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## THE BEE-SIGN (EVANS NO. 86): AN INSTANCE OF EGYPTIAN INFLUENCE ON CRETAN HIEROGLYPHIC

In his monumental work on the Cretan hieroglyphic script Arthur Evans catalogued 5 instances of the bee-sign (his number 86). These instances comprise its occurrence on a three-sided prism seal from the Mirabello province (P.20), in a seal-impression from the hieroglyphic deposit of the palace at Knossos (P.75), and in three inscribed legends on clay labels also from the aforementioned hieroglyphic deposit (P.54, P.76 & P.86).<sup>1</sup> To this series must be added the occurrence of the bee-sign in yet another seal-impression from the hieroglyphic deposit of the palace at Knossos (P.51), also explicitly noted by Evans.<sup>2</sup> In all these six instances in sum the bee-sign is depicted from the side (Fig. 1).

Since the time Evans wrote his monumental work, however, other instances of the bee-sign have turned up. During his excavations at the palace of Phaistos Doro Levi unearthed three different seal-impressions which depict a bee from the side as on the six examples catalogued by Evans (CMS II5 314-6).<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, from the various excavations at the palace of Mallia came two more clay labels inscribed with the bee-sign depicted from the side (H.18 & HM 1664).<sup>4</sup> Finally, the bee-sign depicted from the side is also attested for an ivory seal-ring from Koumassa (CMS II1 159),<sup>5</sup> a three-sided prism seal from Krassi (CMS II2 225) and a four-sided prism seal

<sup>1</sup> Evans 1909: 212-3.

<sup>2</sup> Evans 1909: 159.

<sup>3</sup> Levi 1957-8: 108, no. 282, fig. 267; 123 f., no. 246, fig. 311. Note that the third sealing, CMS II5 316, is damaged at the top side, which renders the identification insecure.

<sup>4</sup> Chapouthier 1930: 23; Poursat, Godart & Olivier 1978: 77. Note with Brice 1990: 4 that Chapouthier wrongly takes the bee-sign for a "cricket".

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Yule 1980: 134 and Plate 9, "insects" no. 9 for the identification of the insect as a bee.

