

**THE MEANING AND DERIVATION
OF ANATOLIAN HIEROGLYPHIC BONUS₂.VIR₂
IN THE SECOND MILLENNIUM B.C.***

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Previous interpretations of BONUS₂.VIR₂.

H.G. Güterbock considered the Anatolic hieroglyphic expression BONUS₂.VIR₂ as an idiomatic sentence which can be translated as literally “good (to) the man”¹, an expression which has a feminine equivalent in BONUS₂.FEMINA, “good to the woman”. E. Masson associated it with a military profession², but her proposal has not been accepted nor is there any evidence in its favour. Instead, in a 1979 paper, Hawkins³ proposed to associate this expression with the corresponding cuneiform LÚ.SIG₅⁴, but recently he has

* This article is an extract from my Ph.D. dissertation [L. Massi, *Princes and Officers in Boğazköy / Hattuša, the Glyptic of the Lower City and Büyükkale: a Prosopographical Study*, Florence 2007], and here there are some references to that thesis which is now in the national libraries of Rome and Florence. Later, I hope to publish further extracts from it, which may be of use to scholars dealing with these subjects. In this article, the Empire Period refers to the period from Šuppiliuluma I to Šuppiliuluma II (according to Bryce, the dates for the reign of Šuppiliuluma I are 1350-1322: T. Bryce, *The Kingdom of the Hittites*, New York 2005; instead, according to Liverani, they are 1370-1342: M. Liverani, *Antico Oriente. Storia Società Economia*, Bari 1998, 2005²). Here, the Ancient Period refers to the Hittite period before Šuppiliuluma I. The hieroglyphic signs are denoted by the letter “L” followed by a number, as given in Laroche’s hieroglyphic sign list, but are only indicated by the letter “L” in order to distinguish signs in his list from signs in earlier lists such as those published by Meriggi, Gelb, and Güterbock (see E. Laroche, *Les hiéroglyphes hittites*, Paris 1960; P. Meriggi, “Listes des hiéroglyphes hittites”, RHA 27, 1937, pp. 69-114; 157-200; I.J. Gelb, *Hittite Hieroglyphs*, vols. I-III, Chicago 1931, 1935, 1942; H.G. Güterbock, *Siegel aus Boğazköy. Die Königssiegel von 1939 und die übrigen Hieroglyphensiegel*, AfO Beiheft 7, Osnabrück 1942, pp. 84-104). Furthermore, the seals are indicated with specific phrases, in accordance with the publications from which they have been taken, and each time this phrase is explained by a note. This was also to avoid causing confusion among the different seal collections.

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- 1 See H.G. Güterbock, “Hieroglyphensiegel aus dem Tempelbezirk”, in *Boğazköy V. Funde aus den Grabungen 1970 und 1971* (AbhDOG), Berlin 1975, pp. 73f.
- 2 See E. Masson, “Quelques sceaux hittites hiéroglyphiques”, *Syria* 52, 1975, pp. 213-239
- 3 See J.D. Hawkins, “The Hieroglyphic Luwian Stele of Meharde-Sheizar”, in E. Masson (ed.), *Florilegium Anatolicum: Mélanges offerts à Emmanuel Laroche*, Paris 1979, p. 153
- 4 See F. Pecchioli Daddi, *Mestieri professioni e dignità dell'Anatolia itita*, Incunabula Graeca 79, Roma 1982, pp. 447-449.

revised his position in favour of Güterbock's original hypothesis⁵. Also, C. Mora agrees with Güterbock, and considers it to be a generic title of owner of a seal⁶, even though linked to a specific period: the Late Empire Period.

At present, the expression BONUS₂.VIR₂ is understood as follows: "il significato di tale gruppo (si intende qua BONUS₂.VIR₂) è quello di introdurre e caratterizzare il nome del proprietario del sigillo, senza avere, a quanto pare, una specifica funzione di titolo." ("The meaning of this group is to introduce and indicate the name of the owner of the seal, apparently without having the explicit function of a title")⁷.

	370	BONUS2	su
	370*	BONUS2.VIR2	
	370**	BONUS2.FEMINA	
	386	VIR2	

Fig.1

(From the list of hieroglyphic signs in
M. Marazzi, *Il geroglifico anatolico*, cit.)

Analysis of the phrase VIR₂.

The phrase BONUS₂.VIR₂ is composed of two different signs: L370 (BONUS₂) and L386 (VIR₂), each of which has its own ideographic value irrespective of the combination. In fact, L370 can mean generically either "health", "well-being" or "luck" (mainly because it is frequently combined to the CRUX ANSATA, L369, especially in the Ancient Hittite Period), or it can have the specific phonetic value of *su*, based on digraphic seals from Ras Shamra. L370 is also usually interpreted as a mere "filler". In addition, it is possible to find it linked to other signs indicating specific professions, such as L157/L160⁸, L326, etc.

