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The Utility of Seals in Interpreting the Influences of Empires on
Periphery Urban Settlements: The Case of Iron Age Chatal
Hoyuk

By

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Abstract

Typical approaches to seals in ancient Near Eastern studies often ignore the role of the individual human agent in both the creation and use of the artifact type. Favoring the functional attributes of a seal as evidence for the existence of larger socio-cultural structures, these approaches rarely incorporate discussions on how an agent's experience of such structures informs the creation and reproduction of these seals. To introduce the variable of human agent into more functionally oriented approaches to seal studies, an emphasis must be placed on the notions of intentionality and choice that go into the production of a seal. Arguing that lived experience goes hand in hand with functional considerations of seals, this paper uses the case study of Chatal Hoyuk to explore how seals can be used as evidence for interpreting such experiences. By analyzing seals as intentional creations that incorporate the experiences of an individual agent, the continuity perceived in the stamp seal tradition at Chatal Hoyuk can be interpreted; the stamp seal tradition reflects a lack of intervention by and influence of the affairs of foreign political powers and large-scale empires during the Iron Age period at the site.

Introduction

Although the association of ancient seals and sealings with the human body is generally accepted in the fields of art history and Eastern Mediterranean archaeology (Aruz 2008; Knappett 2020), this acceptance rarely goes beyond an acknowledgment of cultural presence. By cultural presence, I refer to the tendency of scholars to use seals as evidence by isolating the style and/or glyptic of a seal or sealing and aligning it with a specific culture or group. However, although this form of analysis is useful in assigning a broader socio-cultural provenance to a seal or sealing, it rarely incorporates discussions of the experiences that go into creating a socio-culturally specific seal. Furthermore, scholarly arguments made using seals as the primary form of evidence – which I will refer to broadly as seal studies – are typically functional in nature, aiming to use seals as corroborative evidence for the larger structures and systems that characterized a past society. Although these approaches are useful and will be included in this paper when assessing seals generally, their dependency on functional context (use) as the primary variable in seal composition relegates the role of the individual human agent to a position of lesser importance. To contend with this, I propose that an analysis of seals from the Ancient Near East and Eastern Mediterranean should actively incorporate the intentionality and context of the ancient individual(s) that goes into creating a seal for use. This perspective prioritizes the physical nature and overall composition of the seal itself, asking not just what socio-cultural structures (administrative, political, ideological, etc.) tell us about seal traditions and their purpose, but also what seals themselves can tell us about how ancient individuals experienced such structures. In other words, an acknowledgment of intentionality and choice in the creation of seals filters functional considerations through an active human agent, shifting the question from what seals are used for to why they exhibit the qualities they do. In this paper, my

aim is to demonstrate how seals can be used as a form of evidence that reflects aspects of the lived experiences of ancient individuals. Perceiving current studies in the Near East and Eastern Mediterranean as heavily focused on “major arts” (architecture, frescoes, pottery, etc.) and direct textual references, I assert the position of “minor art” seals as “experience-near” evidence, a term borrowed from James Osborne in his work on sovereignty and territoriality in the Amuq Valley (Osborne 2013). In order to demonstrate this perspective on seals I explore the stamp seal tradition at the Iron Age Amuq Valley site of Chatal Hoyuk. Noting a trend of continuity in Hittite influences on these stamp seals and a lack of evidence for Neo-Assyrian influence after their conquest of the region, I propose that large-scale political events (such as collapse or conquest) had minimal effects on the experiences of the local population of Chatal Hoyuk. By analyzing how Chatal Hoyuk stamp seals reflect the experiences of the local population during transitional periods in the Iron Age, I aim to demonstrate how ancient seals might be used as a more profound form of archaeological evidence. I assert that a detailed analysis of seals that incorporates serious considerations of intentionality and choice alongside functionality can enrich our knowledge of both core-periphery empire dynamics and the unique experiences of urban sites.

The notions of intentionality and choice are central to my interpretation of seals. Although these ideas will be explored in depth in a section devoted to understanding the theory behind intentionality in seals, I will briefly introduce the basic premises here. The idea of intentionality as used in this project rests on two basic assumptions: an ancient seal's association with the body, and the function of a seal as a representation or extension of its individual owner. As briefly mentioned, the former is generally accepted. A common tradition of perforating seals (presumably to attach to something or to be worn) is prevalent from the Early Bronze Age on in

the Eastern Mediterranean. This, paired with specific shapes meant for adornment (such as seal rings) and archaeological analysis of grave sites (where seals were often found placed on or around the body) corroborate this notion (Aruz 2008). The latter assumption will be argued based on function; however, instead of approaching seal function as directly related to preexisting structures, the function of seals and seal technology is understood as part of a dialectical relationship between a socio-cultural environment and individual agents. Here, the term socio-cultural is understood holistically and will refer to a shared political, ideological, and sociological environment that socializes an individual and helps form their conception of their social reality.

