

Textiles and Seals.

Relations between textile production and seals and sealing practices in Bronze Age Greece

Research objectives of the project and overview of the research tasks:

'**Textiles and Seals**' research project explores significant and multiple, but largely ignored relations between textiles and textile production, and seals and sealing practices in Bronze Age Greece, from the Early to Late Bronze Age (c. 2650-1200 BCE). The project aims to identify the structure and meaning of these relations by investigating: 1) the use of seals in administration of textile production; 2) the use of textiles in sealing practices; 3) iconographic references to textile production on seals. Its goal is to explain how textile production was administered, what types of textiles and how were used in sealing practices, and how and why textile production was reflected in the imagery of glyptic.

Textile production was one of the key crafts in Bronze Age Greece. The economic and social importance of textile production results from its complex technology, time-consuming labour inputs and the significant involvement of the whole society. Until recently, the role of textile production remained largely unnoticed, due to the fact that textiles, being organic products, do not conserve well in archaeological contexts. However, the combination of different research approaches to direct evidence of textile production (archaeological textiles, their imprints, textile tools) with indirect evidence (iconography, textual sources, experimental archaeology) allows successful investigating textile production and its complexity.

This complexity, diversification of operational sequences in textile production and distribution of textiles, required producers to use elaborated scheduling patterns and management skills. The organisation of Aegean industries can be traced through written documents (e.g. Linear B tablets from the Mycenaean palaces) and archaeological discoveries of textiles, specialised workshops, textile tools, and dye-works. But the administrative system based on the use of seals was not sufficiently investigated as regards textiles and textile production. The imagery of seals, with corpus of c. 10,000 published faces of seals, as a source of textile knowledge remained largely unnoticed as well.

The relationship between textiles and glyptic revealed in this study will offer, therefore, a new and more sophisticated understanding of how production was organised in Aegean societies and how various textiles were consumed in administrative practices.

Therefore, the main objectives of this project may be formulated as the following research questions:

- 1. What can sealing practices attested on textile tools and archaeological contexts of seals and sealings tell us about textile technology, organisation and administration of textile production?**
- 2. How various types of textile products were used in sealing practices and what are the technical parameters of those textiles?**
- 3. What types of textile production-related motifs can be recognized in the imagery of Aegean glyptic, and what iconographic conventions were chosen to indicate textile production?**

This questions will be answered by undertaking several research tasks which will integrate the research methods and standards recently developed in textile archaeology and microscopy (e.g. to examine textile imprints preserved on undersides of clay sealings) and specialist textile knowledge with methods of archaeological research (contexts of seals, contexts of textile tools, their spatial and diachronic distribution), and the iconographic studies, revealing the meaning of motifs.

Reasons for choosing this topic

The relationships between textiles and seals to be investigated in this study will not only fill the gap in current knowledge but will also open new horizons for further research regarding technology, its relations to culture and society and connections between crafts. Specifically, it is expected that the new understanding of the organisation of textile production, in which the use of seals and sealings is included, will make an impact on more general research on economy and organisation of production in Bronze Age Greece. The results will pose new questions about the modes of cultural and technical transfers between Aegean and Near Eastern cultures. The results are to be exploited in new educational paths for studies about Bronze Age technologies, textile archaeology and iconography. With this project I also aim to raise the general awareness of the economic and cultural importance of textiles and textile production in societies of the past.