⁵ See J.D. Hawkins, "Commentaries on the Readings and on the Sign List", in *Die Prinzen- und Beamtensiegel der Hethitischen Grossreichszeit auf Tonbulln aus dem Nişantepe-Archiv in Hattuša*, BoHa XIX, Mainz 2005, p. 311.

⁶ See C. Mora, "I proprietari di sigillo nella società ittita", in *Storia Economia Lavoro nel Vicino Oriente Antico*, Istituto Gramsci Toscano, Milano 1988, pp. 263-264.

⁷ See M. Marazzi, *Il geroglifico anatolico. Problemi di analisi e prospettive di ricerca*, Roma 1990, p. 237.

⁸ See Massi, *Princes and Officers*, cit., seal 246BG.

Instead, the sign L386 (VIR₂) has two different functions, depending on the period: during the 2nd millennium it marks the male gender; however, during the 1st millennium, it is simply a word divider⁹.

VIR₂ does not have a phonetic value exclusively linked to a specific language and in Hawkins' opinion, how it is read depends on the linguistic context. In this respect, VIR₂ contrasts to VIR (L312); when used in personal names, this second sign is always read in Luwian¹⁰, that is, as *ziti*¹¹. Hawkins notes that during the Late Empire Period, VIR₂ functions almost exclusively as an appellation in glyptic contexts, to the detriment of meanings referring to professions and/or titles. In this regard, see the few references present in HH386.I.6¹², to which an additional example can be added: "the Ankara silver bowl inscription"¹³, which runs as follows: REGIO.ḪATTI.VIR₂. Instead, the VIR sign is well represented in 2nd millennium glyptic, either as bearing a specific logographic value associated with titles [i.e. PITHOS.VIR(DOMINUS), 31H-32H¹⁴; MAGNUS.VIR.-(SUPER) (even if, in my opinion, this last sign is *pi*)¹⁵, 52H-53H¹⁶; VIR.TONITRUS, SBoII 36¹⁷ and so on] or as a second onomastic element. In this second meaning, as noted above, VIR is complemented by *zi*, from which *ziti* is derived. Furthermore, during the 2nd millennium only the hieroglyphic expression BONUS₂.VIR₂ is used and BONUS₂.VIR never occurs. In glyptic, BONUS₂.VIR₂ is associated with different titles or professions¹⁸, but it is impossible to combine it bi-univocally. Instead, the presence of BONUS₂.VIR₂ excludes the title REX.FILIUS.

9 See Marazzi, *Il geroglifico anatolico*, cit., p. 250.

10 When L312 is followed by a phonetic complement, then it is *zi*, except for two cases in which *pi* occurs instead of *zi*. With regard to this item, see the explanation of 191BG (i.e. R.M. Boehmer – H.G. Güterbock, *Glyptik aus dem Stadtgebiet von Boğazköy*, BoHa XIV, Berlin 1987, no.191) given in my dissertation.

11 In onomastics, when the second term of a composite proper name is VIR (L312), which is rare, then VIR is complemented phonetically by *zi* and corresponds, beyond any reasonable doubt, to the reading *ziti*.

12 See E. Laroche, *Les hiéroglyphes hittites*, cit., no. 386; J.D. Hawkins, *The Hieroglyphic Inscription of the Sacred Pool Complex at Ḫattuša (Südburg)*, StBoT, Beih.3, Wiesbaden 1995, p. 74.

13 See Hawkins, "Commentaries", cit.; on this quote, see also the previous comment by J.D. Hawkins, "A Hieroglyphic Luwian Inscription on a Silver Bowl in the Museum of Anatolian Civilizations", *Anadolu Medeniyetleri Müzesi*, 1996 Yıllığı, Ankara 1997, p. 8 and 10.

14 I.e. all the sealings published in S. Herboldt, *Die Prinzen- und Beamtsiegel der Hethitischen Grossreichszeit auf Tonbullen aus dem Niçantepe-Archiv in Ḫattuša*, BoHa XIX, Mainz 2005, nos. 31, 32.

15 See note n.10.

16 See Herboldt, *Die Prinzen- und Beamtsiegel*, cit., nos. 52, 53.

17 I.e. the sign published in H.G. Güterbock, *Siegel aus Boğazköy II. Die Königssiegel von 1939 und die übrigen Hieroglyphensiegel*, AfO Beiheft 7, Osnabrück 1942, no. 36.

18 See, for example, the occurrences in Hawkins, "Commentaries", cit.; see also the appendix in Massi, *Princes and Officers*, cit.

