

RETHINKING ADMINISTRATION AND SEAL USE IN THIRD MILLENNIUM CRETE*

The nature of administration during the Prepalatial period in Crete has been a matter of a lively debate over the recent years. Scholarly opinion appears divided between two main approaches. The first line of thought favours a distinction between *administration*, as a local, small-scale process with only sporadic occurrence, and an *administrative system*, considered large-scale, continuous and with a complex bureaucratic organisation. Prepalatial society supposedly falls within the first category, while only with the emergence of the Palaces a proper administrative system is thought to come into play¹. To a large extent this view builds upon earlier accounts that saw Minoan Prepalatial society as largely undifferentiated with social and economic structures characterised by small-scale household organisation². The second approach argues to the contrary that there is sufficient evidence in the Prepalatial period of complex social and economic organisation³ and administrative activity to justify speaking of an administrative system with common features throughout the island⁴.

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¹ WEINGARTEN 1990a, p. 56; WEINGARTEN 1990b, p. 105; WEINGARTEN 1994, pp. 176-177; PALAIMA 1990a, p. 85; A.C. BLASINGHAM, Discussion Pini, in *Aegean Seals*, p. 59; J.-C. POURSAT, Response to Pini, in *Aegean Seals*, p. 55.

² E.g. WHITELAW 1983; J.F. CHERRY, Evolution, revolution and the origins of complex society in Minoan Crete, in *Minoan Society*, pp. 33-45; ID., The emergence of state in Prehistoric Aegean, in *PCPS* n.s. 30, 1984, pp. 18-48.

³ E.g. P.M. DAY-D.E. WILSON-E. KIRIATZI, Reasses-

sing specialisation in Prepalatial Cretan ceramic production, in P.P. BETANCOURT-R. LAFFINEUR edd., *TEXNH. Craftsmen, craftswomen and craftsmanship in the Aegean Bronze Age* (Proceedings of the 6th International Aegean Conference, Philadelphia Temple University 18-21 April 1996) (*Aegaeum* 17), Liège and Austin 1997, pp. 275-289; P.M. DAY-D.E. WILSON, Land-scapes of memory, craft and power in Prepalatial and Protopalatial Knossos, in Y. HAMILAKIS ed., *Labyrinth Revisited. Rethinking 'Minoan' Archaeology*, Oxford 2002, pp. 143-166; D. HAGGIS, Staple Finance, Peak Sanctuaries and Economic Complexity in Late Prepalatial Crete, in A. CHANIOTIS ed., *From Minoan Farmers to Roman Traders. Sidelights on the Economy of Ancient Crete*, Stuttgart 1999, pp. 53-85; ID., Integration and complexity in the Late Prepalatial period: a view from the countryside in Eastern Crete, in Y. HAMILAKIS ed., *Labyrinth Revisited. Rethinking 'Minoan' Archaeology*, Oxford 2002, pp. 120-142; SBONIAS 1999.

⁴ PINI 1990, pp. 33-34; VLASAKI-HALLAGER 1995; M. PERNA, Il sistema amministrativo minoico nella Creta prepalaziale, in V. LA ROSA-D. PALERMO-L. VAGNETTI edd., *Επί πόντων πλαζόμενοι. Simposio italiano di Studi Egei*, Roma 1999, pp. 63-68; I. SCHOEP, The origins of writing and administration on Crete, in *OJA* 18 (3), 1999, pp. 265-276; EAD. 2004.

Despite their differences, both arguments use as evidence the Prepalatial seals and sealings, which they consider as unquestionable instruments of administration. In so doing, both approaches make some implicit assumptions about these objects and the nature of administration that I would like to call into question in this paper. I argue that, on the one hand, a more detailed theoretical discussion of the concept of administration is necessary in order to further the existing debate on Prepalatial administrative practices, while on the other, the role and significance of seals and sealings within this process need to be specified with greater accuracy.

I. Administration

Inevitably our view of Prepalatial administration is affected by what we know about administrative practices in the later, palatial times, in which seals and sealings constitute important components of the administrative process across the island. However, although seals and sealings occur both before and after the establishment of the Palaces, a closer look at the patterns and the contexts of use of these artefacts reveals significant disparities from one period to the next. Therefore, we must acknowledge the possibility that their meaning and associated practices may differ markedly between the two periods.

Scholarly opinion has generally accepted a fairly centralised character for the administrative practices attested in the Minoan palaces, although recent work has argued for more heterarchical, less centralized social structures at least for the First Palaces⁵. On the contrary, the prevailing understanding of sealings as «always related to a centralised collection system with a view to redistribution»⁶ has been the fuel in the debate about the existence or not of a clear administrative system in the Prepalatial period. The lack of central buildings or other indications for centralised activities in Prepalatial society appear to some scholars to be at odds with a use of sealings for administrative purposes, casting doubts at even the necessity of an administrative system before the Palaces. As Weingarten⁷ suggested, in the absence of large-scale storage facilities the question becomes «what was being administered».

Such views stem on the one hand from a generalised perception of sealings that does not stand up to the more detailed scrutiny of specific contexts of use, and on the other, from an understanding of administration as a process intricately linked with centralised social structures. Although more balanced arguments stress the existence of a variety of forms of accounting other than the complex bureaucratic procedures encountered in the Palaces⁸, the more common understanding of administration remains firmly attached to centralisation. While there is no doubt that the scale at which administrative activity oper-

⁵ SCHOEP 2004; EAD., Social and political organisation on Crete during the Protopalatial period: the case of Mallia in MMII, in *JMA* 15 (2), 2002, pp. 102-125; EAD., Looking Beyond the First Palaces: Elites and the Agency of Power in EM III-MM II Crete, in *AJA* 110, 2006, pp. 37-64; RELAKI forthcoming.

⁶ P. FERIOLO-E. FIANDRA-G.G. FISSORE, Research into the use of cretule in ancient administrative systems: problems regarding orientation and methods, in M.

PERNA ed., *Administrative Documents in the Aegean and their Near Eastern counterparts* (Proceedings of the International Colloquium Naples, February 29-March 2, 1996), Torino 2000, p. 354.

⁷ WEINGARTEN 1990a, p. 57.

⁸ PALAIMA 1990b, p. 57; P. MILITELLO, Amministrazione e contabilità a Festòs. I. Gettoni di età prepalaziale, in *Creta Antica* 2, 2001, p. 29; SCHOEP 2004, p. 284.

ates is important, centralisation is not tantamount to, or a prerequisite for administration. Some form of management of resources takes place at every type or level of social organisation and any kind of social structure entails some form of leadership entwined with some way, formal or not, of decision-making. Such roles may not be as intensive or formalised in the same ways in every social context, however, we cannot underestimate their significance in the every day running of things. Moreover, although administration is generally understood as the management of material resources, symbolic resources are also part of such practices, and the two types more often than not intersect.

It is possible therefore, that different activities are managed in different ways and different processes of decision-making may be applied according to different circumstances. For instance, the overall management of resources within a household may be the responsibility of the household leader, but the management of certain activities such as the organisation of a wedding may fall within the jurisdiction of other members of the household. In other circumstances, although each household may be independent in the management of its own affairs, there may exist certain resources, either material or symbolic, that are managed exclusively by specific members of the community: for example, public spaces or public events, or even more private situations, but which call for more specialised management, such as ritual lament or matchmaking. 'Economic' and 'symbolic' administrative concerns are intertwined in such cases representing highly complex forms of management that surpass the narrow view of administration as a practice that can be either small or large-scale, centralised or non-centralised. More importantly, from a methodological point of view, different types of management may leave different kinds of traces or no traces at all in the archaeological record, a fact that should make us more cautious in the suggested interpretations of extant material.

On the other hand, although Weingarten's argument for the non-necessity of administration before the Palaces may be considered exaggerated, the question of *what was administered* in the Prepalatial period is a valid one. The administrative purpose of seals and sealings has been taken for granted without specifying though how exactly they perform such function and in relation to which particular resources. Generally sealings constitute the starting point in this discussion, but I would like to begin with a more detailed examination of the role of Prepalatial seals.