This thesis argues for a more intimate analysis of ancient seals from the Eastern Mediterranean in two parts. The first section of my research, introduced above, deals with the role of intentionality in the creation of seals and how intentionality informs interpretation. The second, however, will attempt to demonstrate why this more intimate perspective on seals should be used in scholarship of the Eastern Mediterranean and the Ancient Near East. To do this, my project will look at a selection of Chatal Hoyuk stamp seals from the Iron Age Amuq Valley. My selection of Chatal Hoyuk stamp seals is based on the unique history of the site, the Amuq Valley Region, and its associated scholarship. My research will follow and use a variety of sources related to the Amuq Valley, especially those that pertain to the Iron Age settlements and empire dynamics (Casana 2007; Harrison and Osborne 2012; Osborne 2013; Osborne et al. 2019; Welton et al. 2019; Osborne 2021).

Literature and Methodology

The research presented here primarily builds off and incorporates scholarly work in the Northern Levant, Syro-Anatolia and seal studies in the broader ancient Near East. Within the first vein of scholarship, my research project owes much to the work of James Osborne and his recent publication *The Syro-Anatolian City-States* (2021). Focusing on the Syro-Anatolian city-states (of which the Amuq region is a part), Osborne sets multiple precedents for my own research in his examination of the socio-cultural make-up the Syro-Anatolian Culture Complex (SACC). Of particular importance for my research are his arguments showing the hybridized nature of the Syro-Anatolian city-states during the Iron Age. This assessment of the region both informs and helps to structure my own argument on continuity at the site of Chatal Hoyuk.

However, although Osborne's work will serve as an essential model and supplement, my project looks specifically at how a more intimate perspective of Chatal Hoyuk seals can be informative on the way that periphery urban settlements interacted with larger powers. Furthermore, whereas Osborne argues for hybridization, I favor an interpretation that highlights continuity. Although Osborne makes a strong case for the use of socio-cultural hybridity in his consideration of a larger complex of city-states, my micro-level focus on a singular secondary settlement lacks the evidentiary basis for using such a strong and loaded term. Instead, I argue that Chatal Hoyuk seals evidence continuity of prior cultural influences in a time of shifting demographics and political power. This continuity will be essential in interpreting how the population of Chatal Hoyuk experienced large-scale shifts in political power and regional organization in the Iron Age.

With regards to seal studies, the research here utilizes and augments the functional approaches that dominate the field. By functional approaches, I refer to the tendency of scholars

studying seals to view the object type through the lens of the structures in which they function. In other words, the meaning of the seal is derived primarily from its function and its merit as evidence is in how it was used, not in the relationships that influenced its construction (Feldman 2005). Alternatively, an extensive tradition of isolating seal glyptic to build a repertoire of iconography (Collon 1982; Parpola 2018) or to emphasize narrative traditions (Ameri 2018) has also dominated the field of seal studies. By discussing these approaches here, I do not intend to condemn them, and elements of these approaches are present throughout the analysis presented in the latter half of this paper. However, the approach to seals used here follows a much more recent turn in seal studies that emphasizes both process and practice and the role of the human agents in creating and using the seal (Jamison 2013; Scott 2018; Regulski 2018). What I intend to do in this paper is to explore how top-down functional approaches can be enhanced by explicit attention to the intentionality of the human agent creating and using a seal. As such, my approach to seals starts first with the physicality of the seals themselves; I view the qualities and characteristics of the seal as a product of both the choices of a human agent and the function and structural context of the seal. Through this lens, seals can be understood as a collection of meaningful choices, determined by an individual agent existing and acting within a specific socio-cultural environment. As a form of evidence, interpreting seals in this way allows for a glimpse into the experiences of individuals within the realms in which seals are used. Thus, in this paper I will demonstrate how seals can be used to interpret how historical individuals and groups experienced the structures that influenced seal use.