Occurrences of BONUS₂.VIR₂.



Fig.2

(An example of seal with the phrase BONUS₂.VIR₂: seal 196BG,
from R.M. Boehmer – H.G. Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit.)

We now consider the data from the distribution of this combination of signs, from examining seals in which the phrase (BONUS₂.VIR₂) is found, taking into account their owners, the provenance of the seals, etc.

First of all, it is necessary to specify that BONUS₂.VIR₂ is a typical expression that belongs to the Empire Period and never occurs earlier. The first fact to emerge is the provenance of seals inscribed with this title

From examining seals with hieroglyphic inscriptions that do not belong to the great Hittite kings and can be traced to the Late Empire Period¹⁹, it is noticeable that until this period in Ḫattuša, this title appears on 13 (or 14) out of the total of 80 seals and sealings (seal impressions) considered²⁰. To these we can add the data from the new publications of seals and sealings from Nişantepe, a site located inside Ḫattuša. From this site we obtain 21 (or 22)²¹ sealings with the expression BONUS₂.VIR₂ and 4²² sealings with the

19 Data from Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit., with the addition of the seals from Ḫattuša published only by A.M. Dinçol, “Eine interessanter Siegelabdruck aus Boğazköy und die damit verknüpften historischen Fragen”, in G. Wilhelm (ed.), *Akten des internationalen Kongresses für Hethitologie*, StBoT 45, Wiesbaden 2001, pp. 89-97; B. Dinçol, “Der Titel GAL GEŠTIN auf den Hethitischen Hieroglyphensiegeln”, in *Festschrift H. Klengel*, AoF 25, 1998, pp. 163-167). It should be noted that for these statistics, biconvex seals which present two different personal names on the respective faces are counted as two, while biconvex seals which presented either the same personal name on both faces, or have only one face engraved, are counted as one.

20 The data result from the following considerations: first of all, we have listed the occurrences of BONUS₂.VIR₂ together with those of BONUS₂.FEMINA, its female equivalent. Possibly 185BG and 186BG are to be considered as belonging to the same individual. Since 182BG is uncertain, although probable, it is in brackets. 182BG, 185BG, 186BG refer to the seals with these corresponding numbers in Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit., nos. 182, 185, 186.

21 The uncertainty is due to the condition of 582H: only VIR₂ can be seen on the legend and it is not known whether or not BONUS₂ was present in the part not conserved. 2H is also included among these occurrences of BONUS₂.VIR₂ even if it is not at all certain that this expression may be considered as separated from the SACERDOS sign. Furthermore, both BONUS₂ and VIR₂ are

phrase BONUS₂FEMINA. Therefore, the same expression, whether male or female, appears on 25 (or 26) pieces out of a total of 760 different seal(ings)²³. So out of the 840 documents from Hattuša selected, we have a total of 38 (or 40) seals and sealings that have this title in the iconography, which is approximately 4,5%.

To summarise, from the capital of the Hittite kingdom, the residence of the royal family and where many occurrences of REX.FILIUS are documented compared to other sites²⁴, there is a very low percentage of seals and sealings with the expression BONUS₂VIR₂. From these seals emerges that, both during the old and the new kingdoms, neither the Hittite kings ("the great kings"), were using this title for themselves nor were their sons, the REX.FILIUS. It is important to note that during the 2nd millennium B.C. the title REX.FILIUS is often mentioned in association with many types of professions and titles, but never together with BONUS₂VIR₂. Furthermore, not even minor kings were associated with BONUS₂VIR₂. It is evident that by belonging to the royal family the use of this title was excluded, which must therefore have transcended its generic meaning.

Now we will analyse the data from the glyptic studies of documents belonging to the Empire Period and from sites located outside Hattuša, that is from other Hittite centres. A preliminary remark is required here. The data presented are taken from the respective publications of those seals and sealings without carrying out a specific preliminary study on all the seals and sealings considered here. It was not possible to check personally whether all these seals actually belong to the Empire Period, as considered by the authors of those publications. In spite of this, it must be stressed that out of the total number of the

present, even though the two signs are quite distinct and separate in the legend on one side of the seal. The other certain occurrences are: 237H, 40H, 50H, 418H, 616H, 128H, 503H, 208H, 314H-315H, 487H, 215H, 235H, 645H-646H, 279H, 454H455H, 470H, 523H, 534H, 538H, 546H. These refer to the sealings published with these numbers in Herbordt, *Die Prinzen- und Beamtensiegel*, cit.