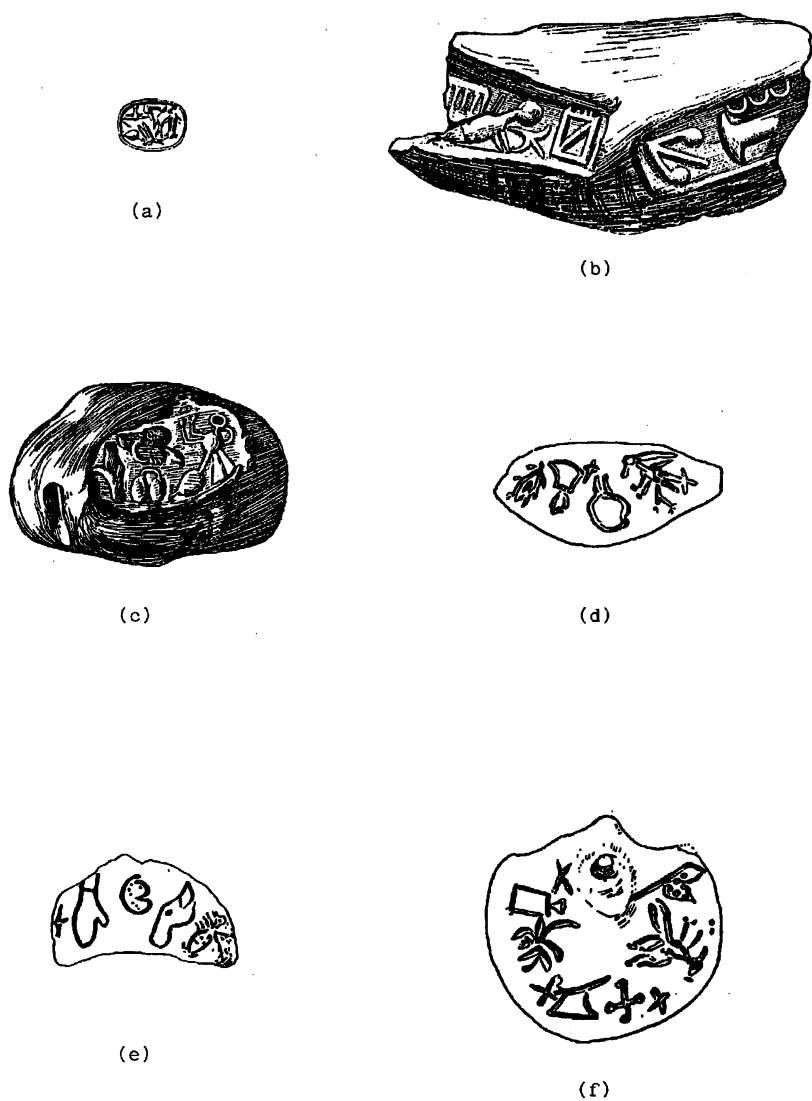


Figure 1.

Bee-sign depicted from the side; (a) P.20b, Mirabello province; (b) P.75a, Knossos, hieroglyphic deposit; (c) P.51a, *ibid.*; (d) P.54b, *ibid.*; (e) P.76a, *ibid.*; (f) P.86b, *ibid.*

