From Tholos to Palace: Individual and Corporate Identity in Prepalatial Burials and Seal Iconography

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Seals from prepalatial Minoan Crete have been dismissed as purely decorative objects. It is not until the first palaces are founded around 1900 BCE that archaeological evidence reveals that seals are used in regional administration systems. This paper argues that seals are items with economic significance, whose designs are meant to communicate messages in island-wide exchange networks. These designs have the potential to express both the individual identity of the seal owner and the relationship of the seal owner to a group with economic authority. By looking at changes in iconography from the Early Minoan II through the Middle Minoan II periods, one can identify an increase in social hierarchy in the period immediately preceding the foundation of the first palaces. The results from the study of seal iconography can be compared to burial data to reveal changing strategies in legitimation of economic and ritual authority as social complexity grows.
To Jeff.
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Introduction

Our view of social complexity in prepalatial Crete is severely limited by the vagaries of preservation and recovery: we have sealstones, pottery, and other artifacts from tombs that have been looted or excavated with poor documentation. While survey data has provided some evidence of regional settlement structure, there have been few habitation sites excavated. Scholarship has also been tinted by our preoccupation with palatial Crete and the function of the palaces, from which we try to retrospectively reconstruct prepalatial social structure. Opinion on whether the palatial social system sprang up suddenly or gradually evolved has determined the view of social complexity in the preceding period. These questions are further complicated by the long duration of the Early Minoan (EM) period, from approximately 2800-2200 BCE, and the debated chronology of the foundation of the first palaces, which do not appear to have been built simultaneously.

This paper attempts to address these questions by first examining data that are prepalatial in date: looking at prepalatial burials and seals, what can this tell us about social organization in the period preceding and immediately leading up to the architectural foundation of the palaces? Glyptic studies have been traditionally art-historical in emphasis, and while such analysis helps classify seals stylistically, it does little for an understanding of the role of seals with respect to social and economic organization. More recent scholarship has analyzed both seal iconography and the prepalatial tombs as evidence for or against a stratified society in the EM period, and these studies have greatly aided our understanding of seal usage and meaning. Prepalatial burials, however, themselves are not without problems of
function and chronology. It is my assertion that by examining the recent discussions and controversies on EM tholoi, and their changing roles throughout the prepalatial period, we may shed light on the social context of the seals and social complexity in the period.

I propose to examine the evidence of the Mesara tholoi from the prepalatial period, as the seals themselves are found deposited in a funerary context. The tholoi are not only resting places for the dead, but areas of veneration of ancestors, and clearly places for non-funerary or post-funerary ritual.¹ These burial contexts, though often looted and rarely preserving stratified deposits, can still give us information as to changes in EM social complexity through changes in funerary and communal ritual and burial goods. This provides one set of data on social complexity leading up to the foundation of the first palaces. On the other hand the data from seal iconography appears on the surface spatially scattered, especially for the earliest prepalatial levels. But by comparing these two sets of data, seals and burials, and discussions surrounding them, we find that attitudes towards burial can elucidate the use of seal iconography and in combination suggest changes in expression of social identity and the use of seals leading up to the foundation of the first palaces.

In EM III, if not as early as EM II, we can discern patterns in seal iconography that suggest the expression of corporate identity, probably corresponding to some form of authority and seal usage. If this authority is also tied to ancestral traditions, then the rituals of the tholoi could grant the individual seal owner authority over the management of resources such as agricultural surplus. In EM III – early Middle Minoan (MM) IA, the transitional period before the foundation of the first palaces, seal iconography reflects multiple, complex forms of corporate identity that I argue are tied to elite trading networks. Iconography in this period also becomes more individualizing, perhaps reflecting individual authority or specific

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roles in the midst of these networks. This is paralleled in burial trends by more individual
distinction in burial.

In MM IB through the early protopalatial period, corporate identity expression
becomes less complex due to the division between palatial and non-palatial authority. Seals
associated with palatial authority show more similarity and regional distinction, possibly
based on a shift in legitimation of authority from ancestral tradition and the tholoi to one’s
position in the palatial bureaucracy. Regionalism, however, is not a new trend in this period,
and instead grows out of the prepalatial need to distinguish commodity origin in elite trading
networks. Some seals of the period continue to show clear signs of concern for ancestral
iconography and kinship affiliation.
Theoretical Background and Problems

Discussion of EM social complexity has focused around the debate of whether a sudden stimulus of either indigenous or external origin resulted in the rapid growth of the palatial administration. This “punctuated equilibrium” theory\(^2\) would suggest that “administration,” or a system of accounting for exchange in commodities through sealings, did not exist above the household level in the EM II period (ca 2600 -2300 BCE). These theories, while they primarily relate to the foundation of the first palaces, have directed discussion of Early Minoan seals and the possibility of widespread EM “administration.” For Weingarten, for example, the entire sealing system arrived with the institution of the first palaces, and any Early Bronze Age (EBA) seals are simply imports that do not factor into a large-scale commodity management scheme.\(^3\) Similarly, for Watrous, the palaces and the institution of kingship arrived from the Near East as a package in the MM I period, for which he cites a general increase in Near Eastern imported artifacts in this period.\(^4\) While social complexity and urban growth may have occurred through the MM IA period, any concept of administrative hierarchy arrived from the Near East at the same time as the palaces were founded. Any EM II seals, for Watrous as for Weingarten, do not indicate indigenous administrative practices, but are simply exotic items that indicate prestige.

\(^2\) Cherry 1984.

\(^3\) Weingarten 1990, 105-107.

\(^4\) Watrous 1987.
Others prefer the gradualist view, however, which suggests that social complexity and administration evolved without major interruption from the EBA period.\(^5\) According to this viewpoint, the first palaces are the architectural descendants of the buildings at Myrtos and Vasiliki, which express a low level of social hierarchy in EM II.\(^6\) At these sites, however, architectural evidence for storage and commodities and the presence of seals and sealings at Myrtos suggest social differentiation and an administrative function. In other words, the level of social complexity of the EBA is still debated, and may not be consistent across the island. The issue is further complicated by the fact that the first palaces at the sites of the larger second palaces do not appear to be built at exactly the same time. At Knossos, for example, there is definitely a building of palatial form in the MM IB period, however, it is built over a MM IA building of uncertain extent. Both of these structures are very poorly preserved due to the later MM III building, and so it is difficult to tell architecturally when the palace was instituted at Knossos. The MM IA building does seem to indicate the existence of a previous central building at the site,\(^7\) but early predecessors are not attested across the entire island. At Phaistos, for example, the first monumental building does not appear until the MM IB period, but the evidence at Malia suggests a foundation date in the EM III-MM IA period.\(^8\) Schoep points out that these first palaces, although they reflect a degree of centralization, do not conform exactly to our idea of the later palaces, and she reminds us that administrative control may not be highly centralized in the MM IB period.\(^9\) What we can take away from

\(^7\) MacGillivray 1994, 45-55.
\(^8\) Schoep 2004, 247.
this debate is that by MM IB (ca 1900 BCE) at the latest, the first palaces were built, but that
the period of change may be the transitional EM III-MM IA period (ca 2300-1900 BCE), and
that the construction of the palaces is likely not to be exactly contemporary across the island.
These discrepancies are likely related to varied levels of social complexity across the island.
In this sense, seals might help to inform us as to social complexity, through an examination
of social complexity through patterns in iconography.

Because of these opposing theoretical perspectives in the bulk of scholarship on EM
society, the term “administration” may connote different levels of complexity, and requires
definition. At the household level, most would be reluctant to call the action of sealing
commodities “administration.” Because very few EM sealings survive, the extent of regional
exchange and usage of sealing systems is unknown, though this possibility is discussed
below in more detail. For the early prepalatial period, I will use the term “commodity
management,” which suggests household and site-level management, but does not exclude
the possibility of complex exchange networks between sites. Whether or not a homogenous,
island-wide sealing system existed in the early prepalatial period, no centralized system of
recording survives, and therefore commodity management is differentiated from the more
complex protopalatial control of commodities, which is securely attested in the material
record.

The idea of commodity management allows the possibility of commodity exchange
between sites and even across the island. I will examine ways in which prepalatial seals could
function in such a system, ways in which their iconography, if stamped on a sealing, could
have significance for commodity management at the household or site level, and how it could
communicate between sites. Schoep suggests that based on recent finds (at Chania and
Khamalevri), there was some sort of “administrative” structure in the prepalatial period; she further suggests that *noduli* and direct object sealings were island-wide features of an administrative system before it was fragmented in the transitional period (EM III – early MM IA). The result of this fragmentation in seal iconography is the duality of scripts in the MM IB – MM IIB periods.\(^\text{10}\) This is a convincing argument, but a re-examination of seal iconography might explain how such a system might have functioned in the prepalatial period.

These are the theoretical problems behind the study of EM seals: first, that discussion is couched in terms that conform to one of the two dichotomous perspectives on the formation of the Minoan palace society outlined above, either the indigenous-gradualist or the discontinuous view. Secondly, the chronology of late prepalatial and early protopalatial developments is not always clear and likely not simultaneous across the island.

Discussion of the tholoi and sealstones in purely material terms must overcome further problems, the most obvious being that very few of the tholoi preserve clear stratigraphic levels, excepting the multiple burial buildings of Archanes-Phourni.\(^\text{11}\) Many of the known tholoi have been looted, as seals have been desirable commodities on the art market. I choose to focus here on seals whose excavation contexts are more certain because of the importance of the burial context for my argument. These seals are catalogued in the *Corpus der Minoische und Mykenische Sieglen* II.1.\(^\text{12}\) This provides some control over dating the seals, as the tholoi have general spans of use that can be determined by ceramic finds.\(^\text{13}\)

\(^{10}\) Schoep 1999 b, 265.

\(^{11}\) Karytinos 2000, 125-127.

\(^{12}\) Platon, ed. 1969.

\(^{13}\) Xanthoudides 1924; Galanakis 2005, 21-22.
Within a tholos, however, the seals often must be classified on stylistic grounds, and division into periods of EM II, EM III - early MM IA, and MMI A – MM IB is not always possible. We must keep in mind as well that seals may be preserved as heirlooms, and might exhibit conservative iconography in some cases based on legitimation strategies involving the use of seals and seal designs of predecessors. That is to say, newer seals might deliberately employ older iconographic traditions in a strategy that appeals to the past. This caution is particularly appropriate to the communal tomb setting where the seals are deposited. Finally, the tombs themselves are contexts that were reused over centuries, and the periodic cleaning and post-burial interference with remains means that the earlier seals may have been removed. Despite these problems, we can identify certain trends and aspects of prepalatial seal iconography and use, which we can correlate with trends in burial practice.
The Tholoi: Evidence and Current Discussions

As prepalatial seals are almost exclusively found in burial contexts, we should examine these in detail. While recent work has been done on the burial context of Archanes and its seals, the seals from other tholoi in central Crete lack clear evidence of stratification and so little of the work on prepalatial burials has been incorporated into the study of seals. Once we identify burial practices in the prepalatial period and their significance for EM social complexity, we can compare suggestions of social complexity in seal iconography.

The burial evidence that we have is concentrated into several regions. From the Mesara region of Crete, the tholos tomb predominates. We have around 90 tombs from the Mesara sites, and their dates of use range from EM I to MM I, that is, up to the foundation date of the first palaces. It seems that tomb use drops off at approximately the same time the palaces are built, around the end of MM I, though some are used sporadically afterwards. These tombs range in size and are found singly or in groups; they are generally circular and often have additional rooms added; the consensus is that they were typically corbelled. We also have tholoi from the Ayiofarango Valley which are typically smaller; it has been

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15 Branigan 1993, 12.
16 Branigan 1993, 12.
17 Xanthoudides 1924; Branigan 1993, 55-56; contra Branigan 1970, 28-55.
18 Branigan 1993.
suggested that these reflect a more egalitarian social structure.\textsuperscript{19} From north-central Crete we have more house tomb and cist burials,\textsuperscript{20} likely influenced by a Cycladic presence, and the cemetery of Mochlos is unique in the large number of house tombs and the richness of the graves.\textsuperscript{21} The Mesara region, however, provides the majority of our prepalatial seals. Once again, this regional variety in burial practice and burial goods must serve to remind us that social differentiation based on wealth and therefore social complexity are not uniform throughout the island.

\textit{Discussions: Population of the Tholos}

The most difficult parameter to define is the population buried in a tholos: did they belong to village, kinship group, or nuclear family? The easiest option to rule out is that of village: certain sites have multiple tholoi which seem to at least partially overlap in use, as for example at Platanos or Lenda.\textsuperscript{22} Based on survey data most tholoi are clearly associated with settlements,\textsuperscript{23} and so the population of each tholos must be more exclusive than the village. The presence of multiple tholoi in EM II suggests that as early as this stage, the population of the village was fragmented into several different social groups with separate corporate identities.