- 22 These are the following sealings: 132H, 414H, 517H, 519H-520H.
- 23 The actual number of sealings found in Nişantepe is 786, but a single person could have more than one seal impression, even if they were made with different seals. In other words, the number of owners should be less than the number of the seals. All things considered, this does not affect considerably the percentages. However, as an approximation, we have excluded 26 sealings from the total number, in order to be as objective as possible.
- 24 We follow Güterbock (Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit., p. 74), Poetto (M. Poetto, "Nuovi sigilli in luvio geroglifico", in H. Otten – E. Akurgal – H. Ertem – A. Süel, eds., *Sedat Alp'a Armağan. Festschrift für Sedat Alp. Hittite and Other Anatolian and Near Eastern Studies in Honour of Sedat Alp*, Ankara 1992, pp. 431-443 [p. 435]) and Beckman (G. Beckman, "Hittite Administration in Syria in the Light of the Text from Hattuša, Ugarit and Emar", in *New Horizons in the Study of Ancient Syria*, Bibliotheca Mesopotamica 25, Malibu 1992, pp. 41-49 [47]) in interpreting REX.FILIUS as "prince" in the widest meaning of this term, used to describe all the male members of the royal family. "La presenza o meno del titolo in questione sui sigilli di uno stesso funzionario si può spiegare con il fatto che frequentemente funzionari di rango elevato sposavano una principessa hittita e pertanto assumevano il titolo di REX.FILIUS dopo il matrimonio." ("The presence or the absence of the title in question on the seal of the same official can be explained by the fact that frequently high ranking officials used to marry Hittite princesses, which is why they adopted the title of REX.FILIUS after marriage.": S. Herbordt, "Sigilli di funzionari e dignitari hittiti. Le cretule dell'archivio di Nişantepe a Boğazköy / Hattuša", in M. Marazzi, ed., *Il geroglifico anatolico*, Naples 1998, pp. 173-193 [179-180]).

seals and sealings of those specific sites, the proposition of the seals and sealings with the phrase $BONUS_2.VIR_2$ would not be lower if some of the seals were to date back to the Ancient Period. This is because the only seals that could be earlier are those without the phrase $BONUS_2.VIR_2$, and as previously pointed out, this expression was never used in the Ancient Period but is exclusive of the Empire Period. This means that the percentage of seals and sealings with this expression could only increase.

After these preliminary remarks let us consider now the statistical data regarding the seals and sealings contained in these other Hittite centres²⁵.

In Alişar out of 18 selected seals/sealings²⁶, seven are inscribed with $BONUS_2.VIR_2$, of which one has the corresponding female noun $BONUS_2.FEMINA$ on face B of a biconvex seal. The percentage is 38,88%.

In Tarso (Gözlü Kule) $BONUS_2.VIR_2$ is found on 33,33% of the entire glyptic material studied, which is 13/14²⁷ out of 42.

If we consider, for example, the glyptic dated as belonging to the Empire Period found in Adana, Hatay and Istanbul museums²⁸, the percentage of glyptic material with the phrase $BONUS_2.VIR_2$ is more consistent. In fact from the data in these museums, it can be deduced that from a total of 22 seals and sealings considered²⁹, 13 satisfy the parameters considered here, which means that the percentage is almost as high as 60%.

Generally, if all the seals and sealings from other sites outside Ḫattuša (excluding those mentioned already) are considered³⁰, out of a total of 242 selected seals/sealings (excluding any that are royal or too fragmentary) then the percentage obtained from the glyptic material with $BONUS_2.VIR_2$ (including its feminine equivalent $BONUS_2.FEMINA$) is more or less 32,23%, almost the same as obtained from Alişar and from Tarso. This is quite a significant result.

The similarity and the wide presence in these areas of seals and sealings characterized by the title of $BONUS_2.VIR_2$, mostly a little more over 30%, contrasts with the almost

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- 25 See Mora, "I proprietari di sigillo", cit., pp. 165f.; for illustrations of the seals see C. Mora, *La glittica anatolica del II millennio a.C. I. I sigilli a iscrizione geroglifica* (Sammlung Hieroglyphischer Siegel, Bd. II), *Studia Mediterranea* 6, Pavia 1987.
- 26 More specifically, those seals which are dated as belonging to the Empire Period and excluding the sealings of the great Hittite kings.
- 27 On one biconvex seal it is difficult to say whether $BONUS_2.VIR_2$ is to be read in the missing part of Face B (which is already present on Face A), or whether it is $BONUS_2.FEMINA$.
- 28 See A.M. Dinçol, "Hethitische Hieroglyphensiegel in den Museen zu Adana, Hatay und Istanbul", *Anadolu Araştırmaları* 9, 1983, pp. 173-249 [pp. 213f.]. It has been considered as belonging to the Empire Period the seals starting from no.11; then out of these are deduced, from the total number, those seals considered too damaged to provide reliable information. As indicated in n. 19, of the total number of seals considered, biconvex seals having a different name on the Face A from the name on Face B (for example, nos. 26 and 25), while biconvex seals having the same personal name on both faces are counted as one.
- 29 See n. 17 above.
- 30 In this respect, it would be of great interest to examine the glyptic from Kuşaklı, as it is a site that was discovered recently. This site is very interesting both because of modern excavation techniques which allow more certainty in respect of dating, and because the archaeologist of that site (M. Karpe) is accurate and precise, as I know from personal experience. That would allow us to have archaeologically exact data related to the dating, precise enough to rely on during our statistical research.

irrelevant presence of this title on the wide number of seals/sealings from Ḫattuša. Considering that the numerical terms are consistent, this cannot be by chance.