In addition to the scholars mentioned above, I draw heavily from the efforts of early excavators and surveyors of the Amuq region and the authors of subsequent reports (Braidwood 1960; Haines 1971; Yener et al. 2000). Throughout the work presented here I engage with the

archaeological data presented in these reports and rely on the archaeological contexts they provide. However, of more recent significance to my research is the work of Marina Pucci. In the third publication of the *Excavations in the Plain of Antioch*, Pucci comprehensively organizes the stratigraphy and small finds from Chatal Hoyuk, ultimately making the research presented here possible (Pucci 2019). Although leaving the assignments of shapes and styles of Chatal Hoyuk stamp seals to prior publications (Meyer 2008), Pucci integrates the chronology and excavation context of the stamp seals with their more material aspects (shape, color, dimensions) in a thorough catalog format. Following Pucci's publication, I intend to further her tentative conclusions on the seal traditions of Chatal Hoyuk by inserting intentionality and historically relevant conditions into my analysis.

As discussed above, methodologically my research can be split into two parts. The first part will examine seals and seal practices in the broader context of Syro-Anatolia and consider the philosophical and sociological underpinnings of viewing seals as intentional representations and expressions of individual agents or groups. Here, I will solidify my argument that the importance of viewing seals in this way is essential in deepening our understanding of experiences in the past. The second part of my research will apply this perspective to a selection of Chatal Hoyuk stamp seals. My analysis will include a detailed look at the various attributes of seals and the techniques used to create them. From this, I will suggest correlations of the seal shapes and glyptic trends with socio-cultural influences from both Late Bronze Age (LBA) and Iron Age powers. Building off of a discussion on theoretical considerations for intentionality, I will approach the Chatal Hoyuk stamps seals as a collection of attributes, consciously decided by their makers and/or selected by their users, and thus reflective of expressed identity and experiences within the settlement. By analyzing the intentionality of form and function and

questioning how seals reflect attributes of larger socio-cultural traditions, I will demonstrate how the stamp seals from Iron Age Chatal Hoyuk evidence a lack of intervention by the dominate political powers of the period.

Exploring Human Intentionality in Ancient Stamp Seals

In theoretically examining the role of intentionality in artifacts like seals, I have drawn from hermeneutic and phenomenological perspectives on the construction of social life and theories on human action. Although this connection will be discussed in detail in the succeeding paragraphs, the primary idea behind my approach is the mutual dependence of societal structures and human agents, most recently described by sociologist Anthony Giddens in his theory on “Duality of Structure” (Joas 1993, p. 177). Particularly, my use of the concept of societal structures refers to the institutions born of the collective and patterned behavior of a social group. These structures can be religious, ideological, political, economic, administrative, or any number of combinations of these realms of social life. The related concept of “human agent” will be explored in more detail at a later point in this section; briefly, however, “human agent” will refer to an individual social being that is capable of experiencing their own existence and creating their own subjective meaning from it. Although these definitions will maintain the type of epistemological realism used in the hermeneutic paradigm of social theory, my approach to intentionality in seals also includes a detour into the ideal realm. Following the work of Paul Ricoeur on text and language, the perspective presented here views the communicative properties of objects like seals as abstractions or stand ins for tangible interaction and living speech between human individuals (Ricoeur 1981). However, although these communicative properties will be acknowledged and are essential for understanding functional considerations

behind the creation of seals, the primary emphasis will remain on the relationship between a human agent and their social reality. This dialectical relationship is what produces the choices behind what the seal will come to communicate. In preparation for such a discussion it is first essential to understand the historical and social contexts of ancient seals as a technology.

For the purposes of this project, the use of the plural term “seals” will inherently reference the relatively uniform seal functions and traditions that existed in the Ancient Near East and Eastern Mediterranean between the late Neolithic and the end of the Iron Age. Although seals and their associated functions in no way ceased in practice during the Roman Period, my research here is terminally bound by selecting Iron Age Chatal Hoyuk as a tangible example for further exploration. The consideration of seal traditions prior to the Iron Age as far back as the late Neolithic is due to evidence of early stamp seals appearing in Syria potentially as early as the late Pre-Pottery Neolithic B (PPNB) (Duistermaat 2012). Furthermore, my discussion of seals will include two broad types that were common in the Ancient Near East and Eastern Mediterranean throughout the selected period: the cylinder seal and the stamp seal. Although my focus will be on the stamp seal when discussing Chatal Hoyuk specifically, the two seal types are often found together and are functionally similar in their associations with social structures.