Todd Whitelaw has proposed that the nuclear household is the basic prepalatial social unit based on division of household space in EM settlements: at Myrtos – Phornou Koriphi,

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{19} Karytinos 2000, 133.
\textsuperscript{20} For description see Soles 1992.
\textsuperscript{21} Soles 1992, 41.
\textsuperscript{22} Xanthoudides 1924, 88-125 for Platanos.
\textsuperscript{23} Branigan 1988, 14-16.
\end{flushright}
he identifies six or seven separate household units, each with their own food preparation area and reduplicated domestic activities. He uses this analysis to suggest that the tombs of the Mesara were each used by one nuclear family, estimating the number of burials and estimated period of use for each tholos.\textsuperscript{24} His calculations are based on several assumptions: he computes the burial population of each tomb by the numbers of seals and daggers, which would be buried with household leaders. As Branigan points out, however, seal availability and deposition would not be constant over the entire period of use.\textsuperscript{25} Furthermore, he assumes that the tholoi were in use constantly from the EM I – MM I period, over approximately a thousand years, which is highly unlikely.\textsuperscript{26} It is this unproven period of use that allows him to come to a figure, based on 20 corpses per century per nuclear family, of 0.40-1.91 nuclear families for each tholos tomb.\textsuperscript{27} Whitelaw then goes on to admit that while the nuclear family was the basic social unit, the settlement of Myrtos itself is likely comprised of interrelated nuclear families: “All of the families would undoubtedly be related; and it seems likely that integration and regulation would be articulated through kinship relations.”\textsuperscript{28}

Recent scholarship has tended to favor a larger kinship group as the “owner” of the tholos. Branigan re-calculates Whitelaw’s chart to take into account possible gaps in usage and recalibrated carbon dates that reduce the length of the Early Minoan period.\textsuperscript{29} These

\textsuperscript{24} Whitelaw 1983, 334-335.
\textsuperscript{25} Branigan 1993, 84-89.
\textsuperscript{26} Branigan 1993, 84-89.
\textsuperscript{27} Whitelaw 1983, 334-335.
\textsuperscript{28} Whitelaw 1983, 333-334.
\textsuperscript{29} Branigan 1993, 85 for chart.
considerations lessen the estimated usage period of the tholoi, allowing the burials to have occurred at a more intense rate. Of the Mesara tombs, he concludes: “it seems far more likely that these pairs and trios of contemporary tombs were built by groups which in numbers were the equivalent of two to four nuclear families. The most likely grouping of this size is some sort of extended family or small clan group based on family relationships.”  

Other scholars have followed his conclusions as falling between the two extremes of village or nuclear family.

The question of who is being buried in which tholos concerns the fundamental question of EM social complexity: how is the village population defined and broken into sub-groups, if these groups share a certain common identity reflected in common burial grounds? If we hypothesize that one tholos is equal to one kinship group, it becomes easier to look for patterns in EM seal iconography. Assuming that kinship identity is reflected in seal iconography, we would expect many similar designs in each tholos, and little overlap between tholoi. It turns out, however, that certain iconographic schemes are not unique to certain tholoi; the picture is much more complicated. While the dispersal of similar designs among multiple tholoi does not rule out heredity and kinship associations, the evidence points to corporate identities other than simple kinship affiliation. We must look for alternative, possibly overlapping, corporate identities, while examining the means of iconographic transmission.

The very possibility that the EM tholoi are not in constant use requires consideration: why should a tomb go out of use for a short time? Since most of our information on EM

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30 Branigan 1993, 95.

31 Sbonias 1999, 39.
settlement is derived from survey data, which gives us a rough chronology, it is possible that
the contributing population is not consistently present. I would like to add the possibility that
not only is a tholos not in use constantly over the entire EM period, but that after it goes out
of use for a time, a new clan group could appropriate it. This would account for the evidence
in some tombs that they are cleaned out and a new floor is laid. For example, at Platanos A
and at Lebena Y2a, the tombs show signs of burning, after which a new floor of sand is laid,
suggesting possibly a ritual purification. This evidence may also provide one reason behind
the mixed iconography in each tomb, suggesting a change in the kinship group populating the
tomb.

Discussion: Tholos and Settlement

Another question, again difficult to answer due to the paucity of excavated EM
settlements, is the relationship between the tholos or tholoi and the settlement. Physically, the
tholoi tend to be located in view of the settlement, and usually to the east; the doorway to the
tholoi are consistently on the east sides. Often, the door of the tholos is obscured with
further architecture which tends to have been built gradually through the prepalatial period;
this suggests to Branigan a requirement that the living settlement have a view of ancestral
burial grounds, but also a concern that the dead not interfere with the living. He discerns in
the physical placement of the tholoi as well as the deposition of burial goods and the post-
burial manipulation of remains an underlying attitude of anxiety: “Making the cemetery
visible and accessible to the living, whilst ensuring that the dead could not intrude on the

32 Xanthoudides 1924, 89-90 ; Branigan 1993, 126.
33 Branigan 1998 b, 18-19.
34 Branigan 1993, 67; Branigan 1998 b, 23.
everyday life of the community reflects an underlying stress in attitudes to death and the dead in EM society.”

Whether this attitude was predominantly fear or simply reverence is impossible to say. Certainly Branigan’s points about the physical relationship between the tholos and the settlement and the obscured entrances suggest the desire to restrict access to the tholoi. Control of the entrance to ancestral burial places is an expression of EM social order, but the relationship of this authority or privilege to the physical landscape relates control of the tholos with control of land, and therefore with control of economic resources. Joanna Murphy has suggested that tomb placement grants authority for ownership or legitimation of land usage based on descent. She finds their placement significant in relation both to arable land and to trade routes, and suggests that the land is conceptualized as belonging to, or in the care of, the ancestors. I find this argument compelling principally because the tholoi seem to be obtrusive and permanent built features of the landscape, more so even than the settlements themselves; not only are they constructed to be durable, but they are also used for centuries in some cases, such as Lebena Tholoi I and II, Marathokephalo, Platanos A and B, Ayia Triadha B, Ayia Irini, and Aspri Petra.

The strategic placement of tholoi with relation to arable land, as Murphy suggests, provides a consistent strategy for legitimation of land usage throughout the Early Bronze Age. The agglomeration of architecture and the built platforms that suggest a ritual gathering place are strategies of exclusion for claiming rights to the land around the settlement.

35 Branigan 1998 b, 23.
37 Murphy 1998, 28.
Branigan has commented on the role of tholoi in the Ayiofarango Valley, correlating the distribution of tombs and ownership or use of land. The tholoi seem to be distributed along with households and natural resources, including farm land:

“the valley was divided into a number of discrete holdings, each held by one or more clan groups. … the settlement at Megaloi Skinoi with its three contemporary tholoi would be the home of…. 6-12 families… each clan group would have its own arable land, fresh water supply, potting clay… and building stone, and on each land holding were built not only the houses of the living but also the tombs for the dead and an open-air shrine.”

Although it is difficult for us to envision how ancestor worship took place because of the disturbances to the tholoi, it is clear that the tholoi play some part in linking living settlements to natural resources.

The deposition of seals in burial makes the relationship between tholos and settlement relevant to the distribution of seal iconography. The discovery of a few seals from settlement contexts, as at Myrtos for example, confirms that the seals were indeed used in domestic settings. The fact that only certain individuals were buried with seals confirms that they are likely signs of a privileged authority or a special role. Their burial attests that the seals were used by one person only and the fact that each had a unique iconography makes them highly individualizing. Murphy suggests that the identity of the deceased is maintained until the body decomposes, at which point the person becomes one of the “ancestors.” We have evidence, however, from Archanes that the seals are often retained with the skulls of certain burials even after post-burial cleaning of the bones, suggesting that individual authority is retained in the seal even after decomposition of the owner. This suggests that the seal, as a

39 Branigan 1993, 104.

40 Warren 1972, 226-227. These seals are catalogued in CMS V.14-20.

41 Murphy 1998, 33-34.

42 Maggidis 1998, 93.
marker of individual identity, still has power or meaning. Therefore, when we have evidence of the use of seals as heirlooms\textsuperscript{43} and the repetition of certain iconographic elements even between a few seals in one tomb, this could suggest a legitimation strategy based on kinship identity and ancestry.

\textit{Trend in Burial Individualism}

One more consideration revealed by recent research is that, despite the fact that the tholoi are the predominant method of burial through or up to the MM I period, and as such are an expression of some communal identity, a trend towards the “individualizing” burial can be discerned, especially towards the end of EM III on.\textsuperscript{44} As the tholoi become more crowded with previous burials, individuals begin to be deposited inside pithoi and larnakes, which mark the individual burial out of the mass of bones. This phenomenon is noted in EM III – MM I Ayia Kyriaki\textsuperscript{45} and at Archanes,\textsuperscript{46} as well as at Drakones.\textsuperscript{47} It is interesting that the trend towards individual identification of burials within a communal setting takes place within the social context of increasing complexity in the period immediately preceding the foundation of the first palaces; it is not long after this that the burials in the tholoi begin to drop off in numbers, although certain tholoi are built late, as at Drakones, Kamilari, Apesokari, and Vorou.\textsuperscript{48}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{43}Karytinos 1998, 84.
\item \textsuperscript{44}Branigan 1993, 65-66; Maggidis 1998, 98-99.
\item \textsuperscript{45}Brannigan 1993, 31-32.
\item \textsuperscript{46}Maggidis 1998, 98-99.
\item \textsuperscript{47}Branigan 1993, 65-66.
\item \textsuperscript{48}For Drakones, see Xanthoudides 1924, 76-80.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
This emphasis on the individual has been noted in seal iconography as well, where EM III seals become increasingly varied in iconography and therefore probably unique to their owners.\textsuperscript{49} Both the iconography and the material seem to indicate a concern for individual status display: ivory, for example, becomes a popular material for a brief time in EM III.\textsuperscript{50} Branigan suggests that in this transitional period funerary ritual changes as well. At Ayia Kyriaki, he identifies more cups and fewer jugs among the funeral assemblages in EM III – MMI, suggesting an increase in the number of participants.\textsuperscript{51} Similar remarks have been made of prepalatial pottery, suggesting that the transition may begin even earlier: Day and Wilson suggest that in the transition from EM I – EM IIA pottery, the shift in ceramic assemblages suggests that even in a communal ritual setting, participants partake of food that is apportioned to the individual rather than eating or imbibing out of a common dish.\textsuperscript{52} Certainly by the end of the prepalatial we can discern parallel trends in burial individualization, social complexity, architectural elements around the tholos, and a more communal funerary ritual. The correlation of these trends with a more individualized and display-oriented seal iconography requires further discussion, and the topic will be taken up again below.

\textit{Tholoi and Non-funerary Ritual}

These architectural elements which are built in an agglutinative fashion suggest a trend towards more communal ritual at tombs, but the tholoi preserve evidence of non-funerary ritual as well. In addition to the annexes built off of the tholoi, the areas tend to

\textsuperscript{49} Sbonias 1999.

\textsuperscript{50} Krzyszkowsa 1988 for discussion of ivory imports; Sbonias 1999, 33-34.


\textsuperscript{52} Day and Wilson 2004.
preserve paved areas or platforms. These platforms suggest to Branigan a setting for dancing or other communal gatherings that have no intrinsic connection to the primary burial ritual.\textsuperscript{53} Recalling the importance of Ariadne in later Cretan myth, he suggests that dancing rituals worship a vegetation goddess, eventually the chthonic and domestic “Snake Goddess.” He also notes the EM presence of bull imagery as a palatial predecessor, and even suggests that bull games began in these paved areas, though he admits the improbability of this activity based on the restricted space.\textsuperscript{54} While the material remains of \textit{labyrinth}, bull statues, and bull rhyta do not necessarily imply bull games, it does seem that cultic activity of a non-funerary nature, or at least activity of not exclusively funerary nature, took place around the tholoi. Branigan sees this as part of the trend of developing social complexity, and suggests that

\begin{quote}
“the public or communal aspect of the tombs as represented by surfaced enclosures was a developing feature rather than a primary one, and one is tempted to suggest that as the population grew and larger communities developed so the role of the cemetery in maintaining the stability and integrity of the kin-group became more important.”\textsuperscript{55}
\end{quote}

Although he does not state this explicitly, to follow the line of argument, it could be suggested that the tholoi are predecessors in terms of palatial cultic activity. Their gradual abandonment as the protopalatial begins does indeed suggest a shift in communal gathering away from the tholoi and into the palace complexes, although their sporadic reuse does indicate that the power of ancestral claim does not immediately disappear with the palaces.

The trend towards individualizing burial moving into the protopalatial period is accompanied by a trend in decreasing numbers of burials. Most tholoi drop out of use by the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{53} Branigan 1993, 127-136; Branigan 1998 b, 19-23.
\item \textsuperscript{54} Branigan 1993, 127-136.
\item \textsuperscript{55} Branigan 1993, 129.
\end{itemize}
end of MM I,\textsuperscript{56} including Siva, Lenda-Lebena, Aspri Petra, Ayia Irini, and Koumassa A and B.\textsuperscript{57} In the Ayiofarango Valley, Branigan notes that the tholoi are no longer regularly in use by the end of MM I, which he attributes to a population movement away from the valley, although there are signs of sporadic use thereafter.\textsuperscript{58} Such population shift would agree with our concept of a nucleated settlement pattern in the start of the protopalatial period in the Mesara. He also attributes to this population shift the late foundations of certain tholoi as late as MM IA: Kamilari I, Apesokari I and II, and Vorou.\textsuperscript{59} Murphy points out, in addition, that these tholoi were constructed with the communal gathering places (pavements and platforms) as part of their earliest phase,\textsuperscript{60} suggesting that they were built not only as burial places but as gathering places, equal in concept to the Early Minoan tholoi that evolved such a role with the gradual addition of architecture and platforms. These tholoi also go out of use by MM II, as at Vorou,\textsuperscript{61} despite their late foundation date, and so do not contradict a trend away from use of the tholoi as the protopalatial period opens.

I argue that we must take into account the burial context of the seals, and the changing meaning of the burial context. Seals are markers of individual authority, but they are related to trends towards individual burial and legitimation of land usage through ancestral claims. The communal nature of the tholoi cannot be ignored; the shift in communal gatherings from the tholoi to the palaces corresponds to a shift in the protopalatial

\textsuperscript{56} Branigan 1993, 12.

\textsuperscript{57} Galanakis 2005, 21-22.

\textsuperscript{58} Branigan 1993, 139-141.

\textsuperscript{59} Branigan 1993, 116-117.

\textsuperscript{60} Murphy 1998, 37-38.