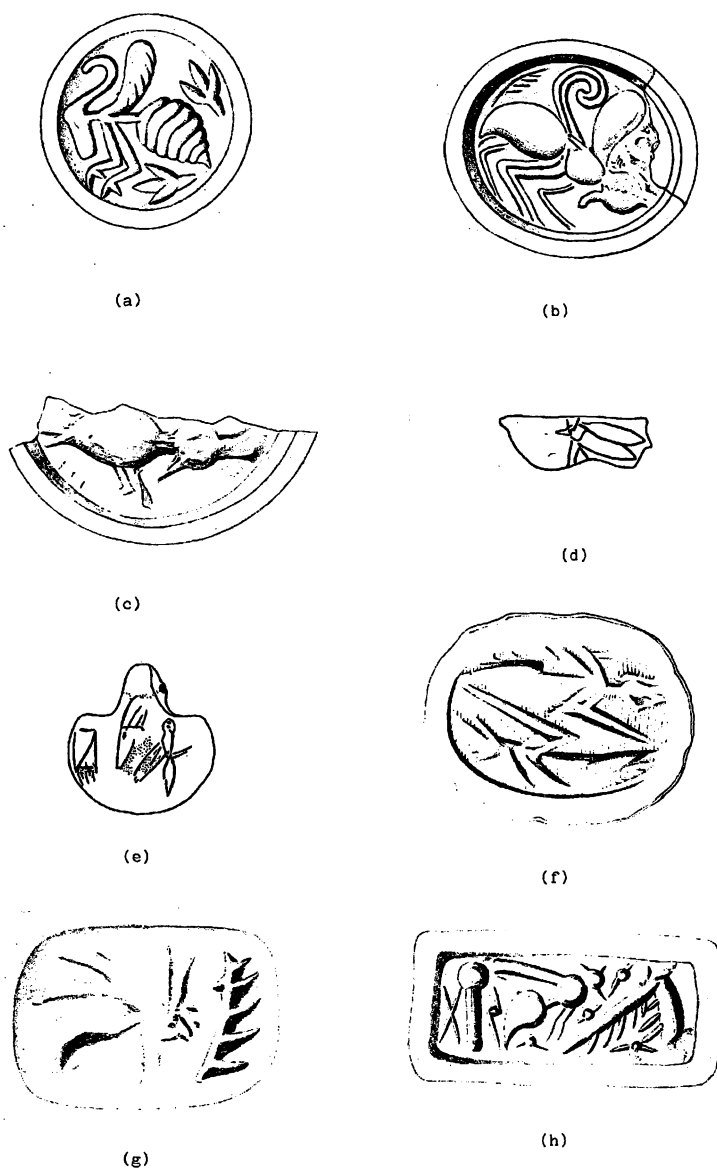


Figure 2. Bee-sign depicted from the side; (a) CMS II5 314, Phaistos; (b) CMS II5 315, *ibid.*; (c) CMS II5 316, *ibid.*; (d) H.18, Mallia; (e) HM 1664, Mallia, "le quartier Mu"; (f) CMS II1 159, Koumassa; (g) CMS II2 225, Krassi; (h) CMS XII 109, Metropolitan Museum.

now exhibited in the Metropolitan museum (CMS XII 109) (Fig. 2).<sup>6</sup>

In a seal-impression from the archive of “le quartier Mu” at the palace of Mallia the bee-sign also occurs in a variant writing depicted from the top (HM 1090).<sup>7</sup> As keenly observed by William Brice, the entire combination of this sealing is paralleled for a seal from the same archive (HM 2390), which allows us to identify the middle sign, provisionally labelled “trident”, as a stylized writing variant of the bee-sign depicted from the top.<sup>8</sup> In line with this latter inference, the insect depicted on a three-sided prism seal from Ajios Onouphrios (CMS II1 111) and similar depictions of the insect in question on a three-sided prism seal from the collection Metaxas (CMS IV 22D) and a seal-impression from Phaistos (CMS II5 312), provisionally taken for a spider, are likely to be identified as stylized writing variants of the bee-sign depicted from the top.<sup>9</sup> Of particular interest in this connection is the fact that antennae are indicated – which seems to rule out the current identification of the sign as a spider (Fig. 3). Indeed, the indication of antennae on other writing variants of the spider-sign (Evans no. 85), as well as in the cases of a three-sided prism seal from Candia (P.1) and a four-sided bead-seal from Siteia (P.29), might induce us to side with Brice and to identify the spider-sign altogether as a writing variant of the bee-sign depicted from the top.<sup>10</sup> As this is not entirely certain, however, I have listed only a few instances of the spider-sign in my catalogue below; for a fuller list see Yule 1980: 135 and cf. Younger 1988: 205 who includes a lentoid seal now exhibited at the British Museum with a bee depicted from the top in flight (CMS VII 70). A final instance of the bee-sign depicted from the top worth mentioning here is formed by glyph D 34 of the discus of Phaistos (Fig. 4).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Yule 1980: Plate 9, “insects” no. 10.

<sup>7</sup> Poursat, Godart & Olivier 1978: 88–9.

<sup>8</sup> Brice 1991b: 98–9, fig. 6, nos. 22 & 34; cf. Poursat, Godart & Olivier 1978: 80.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Yule 1980: 135 and Plate 9, “insects” no. 4.

<sup>10</sup> Brice 1991a: 48; Brice 1991b: 98.

<sup>11</sup> Matz 1928: 120; cf. Duhoux 1977: 60.