In the Ancient Near East and Eastern Mediterranean, from their first appearances to their eventual proliferation, seals have been intimately connected to two realms of social life: administrative contexts and decorative or protective adornment. Seal impressions first appear in association with property control as early as the 7th millennium, with early evidence of seals used to mark and distinguish food supply coming from Neolithic Syria at sites like Tell Ain el-Kerkh and Tell Sabi Abyad (Duistermaat 1996; Duistermaat 2012). Apotropaic or amuletic functions for seals may appear even earlier. Geometric and figurative imagery on early stamps

may have been related to concepts of protection or even identity and social affiliation, as similarity amongst early patterns or themes suggest (Duistermaat 2012). Although these functions may appear to be distinct, belonging to different social realms, they are similar in that they are both intimately tied to the concept of ownership. The earliest evidence of seals associated with administrative structures is often attributed to the Pre-Halaf Neolithic in Syria, where seals were used to impress clay and seal containers, mark container lids, and even act as evidence of tampering with goods in the case of broken seals (Duistermaat 2012). The administrative function of a seal can be understood as signaling explicit claim to property or the origin of an item in much the same way as a signature; the presence of a seal, sealing or multiple sealings act as signs that a marked object belongs to or comes from an individual or group. Similarly, for a seal to function as a form of protection or amulet it must embody and/or communicate its purpose. This purpose or function is selected by the individual holder of the seal: what is the amuletic seal protecting against and who is it protecting? What does the presence of a seal mean to the individual displaying or holding it? Whatever the meaning, an apotropaic or decorative seal undoubtedly expressed something in relation to the individual it belonged to in the same manner that an administrative seal might signal property. That is, the seal or the sealing it creates is a meaningful expression of an individual or group in some capacity and it expresses this affiliation through its form, material, iconography and impression or all these attributes combined.

So how can intentionality be derived from seals? I argue that such intentionality can be located in the choices made to create a seal that fulfills a specific function. In other words, the specific attributes of a seal reflect how its individual user or holder chooses to express themselves within a specific social sphere or in accordance with a specific social system or

structure. From this, it would follow that by identifying the likely function of a seal, the choices that go into its creation and use can best be understood. In the case of a seal with an administrative function (to mark property, ownership, or origin) the seal must reflect the “administrative self” of an individual or affiliated group. What I wish to tease out is how this notion of intentionality in seals can be used to explore the individual choices and subjective experiences of ancient individuals. Before exploring Chatal Hoyuk stamp seals to demonstrate the utility of this intimate approach to seals as a form of evidence, I must first elaborate further on the underlying assumptions I use to relate social structures and individual agents, as well as the role that objects play in communication and social interaction.

Social Theory and Hermeneutical Approaches to Seals and Intentionality

Central to my discussion on ancient seals and intentionality is an adherence to the hermeneutic concept of a dialectical relationship between individual social agents and their social context. Central to discussions within the Hermeneutic paradigm and phenomenological studies, this idea has been expressed more recently by sociologist Anthony Giddens in his theories on “Duality of Structure” and “Structuration Theory”. Within these theories, social structures, social agents, and the meaningful actions taken by such agents all intersect to create the social world that they are embedded in. Social structures cannot exist without social agents to continuously construct and reconstruct them through their actions, nor do social agents act in isolation of the social structures that exist around them; social agents and social structures exist in a continuous dialectical relationship that creates a particular social reality (Joas 1993; Mann 2008). Through this lens on social life, seals can be understood as an intermediary between agency and structure. Seals are a unique tool for meaningful social action and play a key role in

creating and maintaining the structures within which their functions have meaning; the function of the object is intertwined with the function of the structure it is related to, as is the meaning it is imbued with by an individual agent. In using a seal, an individual relies on the capacity of a seal or its impression to act in their place, representing some aspect of themselves or their identities in the absence of the individual's body or voice. I do not argue here that a seal's functional capacity equates to its own agency, rather, a seal acts only in the sense that it is being used to represent a human agent acting within a specific social structure and context. This concept is related to and derived from the sociology of Max Weber. In Weber's sociology, human action is subjectively meaningful but also inherently social. For Weber, social action does not occur in isolation, but accounts for the behaviors of other social beings (Mann 2008). Thus, for a seal to act in place of a human agent it must meet two conditions: be imbued with meaning by a social agent that relates directly to its function and exist within a social context where the attributes that encompass this meaning can be understood by a different social agent as related to the other. In Weberian terms, this approach to using seals for social action would fall under the instrumentally rational ideal type; an agent using a seal has a functional end goal that can be interpreted within a broader social context of seal functionality (Mann 2008). These conditions demonstrate how seals can be interpreted by understanding their place within the dialectical relationship between a social agent and social structures. However, to complete this discussion, it is important to not only understand the relationship, but how it is grounded in human experience and history. This idea is best understood through phenomenological theory.