\textsuperscript{61} Galanakis 2005, 21-22.
period in seal find-spots: when the tholoi go out of use, sealings are found in palace or other elite contexts. As we shall explore below, this would be an unlikely coincidence. It is with this view of corporate identity, individual identity, and identity tied into the physical landscape, that we should re-examine seal iconography.
**Seal Design and Identity**

Seal imagery is not chosen at random – it conveys meaning. Although the connection between imagery and symbolic meaning is debated and probably varies by period, scholarship has treated seal imagery as meaningful. The repetition of motifs found on Bronze Age Cretan seals supports this idea, in that their reuse implies the deliberate selection of meaningful images.

Seal imagery may express different identities or roles through the combination of symbolically meaningful motifs. A unique image may imply an individual seal user, but the reuse of motifs implies that the individual seal user belongs to a group which is represented by these motifs. As status items and tools which can communicate ideas via sealings over long distances, seals are items that express control over production and distribution, that is, of commodity exchange. The identity of the individual and their authority are therefore tied together in seal imagery. Evans was one of the first to draw a connection between economic authority and imagery, suggesting that the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) seals with spider motifs were used in transactions related to textile production, based on the association of Crete with the myth of Arachne.62

**Cross-Cultural Models of Seal Imagery and Identity**

Evans’ claim that the imagery relates to the commodity which the seal guarantees is based on a Mesopotamian model for seal meaning. Scholarship on seals of the pre-literate

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62 Evans 1901, 212.
period has concentrated on the connection between the pictorial representation of commodity and the authority of the seal owner to oversee production of this commodity. Another theory, which does not necessarily exclude commodity control, suggests a connection between seal style and the socio-economic class of the seal owner.\textsuperscript{63} Niessen has suggested a dichotomy in style: those seals with more complex and a higher quality of carving may belong to the elite, whereas more stylized seals belong to lower-level individuals.\textsuperscript{64} Holly Pittman suggests that the seal imagery relates to the commodity in question, but reminds us that in the Mesopotamian context as well, economic and ritual imagery are inseparable: “the glyptic imagery suggests that the most commonly occurring themes, those of rituals or activities of production were all bound together.”\textsuperscript{65} The role of the temple ties economic control to ritual; the seal imagery reflects this dual nature.

Again, this specification of administrative, economic, and ritual identity does not preclude the association of a particular seal impression with an individual. In the literate period, Bonnie Magness-Gardiner notes the “close association of the individual to his or her seal,” adding that this indicates where responsibility lies, adding an economic dimension to the symbolism of seal imagery.\textsuperscript{66} Among Mesopotamian seals of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} millennium BCE, Dominique Collon suggests that when iconography is largely standardized, individual identity is still displayed through background ornamentation: “at some periods when seal designs were stereotyped, an individual would probably choose his seal from a seal-cutter’s stock and have it ‘personalized’ by the addition of so called ‘filling-motifs.’”

\textsuperscript{63} Aruz 1994, 216.

\textsuperscript{64} Niessen 1977.

\textsuperscript{65} Pittman 1994, 131.

\textsuperscript{66} Magness-Gardiner 1990, 65.
probably nothing random about the choice of these motifs although their meaning often eludes us. Indeed, in one case they seem to form a rebus echoing the cuneiform inscription."^{67}

To move to a context geographically closer to Crete, Cypriote seals also suggest a connection between imagery and both economic authority and individual. E. Porada has identified a three-tiered stylistic classification based on quality of carving which reflects status of the seal user, similar to Niessen’s Mesopotamian model.\textsuperscript{68} Jennifer Webb has tied the subject matter of the seal to this hierarchy. She finds that the representations of divine subject matter appear on Elaborate Style seals, linking political and economic authority with religious ritual.\textsuperscript{69} She further specifies a link between written administration and personal identity in the subset of these Elaborate Style seals which carry Cypro-Minoan signs.\textsuperscript{70}

To move even closer to the Minoan sphere, we can examine the role of imagery in Early Helladic glyptic. As EH II seal imagery has been considered to influence Minoan glyptic,\textsuperscript{71} it is important to keep in mind what mainland seal imagery may represent. Our largest source of evidence comes from EH II Lerna, in a cache of sealings from the House of the Tiles. Here the sealings are clearly connected to commodity control and administration because the backs of the sealings reveal that they were pressed against containers and doorways. A further link between these sealings and administration is that they are found in a large building with a probable role in storing and redistributing goods; such a building is not

\begin{flushright}
\small
\textsuperscript{67} Collon 1997 b, 17.
\textsuperscript{68} Porada 1948, 178-98.
\textsuperscript{69} Webb 2002, 135-136.
\textsuperscript{70} Webb 2002, 137.
\textsuperscript{71} Krzyszkowska 2005.
\end{flushright}
preserved from EM II Crete, though several large buildings of special function may have existed.\textsuperscript{72} Again, it seems that while the imagery is meant to convey meaning, scholarly opinion is divided. Some literature highlights the message of commodity control, either among the local population,\textsuperscript{73} or as supervised by Anatolian traders.\textsuperscript{74} Pullen has suggested that economic authority is related to the kinship group, and sees seal imagery as reflection of kinship identity; the repetition of certain motifs is indicative of place within hierarchy of chiefdom.\textsuperscript{75} None of these theories precludes the association of a particular image with an individual owner.

Even in cultural contexts where seal use is older and better documented, the identity that seal imagery specifies is debated. We can conclude, however, that seal imagery has meaning, and that the combination of motifs allows a seal impression to communicate different roles and identities: that of the individual, his association to a group or groups with ritual and/or economic authority, as well as the individual’s own role in the economic and ritual life of the settlement. We need to define more precisely the roles and identities that are possible candidates for iconographic meaning.

\textit{Corporate Identity and Kinship Groups}

Now that we have examined that seal iconography reflects some sort of identity, whether personal, corporate, ritual, and/or economic, we must come to an understanding of these terms. An individual’s identity is the easiest to understand: one person owns a seal with imagery that is unique to himself or herself. Even when a seal is used over time as an

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\textsuperscript{72} Schoep 2004.

\textsuperscript{73} Aruz 1994, 222.

\textsuperscript{74} Weingarten 1997.

\textsuperscript{75} Pullen 1994.
heirloom, which it seems may have happened on Crete, one seal is theoretically used by only one person at a time.

Based on the reduplication of certain motifs, it seems that seal imagery may also specify a corporate identity, which generally places the individual seal user as a member of a group with similar seal iconography. This group is not necessarily restricted to one settlement site, as we shall see. There may also have been “sub-groups,” and indeed a number of levels of corporate identity may indicate an increase in social complexity. Corporate membership can grant economic as well as ritual authority. For example, elite members of trading networks may consider themselves part of a group, but solidarity can also be reinforced through ritual. The different levels of exclusivity in rituals define the different levels of hierarchy in corporate identity. Drinking and dining rituals are well supported in the archaeological record as a way of reinforcing corporate solidarity.

In Minoan Crete, these drinking and dining rituals occur as early as EM II in the tholoi. Placing group identity in this context suggests a connection between group members through ancestry, which would mean that one way of defining corporate identity in Minoan Crete is the “kinship group” – the clan or the extended family. But because of the lack of written sources and the wide distribution of seal imagery, it is difficult to be certain that the kinship group is one of the main components of administrative corporate identity in protopalatial Crete. That said, the iconographic definition of kinship identity could be based on the agnatic or the matrilineal line, either of which would tend to distribute seal owners across multiple sites based on exogamy. Such a social structure would imply that members of the same kinship groups living at different sites would own seals with similar iconography. If we assume the gradual evolution of administration from household management to inter-site
exchange, we might suggest that the extended family could initially have been the principal participants in inter-island trading relationships. The importance of ancestry as seen through the construction and use of the tholoi would reinforce the kinship aspect of corporate identity, whether kinship association is real or assumed.

The role of iconography in defining competing elite groups in protopalatial Crete has recently been highlighted by Haggis’ study of the Lakkos deposit pottery from Petras.\textsuperscript{76} He defines the connection between iconography and social structure, drawing on work by Susan Pollock on Susiana pottery. She suggests that high repetition of motifs and variation in the number of similar motifs suggests vertical variation, or hierarchy; a wide variety of motifs suggests horizontal variation, or equal, possibly competing groups.\textsuperscript{77} Haggis finds that across the entire deposit, the wide variety of ware groups and motifs suggests a high level of horizontal variation, or competing kinship groups. Within each ware group, however, the repetition of motifs suggests a hierarchy, meaning that social structure in protopalatial Crete is composed of a number of interacting elite peer groups, but that within these groups there is evidence of hierarchy.\textsuperscript{78} Haggis also identifies seals as another medium of elite display that shares in the same iconographic traditions as pottery.\textsuperscript{79} This iconographic transmission suggests that similar marks of corporate identity are to be found on seals. With these definitions, let us turn to the seals themselves.

\textsuperscript{76} Haggis 2007.

\textsuperscript{77} Pollock 1983; E. Borgna (2003) has also applied this study in looking at ceramic decoration in Neopalatial Crete.

\textsuperscript{78} Haggis 2007, 759-760.

\textsuperscript{79} Haggis 2007, 762-769.
Aegean Seal Imagery and Previous Scholarship

Having examined in the broader Mediterranean the evidence for seal imagery and identity, we can turn to scholarship on Aegean seals on protopalatial seals, early prepalatial seals, and then the transitional period in between. For the protopalatial period, we have a greater volume of evidence, and there is no question about the administrative function of seals, since they are attested by actual sealings.

Discussion centers instead on what these seals mean. Poursat and Blasingham see the seals tied to palatial authority alone, and suggest that the seals represent administrative officials or bureaucratic roles. Poursat argues that “the different faces of four-sided prisms may have corresponded to different functions of a single individual.” This would in one sense allow one individual to be identified by multiple impressions, and in another would specify the role of the individual or one part of a transaction that the individual is authorized to guarantee. Administrative identity and individual identity would both be communicated by a seal impression, and tied to the palace. This specification relies on two assumptions. First, it assumes that administration is carried out under the auspices of palatial authority alone, but Schoep has recently pointed out evidence, architectural and administrative, that the first palaces represent only one of a number of competing groups. Second, the specification of administrative identity instead of kinship assumes that there is no overlap between the two. That is, this theory assumes that palatial administration is in no way related to kinship groupings. Karytinos has identified similar seal iconography within several kinship groups.

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81 Poursat 1990, 29.
82 Schoep 2004; Schoep 2006.
based on the association of seal style or iconography with certain tomb buildings. Although working exclusively with the evidence at Archanes, he is able to assign certain seal types (such as the Archanes script group) to certain funerary buildings, again suggesting that kinship relationships are the basis of the expression of corporate identity on seals.\(^\text{83}\) What is clear from these discussions is that administrative, kinship, and individual identities are potentially expressed all together, and that such expression of authority is not limited to palatial elites.

Turning to early prepalatial seals, in EM I – II, the function and iconographic symbolism of seals is highly debated. In terms of “administration,” we have some evidence for sealings. Weingarten does not envision administration above the household level in EM II, arguing instead that sealing systems are introduced with the foundation of the first palaces.\(^\text{84}\) Prepalatial seals are markers of elite status, but have no communicative value above the site level.

Schoep on the other hand points to the wide distribution of the few sealings that we have, suggesting an island-wide system of administration, and points out that sealings would not be needed if commodity management were occurring only at the household level.\(^\text{85}\) The numbers are small, but we have sealings from Chania, Khamalevri, Knossos, Myrtos, Trypiti, and other impressed objects from Malia, Archanes, and Sphoungaras.\(^\text{86}\) This paucity of sealings could be attributed to preservation: sealings were never meant to be fired, and the

\(^{83}\) Karytinos 1998; Karytinos 2000.

\(^{84}\) Weingarten 1990.

\(^{85}\) Schoep 1999 b, 267-268, 272.

\(^{86}\) Schoep 1999 b, 268-269.
ones that have been found are extremely fragile. The lack of sealings does not mean that the seals were not used in a commodity management scheme even as early as EM I or EM II.

In addition to the sealings, pottery and hearths are found stamped in the early prepalatial. While Weingarten and others would consider this use purely decorative, Poursat reminds us that the stamping of hearths and pottery could also relate to control of pottery production and household management, and so we cannot assume that the designs do not have meaning. Instead, these artifacts may imply commodity management on multiple levels, including the island-wide sealing system suggested by Schoep.

There has been little discussion as to what sort of symbolic meaning EM II glyptic iconography is meant to communicate, aside from those scholars who conclude that these seals are purely decorative, and not meant to indicate any social position beyond a general “elite status.” Sbonias concludes that they are not markers of individual identity, but does not suggest any alternative. John Younger has suggested that textiles may have provided the inspiration for EM I-II iconography, suggesting that the cross-hatching and other geometric patterns are taken from patterns on elite costumes. This would allow the iconography to reflect elite status through recognizable patterns. He also connects the display of seals to the economic significance of their iconography, suggesting that the dual nature of seals as ritual items and economic tools begins long before the foundation of the first palaces. As

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87 Ferioli and Fiandra 1989, 41.

88 Poursat in response to Pini 1990, 55.

89 Sbonias 1999, 35-36.

90 Younger 1995, 331-335. He also suggests the use of these seals as pintaderas to stamp clothing, which is less likely. The small size of the seals would make them ineffective in stamping large areas of cloth (Younger 1995, 332).

91 Younger 1995.
Kryszkowska comments on the stamped hearths: “while the intent does seem to be purely decorative, we cannot exclude this material from our enquiries, since some motifs are related to those attested in the surviving repertoire of seals and (true) sealings.” In other words, the use of similar iconography in later administration systems which does contain symbolic message suggests the early use of imagery as symbolism. This would allow the seals to function as tools of commodity management, and the low number of sealings may be the result of preservation.