II. Seals

Seals are commonly considered as 'artefacts of identity' but it is not always clear what kind of identity this may be. They are also frequently interpreted as status symbols⁹, but again, although a large number of them were made from what can be safely considered luxury raw materials, such as hippopotamus ivory¹⁰, the characterisation is rather broad and not always adequately explained with relation to the particular social circumstances of their use.

⁹A. KARYTINOS, Sealstones in cemeteries: a display of social status? in K. BRANIGAN ed., *Cemetery and Society in the Bronze Age*, Sheffield 1998, pp. 78-86; KRZYSZKOWSKA 2005, p. 76.

¹⁰O. KRZYSZKOWSKA, Ivory from Hippopotamus

Tusk in the Aegean Bronze Age, in *Antiquity* 58, 1984, pp. 123-12; EAD., Ivory in the Aegean Bronze Age: Elephant Tusk or Hippopotamus Ivory? in *BSA* 83, 1988, pp. 209-234.

The most important defining feature of seals is the fact that they can, and more likely were designed to, leave an impression on another material. They are therefore devices that can transfer meanings or properties from one entity to another, and most notably between living and material entities, namely the seal-users and the materials they impress. This means that they can be used to create physical as well as symbolic links between either different people, or people and artefacts.

Cretan Prepalatial seals were almost invariably perforated and therefore, were meant to be worn in some ornamental fashion, in an analogous way to Neolithic stamps attested from mainland Greece, which were also provided by perforations and could have been worn when not in use¹¹. Warren¹² further remarked that all the finished seals found at Myrtos Fournou Koryfi appeared 'distinctly worn from suspension'. An amuletic function is also commonly suggested for seals¹³, seen to operate as charms protecting the persons wearing them from harm. Although some approaches have favoured an exclusive use of early seals as talismanic objects without any sphragistic purpose that would implicate them in administrative practices¹⁴, most scholars see the amuletic and sphragistic features of seals as inseparable and active elements in all the periods of their use¹⁵. Support to the latter suggestion may also be provided by Mesopotamian texts, which document the use of seals for both amuletic and administrative purposes in various chronological contexts¹⁶. Seals therefore could have combined a range of functions: items of display, protective objects and sphragistic devices. Irrespectively of whether their sphragistic capacity was used for administrative tasks or not, all the other features of seals imply a strong personal association between the seals and the individuals who used them. An examination of their patterns of deposition and their motifs could shed more light into the issue of seal ownership.

With very few exceptions, the majority of Prepalatial seals come from tombs, especially in the Mesara¹⁷, although the seals discovered in the Early Minoan settlement of Myrtos Fournou Koryfi¹⁸ testify to their use in habitational contexts as well. Despite the relative dearth of excavated Prepalatial settlements, the very frequent occurrence of seals in burial contexts across the island suggests that this was an intentional and meaningful pattern of deposition. Unfortunately the messy nature of communal burials and the regrettable looting of many tombs do not allow us to make clear associations between particular individuals and seals¹⁹.

¹¹ KRZYSZKOWSKA 2005, pp. 21, 33 and 76.

¹² WARREN 1972, pp. 226-227.

¹³ SAKELLARAKIS-SAPOUNA-SAKELLARAKI 1997, p. 631; SBONIAS 1999, p. 35; A. KARYTINOS, Oi zoomorphikes sphragides ton Archanon, in *Peprag. tou H' Dieth. Kritolog. Syn.* (Herakleion 1996), A2, Herakleion 2000, p. 37; KRZYSZKOWSKA 2005, p. 76.

¹⁴ WEINGARTEN 1990a, p. 56; BLASINGHAM 1983, p. 12.

¹⁵ PINI 1990, p. 59; J. ARUZ, Discussion Pini, in *Aegean Seals*, p. 59; ARUZ 1994, p. 226; KRZYSZKOWSKA 2005, p. 78.

¹⁶ B.L. GOFF, The role of amulets in Mesopotamian ritual texts, in *JWarb*, 19 (1/2), 1956, pp. 1-39.

¹⁷ S. XANTHOUIDES, *The Vaulted Tombs of Mesara*, London 1924; K. BRANIGAN, *The tombs of Mesara. A Study of*

Funerary Architecture and Ritual in Southern Crete, 2800-1700 BC, London 1970. Seals occur in burial contexts across Crete (Archanes, Mallia, Mochlos, Palaikastro), however the overwhelming majority derives from the Mesara inevitably shifting the focus of the argument to this area: K. SBONIAS, *Frühkretische Siegel. Ansätze für eine Interpretation der sozial-politischen Entwicklung auf Kreta während der Frühbronzezeit* (BAR IS 620), Oxford 1995.

¹⁸ WARREN 1972, pp. 226-227.

¹⁹ Renfrew had suggested that family or clan leaders had been buried with a dagger and a seal in the tholos tombs in the Mesara, with Whitelaw later arguing for these individuals being heads of nuclear households: A.C. RENFREW, *The Emergence of Civilisation. The Cyclades and the Aegean in the Third Millennium B.C.*, London 1972, pp. 387-388; WHITELAW 1983. Howev-

Also, rough estimates of burial numbers²⁰ indicate that, as a general rule, there were fewer seals than individuals buried in the tombs. This is confirmed by the more accurate numbers of individual burials provided by intact contexts such as Lebena and Archanes Phourni. For example, in Lebena Papoura (Tomb I), 23 sealstones correspond to approximately 31 individuals, in Lebena Zervou (Tomb III), 5 seals are attested for about 15 individuals²¹, while in Archanes Phourni, only 9 seals correspond to at least 30 individuals buried in Tholos γ ²², indicating that perhaps *not* everybody was buried with a seal. Krzyszkowska²³ also underlines the very small number – about two dozen – of seals dating to the entire EM II period. Such a small amount would be a further indication that perhaps only some burials were accompanied by sealstones. This suggestion is also supported by the occurrence of typologically earlier seals in later contexts, demonstrating their preservation and curation as heirlooms²⁴. Therefore, it seems that seals could be buried with their owners or users, but also inherited through the generations, making it quite plausible to suggest that seals that were withdrawn from circulation through burial and seals that were bestowed through inheritance might have represented two distinct types of seals.

The motifs depicted on the sealstones are a crucial attribute of the kind of identity that the seals were supposed to confer and transfer and their interpretations range from denoting the person who owned the seal to different types of commodities, activities, or localities²⁵. From an administrative point of view it would be of paramount importance to distinguish between these various identifications. Due to the more personal features of seals that I discussed above, I would suggest that an association with persons is more likely to be reflected by the seal imagery.

However, a lot of the motifs are geometric and abstract and characterised by a strong homogeneity that would have made the recognition of different individuals very difficult. Although the clustering of motifs in iconographic groups may indicate relationships between the people who used seals from the same series²⁶, the very wide distribution of such motifs across diverse geographical contexts (*fig. 1*) calls for a further refinement of this interpretation. Aruz²⁷ has further remarked that the use of identical seals on a variety of objects is suggestive of an administrative purpose, which, however, remains unspecified. For example, motifs such as the angle-filled cross have a very widespread distribution in

er, a closer look at the patterns of deposition of seals and daggers in the Mesara tombs suggests that these two artefacts were not always associated and might have represented different kinds of personal strategies and different consumption practices on a collective level: M. RELAKI, Community, Identity and Representation in Prepalatial and Protopalatial Mesara, in *BICS* 51, 2008, pp. 187-188.

²⁰ K. BRANIGAN, *Dancing with Death. Life and death in Southern Crete c. 3000-2000 BC*, Amsterdam 1993, pp. 81-95.

²¹ S. ALEXIOU-P. WARREN, *The Early Minoan Tombs of Lebena, Southern Crete* (SIMA 30), Sävedalen 2004, pp. 12, 37 and 187-188.

²² Y. PAPADATOS, *Tholos Tomb Gamma. A Prepalatial Tholos Tomb at Phourni, Archanes* (ISNTAP Prehistory

Monographs 17), Philadelphia 2005.