We can now consider an important city such as Ras Shamra. During the Hittite Empire Period, this city maintained its role as the capital of a Syrian kingdom under Hittite rule. It was still the residence of the royal family and of its court, so from a political point of view we can consider it as an intermediate city between Ḫattuša and other smaller centres such as Tarso and Alişar. In Ras Shamra, the percentage of seals/sealings with the title BONUS₂.VIR₂ increases to about 18,18% out of the total³¹. This is halfway between Ḫattuša and the other smaller Hittite centres and so reflects its political status. It leads us to consider that the numerical data can not be due to chance, but provide evidence that the title BONUS₂.VIR₂ is very probably more specific than a generic “qualifica utilizzabile da chiunque” (“title that anyone could use”)³². We agree with Clelia Mora when she states that “dalle scarse attestazioni in contesti di sicura provenienza palatina, non è (questa “qualifica”) legata a funzioni burocratico-amministrative ma è probabilmente da collegare con la maggiore diffusione dello strumento sigillo in epoca imperiale matura e tarda” (“from the few occurrences in contexts that definitely come from the palace, (the title BONUS₂.VIR₂) linked to bureaucratic and administrative functions, but should be probably be connected with the wider distribution of the seal during the very Late Empire Period”).

But we do not completely agree when C. Mora also concludes: “che è improbabile che indicasse una classe particolare, mentre rimane da stabilire se si tratta di una sorta di titolo onorifico, vincolato ad una concessione dall’alto o di una normale - e banale - qualifica utilizzabile da chiunque” (“it is unlikely for it to indicate a specific social class, while it has yet to be established whether it is a sort of honorific title, linked to a concession from higher up, or whether it is a normal and commonplace title that could be used by anybody”).

It seems to us that by this statement C. Mora does not consider much of what she herself has previously stated, namely that the title BONUS₂.VIR₂ rarely occurs in palatine centres, whereas it is very frequent in the other centres.

From this we tend to deduce, against Mora’s hypothesis, that it is very likely that the phrase refers a specific class, which received its support from outside the palace and had connections with cities that, even if important, were secondary. This is because in the cities which had palaces serving as permanent headquarters of royal families, it is logical to expect that many functions and titles in use, for which the use of a seal was necessary, were distributed among the king’s relatives. Therefore, the functions and titles could not be attributed to individuals belonging to other families. Otherwise, as previously demonstrated, there are no seals/sealings where REX.FILIUS is associated in iconography with BONUS₂.VIR₂, as the two titles are mutually exclusive. On the other hand, in less important centres the functions/titles were distributed among the members of the rich families or the high dignitaries of these cities. A considerable percentage of the glyptics from these minor centres, dated as belonging to the Empire Period, have the phrase BONUS₂.VIR₂. Combining the different data presented here it is obvious for us to consider that this title indicated a specific social class, which had a certain importance in

31 See Mora, “I proprietari di sigillo”, cit.

32 See Mora, *ibidem*.

these lesser centres. This social class could have been represented by important local landowners, a class that could be considered as very close to something like an “aristocracy”. Even if the term seems a little anachronistic to us, what better word than “aristocratic” can explain the underlying meaning of BONUS₂.VIR₂? Both expressions make us think, in different ways, of “better (to) the males”, but they do not change the initial concept. The title “Better male” promoted anyone associated with it to a rank above ordinary men.