It is in the transitional period of EM III – early MM IA that the discussion on the iconographic significance of seals begins, because it is in this period that iconographic diversity increases and figural motifs begin. Sbonias allows that the innovation in iconography and repetition of motifs symbolize some social structure; he concludes that there is an expression of corporate identity on some EM III seals, such as the Lion/Spiral group discussed below, and that this identity is not tied to palatial administration but is the result of competing elite groups in villages of equal status. Karytinos, on the other hand, discusses these seals as distributed among certain kinship groups in the Archanes cemetery, but also allows their individualizing nature.

This examination of seals will show that we cannot isolate the trend towards expression of individual identity and the increasing social complexity in this period. Seals have the ability to express membership in more than one (possibly overlapping) corporate group, and these expressions are tied to their use not only in the economic sphere but as ritual

93 Kryszkowska 2005, 64.
95 Karytinos 1998, especially p. 84; Karytinos 2000, especially p. 133.
items. The shift in iconography from the late prepalatial to the early protopalatial is not tied merely to the emergence of the palace centers to reflect regional boundaries, but also corresponds to a ritual trend away from legitimation through ancestry at burial grounds. The approach of this paper differs from previous scholarship in that it examines the iconography of prepalatial seals to draw conclusions on social structure, as recent research has identified more social complexity and economic exchange on Crete. In order to understand the EM III – early MM IA seal iconography, I place this period in chronological context by discussing the periods immediately before and after.
Seal Iconography: Minoan Glyptic

Let us now turn to how this information informs our study of seal iconography, as the seals themselves are used and deposited in this funerary context. We will examine changes in seal iconography keeping in mind the trends discussed above: the communal nature of the tombs, the individualizing trend in later burial in EM III onwards, which corresponds to the maximum point of variation in seal iconography,\textsuperscript{96} and the eventual movement of communal gatherings away from certain tholoi and into the palaces, peak sanctuaries, and newer tholoi, which correspond to a change in the findspots of the seals from MM II on. I consider the question chronologically, from EM II to MM IB, examining the seal evidence and in particular the spatial distribution of the seals. For this reason I use examples that come from known excavation contexts, in particular those of CMS II 1. This allows an examination of motifs at the site level, especially where multiple tholoi are in use; considering whether or not particular seal motifs belong exclusively to those buried in certain tholoi, and not to others, as well as the role that heredity might play in the reuse of seal iconography. At the regional level, the distribution of similar motifs at different sites across the island suggests a constant symbolic syntax and meaning, and therefore widespread networks of members in groups where solidarity is both symbolized by seal iconography and reinforced by its use on impressions and in ritual display.

\textsuperscript{96} Sbonias 1999, 37.
The central argument is that prepalatial seals express corporate identity that is tied to ancestry and legitimation of authority, and so are able to function as tools for communication in island-wide and long-distance trading networks. Even in EM III the seals show signs of regionalism, suggesting a concern to express the origin of stamped commodities, but the expression of multiple corporate identities foreshadows the split between palatial and non-palatial elite authority in the Protopalatial period.

The seals that we have come almost exclusively from tombs. They are often difficult to date because of the confused stratigraphic contexts in which they are found, and their possible reuse as heirlooms. Material may provide a clue: local soft stone seems to be most common in EM II, with a shift to ivory and bone in EM III, and then a shift back to local stone in MM IA. 97 These trends, however, are based on only a few stratified excavations (especially Archanes), and their applicability to seals from other regions can only be supported by stylistic dating. Stylistic dating can provide relative dates, even if in some contexts earlier seals were reused and deposited in later periods. Even so, seals associated with known excavation contexts can be dated within a wide range of dates based on associated pottery. 98 This allows us to draw conclusions over the broader prepalatial period.

The relevant burial sites for EM II include Aspri Petra, Ayia Irini, Ayia Triada, Koumassa, Lenda-Lebena, Marathokephalo, and Platanos. 99 Seals from this period are characterized by simple incised linear designs, with a predominance of cross-hatching. Square lattice, lonzenge lattice, and central crosses with quadrants filled in by parallel lines predominate

97 Sbonias 1999, 33.
98 See Kenna 1960, 13-14 for a discussion of the resulting chronological problems for glyptic studies.
99 Galanakis 2005, 21-22; Xanthoudides 1924.
(See Fig. 1 for examples). There are no figural designs, although the shapes of some seals are zoomorphic, suggestive of a talismanic function as well as an emphasis on display.\textsuperscript{100} Local stone predominates as the most common material, as opposed to the ivory employed in EM III, but again, the warning against classification purely by material applies,\textsuperscript{101} although some of these simple geometric motifs continue from the EM II into the EM III and are used in ivory seals.

The breakdown of EM II seals into three (or possibly more) major groups of designs – the square lattice, lozenge lattice, and central cross – might suggest Pollock’s horizontal variation. Each of the three designs may represent one large group. The similarity of seals within each design type suggests little vertical differentiation, or little hierarchy within each group. The horizontal variation continues into the EM III – MM IA period and will even become more complex, that is, more groups defined through conspicuously different imagery will indicate this complexity. The vertical complexity, or hierarchy, does not appear obtrusively in seal iconography in EM II; the appearance of vertical complexity as attested by EM III complexity indicates the increase in social complexity in the period leading up to the foundation of the first palaces.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figures/figure1.png}
\caption{Examples of Typical EM II seal designs}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{100} Sbonias 1999, 35.
\textsuperscript{101} Karytinos 2000, 130; Krzyszkowska 2005, 59.
Early Examples: EM II Motifs on EM III Seals

Scholars have had a difficult time drawing significant conclusions about EM II social complexity or economic hierarchy from these simple incised seals, either in terms of administrative function or iconographic expression of social complexity. As mentioned above, a prevalent view is that the entire administrative sealing system of the protopalatial period was imported from the Near East sometime in the MM II period.102 While the simplicity and repetition of design on these prepalatial seals do not seem to communicate meaning, there are two problems with this approach. First, we can say that by EM III seals show signs of being competitive display items. Material shifts from stone to the costlier ivory, their iconographic variation increases, and they become larger. The pivotal transitional period before the foundation of the first palaces is the latest point at which seals show signs of acquiring whatever symbolic meaning they held in the protopalatial period. Second, the iconographic tradition from the prepalatial to the protopalatial continues largely uninterrupted. While there is much more pictorial representation and a wider variety of themes beginning in EM III, geometric designs established in EM II continue in use in later periods, and we do not have any signs of an abrupt break in iconographic style. Even if not certainly used in large scale administration systems in EM II, the existing iconographic tradition is later integrated into the palace administrative system, suggesting that iconographic meaning in seals should begin with the earliest examples.

Still, despite the fact that these EM II seals could have been used for commodity management schemes, the limited variation in iconography makes it difficult to determine how they might have communicated any sort of identity of the seal user through a sealing. While all of the seals are unique, their individuality is largely obscured by the uniformity of overall seal designs. Certainly it is difficult to find a pattern behind the distribution of motifs. Possibly the designs reflect not individual identity, but are generally a sign of authority. Still, similarity among the motifs suggests Pollock’s horizontal differentiation, where seal owners are largely on the same social level with each other. The repetition of basic types of patterns suggests large corporate networks which are largely equal to each other. Possibly membership is restricted to one of these groups, indicated by broad patterns such as the lattice or the cross with linear decoration. As EM II seals tend to have only one face, this suggests that an individual relies on one motif to represent membership in one group. Within each group, there appears to be no further hierarchy promoted by the number of motifs or their complexity, and therefore there appears to be no further complexity within corporate groups. Pollock’s vertical differentiation is missing.

When we consider that the EM II design continues into the EM III period and is used on ivory seals, we must allow the possibility that the iconographic tradition is being prevailed upon as a strategy of legitimation and appeal to the past in a burgeoning complex society. That is, the iconography of the older seals is being re-used, suggesting a continuity in meaning, or at least a continuity in appeal to a certain authoritative iconography. When we examine one subset of these seals, we can see patterns forming in the distribution and use of the EM II motifs.
**EM II designs on EM III Seals: Hollow Cylinders**

Table 1 lists ten late EM II – EM III seals that have predominantly linear hatching designs, but the center of the impression is blank, caused by the hollowness of the seal. There is an additional hole for suspension of the seal by string, therefore this hole is an integral part of the seal design, and not simply a functional means of hanging the seal. The seals themselves are depicted in Figure 2. The linear hatching motif (square lattice or lozenge lattice) is most common and obviously continues from the earlier EM II iconographic repertoire (see Figure 1).

### Table 1: EM II – EM III Hollow Cylinder Seals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CMS II.1 Cat. No.</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Seal Shape</th>
<th>Seal face shape</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Geometric or Figural</th>
<th>Description of Sealing Decoration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ay. Triada</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Wide lozenge lattice with blank center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ay. Triada</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Radial lines with large blank center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ay. Triada</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Cross with projections and blank center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Ay. Triada</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Radial lines with large blank center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ay. Triada</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Radial wave lines with blank center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11a</td>
<td>Ay. Triada</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>Half-cylinder</td>
<td>Elliptical</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Square lattice with elliptical blank center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11b</td>
<td>Ay. Triada</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>Half-cylinder</td>
<td>Elliptical</td>
<td>Ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Three groups of irregular parallel lines – no blank center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ay. Triada</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>Irregular 3-sided prism</td>
<td>Irregular ellipse</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Loose, irregular square lattice with irregular blank center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>265</td>
<td>Platanos</td>
<td>Tholos B</td>
<td>conoid</td>
<td>Elliptical</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Close lozenge lattice with large elliptical blank center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>480</td>
<td>Palaikastro</td>
<td>Gravecircle?</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>Irregular ellipse</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Lozenge lattice with large elliptical blank center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>482</td>
<td>Palaikastro</td>
<td>Gravecircle?</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Square lattice with round blank center</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Note the high concentration of the motif at Ayia Triada. As with other motifs, we cannot say that this hollow seal construction is unique to one site; this rules out the
possibility that this very early seal design would specify a seal owner from Ayia Triada alone. But this seal form may still be a marker of identity that is shared across sites, or even kinship distinction, if we allow the possibility of the transmission of seal iconography through exogamy. Here we may see a connection between Palaikastro and Ay. Triadha, but the nature of the connection (trade and/or kinship tie) remains obscure.

The predominance of the cylinder shape with this construction is also significant. Cylinders are often carved on two sides, but of these ten, only CMS II.1.11 from Ay. Triadha (Fig. 2F) has a second carved face. This may suggest a similarity in the physical usage of seals with similar motifs and forms, that is, in the act of stamping a sealing, and therefore also in commodity management. If each seal belongs to one individual, then those individuals owning seals of this type would need only one image to mark a sealing. In other words, the seal owner does not need to use the one motif with blank center in combination with another motif, and one side is sufficient to convey the meaning intended when this seal is used. While this does not rule out the possibility that one individual could use more than one seal to communicate another identity or meaning at another time, the use of the cross-hatch motif with blank center seems to suffice for the role played by this seal. This may suggest a similarity in the form of commodity management between the sites where this seal type is found.103 Within one site, since there is no need to differentiate goods at the household level, this could imply a network of supra-local or even regional economic contacts.

103 Here I would like to mention Blasingham’s suggestion (Blasingham 1983, 15-16) that the sealings could have been read in dark storerooms by the fingertips. The cross hatch motif with central blank area would be easily recognizable by the fingers alone and clearly distinguishable from the seals with cross-hatchining only.
Here we should note that as most of these seals are ivory, they might be dated to the EM III period. However, it is the continuation of this type of construction through time that argues for the early acquisition of meaning for these simple geometric seals. Within Ay. Triadha, the seal type repeats in seven seals out of a total of 98 prepalatial seals from this site as classified in CMS II.1. This repetition implies that within the site of Ay. Triadha, this seal type was deliberately copied, and that the seal motifs and shapes of earlier seals were invoked on later seals to express identity. But it appears on only about seven percent of seals from this tholos (the only tholos in use for this site in this period). It represents a specific kinship group, but we cannot say that it alone reflects the population buried in the tholos – we must explain its relationship to other EM III seals from Tholos A. One possibility is that this is one of the earliest kinship groups in the tholos, after which a new kinship group appropriates the tomb. Another possibility is that the iconographic identity of the kinship group at Ay. Triadha changes. A final possibility, which I find most likely, is that the identity expressed is that of one kinship group within several cooperating kinship groups buried in the tholos. If, within this family group, the linear motif with blank center is repeated, the hereditary importance of the motif is undeniable.

To conclude, the EM II- EM III simple geometric motifs may imply more expression of the identity of the individual user than the “homogeneity” of the motifs would initially suggest. Firstly, these earliest motifs continue into the EM III period, suggesting firstly a slow evolution in meaning as socio-economic complexity and therefore commodity management becomes more complex. It also suggests a hereditary element to the iconography, or legitimation of economic authority based on ancestral seal motifs. While few

104 Sbonias 1999, 33.

105 Platon, ed. 1969, 12-117.
would argue at this time that commodity management occurred above the household level, the recurrence of the motifs across the island (from the Mesara to the East Coast) implies some sort of interregional contact. The similarity in the use of this particular motif may imply a sort of administrative homogeneity and therefore meaning of the motif. This connects usage of the seal with a certain corporate identity, which is expressed through similar, yet still individual seal motifs.

**EM II – EM III Seals and Burial Evidence:**

The burial evidence discussed above can add somewhat to our understanding of the increase in social complexity. In EM II, several sites have multiple tholoi in use: Platanos, Koumassa, and Lebena; Ayia Triadha has one EM II tholos and building S.\(^{106}\) Whether the tholos represents the kinship group, the clan, or the village, there is little social differentiation through style of burial. Any signs of differentiation are found in grave goods, such as seals. The homogeneity of motifs, far from representing lack of distinction, suggests contact and seal usage based on corporate identity that is expressed through seal imagery. These linear motifs may communicate a message of authority that is recognized island-wide, suggesting membership in one or more corporate groups that are potentially recognizable across the island. Schoep’s hypothesis that the protopalatial regionalized administrations grew out of earlier homogenous administration practices is relevant here.\(^{107}\) The homogeneity of motif, then, is the result of lack of vertical complexity in the organization and expression of corporate identity. That is, members of the corporate group are largely social equals, and

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\(^{106}\) Galanakis 2005, 21-22, for Koumassa, and Platanos see Xanthoudides 1924, 88-125.