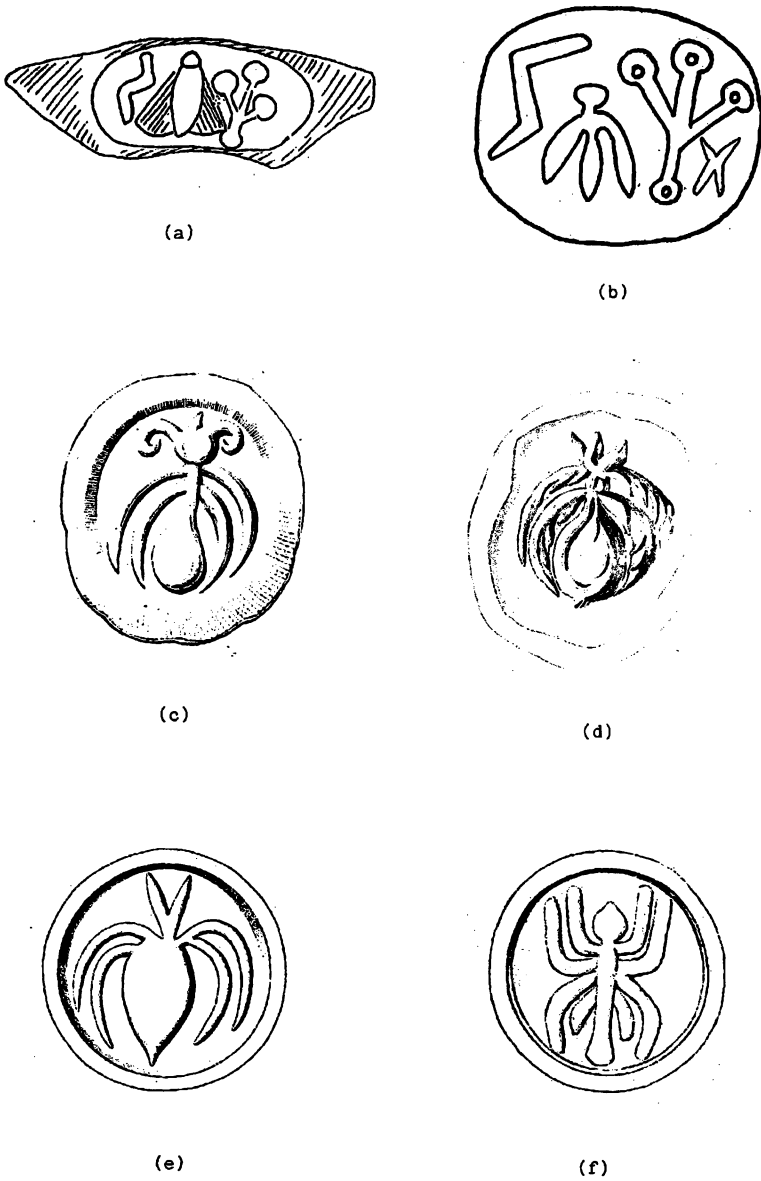


Figure 3. Bee-sign depicted from the top; (a) HM 1090, Mallia, "le quartier Mu"; (b) HM 2390, *ibid.*; (c) CMS II1 111, Ajios Onouphrios; (d) CMS IV 22D, Sammlung Metaxas; (e) CMS II5 312, Phaistos; (f) CMS II5 313, *ibid.*

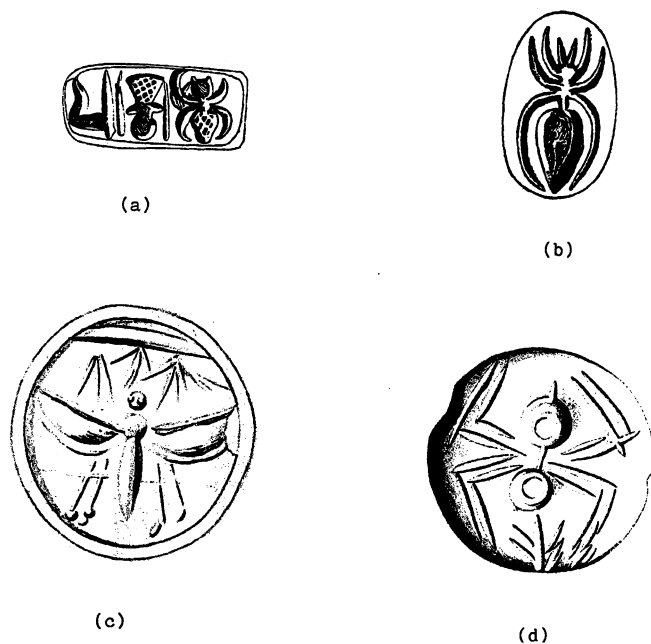


Figure 4. Bee-sign depicted from the top; (a) P.1c, Candia; (b) P.29b, Siteia; (c) CMS VII 70, British Museum; (d) CMS V 579, Kasarma.