²³ KRZYSZKOWSKA 2005, p. 63.

²⁴ BLASINGHAM 1983, p. 13; PINI 1990, p. 34; KARYTINOS, Sealstones in cemeteries... cit. in note 9, p. 84.

²⁵ BLASINGHAM 1983, p. 11; SBONIAS 1999, p. 35; P. MILITELLO, «L'archivio di cretule» del vano 25 e un nuovo sigillo da Festòs, in M. PERNA ed., *Administrative documents in the Aegean and their Near Eastern Counterparts*, Torino 2000, p. 227.

²⁶ ARUZ, Discussion Pini, in *Aegean Seals*, p. 59.

²⁷ J. ARUZ, Seal imagery and sealing practices in the early Aegean world, in P. FERIOLI-E. FIANDRA-G.G. FISSORE-M. FRANGIPANE edd., *Archives Before Writing* (Proceedings of the International Colloquium Oriolo Romano, October 23-25, 1991), Roma 1994, pp. 211-246.

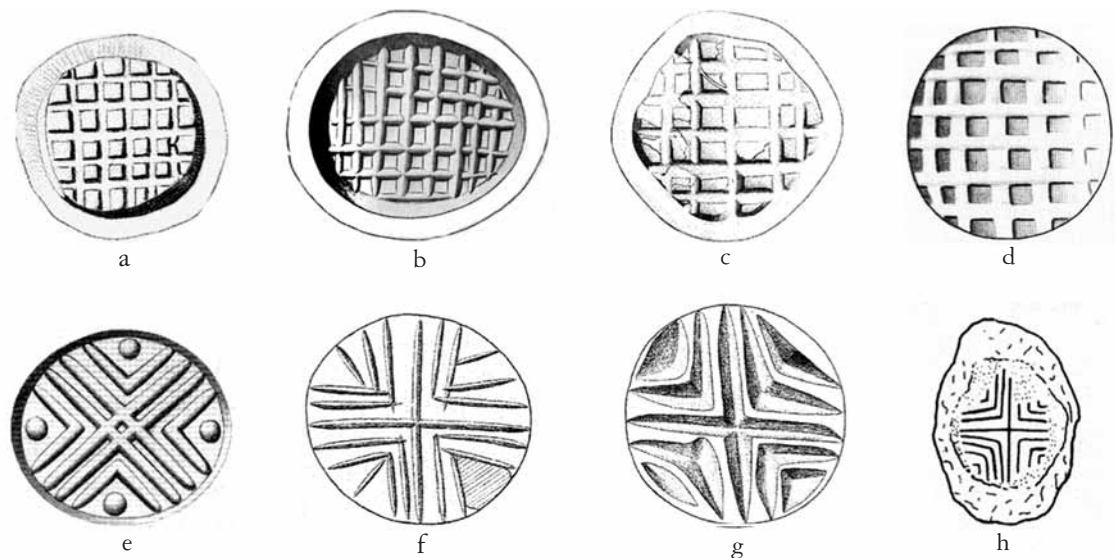


FIG 1 – SIMILAR EBA SEAL MOTIFS ACROSS SITES. A: LEBENA CMS II.1, 171. B: AG TRIADA CMS II.1, 17. C: KOUMASA CMS II.1, 141. D: PALAIKASTRO CMS II.6, 236. E: MYRTOS FOURNOU KORYFI CMS V, 20. F: MIKRO VOUNI SAMOTRAKI CMS V S.3, 339. G: MITSOTAKIS COLLECTION CMS V S.3, 129. H: MALLIA NODULUS (HUE AND PELON 1992, FIG. 34).

the Early Bronze Age Aegean and Anatolia and are attested on a variety of supports including seals from Ag. Irini on Keos (CMS V, 486), Poliochni on Lemnos (CMS V, 518), Kapros on Amorgos and Tzoungiza in the Peloponnese²⁸ to which we can also add three seals from the Mitsotakis collection most likely deriving from Crete (CMS V S.3, 128-130), sealings from Lerna²⁹, Myrtos Fournou Koryfi (CMS V, 20) Mikro Vouni on Samothraki (CMS V S.3, 339 of EBII date) while the Prepalatial *nodulus* from Mallia also bears a similar motif³⁰, jewellery from Poliochni (CMS I S., 65), pottery from Lerna (CMS V, 52), Chalandriani on Syros (CMS I S. 171) and Chania³¹ (CMS V S.1A, 150), and hearth rims from Ag. Irini (CMS V, 470-472) and Kastri on Syros³². Even allowing for far-reaching inter-regional contacts to encompass the entire Aegean, we may struggle to find a likely enough administrative purpose to justify the occurrence of the same motif on such a diverse range of objects and contexts. I think a more plausible explanation of this homogeneity may be found in the potential amuletic character of seals.

Drawing an analogy with the widespread superstition of the evil eye³³, still widely encountered in contemporary Greece³⁴, it is possible to view early seals and their motifs as

²⁸ PULLEN 1994, p. 38, n. 13.

²⁹ PULLEN 1994, p. 38, n. 14.

³⁰ M. HOUE-O. PELON, La Salle à piliers du palais de Malia et ses antécédents, in *BCH* 116, 1992, pp. 31-33, figs. 33-34.

³¹ VLASAKI-HALLAGER 1995, fig. 14.

³² PULLEN 1994, p. 38, n. 17.

³³ C. MALONEY ed., *The Evil Eye*, New York 1976; Sir E.A.W. BUDGE, *Amulets and Superstitions*, a reprint of the 1930 edition published by Oxford University Press, New York 1978; DUNDES 1981; SIEBERS 2000.

³⁴ DIONYSOPOULOS-MASS 1976; M.H. HARDIE, The Evil Eye in some Greek villages in the upper Haliakmon valley in West Macedonia, in A. DUNDES ed., *The Evil Eye. A Folklore Casebook*, New York 1981, pp. 107-23; M. HERZFELD, Meaning and Morality: a semiotic approach to Evil Eye accusations in a Greek village, in *American Ethnologist* 8 (3), 1981, pp. 560-74; M. KENNA, Saying «No» in Greece: some preliminary thoughts on hospitality, gender and the evil eye, in S. DAMIANAKOS ed., *Brothers and others: essays in honour of John Peristiany*, Athens 1995, pp. 133-46.

expressions of such kinds of apotropaic beliefs. The evil eye superstition holds that beauty, prosperity or accomplishment of any kind may attract envy against not only persons, but also animals, plants and inanimate objects³⁵. There is therefore a need to be protected by wearing powerful magic objects such as amulets or talismans³⁶.

Materials, shapes and motifs have been considered suggestive of the protective powers that sealstones might have had³⁷. The motifs in particular with their geometric and abstract designs fall into a standard category of prophylactic objects whose main purpose is to distract and confuse the harmful gaze of the onlooker away from the person or the object carrying the charm, an idea also common in antiquity as demonstrated by Plutarch who maintained that «the strange look of them [amulets] attracts the gaze, so that it exerts less pressure on its victims»³⁸. Such motifs as those that occur so commonly in the Early Bronze Age Aegean are also found in a range of ethnographic and archaeological contexts displayed on shields, house walls or worn as charms³⁹. Moreover, potential uses suggested for Neolithic stamps (or *pintaderas*) include the stamping of geometric designs on textiles, skin or even the body⁴⁰. Such a practice could perhaps have formed part of apotropaic behaviour, as a way of transferring the protective qualities of the motif onto the material or person in danger⁴¹. Evil eye beliefs reflect essentially an emphasis on interpersonal interaction through gazing⁴², while envy is considered the most common motivation for someone casting the evil eye⁴³. If such an apotropaic function can be accepted for Prepalatial seals, then it reveals quite strong concerns with personhood and individual identification. At the same time, if the homogeneity of motifs can be attributed to shared beliefs about the apotropaic qualities of seals, more personal aspirations might have also been served by the greater diversity of seal shapes and materials, and in particular the zoomorphic categories.