\(^{107}\) Schoep 1999 b, 268-270.
socially these groups are not complex, therefore a small number of motifs suffices to express
group identity.
EM III – MM IA: Multiple Corporate Identities

In EM III and early MM IA, there is a continuation of similarity in seal iconography and seal usage. The diversity of motifs is new, however, and suggests a concern with expressing more complex associations of corporate identity. The balance between old and new iconography suggests legitimation strategies based on ancestry.

We have more data for EM III and early MMIA than for EM II in general, and seal iconography begins to become figural.\(^{108}\) It is also during this period of transition, shortly before the foundation of the first palaces, that a shift in seal material takes place.\(^{109}\) The local stone of EM II is joined (and largely replaced) by ivory, a more expensive import, in EM III. In terms of archaeological context, the tomb is still the most common findspot for seals. Many tombs continue in use from EM II, including Ayia Triadha Tholos B, which is joined by the newer Tholos A, and then in the MMIA period the South building. At Koumassa, Tholoi B and E continue from EM II, as do Lenda I and II. Lenda IIA may experience a gap in usage during the EM III period, but MM IA material is attested. The tomb at Marathokephalo and Tholoi A and B at Platanos continue. New tombs are found at Vorou, Porti, and Drakones, and the tholos at Siva is reused for the first time since EM I.\(^{110}\)

\(^{108}\) Sbonias 1999, 36.


In terms of social complexity, the fact that the newer tombs tend to have only one tholos may suggest that the earlier sites are hierarchically more important in the region, but certainly the construction and simultaneous use of multiple tholoi at the same site indicates differentiation in corporate identity within the settlement, possibly along kinship lines. In other words, corporate groups are developing sub-groups, each represented by a separate tholos. Whatever the contributing population of these tholoi, it is certainly smaller than the entire villages of Platanos, Koumassa, Ayia Triadha, and Lenda. To add another level of complexity, burial practices during this period become more individualizing, as discussed above, suggesting a “fragmentation” of identity: there is the individual identity, as expressed by individual burial and individualized seal iconography. There are also multiple levels of group identity, expressed by burial within communal tombs and similarities in seal iconography, as well as evidence of communal ritual at the tombs. The rituals occurring at these tombs must have been crucial in the transformative period before the first palaces: the tholoi provide the physical setting for the reinforcement of corporate identity.

It is therefore not surprising that scholars have sought expressions of corporate identity in seal iconography in this period, but patterns are not easily found. This has been identified as the period of “maximum innovation,” and a certain set of figural motifs are found repeated. But there is no one-to-one correlation between a particular motif and a particular tholos. This has led Sbonias to conclude that

“style and iconography are not used to express exclusive membership in a specific group. Relevant in this context is Earle’s remark… that when there is a need for external connections, the projection of a separate identity through style is not appropriate. In the case of the Prepalatial seals, the fact that different big settlements share the same style or the same emblems – if we accept the emblematic

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112 Sbonias 1999, 47.
significance of the seal motifs – denotes interaction and exchange, or could contribute to interaction and exchange.”

Therefore we cannot draw an easy connection between motif and corporate identity based on kinship groups buried in the same tholos. But based on the fact that we do not know how corporate identity was defined with respect to the tholos, all we can say is that shared seal iconography is not based exclusively on membership within the group buried in one tholos. We can, however, still find more geographically dispersed patterns of seal iconography that suggest the formation of corporate identity at the regional level. Karytinos, working with the well preserved burials at Archanes, has found associations of certain seal types with particular burial buildings. He finds, for example, an association of the Walking Lions Group (for description see below), with buildings 7, 16, and 19 and the Archanes script seals with buildings 3, 6, and 18. This distribution connects the Archanes script seals with the burials in buildings rather than tholoi, and the lion-spiral group seals with Tholoi B, E, and Building 19. Once again, there is no one-to-one correlation between seal style or motif with tholoi, but a looser association of certain styles with certain buildings. According to Karytinos, “this probably means that particular groups of people were buried in the different tholoi and buildings, and that each of these groups used seals of a restricted type only... The fact that we have a small number of stylistic groups, each containing seals with similar characteristics, during the Prepalatial period, is indicative of groups of people that had something in common, although they lived in different settlements and areas in the land.”

Archanes is a unique site with 26 burial buildings, including five tholoi, that shows a

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113 Sbonias 1999, 42.
114 Karytinos 2000, 131.
115 Karytinos 2000, 133.
considerable number of different burial types;\textsuperscript{116} as such, it may be easier at Archanes than elsewhere to associate seal types with burials. But based on the striking similarities between certain seal types across sites, I think we must accept Karytinos’ argument that there is a strong sense of corporate identity expressed along kinship lines, and I would add, multiple corporate identities. In addition, we have a clearer individualizing iconography. As Karytinos notes, this expression of group identity does not obscure the individualizing nature of the seals.\textsuperscript{117}

I have chosen examples of motifs from the Mesara that are not restricted to one site but whose similarities bear examination. In these seals we can find both individualizing characteristics as well as traits that must express membership within a larger group. Furthermore, the similar form of the seals (material, shape, single- or double-sidedness) suggest that, just as in EM II, the seals are being used for similar purposes at all sites. This in turn suggests that the corporate identity expressed is one that is in some way related to commodity management.

\textit{The Lion-Spiral Group}

The first example is the Lion-Spiral Group, first identified by Paul Yule as the Parading Lions/Spiral Complex,\textsuperscript{118} and then discussed by Martha Wiencke.\textsuperscript{119} These seals are all ivory cylinders dated to EM III. They all share iconographic elements, most notably the

\textsuperscript{116} Sakellerakis and Sapouna-Sakelleraki 1991, 66.

\textsuperscript{117} Karytinos 1998, 84.

\textsuperscript{118} Yule 1976, further discussed in Yule 1990, 208-209.

\textsuperscript{119} Wiencke 1981.
lions. While Yule’s catalogue includes 60 seals, I will discuss 20 of those; 18 discussed here display lion iconography. We will begin by looking at two examples of motifs that are found repeated on some, but not all of the seals: the spiralenvierpaß and the scorpion. These two elements are examples within the larger group where we can see the iconographic expression of multiple overlapping corporate identities. Each group is a subset of the entire Lion-Spiral Group, which might represent the least exclusive level of social complexity.

**Spiralenvierpaß Seals:**

The relevant seals are summarized in Table 2 and depicted in Figure 3. These four seals have in common the smaller side with spiralenvierpaß imagery, again perhaps suggesting a common identity among members at each of these sites. In all four seals this geometric motif is very similar and takes up the entire smaller side of the cylinder. The remarkable trait is that each of these seals has a larger side with similar iconographic motifs. Seal 222 from Marathokephalo (Fig. 3A) has a chain of leaves formed by S-spirals, with two lions on one side and a seated human figure on the other. Seal 312 from Platanos (Fig. 3b) has a perimeter of seven parading lions, with a center of dots and hook spirals. Seal 385 from Archanes (Fig. 3C) has three seated human figures in the center, with a periphery of double-leaf motifs. Wiencke considers this seal to be a “paraphrased” example of the group, and it is the only seal with this motif that does not include lions on the opposite seal face. It deserves to be included, however, because the double-leaf motif and the humans are found on other seals of the group. Seal 399, also excluded by Wiencke as a lower quality replica, has two lions surrounding a trefoil motif on the reverse side.

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120 Yule’s full list is given in Yule 1990, 208.

121 Wiencke 1981, 252.
This group expresses hierarchical levels of one corporate group: the most obvious marker of corporate identity is the repeated *spiralenvierpaß*, all but identical between the four seals. In addition there is the individual level of identity, contained in the fact that each reverse face of the seal is different from the others. Each of these different faces, however, is made up of combinations of the same motifs, suggesting that these motifs are further markers of identity, a common pool from which these individuals are drawing design elements: the lions, double-leafs, and seated human figures.

The similarity in material (ivory) and shape again suggest that not only is the iconography chosen to promote multiple levels of identity, but that within this corporate group, the seals are used and displayed in a similar way. Furthermore, these motifs are found elsewhere throughout the island in this period.

Table 2: *Spiralenvierpaß* Seals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CMS</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Seal shape</th>
<th>Seal Face Shape</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Fig / Geom</th>
<th>Description of Decoration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>II.1</td>
<td>No.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>222a</td>
<td>Marathokephalo</td>
<td>Tholos</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>fig</td>
<td>central chain of s-spirals to form leaf chain; seated man on one side and two lions on the other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>222b</td>
<td>Marathokephalo</td>
<td>Tholos</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td><em>spiralenvierpaß</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>312a</td>
<td>Platanos</td>
<td>Tholos B</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>fig</td>
<td>7 lions walking around outside, with three spiral hooks in center, dots underneath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>312b</td>
<td>Platanos</td>
<td>Tholos B</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td><em>spiralenvierpaß</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>385a</td>
<td>Archanes</td>
<td>Gravecircle</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>fig</td>
<td>3 central humans seated, stylized, periphery of double-leafs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>385b</td>
<td>Archanes</td>
<td>Gravecircle</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td><em>spiralenvierpaß</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>399a</td>
<td>Gournes</td>
<td>Gravecircle</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>fig</td>
<td>3 lions with rolled-up tails, poorly preserved, trefoil in center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>399b</td>
<td>Gournes</td>
<td>Gravecircle</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td><em>spiralenvierpaß</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Scorpion Seals:**

Another subset of the Lion-Spiral Group consists of those seals that display scorpion imagery (Table 3 and Figure 4). Again the seals are well represented at the sites of
Marathokephalo and Platanos, possibly suggesting some sort of network between these sites in which seals and sealings play a part. This network is also suggested by the findspots of the *spiralenvierpaß* seals above. The iconographic elements again repeat: aside from lions and scorpions, insects and S-spirals are common as filler ornaments. These are the same filler motifs found in the *spiralenvierpaß* seals, suggesting that the *spiralenvierpaß* seals and the scorpion seals may represent sub-groups of the Lion-Spiral group. These represent an intermediate hierarchical level of corporate membership: all members of the scorpion group belong to the Lion-Spiral group, but not all members of the Lion-Spiral group belong to the scorpion sub-group.

Table 3: Scorpion seals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CMS II.1 No</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Seal shape</th>
<th>Seal Face shape</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Geom. Or fig?</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>223a</td>
<td>Marathokephalo</td>
<td>Tholos</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>fig</td>
<td>5 lions walking around periphery, 2 scorpions in center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>223b</td>
<td>Marathokephalo</td>
<td>Tholos</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>hooked s-spirals in cross arrangement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>225a</td>
<td>Marathokephalo</td>
<td>Tholos</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>fig</td>
<td>2 pairs of lions walking, crescent &amp; other filler ornaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>225b</td>
<td>Marathokephalo</td>
<td>Thg</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>fig</td>
<td>3 scorpions along perimeter with filler ornament, central 3-pronged mark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>248a</td>
<td>Platanos</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>fig</td>
<td>7 lions walking around perimeter, surrounding six spiders walking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>248b</td>
<td>Platanos</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>fig</td>
<td>3 scorpions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250a</td>
<td>Platanos</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>fig</td>
<td>5 stylized lions on perimeter with 4 leaves in middle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>250b</td>
<td>Platanos</td>
<td>Tholos A</td>
<td>cylinder</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>ivory</td>
<td>fig</td>
<td>2 scorpions with central S-spiral, tails grow out of spiral</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 4: Lion-Spiral Seals with Scorpions

Fig. 4A: CMS II.1.223 Side A

Fig. 4B: CMS II.1.225 Side A

Fig. 4C: CMS II.1.248 Side A

Fig. 4D: CMS II.1.250 Side A
The fragmentation of the Lion-Spiral Group seals into scorpion and *spiralenvierpaß* seals suggests a concern with representing corporate identities at the sub-group level in addition to the individual identity of each seal user. This overall identity is represented iconographically with lion imagery, but the common cylindrical shape and material suggests that the seals are all used in the same way. This could mean that corporate identity is tied to commodity management, and the similarity should not be attributed only to place of manufacture. Sbonias has suggested based on stylistic variability within the group that there are multiple locales for the manufacture of these similar seals.\textsuperscript{122} Differing places of manufacture suggest independent and equal centers that are in communication with each other in terms of production and trade,\textsuperscript{123} but also identity. This broad level of corporate identity is then fragmented into sub-groups: the scorpions represent one subset of the overall group, and the spirals represent another option. Both of these seal groups then draw on common motifs for their filler ornamentation, again suggesting that even more exclusive identities may be expressed by different combinations of these motifs.

*The Lion-Spiral Group as a whole:*

Turning now to consider the entire group, Table 4 lists 19 seals which have been associated with the group, either as “originals” or “imitations.” We can now add another level of corporate identity to the social structure. Previously, we identified both individual identity and corporate identity expressed in those members who have scorpions on their seals, or those who have the *spiralenvierpaß*. We also suggested that the choice of motifs of two-leaves, humans, and lions could indicate another level of social complexity.

\textsuperscript{122} Sbonias 2000, 287-288.

\textsuperscript{123} Sbonias 2000, 287-288.
In treating all of these seals as a group, we have an even broader level of corporate identity which includes all those members who use these seals. The most common motif is the lion, recurring on all but two of the seals listed in the table (and these two are the only two from Archanes). These two Wiencke considers as “clever paraphrases.” Whether or not they belong to the group proper, it seems that the motif which marks membership in the group most broadly is the lion. The next most common motifs include scorpions and the spiralenvierpaß, as well as the double leaves. Less common figural motifs include humans and insects.

