JAN BEST

THE LOTUS FLOWER IN CRETAN HIEROGLYPHIC

Arthur Evans was the first to demonstrate that several signs belonging to the repertory of Cretan Hieroglyphic have been derived from the signary of the Egyptian hieroglyphic script. Piero Meriggi, on the other hand, succeeded in proving that also the Luwian and Cretan hieroglyphic scripts have many signs in common (Fig. 1).[1] To the latter category of signs belongs the sign for stamp-seal, *SASAI*, and thus many an inscription on Cretan seals with hieroglyphic writing logically starts with this sign for seal. One face of a sealing shows it as the first sign to the right, its very position indicating that we should read the remaining text from the right to the left (Fig. 2).[2] The remaining text consists of three signs, viz. a round disk hanging from an eyelet, a sign looking like a tree with three branches, and finally a plant with curving stalk that ends in three flowering parts. This plant would seem to represent a Minoan equivalent of the Egyptian lotus flower in reverse.[3] What is to be demonstrated in the present contribution is that these three different signs, following upon the sign for stamp-seal, have the same meaning and the same syllabic value. To this aim we should first look at a sealing with the impressions of a seal and a signet, respectively containing an often recurring formula and, in the words of Arthur Evans, 'a beardless male head with curly hair and aquiline nose' (Fig. 3).[4] According to him, this interesting sealing apparently presents a portrait of a Minoan

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1 A. J. Evans, Scripta Minoa (SM) I (Oxford 1909), p. 240 (Table XVI. Fig. 105. Egyptian comparisons with Minoan hieroglyphs); Vergessene Städte am Indus: Frühe Kulturen in Pakistan vom 8.–2. Jahrtausend v. Chr. (UNESCO Catalogue, Mainz am Rhein 1987), p. 204, Fig. 177, after P. Meriggi (Comparazione tra pittogrammi hittiti e cretesi).

2 Evans, SM I, p. 161, P. 69 a.1,2.

3 See for the Egyptian sign of the lotus flower Alan Gardiner, Egyptian Grammar (EG) (London 1957[3]), p. 480, M9.

4 Evans, SM I, p. 272, Fig. 123; ibid., p. 162, P. 71 a.1,2.

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dynast, together with an official title. The small cross to the right marks the beginning of the text and the last sign to the left is rendered upside down to indicate that the text contains two words, the first one consisting of two signs, the second of only one. Both writing devices are common in the early stages of Cretan Hieroglyphic. The first syllabic sign to the right is the ancestral sign of the corresponding Linear A and B signs with their respective syllabic values *ya* and *ja* (Fig. 4, left column, third sign from below);[5] the second syllabic sign, of a leg, is the ancestral sign of the corresponding Linear A and B signs with their respective syllabic values *pû* and *po* (Fig. 5);[6] and the last sign, when put in upright position, is the ancestral sign of the corresponding Linear A and B signs with the same syllabic value *re*. Notwithstanding the fame of this international meeting of Boy Scouts, Hellenists should better refrain from reading their *ja-po-re* as 'jamboree'. A reading of *ja-bu re*, however, would produce the Egyptian standard component in royal throne-names *jb-R'*,'Heart of Re', which Amenemhet I (1991–1962 B.C.) used for the first time.[7] This interpretation becomes inescapable as the syllabic sign with the value *re* in Cretan Hieroglyphic is quite often accompanied by the Egyptian hieroglyphic sign for 'sun' standing next to it when the sun-god Re functions in the text as a protective deity (Fig. 6).[8] During the intermediate stage, that is, between purely logographic and syllabic writing in Cretan Hieroglyphic, both the logographic and syllabic signs of the same word are written next to each other. Thus, the 'official title of a Minoan dynast' which Evans conjectured appears in reality to be the Minoan throne-name 'Heart of Re'.

On another seal, on which the throne-name *ja-bu re* is written from the left to the right, *re* is rendered by one visible disk hanging from two large, separate eyelets, an arrangement which suggests that behind the visible disk is another one (Fig. 7 left). At first sight this composition may seem very strange, but when one looks at the

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[5] Michael Ventris – John Chadwick, Documents in Mycenaean Greek (Cambridge 1973²), p. 33, Fig. 6.

[6] See for the syllabic values of Linear A signs Jan Best, The First Inscription in Punic: Vowel Differences between Linear A and B, in: Ugarit-Forschungen 32 (2000) (Münster 2001), pp. 27–31.

[7] Jan Best, The ancient toponyms of Mallia: A post-Eurocentric reading of Egyptianising Bronze Age documents, in: Wim M. J. van Binsbergen (ed.), Black Athena: Ten Years After (= Talanta 28–29, 1996–1997), pp. 117–18.