The timing of the seals' introduction into the material culture of Minoan society, at present evidence on EM II, is also revealing. The case has been made for increasingly com-

³⁵ DIONYSOPOULOS-MASS 1976, pp. 49-50; J. ROBERTS, Belief in the Evil Eye in World Perspective, in C. MALONEY ed., *The Evil Eye*, New York 1976, p. 226.

³⁶ DUNDES 1981, p. 258; SIEBERS 2000, p. 23.

³⁷ E. ECCLES, The seals and sealings, in R.W. HUTCHINSON, Unpublished objects from Palaikastro and Praisos, in *BSA* 35, 1939-40, p. 44; SAKELLARAKIS-SAPOUNA-SAKELLARAKI 1997, p. 631; J. ARUZ, The Aegean and the Orient: the evidence of stamp and cylinder seals, in E.H. CLINE-D. HARRIS-CLINE edd., *The Aegean and the Orient in the Second Millennium* (Proceedings of the 50th Anniversary Symposium, Cincinnati, 18-20 April 1997) (*Aegaeum* 18), Liège and Austin 1998, p. 301.

³⁸ Cited in SIEBERS 2000, p. 37; also F.T. ELWORTHY, *The Evil Eye. An Account of this Ancient and Widespread Superstition*, London 1895, p. 143, quotes the same passage.

³⁹ ELWORTHY cit. in note 38, pp. 167-180. Even 'parading animals' as those most commonly occur-

ring in Platanos (but also found in Archanes, Mallia, Knossos, Myrtos Pyrgos) can be paralleled with evil eye charms as illustrated in ELWORTHY, figs. 14-19; A. GONZÁLES-RUIBAL, House societies vs. kinship-based societies: An archaeological case from Iron Age Europe, in *JAnthArch* 25, 2006, p. 158, fig. 11.

⁴⁰ KRZYSZKOWSKA 2005, p. 33.

⁴¹ Two examples of *pintaderas* are mentioned among Prepalatial material from Phaistos, in Acropoli Mediana and Room CC, both bearing a cross-hatched pattern: M. BENZI, Il periodo prepalaziale a Festòs: una ricognizione preliminare, in *I cento anni dello scavo di Festòs* (Atti dei Convegni Lincei 173), Roma 2001, pp. 148, 152.

⁴² V. GARRISON-C.M. ARENSBERG, The Evil Eye: Envy or risk of seizure? Paranoia or patronal dependency?, in C. MALONEY ed., *The Evil Eye*, New York 1976, pp. 291-292.

⁴³ ROBERTS, Belief in the Evil Eye... cit. in note 35, p. 226.

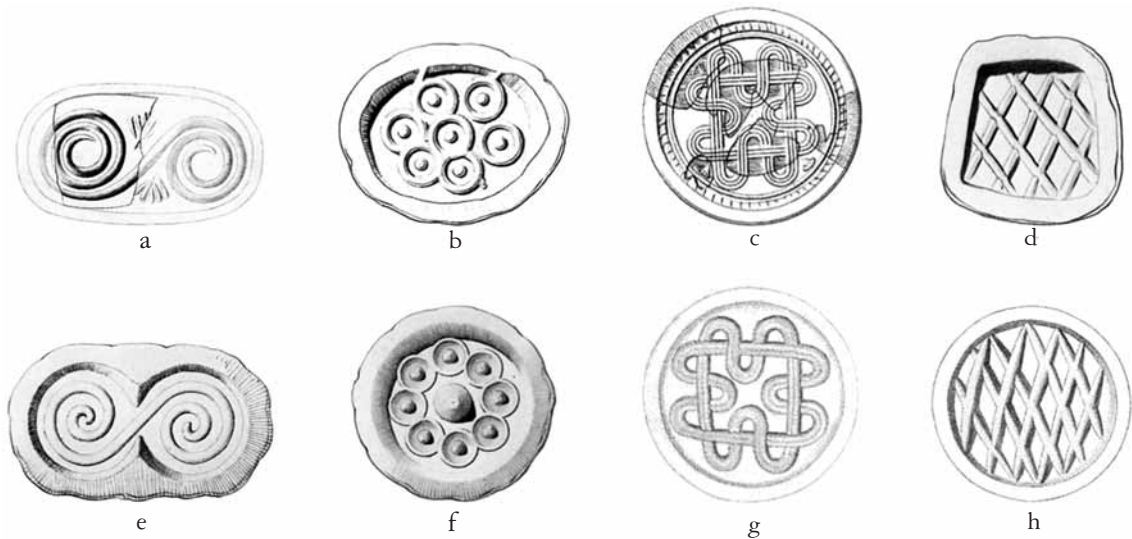


FIG. 2 – PREPALATIAL SEAL MOTIFS CONTINUING INTO LATER PERIODS. A: LEBENA CMS II.1, 195. B: AG TRIADA CMS II.1, 29. C: PLATANOS CMS II.1, 313. D: KOUMASA CMS II.1, 154. E: PHAISTOS MMII B CMS II.5, 186. F: PHAISTOS MMII B CMS II.5, 58. G: PHAISTOS MMII B CMS II.5, 163. H: AG TRIADA CMS II.1, 24.

petitive social strategies characterising this period and more so the late Prepalatial (EM III-MM IA), focusing on discrete locations in the landscape⁴⁴. The seals, through their nature as devices that can transfer meaning from seal-owner to objects, and through their potential apotropaic character directed at the protection of both owners *and* the impressed objects, introduce a new emphasis, or rather formalization of beliefs about *ownership*. By creating a visible link between persons and material objects, Prepalatial seals could have constituted an essential means of negotiating property relations. Although such practices could have been symptomatic of more personal social strategies, certain features of the seals also strongly emphasize collective representation.

Apart from the fact that certain seals could be inherited through the generations, it seems that motifs could also be passed on as is demonstrated by the regular occurrence of certain Prepalatial motifs from the Mesara cemeteries in the MM IIB sealings assemblage from Phaistos⁴⁵ (*fig. 2*) and from similar occurrences at Quartier Mu at Malia⁴⁶. Although it is possible that Prepalatial seals were preserved and used as antiques or heirlooms⁴⁷, the actual wear and tear of seals used for such lengthy periods of time would have necessitated the manufacture of new seals, which would preserve the Prepalatial motifs. This is evident in many examples from Protopalatial Phaistos where seal impressions have very close parallels with Prepalatial seals but with minute differences in the rendering of the design, suggesting that perhaps a Prepalatial motif is reproduced on a Protopalatial seal⁴⁸. Sbonias⁴⁹

⁴⁴ HAGGIS, *Staple Finance, Peak Sanctuaries...* cit. in note 3; SBONIAS 1999; RELAKI 2004; D. CATAPOTI, *From power to paradigm: rethinking the emergence of the 'palatial phenomenon' in Bronze Age Crete*, Unpublished Ph.D dissertation, University of Sheffield 2006.

⁴⁵ PINI 1990, p. 34, table 1; RELAKI forthcoming.

⁴⁶ POURSAT, *Response to Pini* cit. in note 1; WEINGARTEN 1994, p. 176, n. 10.

⁴⁷ KRZYSZKOWSKA 2005, p. 78.

⁴⁸ RELAKI forthcoming.

⁴⁹ SBONIAS 1999, pp. 42-43; ID., *Specialisation in the Early Minoan seal manufacture: craftsmen, settlements and the organisation of production*, in I. PINI ed., *Minoisch-mykenische Glyptik. Stil, Iconographie, Funktion*, (CMS Beiheft 6), Berlin 2000, p. 287.

has also suggested that by the end of the Prepalatial period specific communities come to be associated with particular motifs and iconographic styles. More importantly, a lot of the seal motifs within each of the sites display strong links in terms of their iconography; some to the point of being indistinguishable from one another (*fig. 3*), others in the form of related variations of certain core elements (*fig. 4*). In many cases a few groups of this kind can be identified within each of several sites.