Although it is doubtful that we have all surviving seals in this group, there are clear hierarchies among both figural and geometric motifs. I argue that these motifs represent membership in different subsets among the broader corporate group. These subsets then represent the increasing social complexity of EM III – early MM IA Crete. This increasingly complex hierarchy of figural motifs is depicted in Figure 5. The lions are the most common motif, indicating membership in the group in general. From there, the more exclusive level of corporate identity is marked by the spiralenvierpaß or the scorpion (possibly the hatched leaf is on the same level), and from there, the addition of other figural or geometric motifs such as the humans and particular groupings of leaves suggests further levels of exclusivity. Some motifs appear exclusive of one another, but many of the motifs overlap, indicating a complex and not strictly hierarchical social structure.

We must note that not all motifs are shown on this diagram, and that while the exclusive use of filler ornament within each group would imply a strict hierarchy, this is not the case. Instead, the repetition of the many different motifs found on these seals – both the scorpion group and the spiralenvierpaß group – likely represents membership in overlapping

corporate groups. The spiralenvierpaß group and the scorpion group are two separate
distinguishable subgroups, but there is overlapping of some motifs, like the human motif, that
indicate additional complexity. Some motifs, such as the S-spiral, can appear with either
scorpions or spiralenvierpaß, even though scorpions and spiralenvierpaß appear exclusive of
one another. We must also admit that the combination of scorpion and spiralenvierpaß
imagery may be possible but has not survived. However, given the tendency of the two
motifs to appear on the seal face opposite that which contains the lions (in all cases except
for CMS II.1.223), I think it most likely that one or the other of these two motifs, but not
both, could appear on the same side. They most likely represent exclusive sub-groups.

It also appears that the double-leaf, trefoil, and quatrefoil motifs appear exclusive of
one another. Again, while this may be an accident of preservation, on present evidence these
motifs may suggest Pollock’s vertical variation, indicating a hierarchy of motifs within the
group. \footnote{125}{Pollock 1983.} For example, those with quatrefoils may be more powerful members of the group
than those with trefoil motifs, who in turn are more powerful than those with double-leaf
motifs. \footnote{126}{We can compare the results of Haggis’ (2007) study of protopalatial pottery, where he identified multiple
competing elite groups, but within each ware group the reuse of motifs suggests vertical complexity.} Here, the Lion-Spiral Group represents one of a number of competing late
prepalatial elite groups, but even within the group there are signs of vertical complexity.
Table 4: Seals of the Lion-Spiral Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CMS</th>
<th>Lions</th>
<th>Scorp</th>
<th>Hum</th>
<th>Spiralen-vierpass</th>
<th>Inst</th>
<th>2-leaf</th>
<th>Trefoil</th>
<th>4-leaf</th>
<th>Hatched leaf</th>
<th>Swastika</th>
<th>Goats</th>
<th>e-spirals</th>
<th>Ctrl circle</th>
<th>6-leaf</th>
<th>TOT Mots</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3a</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>222a</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Chain</td>
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<td>222b</td>
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<tr>
<td>222a</td>
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Figure 5: One possible way of visualizing the overlapping motifs. Numbers in parenthesis are the total number of seals in this group depicting this motif. Each motif is represented by an ellipsoid. The regions created by overlapping ellipsoids represent the display of both motifs. Numbers in square boxes indicate the number of seals falling into each region.

Lion-spiral Group (20 total)
*EM III Seals with Central S-Spirals*

The next set of EM III seals considered displays a geometric motif: a central S-spiral (or two), with a perimeter of two concentric circles or ovals (Table 5 and Figure 6).

Again we can note that the motif is found at three different EM III sites, and that even within the site of Lenda, it appears in Tholos II and associated room IIa, and Tholos III. Thus the symbolic corporate identity contained in this image must be shared by members across all three sites, and must be simultaneously allowed in multiple burial groups.

Table 5: Seals with Central S-Spirals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CMS II.1 No.</th>
<th>Site</th>
<th>Context</th>
<th>Shape</th>
<th>Seal face shape</th>
<th>Material</th>
<th>Fig. / Geom</th>
<th>Verbal Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>190</td>
<td>Lenda</td>
<td>Tholos II</td>
<td>conoid?</td>
<td>oval</td>
<td>chlorite</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Central s-spiral in double line, periphery of dots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>204</td>
<td>Lenda</td>
<td>Tholos IIa</td>
<td>scarab</td>
<td>oval</td>
<td>bone</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Central s-spiral with rolled ends &amp; line through end, two hatched ellipses above &amp; below, perimeter line</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206</td>
<td>Lenda</td>
<td>Tholos IIa</td>
<td>conoid</td>
<td>oval</td>
<td>chlorite</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Central s-spiral in elliptical frame with small marks around perimeter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>220</td>
<td>Lenda</td>
<td>Tholos III</td>
<td>cone</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>chlorite</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Central s-spiral in two concentric circles with dots along the outside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>270</td>
<td>Platanos</td>
<td>Tholos B</td>
<td>conoid</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>gray-green steatite</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Central s-spiral in 2-3 circles, with dots on perimeter</td>
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<tr>
<td>279</td>
<td>Platanos</td>
<td>Tholos B</td>
<td>conoid</td>
<td>round</td>
<td>dark green steatite</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Central s-spiral in double line, periphery of dots</td>
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<tr>
<td>375</td>
<td>Siva</td>
<td>Siva</td>
<td>conoid</td>
<td>ellipse</td>
<td>green black steatite</td>
<td>geom</td>
<td>Two s-spirals in double elliptical periphery with hatched lines between</td>
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</table>
Here the seals are one-sided, and made of local stone, with the exception of CMS II.1.204, an Egyptianizing example from Lenda, which is made of bone (Fig. 6B). Again with the same exception, the shape is conoid. This grouping shows similarity in manufacture, display (seal shape), and use: the owners of this particular seal type do not require a second side to express an alternate administrative meaning or membership in a corporate sub-group, despite the fact that multiple seal faces are common during this period. In other words, this seal expresses a certain group identity made up of members at Lenda, Platanos, and Siva, and this one picture is sufficient to express the identity of this individual seal owner, if such an expression is intended. While the overall impression of these seals is very similar, the details
allow each seal to be individualizing, whether it is the double S-spiral of 375 from Siva (Fig. 6G), or the triangular filler ornament of 206 from Lenda (Fig 6C). The one seal face of each of these seals has the capability of conveying a corporate identity, in the overall similarity of motifs, while individualizing identity is expressed in the details. So while some seals express multiple levels of corporate identity, not all seals require this capability.

Hallager discusses this motif, suggesting that there is a uniform administrative meaning behind the motif.\textsuperscript{127} Hallager and Vlasaki conclude that these seals are somewhere “on the borderline between the ‘simple administrative’ and ‘decorative.’”\textsuperscript{128} But the combination of central image with double border which is common to all of the seals suggests the deliberate combination of border and center elements, which Aruz has remarked on as meaningful in Early Helladic seals.\textsuperscript{129} This combination of symbolic motifs suggests a recognizable meaning, linking seal owners as members of corporate groups with authority to manage commodities. This authority is not necessarily separate from the ritual display aspect of the seals. In fact, all of the seals are cones or conoids with similar decoration on the body: all of the above seals except for CMS II.1.204 and 206 are conoids with exterior decoration of \textit{torsionsfurchen}, or furrows which twist around the body of the seal. These seals express a group identity in both administrative potential and in display, suggesting again that legitimation strategies are based on a corporate network across multiple sites and defined by both commodity management and ritual display.

\textsuperscript{127} Hallager 1987, 64 ff.

\textsuperscript{128} Vlasaki and Hallager 1995, 264.

\textsuperscript{129} Aruz 1994.
EM III – early MM IA Seal Patterns and Commodity Management

In these three examples of seal sets, I have shown that iconography is tied to expression of individual identity as well as group and sub-group identity. Similar patterns in terms of seal shape, display, and combinations of motifs suggest that the authority expressed in these images is integral to the function of the seal. It is in this association that the link between administrative meaning and iconography is found. We find in this transitional period, when the variation in seal iconography is at its height, a general trend towards association of figural and geometric motifs as indicators of distinction.

Of zoomorphic seals, which likely had an amuletic function, Galanakis has remarked that “as a general rule in EM glyptic, a theriomorphic shape is always accompanied by a geometric design on its base.”130 While there are Prepalatial exceptions to this rule, such as CMS II.112 from Ay. Onouphrios and CMS II.1. 249, 253, and 277 from Platanos, these may be dated later, to the MM IA period. These four exceptions (which do not include the Egyptianizing scarab and scaraboid shapes) do not disprove the overall trend. I would add that when sites have seals with figural iconography, these seals tend to have more than one carved face, and the second face tends to be geometric in design. As discussed above, the sites of Marathokephalo and Platanos have EM III – MM IA seals with both two figural seal faces and figural/geometric seal faces. Ay. Triadha and Ay. Onouphrios both have seals with only one figural face, such as CMS II.1. 112 from Ay. Triadha, and from Ay. Onouphrios CMS II.1.28, 55, 70, and 77. From Ay. Onouphrios, CMS II.1.63 might also be called figural, but it bears similarities to seals of the Archanes script (see Fig. 9B for example). Again, while seals with only one figural face are found at both of these sites, the numbers are

small, and the general tendency is towards figural seals with multiple faces. Koumassa has only two examples of prepalatial seals out of thirty-seven that may represent figural seals with one face (CMS II.1.159 and II.1.162), and Porti has three possible examples of seals with one figural face out of nineteen Prepalatial seals (CMS II.1.360, II.1.365, II.1.367). All three of these seals are so poorly preserved that we cannot say definitively what the imagery represents. The seals from Drakones and Kalathiana are either strictly geometric, or have figural images paired with geometric designs.

The overall impression in multiple-faced seals is towards the simultaneous use of figural and geometric imagery. As figural seals are becoming more prominent, the figural imagery is being paired with geometric imagery that is more traditional: swastikas, spirals, and lattices. This combination of imagery suggests that the choice of seal iconography and legitimation of authority relies on ancestral tradition. It also suggests a widespread similarity in seal usage, in that both geometric and figural imagery are required on seals with newer imagery. Weingarten has remarked on a similar phenomenon, in which there is a combination of hunting and prey imagery on Minoan/Mycenaean seals of MM III and later. These combinations of stock scenes are connected to administrative meanings.\textsuperscript{131} The fragmentation of corporate social identity reflected in newer seal iconography is balanced with more traditional iconography, suggesting in this transitional period that the old symbols of corporate identity are merged with the new.

\textsuperscript{131} Weingarten 1989, 299-313. She recognizes the re-use of stock hunting and sacrifice scenes on 3-sided prisms, suggesting that in this combination, even when one scene appears in isolation from the rest on a sealing, the viewer would recognize the scene as part of the sequence, and therefore attribute the correct symbolic meaning to the image on the sealing. I suggest here that the combination of figural and geometric imagery in late prepalatial Crete means that the Bronze Age viewer would attribute symbolic meaning based on the geometric or figural nature of the impression.
To summarize seal trends from the EM III – early MM IA period, we have a sudden jump in iconographic variation, which leads to the impression that the seals express individual identity more clearly. However, we also find an expression of multiple hierarchical levels of corporate identity: certain seals, especially from Platanos and Marathokephalo, have two sides, one of which is highly standardized in the inclusion of the lion motif, suggestive of an overall corporate identity. The more individualizing seal faces, however, are different combinations of the same motifs, suggesting that the members of these larger corporate groups are arranged in smaller groups drawing on similar motifs to express their individuality, suggesting an intermediate level of group identity. Further, the similarity in material and seal structure means that the seal usage, and therefore symbolic authority in commodity management, could have been standardized. New figural motifs are paired with more traditional geometric motifs that are the most standardized expression of corporate identity, suggesting that in terms of commodity management, these two sides express two separate but necessarily different meanings, which are also recognized between sites. For example, if the individualizing side of a seal face is used to stamp a sealing, but the recipient of the sealing fails to identify the specific seal owner, he may still understand some notion of the individual’s corporate identity based on the repeated motifs of the seal. Or, if the geometric side is pressed onto the sealing, this may have a similar ability to pinpoint a corporate identity. This suggests similar methods and meanings behind seals and commodity management between these sites. Further, the necessity of including the more traditional motifs suggests a strategy of legitimation of commodity management based on heredity and ancestry.
EM III – Early MM IA Seals and Burial Trends

The trend toward individual burial begins in EM III, a simultaneous expression of both corporate identity (within the tholos) and individual identity (within the pithos or larnake). This agrees with the trend in seal iconography, where motifs are paired to express individual identity within a larger corporate group. This corporate group is not the same as the burial group, but extends across different sites. Seals are still buried with owners in a continued association of individual with authority.

Seal use, display, and ultimately deposition in EM III may be more closely related to the tholoi than the simple distribution of seal iconography initially suggests. The multiple layers of social identity found in seal iconography are reinforced at the communal gatherings at the tombs. This may take the form of funerary ritual, which celebrates the individual deceased while creating a sense of community among the mourners. Here, the deposition of the individual’s seal is symbolic for the communal identity, or identities. The multiple expressions of corporate identity suggested above may relate in some way to the gatherings of multiple groups at the tholoi: kinship may be a factor in one or more of these motif groups, as may be cooperatives of kinship groups (or other sodality). This occasion for seal display, which might involve members from multiple settlement sites, would be one instance for the reinforcement of group identity as symbolized by seal iconography, but also the transmission of goods and therefore the use of the seals.