### Category 1: depicted from the side

#### a. seal

1. Koumassa, seal-ring of ivory (CMS II1 159)
2. Krassi, three-sided prism of olive-green steatite (CMS II2 225)
3. Metropolitan museum, four-sided prism of sapphirine chalcedony (CMS XII 109)
4. Mirabello province, three-sided prism of green jasper (P.20b)

#### b. seal-impression

5. Phaistos, impression of round seal (CMS II5 314)
6. Phaistos, impression of round seal (CMS II5 315)
7. Phaistos, impression of round seal (CMS II5 316)
8. Knossos, hieroglyphic deposit, impression of prism seal (P.51a)
9. Knossos, hieroglyphic deposit, impression of prism or four-sided seal (P.75a1)

## c. inscription on clay

10. Knossos, hieroglyphic deposit, clay label (P.54b)
11. Knossos, hieroglyphic deposit, clay label (P.76a)
12. Knossos, hieroglyphic deposit, clay label (P.86b)
13. Mallia, "le quartier Mu", clay label (HM 1664)
14. Mallia, clay label (H 18)

## Category 2: depicted from the top

## a. seal

1. Mallia, "le quartier Mu", cachet of black steatite (HM 2390)
2. Ajos Onouphrios, three-sided prism of black steatite (CMS II1 111)
3. Sammlung Metaxas, three-sided prism of black steatite (CMS IV 22D)
4. Candia, three-sided prism of steatite (P.1)
5. Siteia, four-sided bead-seal (P.29)
6. British Museum, lentoid of black jasper (CMS VII 70)
7. Kasarma, lentoid (CMS V 579)

## b. seal-impression

8. Mallia, "le quartier Mu", impression of oval seal (HM 1090)
9. Phaistos, impression of round seal (CMS II5 312)
10. Phaistos, impression of round seal (CMS II5 313).

According to Paul Yule, the earliest datable example of the bee-sign is the one on the ivory seal-ring from Koumassa, tentatively assigned to EM II–MM IA.<sup>12</sup> Next in line are the seal-impressions from the palace of Phaistos, which stem from a find-complex dated to the beginning of MM IIB.<sup>13</sup> Then come the examples from the hieroglyphic deposit of the palace at Knossos and the archive of "le quartier Mu" at the palace of Mallia, dated to the very end of MM II.<sup>14</sup> Finally, the clay label H 18 originates from a hieroglyphic deposit of the palace at Mallia dated to MM III.<sup>15</sup> The lentoid seals from the British Museum (CMS VII 70) and Kasarma (CMS V 579) are assigned for stylistic reasons to the Late Minoan period. On the basis of this chronological sequence it seems that depictions of the bee-sign from the side (Koumassa ivory seal-ring, seal-impressions from

<sup>12</sup> Yule 1980: 134.

<sup>13</sup> CMS II5: ix, note 3; xv–xvi.

<sup>14</sup> Evans 1921: 272 and note 2 (discarding his previous dating of the hieroglyphic deposit to MM III, for which see Evans 1909: 21); Poursat, Godart & Olivier 1978: 25; cf. Chapouthier 1930: 5–6.

<sup>15</sup> Chapouthier 1930: 5–7.