Phenomenological theory emphasizes the role of human bodily experience as the foundation for the construction and reconstruction of social structures and the social reality they belong in; it is this idea of reconstruction that any discussion of seals and their functions must

consider. Essential to the idea of “being-in-the-world”, as expressed by hermeneutic phenomenologist Martin Heidegger and his predecessor Edmund Husserl, is the embedded position of the individual human body within a historically constructed social environment. Hermeneutical phenomenology emphasizes the continuous: the role that human actants play in constructing and reconstructing a social world based on their own experiences within that world, creating what we can be looked back upon as a communal culture (Moran et al. 2013). In the case of seals, their emergence in the late Neolithic at a time when sedentary behavior was on the rise can hardly be seen as a coincidence. Rather, it is likely that the technology and its associated properties emerged from the every-day experiences and needs of the Neolithic populations for marking storage and distributing surplus related to pastoral and agricultural developments (Akkermans & Schwartz 2003; Duistermaat 2012). This embedded position of an individual is also explored in Paul Ricoeur’s work on text as an abstraction of the individual. In his essay titled “What is a text? Explanation and understanding”, Ricoeur states that a text can be understood through a “referential relation or referential function”, where it is only through a “circumstantial milieu that discourse is fully meaningful” (Ricoeur 1981, pp. 147-148). Stated plainly, the attributes of a seal that encompass the meanings and intentions of its user can be understood by another individual if their seal traditions and associated functions belong in the same social and historical context. Thus, when looking at seals from Iron Age Chatal Hoyuk, the tradition can be recognized as one with an extensive history that influences contemporary practices. As such, although we can recognize that the functions of seals only exist as they are continuously reproduced, the social context in which seals are used at any moment in time is influenced by historical conditions, making collective meaning and recognition possible and seals functionally relevant.

Analyzing Seals and Reconstructing the Past

Seals in the Ancient Near East and Eastern Mediterranean are a fascinating example of how material objects can play a key role in social action. More so, the technology has a plethora of functional contexts that tie individual agents to larger social structures. The continuous creation and recreation of these structures by social agents into collective rules and practices can subsequently socialize succeeding generations. As such, the intentionality behind seals, that is the choices that go into their creation and composition, are simultaneously influenced by existing cultural and social structures related to their functions and the unique individuals and agents who create and/or use them. In all cases of their function, seals are connected to an individual agent or group and imbued with meaning that can be interpreted by others due to the shared social environment they are used in. In an administrative context, a seal may represent property or ownership, created and formed by an individual to express the facet of their identity, their self, that they wish to portray in that environment. If a seal has an apotropaic function, it is designed with elements that the individual wearer would associate with protection, which may reflect how they conceive of the present danger and other religious or ideological associations they have. In either case, the physicality of a seal is composed of meaningful choices and selections made by an individual to express a sense of self that can be projected into the related social sphere. As such, I argue that an in-depth analysis of the various attributes of a seal, including its shape, material, and glyptic elements, can be highly informative about the subjective experiences of ancient individuals. Furthermore, such an analysis can aid in reconstructions of the lived experiences of ancient peoples, adding depth to historical and archaeological interpretations. In the following section, I will attempt to demonstrate this more intimate approach to seals by examining a selection of stamp seals from Chatal Hoyuk in the Iron Age Amuq Valley.