Communal gatherings at the tholoi may be less exclusive than funerals. As noted above, Branigan has found evidence for dancing rituals, libations, and possibly bull sacrifice at platforms in EM III in the midst of the tholoi. More widely attended community rituals

at the tholoi provide another context for expression of corporate identity, which may be reflected in the broadly shared seal motifs. Even though non-funerary rituals with wider participation may not be directly associated with ancestor worship, the physical setting of the tholoi will relate wider community rituals to ancestors.

Seal iconography is tied to ancestral traditions through the tholoi, as a means of legitimation of land usage, funerary ritual, community ritual, and seal burial. Individual authority and probably seal usage and commodity exchange are all linked through the physical setting to the ancestors. The importance of bloodline tradition is borne out by the continued appearance of seal iconography within a tholos. Even without equating one image to an entire burial group over the tenured use of the tomb, images are nevertheless reused. For example, we have several seals with radial spiral hooks from Tholos B at Koumassa, CMS II.1. 136 and 137 (see Figure 7 A-B). Aside from these clear examples where iconography is handed down within a tomb, the overall pairing of newer iconography with more traditional iconography suggests the importance of ancestral tradition in choice of seal motif and therefore in communicating authority or identity.

Figure 7: Radial Spiral Hook Seals from Koumassa

| Fig. 7A CMS II.1.136 Side A | Fig. 7B CMS II.1.137 Side A |

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133 Murphy 1998.
Economic Authority, Long-Distance Trade, and Seal Iconography:

Legitimation of authority by ancestral imagery is balanced by the more innovative iconography of the transitional period, which seems to be inspired from Near Eastern contact. The balancing of older, local motifs with those derived from long distance trade suggests that the seals are being used not only to display authority over trading commodities, but also used in both local and long distance networks. Iconography imported from the Near East includes the parading lions, discussed above, and rosette (for example, CMS II.1.373 from Siva, Fig 8A). We also have seals which themselves are imports. Scarabs from Egypt become popular, such as CMS II.1.120 from Ay. Onouphrios (Fig 8B). These scarabs then become integrated into the Cretan assemblage, as they are reproduced locally (for example, CMS II.1.117 from Ay. Onouphrios, Fig. 8C). This example is imitation ivory, actually produced in white steatite, with a highly Cretan motif of concentric circles. Such an incorporation of the Egyptian shape and emulation of precious material indicates the importance of Egyptian contacts in local Cretan commodity management. A handful of Babylonian cylinder seals are also imported, with an example from the Mesara coming from Platanos (CMS II.1.306, Fig 8D). Xanthoudides dates this seal to ca 2000 BCE, contemporary with usage of the tholos.¹³⁴

The significance of this iconography for legitimation of authority and trading networks is undeniable, but changing, from ancestral images to newer images. The importance of trading networks should not be underestimated in the prepalatial period; the seals have symbols that could be recognized in trading relationships both locally and abroad, and as display items they reflect the extent of these trading networks. This reflection of prestige corresponds to the importation of ivory for seal manufacture, once again pointing to

¹³⁴ Xanthoudides 1924, 116.
the importance of Egyptian trading contacts. The Babylonian cylinder seals provide a more significant example of the importance of long-distance trading networks. These seals, because they are rolling cylinders, do not fit with local Cretan sealing practices, which are stamped, not rolled. Therefore, their retention as items of prestige and symbols of authority attests to the importance of long distance contacts in creating elite status.

Figure 8: Egyptian and Babylonian Imports and Influence

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<tr>
<th>Fig. 8A CMS II.1.373</th>
<th>Fig. 8B CMS II.1.120</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seal Face</td>
<td>Scarab seal</td>
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<th>Fig. 8C CMS II.1.117</th>
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<tr>
<td>Seal Impression</td>
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<th>Fig. 8D: CMS II.1.306</th>
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<tr>
<td>Scaraboid Seal</td>
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To conclude our discussion of EM III – early MM IA seals, we have seen seal iconography change to reflect more complex social relationships: seals are representing multiple levels of corporate identity, including a more individualized identity for the seal user, which is paralleled by the trend in individualizing burial. The iconography is drawn from two sources. First local, traditional motifs continue from EM II, and seem to be in part hereditary, or at least an appeal to the past. The seals can thus function to transmit local symbols. Second, the more innovative iconography reflects distance trading networks and allows the seals firstly to claim functionality in an international sphere, and also to reflect elite status gained through trade networks. Trade and commodity management, therefore, cannot be separated from prepalatial seal imagery.

The physical landscape setting of the tholoi ties all of these functions together. The tholoi, intended final destinations for the seals and the individuals whose authority they represent, are a mixture of the individual identity and community identity that we find on the seals. They are places of ancestral worship and serve to legitimate claims to land, as the seals which use traditional iconography legitimate commodity management authority. As places for kinship and wider communal gatherings they are related to the reinforcement of corporate identity that is expressed in similar seal iconography. These gatherings and the seals displayed in these contexts are related to trading and kinship networks. The distribution of similar symbolic expressions of corporate identity across sites is evidence of these networks. This mixture of individual and corporate identity, which is tied to the region but not localized in one site, is a factor of increasing social complexity in late prepalatial society. Soon, with the foundation of the first palaces, these tholoi will gradually lose their roles as permanent gathering places and the palaces and peak sanctuaries will assume their function; at this point
iconography becomes more simply tied to regional and individual identity and less related to ancestral tradition. This shift becomes apparent in a study of protopalatial iconography.
Late MM IA – MMIB: Seals and the Protopalatial Period

The tendency in scholarship has been to identify this period as an abrupt break in sealing practices and iconography from the EM III – early MM IA period, although the difficulty in drawing a strict chronological division between MM IA and MM IB argues against this approach. This is certainly a result of the fact that the first palaces are not founded simultaneously throughout the island. As discussed above, some scholars see the entire sealing administration system imported with the palaces at the beginning of this period, others see the palaces as agents who institutionalize seal use and therefore regionalize seal iconography. In this view, seal iconography expresses membership in one regionally-bounded corporate group with administrative power expressed architecturally through the first palaces.

I would like to suggest that the “regionalized” iconography and expressions of corporate identity are still based on elite corporate networks, and that “regionalism” is not as new to the early protopalatial period as the evidence would initially suggest. Instead, while some corporate groups were becoming more regionally defined by the palace institution, others were not. The palaces become nucleated locales for seal usage and sealed storage, leading to a picture of a more regionalized style. In other words, commodities and sealings collected at palatial centers suggest a centralized picture of seal usage that is biased in favor of palatial use. But the lack of preserved EM II – III central buildings that could serve as

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redistributive centers is negative evidence contributing to this picture of the sudden institutionalization of seal usage and centralization of commodity control.

First, I will review in brief the early protopalatial seal evidence, and then examine it in light of the other evidence for administration: writing. Finally, I will discuss the possibility that expression of corporate identity is still based on kinship lines, but that the difference between the late prepalatial and the protopalatial periods is that palaces have provided a nucleated location where we find corporate identity expressed through sealings, rather than the more distributed pattern found in the deposition of prepalatial seals.

Late MMIA – MM IB Seals and Beyond

The extant collection of MM seals suggests a shift in material from ivory to soft stone, bone, and white paste. This shift away from precious material and to seals of a smaller size suggests a decline in the display value of seals, but it also suggests that seal usage is “institutionalized.” In terms of seal iconography, the result is a highly regional distribution of motifs. For example, the Archanes Script seals (examples, Fig. 9 a-b), are localized to the Archanes region, and are associated with palatial administration on the basis of script and writing.

The geographical regional similarities have suggested to scholars the emergence of territorial boundaries in the protopalatial period, and the idea that corporate identity is now associated with local palaces. The palace complexes then play an active role in standardizing seal iconography in a given region, because corporate administrative identity is

136 Sbonias 1999, 34.
137 Sbonias 1999, 34.
now identified with the palaces. Sbonias contrasts this picture with the distribution of similar motifs across large villages observed in EM III: “In the next phase (late MM IA – MM IB), a change in the direction of interactions can be observed: these big villages were no longer in contact with each other with respect to iconographic traditions. Instead, they orientated themselves towards the emerging regional centers of their respective areas; this orientation is reflected in the integration of their iconographic tradition into the seal engraving of the old palaces of Knossos and Phaistos respectively.”

Sealing as an administrative practice is for the first time attested by a significant number of sealings, which are found at palace centers. Deposits are found, for example, at Malia, Phaistos, Monastiraki, and at Petras. The Hieroglyphic Deposits of both Knossos and Malia are controversial in terms of dating. We should take a closer look, therefore, at how sealing systems, writing, and palatial administration intersect.

Administration: Seal Usage versus Writing

Weingarten has called this period one of “upheaval,” characterizing protopalatial administration as arriving *ex oriente*, a sudden break from a complete lack of regional administration in the prepalatial period. In favor of this argument is the fact that these first palaces preserve the first extensive evidence of the use of an island-wide sealing system, and the first evidence of writing for administrative purposes. These sealings and tablets suggest a concern with controlling agricultural commodities and textiles, or with necessities rather than

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139 Sbonias 1999, 43.
140 Kryzyszkowska 2005, 80.
141 Weingarten 1990, 105-107.
luxury products.\textsuperscript{142} But because seals predate the palaces, we must allow the possibility of two levels of administrative identity in the protopalatial period, or at least different levels of administration associated with different levels of site hierarchy. As Palaima has remarked on Weingarten’s model, it is unlikely that an administrative sealing system would be imported from the Near East at the same time as a writing system is developed that is not clearly related to a Near Eastern predecessor.\textsuperscript{143}

On the surface, Sbonias’ model of regionalized seal iconography also applies to protopalatial administration. Administrative documents are split between the hieroglyphic script in northern and north-eastern Crete, and Linear A in south-central Crete; this latter is the area of the Archanes script attested in MM I. This geographic split between script use suggests the regional quality of protopalatial administration, as well as the formation of boundaries which define corporate administrative bodies geographically or regionally.\textsuperscript{144} At the highest hierarchical level within the palaces, it seems that regionalized practices were not standardized across the island.

Furthermore, there is no evidence of complete centralization of commodity administration in the protopalatial period. While script use may be highly regionalized, we must examine sealing practices, which complicate the issue. While certain types of sealings seem to predominate at different sites, different sealing shapes are found throughout the island, suggesting that while the method of forming the sealing is regional, seal impressions communicate meaning across the island. For example, flat-based nodules are most common

\textsuperscript{142} Palaima 1990 b, 91-93.

\textsuperscript{143} Palaima 1990 b, 117.

\textsuperscript{144} Schoep 1999 b, 268-270.
at Zakro, but are also found in significant numbers from Ay. Triadha, Chania, Knossos, and Sklavokambos, as well as in small numbers at Gournia, Malia, and Phaistos. Similarly, roundels are found from MM II through the neopalatial period, predominantly at Chania, but are also found at Ay. Triadha, Knossos, and Phaistos, and in small numbers at Gournia, Malia, Myrtos-Pyrgos, Tylissos, and Zakros. In other words, there is overlap between regionalized practices in sealing and writing, but they are two different systems. As Schoep describes it: “there are some indications that tablets and sealed documents may have dealt with different matters altogether. Linear A tablets and sealed documents only rarely occur together in archaeological contexts.” I suggest that this difference is representative of different levels of corporate identity, or different administrative groups, in the protopalatial period. This multiplicity of elite groups possibly competing for power has been remarked on the basis of architectural remains (elite buildings other than the palaces) and patterns of consumption for the Middle Minoan period by Schoep. The palaces are only one of these groups, and their records are represented by writing systems. Sealings represent palatial commodity exchange with other elites. While the palaces, and writing systems, may be new, the seals represent the earlier trading networks based largely on kinship identity or other long-standing elite networks.

The Issue of Regionalism

Writing and record-keeping implies bureaucracy and hierarchy. Seal use implies communication and exchange networks. Regionalized writing systems develop with

145 Hallager 1989, 55, 57.
146 Schoep 1999 a, 213.
147 Schoep 2006.
influence from seals, and in tandem with seals, but do not ever replace seals, even in the highly standardized LM IB period when only Linear A is used across the island. This discrepancy suggests that seal imagery in some way retains the individual identity of user, a local identity, or some identity that is separate from the palatial administration. If we examine the different trajectory of development of the regionalized iconography, We can conclude that this identity continues to express island-wide elite networks.

I argue that the “regionalization” of iconography noted by so many scholars on seals, unlike writing, does not develop suddenly in the MM period with the advent of the palaces. Instead, I think we can see signs of beginning regional styles in the EM III – early MM IA seals above, a trait which becomes clearer in the protopalatial period because the palaces serve as nuclei where these sealings (and not always the seals) are found. As noted above, the regional seal styles are not the result of regional palatial administration.

Scholars have tended to see a major break in the early protopalatial, where seal style is tied to emerging palatial centers. This is in direct contrast to the “homogeneity” of EM II and the variation found across sites in EM III – MM IA. Sbonias 1999, 35-40. I would like to draw attention to the fact that most of our EM III and MM IA examples are from the Mesara or Asterousia regions, however. Of a total of 503 seals in CMS Vol. II.1, 378 are from the Mesara or Asterousia, while only 84 come from central Crete, 23 from eastern Crete, and 15 of unknown provenance. These figures are based on the catalogues of CMS II.1.


These figures are based on the catalogues of CMS II.1.
The repetition of seal iconography across multiple sites in EM III could still be termed “regional.” The clustering of these sites in or near the Mesara area puts fairly strict geographic boundaries on certain seal motifs, such as the Lion-Spiral group discussed above, which are attested in the most numbers at Marathokephalo and Platanos. Saying that they are not tied to any one site, as they are in the protopalatial period, is a retrospective conclusion. Instead, the equal distribution of similar seal motifs across sites with seeming equal status remarked by Sbonias\textsuperscript{150} is the evidence of extensive regional contacts, networks, and commodity exchanges that are later physically moved to happen under the auspices of the palaces. While the first palaces represent a trend towards emerging hierarchy, the sealing systems preserve the older trading networks and alliances of competing and/or cooperating kinship groups.