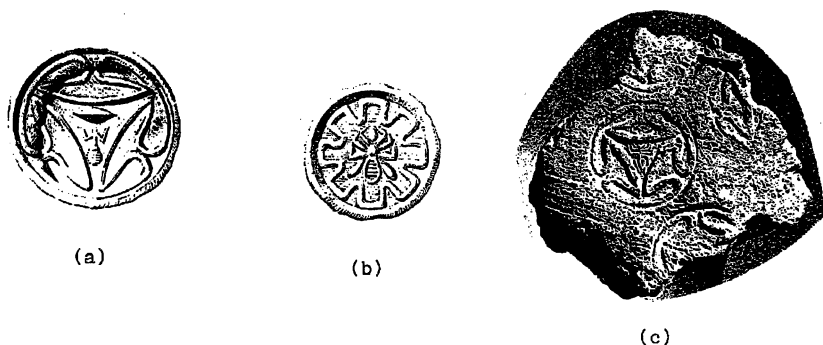


Figure 5. Sealings with bee-sign depicted from the top from the House of the Tiles at Lerna; (a) Heath 1958: Plate 20, S5; (b) Heath 1958: Plate 22, S61; (c) Caskey 1955: Plate 22g.

the palace of Phaistos) precede the ones from the top (seal-impressions from the palace of Phaistos, seal-impression and seal from “le quartier Mu” at the palace of Mallia). The situation is reversed, however, if material from mainland Greece be included in our synopsis, as the bee-sign depicted from the top is already attested there on seal-impressions from the House of the Tiles at Lerna dated to EH II (Fig. 5).<sup>16</sup>

Whatever the question of primacy in dating, what strikes us most about the bee-sign depicted from the side is that it frequently turns up in combination with a floral design in the form of a flower or branch. This happens to be the case with (1–2) two of the three seal-impressions from the palace of Phaistos (CMS II5 314–5) – the third being damaged at its top side –, (3) the seal-impression from the hieroglyphic deposit of the palace at Knossos (P.75), (4–5) two of the three inscribed clay labels from the same hieroglyphic deposit (P.54 & P.86), (6) the three-sided prism seal from Krassi (CMS II2 225), and (7) the four-sided prism bead presently at the Metropolitan Museum (CMS XII 109). Note, however, that on the related

<sup>16</sup> Caskey 1955: 41; pl. 22g; Heath 1958: 104, S5; 112, S61. In all three instances the insect in question is provisionally identified as a spider, but note that the first one shows antennae and the third has wings and a pollen ball between its legs in much the same way as is the case with the Mallia wasp pendant, see Kitchen 1981: 11–2. Rightly, therefore, these Lerna sealings are mentioned by Levi 1957–8: 108 in his discussion of the bee-sign.



seal-impression and seal from “le quartier Mu” at the palace of Mallia (HM 1090 & HM 2390) the bee-sign depicted from the top also occurs in combination with a floral design. The same verdict likewise applies to the lentoid seal presently at the British Museum (CMS VII 70) and the lentoid seal from Kasarma (CMS V 579).

Insofar as foreign relations are concerned, Evans has pointed out that the Cretan hieroglyphic bee-sign corresponds to the Egyptian glyph L 2 which likewise depicts a bee from the side.<sup>17</sup> The latter sign expresses the royal title *bi'ty* “bee-keeper” designating the king of Lower Egypt. According to standards of writing current from the period of the Old Kingdom onwards it occurs in combination with a plant (M 23) for the expression of the composite royal title *nswt bi'ty* “king of Upper Egypt and Lower Egypt”.<sup>18</sup> This royal title in turn serves as an introduction of the cartouche with pharaoh's prenomen.<sup>19</sup> As first acknowledged by Jan Best in connection with clay label P.86, the Egyptian combination “plant-bee” is strikingly reminiscent of the above noted association of the Cretan hieroglyphic bee-sign with a floral design in the form of a flower or branch.<sup>20</sup> Are we not actually dealing here with a local Cretan writing variant of the Egyptian royal title?

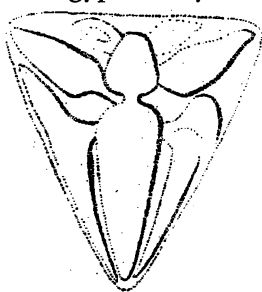


Figure 6. Sealing with stylized bee depicted from the top (from Alp 1968).