[8] Evans, SM I, p. 154, P. 25 a. See for the translation of this inscription as 'Re (protects) the town of Ru(kusawa)' J. Best (note 7), p. 119.

same formula on yet another seal, one discerns a ligature of two sun-disks, the upper one representing the rising sun, whereas the lower one represents the setting sun (Fig. 7 right).[9] This particular combination betrays the originally Egyptian train of thought of how the daily path of the sun-god Re is imagined. So the same thought would lie behind the ornament of one visible sun-disk representing two, since they hang from two separate eyelets.

Finally, the sign with the syllabic value *re* on a very early seal with the formula *ja-bu re* on side *b* already shows its origin in the Egyptian lotus flower in reverse as its three flower-stems clearly bend to the right (Fig. 8).[10] Thus, what above has been described as 'a sign looking like a tree with three branches', is in reality nothing else than a duplicate of the schematized and stylized lotus flower itself standing to the left of this sign (see Fig. 2).

It is quite amazing that neither the sun-disk hanging from an eyelet, nor the Egyptian sign for sun, nor the combination of a rising and a setting sun, but instead of these the schematized and stylized lotus flower had been chosen as the foremost sign for rendering the syllabic value *re* in Cretan Hieroglyphic and for representing the sun-god Re in the formula *ja-bu re*. As the Egyptians, however, imagined the lotus to be the holy flower from which the sun arose for the first time and considered it to be 'the lotus at the nose of Re' whose smell provided eternal life, it becomes understandable why the syllabic value *re* of the sun-god Re himself had been bestowed upon his beloved lotus flower.

As the vocabulary in other inscriptions datable between ca. 2000 and ca. 1950 B.C. makes clear, the presence of originally Egyptian throne-names, royal titles,[11] signs and symbols, and of deities like Hathor and Re[12] in inscriptions on Cretan seals with hieroglyphic writing does not imply that the language of Cretan Hieroglyphic is Egyptian. It is just proof of the enormous influence that Egyptian royal ideology exerted upon emulating dynasts in the region after the accession of pharaoh Amenemhet I.

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[9] Evans, SM I, p. 158, P. 48 a; ibid. p. 152, P. 18 a.

[10] Evans, SM I, p. 151, P. 11.

[11] Fred C. Woudhuizen, The Bee-Sign (Evans No. 86): An Instance of Egyptian Influence on Cretan Hieroglyphic, Kadmos 36 (1997), pp. 97–110.

[12] See J. Best (note 7), p. 119.

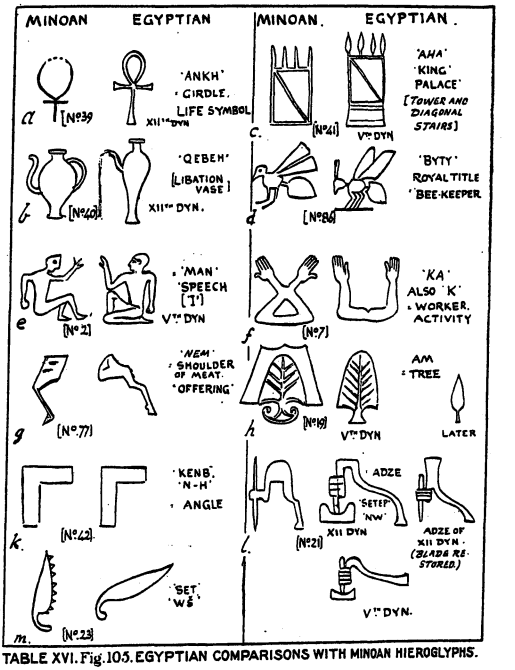
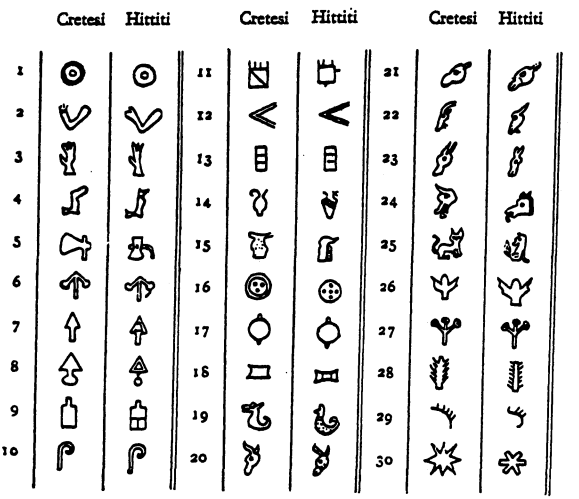


TABLE XVI. Fig. 105. EGYPTIAN COMPARISONS WITH MINOAN HIEROGLYPHS.



Comparazione tra pittogrammi bittiti e cretesi.

