in front of its ears. It has considered several scholars' alternative suggestions for the figure holding a rope instead of a snake. It has explored and connected it to its nearest relative, the SG finial goddess and has identified that figurine's tubular striped attribute as a double rope made of papyrus that echoes the material of its volute/papyrus crown. Indeed, Nanno Marinatos (2023, 77–85) has associated the huge depictions of papyrus volutes (called waz, sacred to the Egyptian goddess Wazet, by Evans) on Thera with the Thera goddess. It has carried the idea of HM 65 holding a single object, a rope in both hands to its ultimate end in a reconstruction based on a prototype from Vrysinas and primarily on the papyrus goddess on the Shaft Grave finial. In the end, both conclusions are possible and are open for consideration. I look forward to new evidence appearing in the future to shed more light on this subject.

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