Thus, the fact that only certain seals were deposited may have had a double meaning, underlining the importance of certain individuals, but at the same time highlighting the importance of certain seals as *group emblems*. This type of seals could have been treated as the inalienable possessions of the entire group, and therefore could have been deposited upon death to prevent a diffusion of value away from the corporate group⁵⁰. It is reasonable to expect that restrictions might have surrounded the bestowing of this kind of seals, and therefore when the kin line either died out or reached an unsuitable heir the seal could have been withdrawn from circulation through burial. Such behaviour would tie well with the increasingly competitive strategies of the late Prepalatial period⁵¹, which specifically emphasized the association of communities with specific locations on the landscape⁵², and may indicate a potential use of seals and their motifs as means of legitimizing possession rights. If an emblematic seal, and the rights and material benefits associated with its ownership, run the risk of being removed away from the corporate group and its territory, then burial deposition could have been an effective means of preventing this and maintaining the material and symbolic integrity of the estate. In addition, the apotropaic character of seals could also have played a role in determining the appropriate ways in which a seal could be passed on, much in the same way as there exist specific ritual prohibitions concerning the manner in which a cure for the evil eye can be communicated from a curer to a novice⁵³.

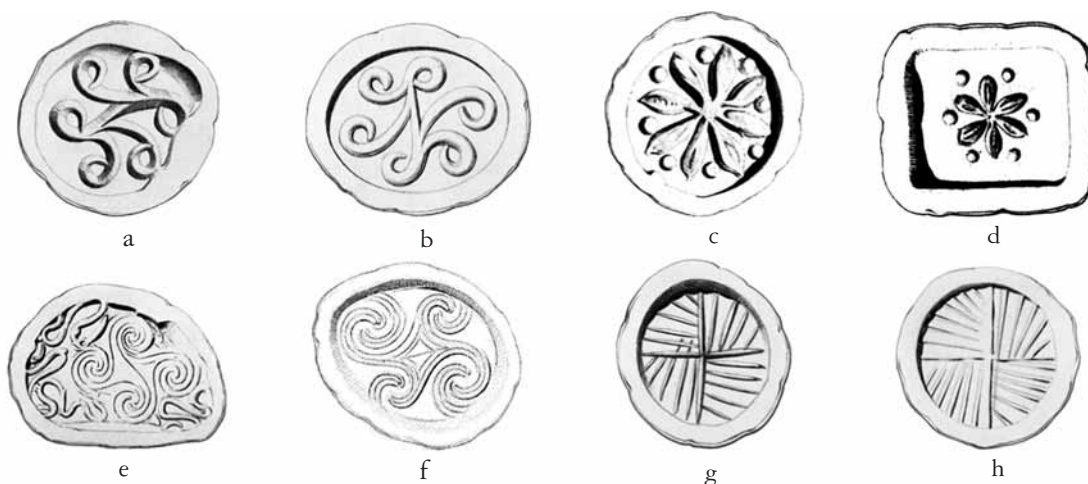


FIG. 3 – ‘LOOK-ALIKE’ SEAL MOTIFS. A: MARATHOKEPHALO CMS II.1,224. B: MARATHOKEPHALO CMS II.1,227. C: SIVAS CMS II.1, 373. D: SIVAS CMS II.1, 374. E: KOUMASA CMS II.1, 133. F: KOUMASA CMS II.1, 134. G: AG. TRIADA CMS II.1, 24. H: COSA METTERE, ?

⁵⁰S.D. GILLESPIE, *Beyond Kinship: an introduction*, in JOYCE-GILLESPIE 2000, p. 13.

⁵¹SBONIAS 1999.

⁵²RELAKI 2004, p. 181.

⁵³DIONYSOPOULOS-MASS 1976, p. 50.

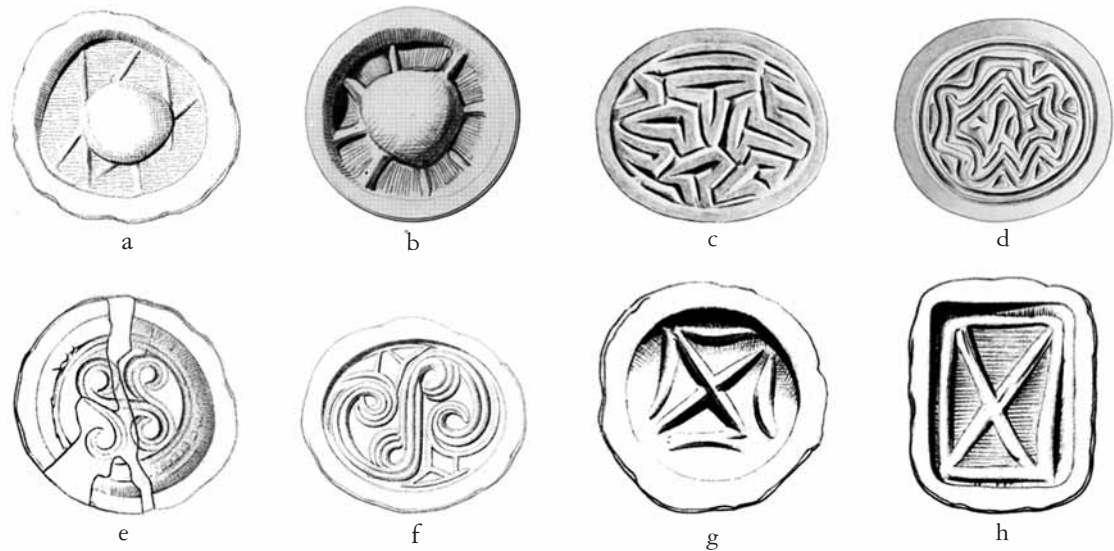


FIG. 4 – VARIATIONS OF SEAL MOTIFS WITHIN SITES. A: AG TRIADA CMS II.1, 6. B: AG TRIADA CMS II.1, 9. C: LEBENA CMS II.1, 185. D: LEBENA CMS II.1, 208. E: MARATHOKEPHALO CMS II.1, 226B. F: MARATHOKEPHALO CMS II.1, 227A. G: PLATANOS CMS II.1, 337. H: PLATANOS CMS II.1, 338.

Therefore, the duplication of motifs in discrete clusters, found in several cemeteries, may indicate that persons with similar roles within a corporate group would carry or inherit the same seal – or seal motif – while the variations of the same motifs may indicate persons with related roles within the group⁵⁴. The use of emblems to safeguard the symbolic and physical property of a corporate group has been noted to be particularly strong in social contexts characterised by either a lack of an established system of inheritance or by fluid hereditary patterns⁵⁵. The use of seals thus, could have been critical in providing guidance for the allocation of resources *within* a group and *between* groups. This interpretation of the role of seals may also justify an increase of sealing activity towards the end of the Prepalatial period as noted by Schoep⁵⁶.

In summary, the above survey of the available evidence suggests that Prepalatial seals appear to have been characterised by a dialectic of personal and collective social strategies that might have been associated with the regulation and formalization of newly emergent ownership practices. Since the nature of Prepalatial seals seems to have been equally determined by both their sphragistic and amuletic properties, what was the role of Prepalatial sealings?

III. Sealings

Although the majority of Prepalatial seals derive from the Mesara, Prepalatial sealings occur throughout the island. Since the original debate in 1990⁵⁷ a host of new sealings of

⁵⁴D.E. DAVIS, Hereditary emblems: Material culture in the context of social change, in *JAnthArch* 4, 1985, p. 165.

⁵⁵DAVIS, cit. in note 54, p. 156; also SBONIAS

1999, p. 45 arguing for Prepalatial seals being used to legitimize inheritance rights.

⁵⁶SCHOEP 2004, pp. 283-286.

⁵⁷PALAIMA 1990a, pp. 55-60.

Prepalatial date⁵⁸ has been added to the catalogue published by Pini⁵⁹ bringing the overall number of known seal impressions for the period to 26 (Table 1)⁶⁰. Despite the still modest number of such artefacts, it has become obvious that their occurrence is as much owed to the vagaries of preservation and sophistication of excavation techniques employed, as it is a reflection of the choices and behaviours of the ancient Cretans who used them. Therefore arguments downplaying the role of sealings in Prepalatial society on the basis of their meagre numbers⁶¹ will have to be reconsidered in light of the possibility of more such objects coming to light in the future.