So we propose the hypothesis that the “title” of BONUS₂.VIR₂ refers, in a certain way, to individuals of a certain importance, an importance derived from owning large tracts of land. The possession of land has always been considered the main and the most stable source of wealth for pre-industrial societies. In fact, BONUS₂.VIR₂ was a title that was specific rather than merely generic

On the other hand, princes never used the title BONUS₂.VIR₂ and in my opinion the reason for this is their status, meaning that they could not have been other than what they were by birthright³³:

We now have to consider the arguments against this hypothesis, which means dealing with two issues. The first problem in the analysis of the phrase is as follows: if individuals with the title BONUS₂.VIR₂ are considered as “aristocratic”, then how one can explain the seal 198BG³⁴, in which an individual is present who, as proved elsewhere³⁵, has the title BONUS₂.VIR₂ and who seems to identify himself as a metal craftsman? It is difficult to believe that a craftsman could belong to an aristocratic family, as this type of work is normally considered to be menial. It is obvious that this concerns the point of view that Hittite society had regarding what is considered as noble or not, or what is menial or not, which differs from the point of view of other and later societies. As L. Godart³⁶ has remarked, in other contexts that were not remote in time or space from the Hittite Empire Period, in reality the metal craftsman was not a menial profession. On the contrary, had a certain importance, because a metal-worker knew and used a technology that was fundamental for the period in question here. Secondly, it has to be considered that not all the sons of the “nobles” could live only from land revenues, as there was always the tendency to keep land intact rather than dividing it up among a number of heirs. So considering the two aspects, it is plausible to hypothesize that some noblemen’s sons were directed to certain professions, one of which could very well have been that of a metal craftsman, which was one of the most at that time. Another such profession could

33 This means that this phrase was related to a very specific social category.

34 See Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit., no. 198.

35 See Massi, *Princes and Officers*, cit., n. 198BG.

36 See L. Godart, *L’invenzione della scrittura*, Torino 1992, p. 273. Godart points out that the title of *basileus*, which means “king” in classical Greek, derives from Mycenaean *vasileus*, who was simply the leader of a generic group, and which specifically meant the leader of a group of metal craftsmen (in this case they can also be called blacksmiths). It has been thought that *vasileus* denoted a metal craftsman to whom slaves were given to enable him to do his job. The *vasileus* was not a palace official, so it was not a very prestigious occupation. At the same time it must be implied that it was much more important than other roles in villages that were nothing but the basis of a palace economy. After the fall of the palaces, the villages were no longer controlled by them, which is when the *vasileus* emerged as an important individual. This may be the reason for linking the later meaning of the word *basileus* to its earlier meaning expressed by *vasileus*.

clearly have been that of a scribe. In fact, this can be confirmed by the many seals of scribes, which also have the title BONUS₂VIR₂ in the iconography. Rather than being a problem this provides confirmation for our thesis.

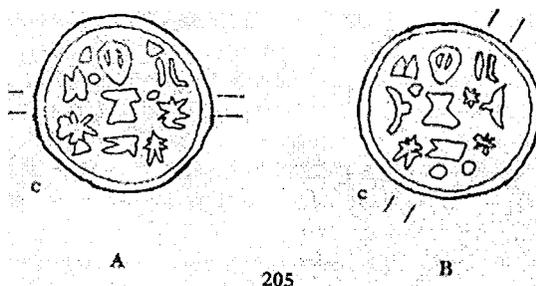


Fig.3

(Biconvex seal 205BG, from Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit.)

The second problem is seal 205BG³⁷. This is a biconvex seal which has the same name (ḥa-pu(?) -ni-ya) on each face with different qualifiers: on Face A we have the BONUS₂VIR₂, while on the Face B only the sign VIR₂ is present. How can this be explained? Possibly it is too simplistic to say that the title (BONUS₂VIR₂) was an indicator of social status whereas VIR₂ simply showed the sex of the seal's owner without any reference to social standing. Therefore we have to provide a better explanation.

If we consider the titles that are very often combined with BONUS₂, for example GAL.GEŠTIN and SCRIBA, it will be noticed that GAL.BONUS₂.GEŠTIN or BONUS₂.SCRIBA are the equivalents of GAL.GEŠTIN and SCRIBA³⁸. This is tantamount to saying that the addition of BONUS₂ to these functions did not affect the real meaning, i.e. the title remained the same, or in its qualitative meaning, i.e. BONUS₂ had no hierarchical meaning within the same occupation. Similarly, then, VIR₂ can be considered as the equivalent of BONUS₂VIR₂ from the parallels between GAL GEŠTIN and SCRIBA. From this we can deduce that the engraver of seal 205BG did not make a mistake regarding the actual meaning of the text. At most he made a mistake regarding the form as he did not follow the exact parallelism.

To summarise, if one would like to ask why the same phrase was written in two different ways on the same seal, one could reply that this was not seen as an error for the reasons given above.