*Sealing Types and Regionalism:*

One example of sealings used in this way is the roundel. While these are found mostly at Chania, they are also attested from Ay. Triadha, Knossos, and Phaistos, and in small numbers at Gournia, Malia, Myrtos-Pyrgos, Tylissos, and Zakros.\textsuperscript{151} This suggests that each site may have regional tendencies in the way that roundels are formed, but that the impressions have meaning across the island. Further, Hallager has identified two actors in the formation of each roundel, which may or may not be marked with Linear A signs: there is the seal user, and the scribe.\textsuperscript{152} The scribe may represent palatial authority, but it is the seal owner who stamps the roundel, in essence creating a receipt for a transaction. This places the

\textsuperscript{150} Sbonias 1999, 42.

\textsuperscript{151} Hallager 1990, 135.

\textsuperscript{152} Hallager 1990, 130.
stamping action in the hands not of palatial authorities, but of those elites who are managing surplus at the local or household levels. However, the discovery of nodules formed, but not yet stamped, at the palace complex at Petras suggests that the stamping action may occur at the palace. ¹⁵³ Again, this attests that palatial administration and sealing systems overlap and have regional boundaries, but are not the same systems, and therefore do not represent a strict economic hierarchy, but multiple elite groups with administrative power.

Another example comes from Psathi in western Crete. Here we find a unique type of sealing, the tenia, which is “a flat, narrow, curved strip of clay which has been attached to a smooth object with the help of strings, the impressions of which are seen on surface of clay and often covered with a second piece of clay.”¹⁵⁴ These are not necessarily protopalatial, and are dated to the EM III – MM IA transitional period, but the fact that such a unique type of sealing is found that early suggests the early nature of the “regional” methods of sealing. These tenia are in contrast to a sealing found at the site, displaying very common seal iconography: the cross/swastika design is one with parallels from all over the island, including Agia Triadha, Mochlos, and Malia.¹⁵⁵ Again, this example shows us the discrepancy between sealing practices, which may be regional, just as palatial administration is regional, and the iconography of seals, which is more uniform across the island, arguing for a universally recognized meaning. Regional administrative practices do not necessitate regionalized iconography.

¹⁵³ Hallager 2000, 100.
¹⁵⁴ Hallager 2000, 97.
¹⁵⁵ Hallager 1990, 135.
Seal Iconography and Regionalism:

If this is the case, we might expect seals to continue to reflect the corporate groups of EM III – early MM IA in addition to any individual or “regional” identity through iconography, and I argue that this is the case. Sealing evidence cannot help this claim so much as securely excavated, stratified contexts where seals are found, because it is the seals themselves rather than the sealings which speak to how seal iconography is distributed among seal users. We can look at two sites which provide different examples for the early protopalatial.

The first site is Archanes, a burial site which continues in use from EM II through LM IIIC. Here we find many seals of the Archanes script type, which demonstrates an association with administration and a regionally restricted iconography. The site is also in proximity to a palace, Tourkokyeiton, and therefore it seems likely that sealing systems, iconography, and administration are beginning to merge to reflect a regionalized corporate identity. But the Archanes script seals are also associated with certain buildings: Buildings 3, 6, and 7 which concentrate around Tholos B, Tholos E, and building 16. Karytinos concludes that seal iconography can be associated with multiple kinship groups based on burial context, not simply with palatial authority. These seals, one of which is depicted in Fig. 9A, depict “ritual formulae:” that is, they do not express individual names, but rather some label or formula. Further, the Archanes script really begins in the late prepalatial period, with examples such as CMS II.1.394 (Fig. 9 B), among other examples. The re-use of

156 Sakellerakis and Sapouna-Sakelleraki 1991, 66.
159 Sbonias 1999, 46.
a late prepalatial script implies continuity of EM III administrative identity as well as ritual authority. The association of this administrative script, a repeated ritual formula, and the association of the seals with particular kinship groups could suggest that the corporate ritual identity that is responsible for administration is also associated with a network of two kinship groups, as represented by the two tomb groups.

Figure 9: Archanes Script Seals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fig. 9A: Archanes Script sealing from Samothrace</th>
<th>Fig. 9B CMS II.1.394 Side A</th>
<th>Side B</th>
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At Archanes we can also find evidence for the continuation of specific iconographic groups from EM III – MM IA that suggests a separate corporate identity. The motifs of the Lion-Spiral Group, argued above to indicate a broad group of seal owners with commodity management power, are found on later seals from Archanes. In particular, seal CMS II.6.149 (Fig. 10) depicts five lions on the perimeter with two seated humans in the center. The seal is found in the buildings associated with Tholos B, again suggesting that this type of seal is restricted to those in this tomb (along with Tomb E).\(^{161}\) An even stronger argument for continuity in iconographic expression of corporate identity, however, is the fact that this seal

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160 Sbonias 1999, 45-46.

161 Karytinos 2000, 131.
was found in a context dated to LM IB. The seal may be an heirloom from the EM III – MM IA period,\textsuperscript{162} though it may be dated to MM IB or MM II based on the quality of the carving.\textsuperscript{163} Other differences suggest a later date: the material is clay, and the shape is conoid, so that the seal only has one side. While it does not belong with the Lion Group of EM III – MM IA in terms of material, the iconography is re-used, suggesting a concern within one kinship group for continued membership in this EM III group. Further, the fact that the seal only has one side indicates changes in the administrative use of this seal which may be due to the foundation of the palaces.

Figure 10: One-sided protopalatial seal from Archanes

The site of Kamilari, on the other hand, paints a different picture for the protopalatial period. The burials here are very late, beginning in MM IB. Although the seals can only be dated relatively by style, all must have been deposited in the protopalatial period or later, as the pottery dates the site to MM IB - LM.\textsuperscript{164} The seals, which have been discussed by

\textsuperscript{162} Platon, ed. 1969, 160.

\textsuperscript{163} Sbonias 1999, 40 suggests that in late MM IA – MM IB quality of seal engraving deteriorates.

\textsuperscript{164} Fiandra 1995, 77.
Fiandra,\textsuperscript{165} show rather conservative iconography. One example is the animal footprint-shaped seal, Kamilari F 2640 (Fig 11a), for which Fiandra finds a contemporary parallel in Phaistos No. 798.\textsuperscript{166} One could also find a prepalatial prototype from Ay. Triadha, CMS II.1.20 (Fig 11b). As another example, Fiandra dates Kamilari F 2643 (Fig. 11c) to the MM II B period, a double sided seal with circle and net motifs. She cites contemporary parallels from Phaistos (CMS II.5.60, Fig. 11d).\textsuperscript{167} The repetition of this motif at both Kamilari and Phaistos does not necessarily negate the regional quality of the motif, as both are in the Mesara. However, the seal has clear prepalatial parallels as well: CMS II.1.273 a and b, from Platanos, CMS II.1.152b and CMS II.1.164b from Koumassa (Fig. 11 e-f), and especially CMS II.1.29, from Ay. Triadha (Fig. 11g). Once again, we cannot deny the regional nature of this motif on present evidence, and so again we have the suggestion that regionalization may begin in EM III. The repetition of earlier motifs and continuation of geometric iconography which is not associated with palatial administration suggests a corporate identity for these seals which may not be associated with palaces but rather based on ancestry. The site itself is not in close proximity to a known palace building.

\textsuperscript{165} Fiandra 1995.

\textsuperscript{166} Fiandra 1995, 83 and Figure 7 a-b.

\textsuperscript{167} Fiandra 1995, 83 and Figure 3 a-c.
Figure 11: Protopalatial seals from Kamilari and Contemporary and Earlier Comparanda

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fig. 11A CMS II.5.17</th>
<th>Fig. 11B CMS II.1.20</th>
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<tr>
<td>from Kamilari, protopalatial</td>
<td>from Ay. Triadha, prepalatial (impression)</td>
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<tr>
<th>Fig. 11C CMS II.5.5 Side A</th>
<th>Fig. 11D CMS II.5.60</th>
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<tr>
<td>from Kamilari, protopalatial</td>
<td>from Phaistos, protopalatial</td>
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<tr>
<th>Fig. 11E CMS II.1.152 Side B</th>
<th>Fig. 11F CMS II.1.164 Side B</th>
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<tr>
<td>from Koumassa, prepalatial</td>
<td>from Koumassa, prepalatial</td>
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<th>Fig. 11G CMS II.1.29</th>
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<tr>
<td>From Ay. Triadha, prepalatial</td>
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At both sites, then, we have motifs that continue from the EM III period, and motifs that are associated with kinship groups according to tomb. The difference is that at Archanes, which may be associated with palatial administration, certain kinship groups take on seal iconography indicative of palatial administration in the Archanes script seals. Here, the repetition of the ritual formula in lieu of a more individualizing iconography suggests a shift from a more individualized iconographic representation of authority (in EM III – early MM IA) to a corporate expression of authority. That such an association between palatial administration and seal iconography is found at Archanes is not surprising, given that the palace is nearby. However, what we must remark is that these seals are found in multiple tombs, suggesting multiple kinship groups that share a corporate identity. These seals are also not found in the other tomb buildings, suggesting that not all elite kinship groups possess this identity. This agrees well with the idea of competing elite groups in the protopalatial period, and also implies continuity from EM III with the repetition of similar motifs across different tombs. At Kamilari, the seal iconography is even more traditional and less standardized.

To conclude our discussion of early protopalatial seals, it is important to recognize that the regionalization that has characterized seal iconography in this period begins earlier, in EM III. It is harder to recognize, for two reasons: firstly, our sample set does not allow for a good comparison of all areas of the island in early EM III. Secondly, the regionalization appears “suddenly” in the archaeological record in MM IB onwards because the palace centers provide areas where regional sealings concentrate, exaggerating the impression of regional styles in comparison to earlier periods.
The palatial context for MM sealings brings up the question of the relationship between palatial authority and sealing systems. Palatial authority has been widely recognized as highly regional in the protopalatial period based on scripts and archival tendencies. At first glance, the regionalized style of seals would seem to agree with this picture. However, we must consider that there are more corporate groups than the palaces wielding authority to manage commodity exchange in the protopalatial period. In this sense, the seal iconography reflects multiple corporate groups who interact, but are not all associated with the palaces. Thus the seal iconography is a continuation of the expressions of multiple corporate identities that we identified in EM III.

The new regional iconography suggests a shift in expression of corporate identity from a strategy of ancestor legitimation to one not only of regional authority, but also of ritual, though these expressions are not limited to palatial centers. This shift away from traditional iconography occurs at a time when the tholoi go out of use as burial chambers, suggesting that legitimation of land usage and management of resources is no longer tied to ancestral right, but to regional corporate identity. This corporate identity, however, still preserves characteristics of kinship identity and the seals function in a network that is complementary to palatial hierarchy, or possibly in competition with palatial hierarchy.

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168 Schoep 1999 a.
Conclusion

Ilse Schoep has asserted that there was an underlying administrative network in place in prepalatial Crete that is then fragmented, but not completely replaced, by the regional palatial administrations of the first palaces. We have examined seal iconography to find that prepalatial seals would indeed serve an administrative purpose well.

In EM II, we have an overall sense of homogeneity, but we must remember that we lack a well-rounded sample set from all areas of Crete. We also lack detail on EM II buildings that may have served as central buildings, where evidence of administration might be found.

In EM III, the continuation of simple geometric motifs that characterize EM II seals suggests legitimation of economic authority and land ownership, and therefore of commodity control, based on ancestry. In the same period, platforms and additional rooms are built around the Mesara tholoi, suggesting again that ancestral tradition is invoked to form corporate identity, probably kinship identity, and legitimate land usage.

In EM III – early MM IA, seals reflect both individual identity in that no two are exactly alike, but also multiple hierarchical levels of corporate identity. The clearest example of this phenomenon is the Lion Group, found mostly at Platanos, Marathokephalo, and Archanes. Here, the seals reflect an overall group identity in their overarching similarity, as well as a more narrowly defined corporate identity expressed by lion, spiral, or scorpion iconography. The filler ornamentation that makes each of these seals individual is also drawn

169 Scheop 1999 b, 268-270.
from a fairly standardized body of motifs, suggesting again another level of identity expressed through seal iconography. This fragmentation of corporate identity is suggested by the different levels of exclusivity in rituals occurring in the burial grounds, still tying corporate identity and legitimation of authority to ancestry. The individual emerges more from the corporate group in seal iconography and in individualizing burial, which is probably tied to the complexity of these corporate identities. Whatever the changing role of the individual may be, the tholoi provide the physical setting for the reinforcement of this corporate identity. The seals could serve in an island-wide administrative network as multiple levels of identity are expressed: even if the individual seal creator is unknown to a member of the trading network, his kinship or other corporate affiliation might be based on seal iconography. The importance of distance as prestige, which is incorporated into seal shape and display, also suggests a basis of trading networks for the definition of the elite class.

In the MM IB period onwards, iconography appears more “regionalized,” but in reality this trend started in EM III. Sealing systems and palatial administration overlap, but their coexistence suggests multiple elite groups with administrative power. Even now, seal iconography is often tied to ancestry, as in the correspondence of the Lion Group to certain Tholoi at Archanes, and the continuation of this motif into the protopalatial in general. At Kamilari as well we have the reuse of traditional iconography, suggesting that authority associated with seal ownership still relies heavily on ancestral tradition. But in areas where there are palaces, seal iconography does appear to take on a regional quality, as in the Archanes script seals. The levels of corporate identity expressed, however, seem to be less complex, probably due to the fragmentation of elite authority into two palatial and non-palatial elites. While the exact symbolic meaning of seal iconography is obscure, a long-term
perspective on the re-use of motifs can still suggest changes in legitimation strategies and social complexity.
Works Cited