This said, the surviving Prepalatial sealings represent quite a heterogeneous collection of material consisting mostly of seal impressions on jar handles (Palaikastro, Myrtilos Pyrgos, Mallia), bases or interiors of open vessels (Chamalevri, Chania, Platyvola), a pithos (Ag. Triada)⁶², a clay larnax (Archanes), loom weights (Palaikastro, Mallia, Chamaizi) and a spindle whorl (Chamalevri), leaving about 10 to 11 cases of 'true sealings' (Table 1), defined as small lumps of clay impressed by a seal and most likely attached to an object⁶³.

The function of sealings is commonly explained as protecting the integrity of the sealed object⁶⁴, operating thus as some sort of locking devices. As Hallager⁶⁵ specifies, «the term *sealing* is here meant as the deliberate securing of the contents of an object in such a way that the sealings must be physically broken to get to the contents». Sealings thus, have been interpreted as denying access to property and therefore implying an unequal distribution of resources⁶⁶. However, in the first place, this 'locking' function could have been served by a range of other means that would have provided equal if not superior quality of protection⁶⁷, while it proves difficult to determine how Prepalatial sealings were attached to what kind of objects⁶⁸, and therefore, in which precise manner they protected the contents of the artefacts so-treated.

One notable exception is a jar stopper from Knossos⁶⁹, where it is evident how the sealing was applied to the object. In other examples though from Chamalevri⁷⁰, Chania⁷¹, and Psathi⁷² the clay lumps appear to have been attached to either a single or multiple objects, but it proves impossible to specify either the nature of the sealed artefacts or how the sealings protected their contents. The same is true for the sealing from Myrtilos Fournou Koryfi⁷³

⁵⁸ VLASAKI-HALLAGER 1995; HALLAGER 2000; SCHOEP 2004, pp. 283-286, tables 23.1, 23.2 and 23.3.

⁵⁹ PINI 1990.

⁶⁰ The two sealings from Knossos West Court House dating to the EMII period have recently been discounted from the list of Prepalatial examples since it seems that they were made by a seal of later date and there is the possibility of contamination in their retrieval context: KRZYSZKOWSKA, pp. 77-78, n. 45 and n. 50.

⁶¹ E.g. WEINGARTEN 1990a; 1990b; 1994.

⁶² I am grateful to Pietro Militello for drawing my attention to this piece of evidence.

⁶³ VLASAKI-HALLAGER 1995, p. 254; SCHOEP 2004, p. 283.

⁶⁴ VLASAKI-HALLAGER 1995, p. 254.

⁶⁵ E. HALLAGER 2001, Sealing without Seals, available at: <http://www.hum.au.dk/ckultur/f/pages/pub->

[lications/eh/sealing_without_seals.pdf](http://www.hum.au.dk/ckultur/f/pages/pub-lications/eh/sealing_without_seals.pdf), accessed on 05 January 2010, p. 3.

⁶⁶ SCHOEP 2004, p. 284.

⁶⁷ W. MÜLLER, How secure are seal impressions?, in *Peprag. tou Θ Dieth. Kritolog. Syn.* (Elounda 2001), A3, Herakleion 2006, p. 237. See also arguments for sealing without seals in HALLAGER 2001, cit. in note 65.

⁶⁸ VLASAKI-HALLAGER 1995, p. 270.

⁶⁹ S. HOOD-V.E.G. KENNA, An Early Minoan III Sealing from Knossos, in *Antichità Cretesi. Studi in onore di Doro Levi*, 1, Catania 1973-74, pp. 103-106.

⁷⁰ VLASAKI-HALLAGER 1995, p. 260, figs. 8-10; CMS V S.3, 324.

⁷¹ VLASAKI-HALLAGER 1995, p. 258, fig. 15.

⁷² HALLAGER 2000, pp. 97-99, fig. 1; CMS V S.3, 119.

⁷³ WARREN 1972, pp. 40 and 227, no. 134, fig. 97, pl. 77C; CMS V, 20.

and a sealing from Trypiti⁷⁴, while a sealing from an EMIB context at Mallia appears to be a *nodulus*, that is it was not attached to any other object, or as Weingarten describes them ‘sealings that do not seal’⁷⁵. Even the two pierced cones from Archanes Phourni⁷⁶ and one from Sphoungaras⁷⁷, which display more clearly how they could have been attached to other artefacts as they were hanging from the sealed artefact with cords, still leave us with no indication as to how they protected the contents of these items, since it would have been quite easy for someone to cut the cord, gain access to the object and replace it without damaging the sealing.

The use of Prepalatial sealings for administrative purposes is generally unquestioned and yet, in most of these cases, it is impossible to tell what was administered, in what way, and by whom, especially in the more ‘irregular’ cases such as Archanes and Sphoungaras, both cemeteries, and possibly Ellenes Amariou and Platyvola, both cave contexts. For the Myrtos Fournou Koryfi sealing, it has been suggested that it could have been attached to a door as it was discovered immediately outside the entrance of Room 29, although the curved surface of the reverse could as easily have fitted to a storage jar as would have on a post or door knob⁷⁸. Moreover, the room, which Whitelaw⁷⁹ classifies as a public space in the settlement, was found devoid of finds⁸⁰, while the clusters of rooms 27-28 immediately to its east were no longer in use at the time of the site’s destruction⁸¹. Another adjacent cluster of rooms 20-21 to the north of room 29, which housed cooking facilities and agricultural storage and might have been a suitable candidate for a sealed doorway, had a separate, independent entrance, opening directly onto a court area.

Some scholars have argued that the impressed vases and loom weights may indicate some sort of control and organisation of production, perhaps similar to potter’s marks⁸². However there are some difficulties with this suggestion: first, potter’s marks – being the most appropriate analogy – are usually placed in invisible parts of the vessel’s body, whereas most of the Prepalatial impressed objects bear the impression on a visible area⁸³. Secondly, producer’s marks designated to record the output of a workshop tend to be quite regular in their design to facilitate recognition and accounting and usually occur in the same type of object. On the contrary, the corpus of Prepalatial seal impressions on vessels comprises a heterogeneous range of ceramic shapes and seal motifs. Such disparity could partly be explained by the wide geographical distribution of these artefacts, so that each site could have had its own distinctive mark and representative type of vessel. However, when we examine each site individually, we are forced to accept Weingarten’s⁸⁴ description

⁷⁴ CMS II.6, 273; VLASAKI-HALLAGER 1995, p. 269.

⁷⁵ J. WEINGARTEN, Some unusual Minoan clay nodules, in *Kadmos* 25, 1986, pp. 1-21; EAD., Addendum I, in *Kadmos* 26, 1987, pp. 38-42.

⁷⁶ Y. SAKELLARAKIS-E. SAPOUNA-SAKELLARAKI, *Archanes*, in *Ergon* 1987, p. 124; CMS II.6, 150.

⁷⁷ E. HALL, *Excavations in East Crete, Sphoungaras* (University of Pennsylvania Museum vol. III), 1912, p. 70; CMS II.6, 155.

⁷⁸ WARREN 1972, p. 226.

⁷⁹ WHITELAW 1983, fig. 63.

⁸⁰ WARREN 1972, pp. 40-41.

⁸¹ WHITELAW 1983, p. 326, fig. 63.

⁸² POURSAT, Response to Pini, cit. in note 1; SCHOEP, *The origins of writing...* cit. in note 4, p. 268.

⁸³ An exception might be the belly-amphora from Platyvola, which has been stamped on the base, while the impressions from open vessels from Chamaevri and Chania are in the interior, but visible part of the vessel when displayed empty VLASAKI-HALLAGER 1995, figs. 11-14.

⁸⁴ WEINGARTEN 1990b.

of such evidence as 'sporadic': nowhere is more than one such impressed vessel recorded within the same site (*tab. 1*). If such stamped objects represented attempts to control production, the precise method and workings of this control remain obscure.