Incidentally, we should also consider that errors were possible even on glyptic. Let us consider seal SBo II 94³⁹. On this seal, the right-hand side is identical to the left-hand side, not only as regards the hieroglyphic signs - as it represents the same name on the

37 See Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit., no. 205.

38 See Massi, *Princes and Officers*, cit., no. 246BG.

39 See Güterbock, *Siegel aus Boğazköy II.*, cit., no. 94.

right and on the left - but also in respect of the filler signs. In this seal, the sign for scribe (L326) is represented on the right-hand side together with L388, and is expressed by the three additional small lines, while on the left-hand side L326 is not accompanied by L388. Note that the “small lines” on L326⁴⁰ could be considered as indicating a certain hierarchy among the scribes according to Güterbock⁴¹. A scribe could be designated by SCRIBA+3 or by SCRIBA on its own (as demonstrated by all the other seals and sealings with the sign L326). It seems to us that the only reason for this discrepancy is that the engraver was not paying attention and he made a mistake. It is strange to see an omission error on a seal, as it could always be corrected by a later addition. We cannot find any other explanation other than an uncorrected mistake made by the engraver⁴². As a consequence, this seal SBo II 94 could provide a parallel to explain seal 205BG, if the absence of BONUS₂ on that seal is considered to be a mistake and not just a simple oversight, which is more plausible.

Evaluating the different elements, it seems to us that the positive ones are clearer and more comprehensive than the negative ones. So we are tempted to confirm that the title BONUS₂.VIR₂ was an indicator of belonging to a specific high class, very likely to be linked to the “aristocracy” of land-owners.

The origin and meaning of the expression BONUS₂.VIR₂.

Another problem connected with BONUS₂.VIR₂, which requires an explanation, is the relationship between BONUS₂.VIR₂ and BONUS₂.VITA.

In fact, if BONUS₂.VITA is present on a seal, then BONUS₂.VIR₂ cannot be present – the two phrases seem to be mutually exclusive. Each of the two phrases belongs to a specific period: BONUS₂.VITA is very frequent during the Ancient Period, while BONUS₂.VIR₂ is more frequent during the Empire Period. Occasionally, seals have been found belonging to the Empire Period, that contain the phrase BONUS₂.VITA, but in these the presence of BONUS₂.VIR₂ has never been proved. Moreover, if we consider the statistical data, then during the Ancient Period, for example, in Büyükkale⁴³, BONUS₂.VITA is found on 13 out of 32⁴⁴ seals and sealings, that is 40,62% of all cases. In the same period, on 30 selected seals and sealings from the lower city⁴⁵, the same phrase is found 18 times, which is 60% of the cases. If we come down to the Empire Period, then it is evident that, on 31 seals and seal impressions belonging to the lower

40 See Massi, *Princes and Officers*, final appendix/charts.

41 See Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit., nos. 246-247. In this connection see also the interesting hypothesis of Shai Gordin, “*Scriptoria* in Late Empire Period Hattuša: The Case of the É GIŠ.KIN.TI”, *Festschrift I.Singer* (in the press), which would not contradict our theory.

42 Perhaps in this case the error could be exactly the opposite: the sign L388 was engraved on one side by mistake and could no longer be corrected.

43 The data from Büyükkale and from the lower city have been considered because they are numerically consistent and therefore more suitable for statistical research. For data on ancient glyptic from Büyükkale see T. Beran, *Die Hethitische Glyptik von Boğazköy* (WVDOG 76), BoHa V, Berlin 1967.

44 As usual, here royal seals/sealings have been excluded.

45 See Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit.; Beran, *Die Hethitische Glyptik*, cit.

city, BONUS₂.VITA is found on 4 or 5⁴⁶ of the cases, i.e. 12,90%. Also from the same period in Temple I BONUS₂.VITA is found on 3 or 4⁴⁷ cases out of the 36, which is 8,33% of the total. Whereas there is an abrupt decrease in the occurrences of BONUS₂.VITA, the combination BONUS₂.VIR₂ is found very consistently. If during the Ancient Period we have no sealings with this last phrase (BONUS₂.VIR₂) either from Büyükkale or from the lower city, then later on, during the Empire Period, we find 3 sealings from the lower city plus another 10 in Temple I with the same phrase. The percentage of occurrences of BONUS₂.VIR₂ in the glyptic of the Empire Period is quite limited compared to the percentage of examples of BONUS₂.VITA during the Ancient Period. This is due to issues pertaining to the function and title of BONUS₂.VIR₂. In fact, this phrase indicated a specific social class, which was more limited in number, as explained before, in Hattuša than in other centres of the periphery of the Hittite empire. After all, it is impossible to find the title of BONUS₂.VIR₂ during the Ancient Period, whereas it occurs very often in the glyptic of the Empire Period. On the other hand, one can rarely find the expression BONUS₂.VITA in glyptic from the Empire period, while the use of this expression was very popular during the Ancient Period.

The two phrases seem to interchange from one period to the other. Another fact is relevant: as deduced from all glyptic parallels, VIR₂ (L386) has almost the same shape as the lower part of VITA (L369) to which it is almost identical, using as an example the lower part of L369 in 161BG⁴⁸.