Fig. 1 Egyptian and Luwian comparisons with Cretan hieroglyphic signs

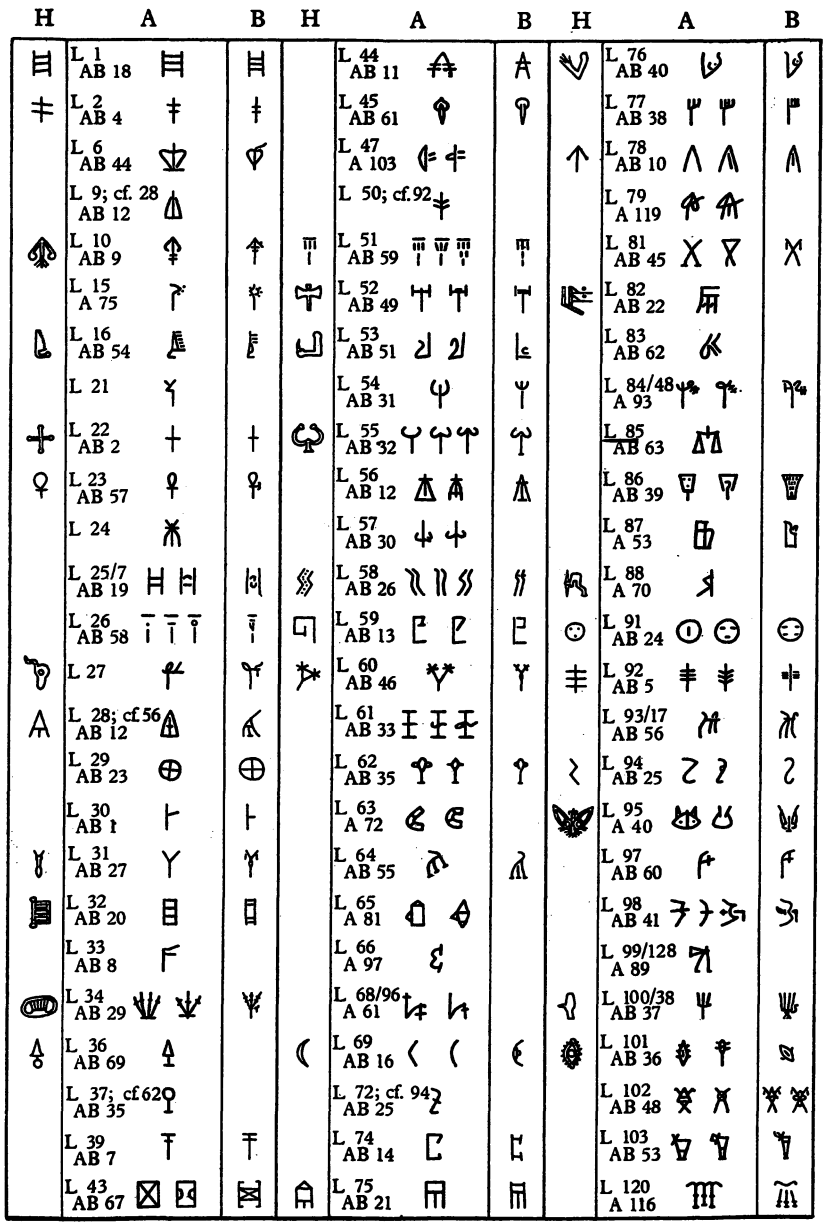


Fig. 4 Cognate syllabic signs in Hieroglyphic, Linear A and B

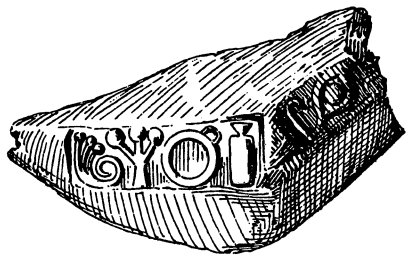


Fig. 2 Impression, probably of four-sided bead-seal

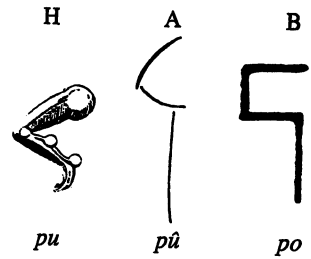


Fig. 5 Development of the leg-sign

Fig. 3 Sealing with inscription and portrait head

Fig. 6 Side *a* of a four-sided bead-seal of green steatite

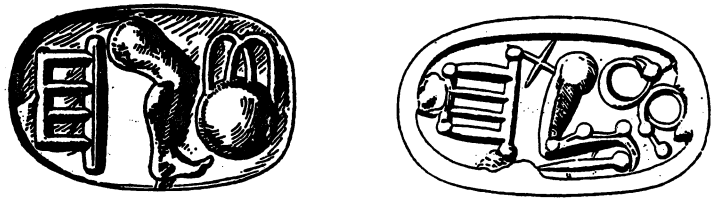


Fig. 7 Two versions of the throne-name *ja-bu re*

Fig. 8 Four-sided bead-seal of steatite