More importantly, impressions from the same seal are often repeated on the same object, in some cases in quite large numbers, as, for example, on the pithos from Ag. Triada, stamped about 60 times along the base of the neck⁸⁵, and on the spindle whorl from Chamalevri, bearing 39 incomplete impressions from the same seal⁸⁶, while the clay larnax from Archanes was also stamped along the handle three times by the same seal⁸⁷. These repetitive impressions have sometimes been explained as simple decoration⁸⁸. However, the multiple impressions often overlap disfiguring the design, while this pattern of repetitive impressions by the same seal also extends to the canonical sealings. Hence, the sealing from Myrtos Fournou Koryfi bears three impressions from the same seal, Trypiti has two, Chamalevri (RM 13249) four overlapping impressions, while the jar stopper from Knossos bears three incomplete and partially overlapping impressions possibly made by two different seals⁸⁹, which however appear to depict different renderings of the same motif, parading animals⁹⁰. In general, wherever multiple impressions are recorded on an object, they are almost always made by the same seal.

One final point about Prepalatial sealings concerns the contexts of their discovery. With the exception of two cemeteries, Archanes and Sphoungaras, and two caves, Platyvola, and Ellenos Amariou⁹¹, the overwhelming majority of Prepalatial sealings comes from what can be best described as 'domestic' contexts (*Table 1*)⁹², while most of the objects bearing seal impressions appear connected with arguably 'domestic' activities, such as storage and serving vessels, loom weights and spindle whorl. This domestic character of the sealings' contexts of use has been a crucial argument for the approaches denying any administrative purpose to these objects. However, I would like to argue that the domestic character of Prepalatial sealings was a powerful factor in their function as mechanisms for the allocation and regulation of resources.

⁸⁵ C. LAVIOSA, L'abitato prepalaziale di Haghia Triada, in *ASAtene* L-LI, 1972-73, pp. 511-512; *Ancient Crete. A Hundred Years of Italian Archaeology (1884-1984)*, Roma 1985, p. 126, fig. 201; MILITELLO, Amministrazione e contabilità... cit. in note 8, p. 38, n. 26, fig. 7.

⁸⁶ VLASAKI-HALLAGER 1995, p. 260, figs. 6-7; *CMS* VS.3, 323.

⁸⁷ SAKELLARAKIS-SAPOUNA-SAKELLARAKI 1997, p. 690; KARYTINOS, Sealstones in cemeteries... cit. in note 9, p. 84. Repetitive stamping of vessels also occurs outside Crete: a fragment from closed vessel from Chalandriani was stamped eight times by the same seal: PULLEN 1994, p. 38, n. 16; an EB vessel from Samos impressed by a Syrian seal rolled more than once with little regard for the integrity of the depicted design; a vase handle from Ag. Irini (*CMS* V, 475) with two impressions from the same seal:

ARUZ 1994, pp. 213-215, figs. 7, 11.

⁸⁸ ARUZ 1994, p. 214; J. ARUZ, Sealing beyond the storeroom door in the Aegean and the Near East, in M. PERNA ed., *Studi in onore di Enrica Fiandra. Contributi di Archeologia Egea e Vicinorientale*, Napoli 2005, p. 31.

⁸⁹ HOOD-KENNA, An Early Minoan III Sealing... cit. in note 69, p. 104, although KRZYSZKOWSKA 2005, p. 78 mentions only one seal.

⁹⁰ WEINGARTEN 1994, p. 175.

⁹¹ Platyvola has certainly received burial depositions, which would make the context of use similar to the two cemeteries, while Elenos Amariou appears to have had habitational debris: E. KARANTZALI, *Le Bronze Ancien dans les Cyclades et en Crète* (BAR IS 631), Oxford 1996, p. 84.

⁹² SCHOEP 2004, p. 284 who also stresses the exception of Building X at Mallia.

	<i>Mus. No.</i>	<i>Site</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Date</i>	<i>'Sealing'</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>No. of impressions</i>
1	HM 432	Sphoungaras	Cemetery	MMI? (on stylistic grounds)	x (pierced cone)		1
2	HM 1177	Archanes Phourni	Cemetery Burial Building 18, Room 3	MMIA	x (pierced cone)		1
3	HM 2934	Archanes Tourkogeitonia	Settlement Mixed deposit	EMIII/MMIA (on stylistic grounds)	x (pierced cone)		1
4	-	Archanes Phourni	Cemetery Burial Building 5, Room 8	MMIA		Clay larnax	3
5	HM 1099	Knossos	Early Houses on S. edge of Palace	EMIII	x (jar stopper)		3 (2 different seals?)
6	HM 4814	Palaikastro	House d32	EM		Loom weight / disc	1
7	-	Palaikastro	Block N, test pit I under LMIB floor in N7	EMIII/MMIA		Jar handle	1
8	HMp 4805	Palaikastro	Street 5	EM? MMI? (on stylistic grounds)		Loom weight	1
9	HMp4806	Palaikastro	House x	EM		Loom weight /block	1
10	HM-	Trypiti	Adami Korfali Settlement	EMII-EMIII	x (unclear object)		2
11	ANM 3237	Myrtos FK	Settlement, Room 29	EMII	x (door knob? jar?)		3
12	KSM MP / 73 / 257	Myrtos Pyrgos	Cistern 2	EMIII/MMI		Jar handle	1
13	MGM M71/ E30	Mallia	Quartier Mu	EM/MMI?		Jar handle	1
14	MGM M69 / E34	Mallia	Quartier Mu	EM/MMI?		Cubic weight	1
15	-	Mallia	Below Palace 'Building X'	EMIB	x (nodulus?)		1
16	HMp 3517	Chamezi	Oval house	MMIA		Loom weight	1
17	RM13247	Chamalevri	Section I (In hearth)	MMIA		Spindle whorl	39
18	RM13249	Chamalevri	Section II (House)	EMIII/MMIA	x (direct object sealing 2 objects)		4
19	RM13248	Chamalevri	Section I (Rubbish pit)	EMIII/MMIA		Open vessel (interior)	1
20	XMP6635	Chania - Kastelli	GSE (in LMIIIB2 rubbish pit)	EM/MMIA?		Open vessel (interior)	1
21	XM KH 1569	Chania	GSE, Odos Kanevaro, Second layer under a MMIA floor	EMII/III	x (direct object sealing 2 or 3 objects)		1
22	XM P 2062	Platyvola	Cave	EMII		Belly-amphora (on the base)	1
23	Π9600	Psathi	No architectural remains	EMIII/MMIA	x (on basketry?)		1
24	-	Mochlos	?House C.1 (under floor?)	EM? (LMIB context)	x		1
25	HMs 1723	Ellenes Amariou	Cave	EMII?	x Direct object sealing?		1
26	HTR 9	Ag. Triada	Settlement West House	EMIA		Pithos	ca. 60

TABLE 1 – PREPALATIAL USE OF SEALS(DATA AFTER PINI 1990); VLASAKI-HALLAGHER 1995; SCHOEP 2004; CMS II.6; CMS II.8; CMS V; CMS V.S. 1A. CMS V.S. 3).

IV. Discussion

If it is not possible to determine how Prepalatial sealings protected the objects sealed, then perhaps they might have not been applied with the exclusive intention to deny access or protect from tampering. Bearing in mind the potential apotropaic function of Prepalatial seals, it is possible to suggest that the stamping of these objects could have represented ritualized attempts to protect such artefacts, and by implication, to establish a clear and visible link between them and particular individuals or groups. It becomes very difficult to understand what sort of administrative control was exercised by the 39 incomplete impressions by the same seal on a spindle whorl in Chamalaveri, or the 60 odd impressions on an EM IIA pithos from Ag. Triada. Even the sealings that occur in burial contexts, such as those from Archanes, Sphoungaras and Platyvola, may be seen as attempts to emphasize the physical and symbolic boundary of specific corporate affiliations.