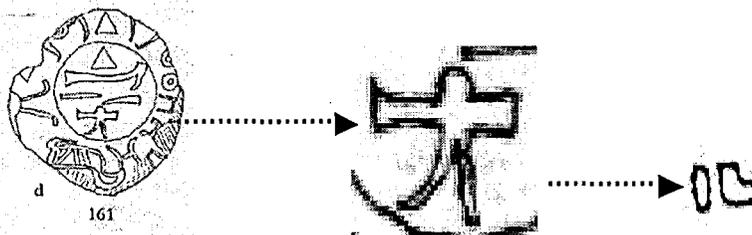


Fig.4

(The lower part of the sign L369 [VITA] compared to L386.
Seal impression 161BG from Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit;
drawing of VIR₂ from M. Marazzi, *Il geroglifico anatolico*, cit.)

Are these data related? Furthermore, during the Empire Period BONUS₂.VIR₂ indicates a social category as has been proven previously, but the question is how did this happen? Was this phrase created deliberately or was there a background that could explain it? The following could be the probable explanation if we consider that the phrase

46 One of them refers to L440, late variant of L369, which is present on seal 240BG: see Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit., no. 240.

47 Here too the sign L440 replaces L369 (i.e. the seal 199BG, see Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit., no. 199). L440 is a later variant of L369.

48 See Boehmer – Güterbock, *Glyptik*, cit., no. 161.

BONUS₂.VIR₂ was closely related to BONUS₂.VITA and not an expression deliberately created during the Empire Period.

Initially, during the Ancient Period, BONUS₂.VITA as an expression of wishing someone well was very popular. This expression was used during the Ancient Period as much as BONUS₂.VIR₂ was present later, during the Empire Period and mostly during the Late Empire Period. As time went by, the sign VITA became the sign VIR₂ which reproduces the lower part of the ancient variant of the sign VITA⁴⁹. This lower part of the sign, which was always present in legends on ancient seals, ended up as being the term for “male”, because generally seals referred exclusively to males. During the Empire Period, the widespread use of seals made it more popular, even amongst women, than in the past, where few cases of women seal owners seem to be documented. In fact, generally these cases are very rare and the owner’s sex is never specified in the iconography of seals from the Ancient Period⁵⁰, the first evidence for a sign that specifies the female sex dates to the Empire Period but never occurs during the Ancient Period.

The sign mentioned above is FEMINA (L79). Similarly, the sign VIR₂, generated by the low part of the L369 (VITA), which was very common in the ancient glyptic and was owned mostly by males, eventually came to mean “male” specifically. It must be stressed that VIR₂ never conflicts with the earlier sign for “male”, which was VIR. The two signs have very well defined and differentiated areas of reference. VIR (L312) it is found from the Ancient Period both in onomastics and to indicate certain types of professions, whereas VIR₂ is found mainly alongside personal names (but never within a personal name), in expressions exactly parallel to the previous ones BONUS₂.VITA / VITA. However, it never appears together with REX⁵¹, and certainly never within the onomastics or for the professions indicated by VIR. When the seals became so widespread in Hittite society that a large number of people owned them, BONUS₂.VIR₂ - the parallel expression to earlier BONUS₂.VITA - indicated a precise category of people, whom we anachronistically consider as belonging to the “aristocracy”. Instead, VITA was almost completely replaced by the new expression and survived in rare cases as a generic expression of wishing someone well, the function it had the antiquity.

In my opinion, this explanation would be the best, as it explains both the data reported initially and lead us to consider BONUS₂.VIR₂ as a phrase denoting a specific social class. Also, the data make BONUS₂.VIR₂ from the Empire Period the equivalent of the corresponding ancient expression BONUS₂.VITA. This correspondence is undeniably present in glyptic, where the two phrases never overlap and where VIR₂ is morphologically very similar to the lower part of the sign for VITA.

49 This does not mean that the sign VIR₂ replaced the sign VITA, but only that the sign VIR₂ is derived from VITA. The sign VITA continued to exist, but its shape changed slightly and it occurred less often.

50 The owner could have been a woman, as shown in the prosopographical studies of sealings no. 110Be and perhaps no. 11Be (which refer to seals published with these numbers in Beran, *Die Hethitische Glyptik*, cit.); see Massi, *Princes and Officers*, cit., nos. 110Be, 11Be.

51 In this respect, VIR₂ is distinct from VITA because, as previously mentioned, VIR₂ ultimately specified a particular social class and no longer had the generic value peculiar to VITA.

To conclude, the phrase BONUS₂VIR₂ developed from the ancient expression BONUS₂VITA; during the Empire Period. this came to specify a well-defined class of people, identified by us as a type of “landed aristocracy” or “landowner”.