Before we address this question, it may be useful to point out that the bee-sign does not originate from Luwian hieroglyphic, the only other hieroglyphic writing system extant in the region. Here a corresponding form is entirely lacking. The only representation of a bee which has surfaced up to now, an impression from a triangular seal from Karahöyük near Konya dated *c.* 1750 BC, must be assigned to Cretan (or more in general Aegean) influences for the reason that it is depicted from the top (Fig. 6).<sup>21</sup>

Returning to our question of whether the formula “bee-plant” constitutes a local Cre-

<sup>17</sup> Evans 1909: 212–3; 240, Table xvi; cf. Matz 1928: 120; for the Egyptian glyph, see Gardiner 1957: 477.

<sup>18</sup> Davies 1987: 44–6.

<sup>19</sup> Gardiner 1957: 73–4.

<sup>20</sup> Best & Woudhuizen 1988: 8, fig. 7.

<sup>21</sup> Alp 1968: 175, no. 50, Abb. 66.

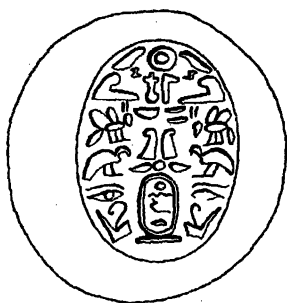


Figure 7. Royal Egyptian nodule from Canaan (from Weingarten 1991).

tan variant of the Egyptian royal title, an objection may be that, contrary to the Egyptian practice, in Crete the bee-sign also occurs on its own without the “plant”. In fact, this happens to be the case in 50% of the cases of our category 1 (= bee-sign depicted from the side) and much more so in the case of our category 2 (= bee-sign depicted from the top). Furthermore, it may reasonably be argued that *bi'ty* on its own is unlikely to have been borrowed as a royal title, only *nswt* being applicable to rulers outside Egypt.<sup>22</sup> Of these two counter-arguments, the first neglects the con-

sideration that in inscriptions from the fringes of the Egyptian empire the bee-sign occasionally turns up without the *nswt*-plant. Thus a hieroglyphic legend on a nodule from Canaan bearing the cartouche of Amenemhat III (1859–1814 BC) shows the titular expression “king of Upper and Lower Egypt” rendered only in part by the bee-sign (Fig. 7).<sup>23</sup> The second counter-argument fails to come to grips with Brice’s plausible reconstruction according to which the bee-sign depicted from the top (Evans no. 85) develops into the Cretan Linear A sign L 56 *pi* (Fig. 8).<sup>24</sup> As it stands, namely, this particular value may well be considered the regular outcome from the royal title *bi'ty* according to the acrophonic principle (note that the Cretan linear scripts lack a separate *b*-series).<sup>25</sup> *Mutatis mutandis*, such a scenario would imply that the bee-sign functioned as a logogram representing the value *bi'ty* and that we are actually dealing here with a direct loan from Egyptian of not only sign-form but also its meaning.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Van Binsbergen 1996–7: 135, note 15; cf. Gardiner 1957: 75.

<sup>23</sup> Weingarten 1991: 87–9; I warmly thank the Egyptologist Willem van Haarlem for reading this legend for me and pointing out that yet another titular expression, that of the vulture with the falcon, is rendered only in part by the vulture-sign.

<sup>24</sup> Brice 1991a: 47, fig. 3; 48; cf. Woudhuizen 1992b: 193; Brown 1992–3: 38. Note, however, that glyph D 34 from the discus of Phaistos stands apart in rendering the value *ri*, see Woudhuizen 1992a: 38–9.

<sup>25</sup> It is interesting to note in this connection the similarity of the Egyptian royal title *bi'ty* “bee-keeper” to the Proto-Indo-European root *\*bhei-* “bee” (see Pokorny 1959: 116): one way or the other we would arrive at the acrophonic value *pi*.

<sup>26</sup> So Best 1996–7: 119.

