

RETHINKING ADMINISTRATION AND SEAL USE IN THIRD MILLENNIUM CRETE

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ABSTRACT

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.