Since it is not clear how Prepalatial sealings denied access to resources, it might make more sense to interpret early sealings as attempts to actively demonstrate claims on specific resources. A host of other methods could have been used to prevent from tampering, however, stamping clay nodules with a particular seal associated either with a specific person or corporate group (or both) represents an active transferral of the specific identity or identities of the seal-user(s) onto the object sealed. In this way, the seal-owners (either individuals or groups) would have claimed the resources represented by the sealed artefacts as their own.

Moreover, the strong association of seal use with domestic contexts and activities, comes at a time when settlements and habitation contexts become more visible on the landscape and architecturally formalized suggesting the emergence of an ideology of the *House* as a unit of corporate affiliation and identification. The *House* as defined by the Lévi-Straussian anthropological tradition of 'Société à Maisons' or *House Societies*⁹³, is «a corporate body (*personne morale*) holding an estate made up by both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or affinity or both»⁹⁴. Gillespie⁹⁵ further clarifies: «The physical house, ancestral relics and immaterial property represent a *concentration of value* which is the key component to the standing of the house as an institution and its prestige in relation to other houses».

Such social structures, as those described above, appear very salient to the patterns observed in Prepalatial society, where resources, particularly in association with land, appear to be at a premium towards the end of the Prepalatial period⁹⁶. Within such a social context, the allocation of resources would have necessitated clear modes of regulation in order to avoid conflict. Seals, their iconography and their patterns of use, appear to con-

⁹³J. CARSTEN-S. HUGH-JONES ed., *About the House: Lévi-Strauss and beyond*, Cambridge 1995; JOYCE-GILLESPIE 2000; for House societies in Minoan Crete, see J. DRIESSEN, Spirit of Place: Minoan Houses as major actors, in D. PULLEN ed., *Political Economies of the Aegean Bronze Age* (Proceedings of the Langford Conference held at Tallahassee Florida, 22-24 February 2007), Oxford in press; ID., This (is)land is our (is)land: social organisation in Prepalatial Crete, in P.D. TOMKINS-I. SCHOEP-J. DRIESSEN ed., *Back to*

the Beginning. Re-assessing social, economic and political complexity in the Early and Middle Bronze Age on Crete, Oxford forthcoming.

⁹⁴C. LÉVI-STRAUSS, *The Way of the Masks*, (translated by S. MODELSKI), Seattle 1982, p. 174.

⁹⁵GILLESPIE, *Beyond Kinship*... cit. in note 50, p. 13.

⁹⁶S.W. MANNING, The emergence of divergence: development and decline on Bronze Age Crete and the Cyclades, in C. MATHERS-S. STODDART ed., *Development and Decline in the Mediterranean Bronze Age*, Sheffield

stitute such a medium for effectively regulating property relations. The initial discussion of Prepalatial administration had revolved largely around ‘the impulse to seal’⁹⁷ focusing on psychological aspects of ownership and approaching the desire to possess as an inherent feature of human behaviour. However, the practices and patterns of ownership arise through distinct social relations and are dependent on specific historical conditions⁹⁸. They are not universally constant, but vary substantially between different geographical and chronological contexts. In this respect we must view the ‘impulse to seal’, emerging during the later part of the Prepalatial period as part of the wider social strategies that placed emphasis on particular resources and their manipulation.

On the other hand, although seal motifs have been interpreted as almost a kind of signature for seal owners, the widespread occurrence of similar motifs and the wide range of related motif variations makes identification of the owner, solely on the basis of the motif, almost impossible. It seems, therefore, more likely that the connection between seal-owner and stamped artefact could be clearly established only when both parts were present. This places a significant weight on the act of sealing itself as an identification strategy rather than just the simple ‘reading’ of the motifs at the absence of the seal owner. This would make the repetitive stamping of particular objects (and the resources symbolised by them) even more poignant and it would throw different light on the use of sealings to control access to resources. If indeed – as all indications suggest – this period is characterised by competitive strategies and negotiable systems of inheritance (whether on a personal or collective level), then the patterns of seal use are better explained as laying claims on resources rather than withholding what is already owned. Moreover, the emphasis on the act of sealing and the complex meaning of seals, representing both personal and collective identities, also suggest that sealing practice was a ritualised activity that had to be performed in front of an audience in order for claims on specific resources to be validated.

The apotropaic nature of seals would be in line with such patterns of behaviour as public display, particularly when food and drink is involved, is one of the most opportune situations in which someone might be the victim of an evil eye attack⁹⁹. Moreover, it is generally argued in many ethnographic case studies that evil eye beliefs have «a socially acceptable role in preventing the accumulation of wealth, or at least in preventing a stress on economic and social differences» within communities¹⁰⁰. Such roles would have been brilliantly fulfilled by seals and sealings in the Prepalatial, a period where not only competition for resources appears to escalate, but also feasting practices seem to take on a central role in the negotiation and articulation of identities with repercussions for the emergence of elites throughout the island¹⁰¹.

1994, pp. 221-270; HAGGIS, *Staple Finance* ... cit. in note 3; SBONIAS 1999; RELAKI 2004; EAD., *Social Arenas in Minoan Crete. A regional History of the Mesara in south-central Crete from the Final Neolithic to the end of the Protopalatial period*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield 2003, pp. 189-198; CATAPOTI, *From power to paradigm* ... cit. in note 44.

⁹⁷ PALAIMA 1990a, p. 57; WEINGARTEN 1990a, pp. 56, 58.

⁹⁸ C.M. HANN, Introduction: the embeddedness of

property, in C.M. HANN ed., *Property Relations. Renewing the anthropological tradition*, Cambridge 1998, pp. 1-47.

⁹⁹ DUNDES 1981.

¹⁰⁰ DIONYSOPOULOS-MASS 1976, p. 51.

¹⁰¹ DAY-WILSON, *Landscapes of memory* ... cit. in note 3; D. CATAPOTI, Rise to the occasion: an insight into the ‘politics of drinking’ at the Prepalatial settlement of Myrtos-Fournou Koryfi, South Crete, in *Peprag. tou I’ Dieth. Kretolog. Syn.*, Chania 2006, forthcoming.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, the patterns of seal iconography and deposition suggest that these artefacts played a key role in strategies of both personal and collective identification, while they also served to regulate and formalize rather fluid practices of ownership and inheritance. The widespread similarities of seal motifs imply that the identification of individual seal-owners, if relying solely on the motifs, would have been very difficult, indicating that the actual performance of stamping an object might have been a crucial identification strategy, something that can also be supported by the intrinsic character of seals as devices that can transfer meaning from one entity to another. It still remains difficult to establish how Prepalatial sealings denied access to specific resources, while the live performance of the sealing act appears to have been quite significant within a newly emerging discourse of ownership, suggesting thus that seals and sealings might have been used as means of laying claims to various material and symbolic resources. The contexts of use of the Prepalatial sealings suggest that such resources were more likely associated with defining and affirming the physical and symbolic boundaries of specific units of corporate affiliation and identification, while seal use also facilitated the distinction and performance of specific social roles within these groups.

Such practices demonstrate an active concern for and a visible means of managing symbolic and material resources in ways that go beyond the narrow 'administrative' notions of controlling access, collecting and distributing. On the contrary, if anything, Prepalatial sealing practices appear to have been embedded in the management of social identities.

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ABSTRACT

RETHINKING ADMINISTRATION AND SEAL USE
IN THIRD MILLENNIUM CRETE

The specific outlook and reach of administration in Prepalatial Crete is the topic of heated debate. The materials most frequently implicated in this debate are clay sealings, usually taken as a clear demonstration of administrative concerns. However, although early sealings might have been used for this purpose, this view tends to be influenced by our knowledge of sealing practices from later, palatial contexts. This paper argues that in order to address such issues we need to explore both the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of administration and sealing practices within their social context. This entails reassessing the types of sealings found, their contexts of use and deposition and their relationship with Prepalatial seals. I suggest that the 'administrative' practices of Prepalatial Cretan society were forged through an interplay between communal and personal strategies that were intimately connected to an ideology of the 'house', seen as a unit of corporate affiliation and identification in the Levi-Straussian tradition.