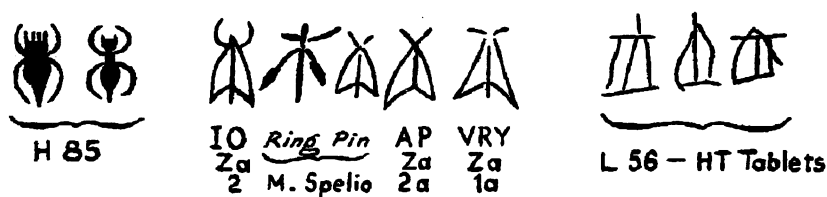


Figure 8. Development of the bee-sign depicted from the top (from Brice 1991a).

Yet another argument in favour of our thesis that the Cretan hieroglyphic bee-sign represents the Egyptian royal title *bi'ty* may perhaps be provided by the observation that in phonetic rendering this title may appear in the legends on the seals in two other forms. According to a proposition by Best, the recurrent formula “trowel-adze”, represented *inter alia* on side b of the three- and four-sided seals P.23 and P.29, reads *pi-ti* = *bi'ty* “king”.<sup>27</sup> In an earlier contribution, I have suggested myself that the same royal title is rendered by the recurrent formula “trowel-eye”, represented *inter alia* in the legend of clay label P.54b, which reads *pi-ti* = *bi'ty* “king”.<sup>28</sup> Here the titular nature of the formula is further emphasized by its occurrence in the composite form “trowel-arrow-trowel-eye” as an honorific title of lower ranks, reading *pi-ni-pi-ti* = *bn bi'ty* “prince (*lit.* son of the king)”.<sup>29</sup>

An intriguing question which remains to be answered is whether the Cretan variants of the Egyptian royal titles “plant-bee” and “bee” bear reference to the Egyptian pharaoh himself or were usurped by local Cretan dynasts. In order to answer this question, it is first of all important to realize that, contrary to the Egyptian practice, the Cretan formula “bee-plant” never serves as an introduction to a cartouche with pharaoh’s prenomen. Furthermore, after its borrowing from Egyptian, the bee-sign evidently underwent some independent handling by the Cretan scribes. In the first place it became disconnected from the floral design in the form of a flower or branch. Second, there is a marked tendency to depict the bee-sign from the top instead of from the side, as is regular in Egyptian. Finally, it deserves our attention that the royal title *bi'ty* appears in various

<sup>27</sup> Best 1996-7: 118-9.

<sup>28</sup> Woudhuizen 1992b: 197-8.

<sup>29</sup> Best & Woudhuizen 1989: 124.

phonetic renderings under the guise of formulaic expressions like “trowel-adze” and “trowel-eye”. Of these two formulae, the second is here of special interest as it figures in the composite title “trowel-arrow-trowel-eye” signifying inferior rank, which in the legend of an eight-sided cylinder-like seal is associated with the local Cretan personal name Dapara, son of Nuwa.<sup>30</sup> All in all, then, it seems that the Cretan variants of the Egyptian royal titles “plant-bee” and “bee” bear reference to local Cretan dynasts.

If we be correct in this latter inference, the royal title “bee-plant” may be considered to have functioned as the equivalent of the later cuneiform *LUGAL.GAL* “great king” and the royal title “bee” on its own as that of later cuneiform *LUGAL* “king”. Especially in connection with the royal title “bee” *bi'ty* of the king of Lower Egypt there appears to be nothing inherently implausible about its usurpation by local Cretan dynasts. A glance at the map indicates that the territorial range of the island of Crete matches that of Lower Egypt in the Nile delta: the title would thus apply to dynasts ruling over a comparable geographical entity.

If the case of the bee-sign, then, is representative of Egyptian influence on the island of Crete as a whole during what appears to be especially the period of the 12th dynasty, it may safely be concluded that this influence was substantial but nevertheless indirect.

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<sup>30</sup> Best & Woudhuizen 1989: 124.

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