Iron Age Chatal Hoyuk

To properly explore how understanding intentionality in the seals of Chatal Hoyuk intimately reflects the settlements experience of Iron Age events, it is essential to understand both the geographical and socio-political position of the settlement in relation to other Amuq Valley and North Syrian polities of the Iron Age. Located toward the eastern extent of the Amuq Valley, near the Afrin River, Chatal Hoyuk was intimately tied to the Vally's capital city of Tell Tayinat (ancient Khunualua) between the Iron Age I and Iron Age II periods. At this time, the region encompassed the Syro-Hittite Kingdom of Patina/Unqi (Osborne 2013). As such, the settlement of Chatal Hoyuk can generally be understood within the framework of the larger Amuq when considering historical events in the region. Of primary concern for this paper is the history of the Amuq Valley just before Iron Age I, during the Late Bronze Age (LBA), and just after the Iron Age II period. The chronology of the Amuq Valley has been the focus of much of the research pertaining to the area and has been discussed extensively in publications from the Amuq Valley Regional Project (AVRP) conducted by the University of Chicago (Yener et al. 2000), and the Tayinat Archaeological Project (TAP) centered at the University of Toronto (Harrison et al. 2012). As such, the generally accepted chronology of the region places the beginning of the Iron Age I period at around 1200 BCE and the Iron Age II period between 950 BCE and 750/700 BCE (Osborne 2021). Furthermore, the Amuq Valley chronology is often discussed in terms of phases indicated by alphabetical lettering. The phases associated with Iron Age I at Chatal Hoyuk include the very end of phase M_Late to N_Late, with N_Late transitioning into the Iron Age II period. The Iron Age II period contains the beginning and middle of the O phase, abbreviated O_Beg and O_Mid respectively; phase O_Late indicates the

Iron Age III period, the transition roughly contemporaneous to the Neo-Assyrian conquest of the region around 738 BCE (Pucci 2019; Osborne 2021).

Of significance to the history of the Amuq Valley and Chatal Hoyuk are two major transitional periods initiated by political occurrences in the larger Near East: the “collapse” of the Hittite dynasty at the end of the Late Bronze Age and the Neo-Assyrian conquests during the Iron Age. The influence of such events on the Amuq and Chatal Hoyuk is due to the position of the region itself. The Amuq Valley holds an intermediary position between Anatolia to the north, Mesopotamia to the east, the Mediterranean coast to the west and Syro-Palestine to the south. In fact, it is partly because of the region's geographic position that much of the scholarship surrounding the larger Syro-Anatolian region and the Amuq Valley often ignores the autonomy of the region during the Iron Age. However, between the collapse of the Hittite empire and the Neo-Assyrian conquest, at least two centuries of relative independence characterized the larger Syro-Anatolian region, with nearly four centuries passing in the Amuq Valley before its conquest in the late 8th century BCE (Osborne 2021).

Chatal Hoyuk as a Periphery Urban Settlement

It is in consideration of these transitional periods that I approach Chatal Hoyuk. My selection of Chatal Hoyuk for analysis is based on the unique characteristics of the settlement within the larger framework of the Amuq Valley. Although the settlement is often, even appropriately, included in discussions of the Amuq Valley at large, it is equally important to examine the ways that the settlement differs from other Amuq sites, such as the capital cities (LBA Alalakh/Atchana and Iron Age Tell Tayinat/Khunualua). One major difference between these settlements is the very terminology used to describe them: capital versus non-capital.

However, it is important to note that these hierarchical distinctions are not purely modern conceptions. By cross referencing both Assyrian and local Syro-Anatolian textual evidence, James Osborne demonstrates that city-states in Iron Age Syro-Anatolia were divided into a three-tier system that was recognized both locally and in foreign records (Osborne 2013). The three tiers include a royal city, secondary fortified centers, and small rural settlements. Using a “gravity model” based on the assumptions that political relationships of interaction would decrease as distance increases and that intensity of interaction would increase with the size of a settlement, Osbornes’ analysis convincingly situates the known settlements within the Amuq Valley into this three-tiered system. Charting the 10ha city of Chatal Hoyuk as the second largest Iron II site in Unqi/Patina, Osborne suggest that the settlement was “a significant node in the trade network that would have connected Patina to polities to the east” and likely a secondary tier site within the Amuq Valley (2013, p. 785).

Thus, although Chatal Hoyuk can broadly be understood as a settlement in the Amuq Valley, the settlement may also be interpreted as a more peripheral eastern oriented locality acting as its own center; Chatal Hoyuk was likely partially removed from the political events of the LBA and Iron Age that impacted the capital settlements of the region. This is further evidenced by the general trends of the material evidence at the site. Discussed in depth by Marina Pucci in *Excavations in the Plain of Antioch III: Stratigraphy, Pottery, and Small Finds from Chatal Hoyuk in the Amuq Plain*, Chatal Hoyuk maintained a distinct “local” character throughout its history despite major political events in the region (2019). However, the presence and maintenance of a “local” character does not assume the absence of other elements, especially when considering how the “local” repertoire for material culture developed over time. Rather, both before and after the decline of Hittite control of the Amuq Region, elements of Hittite and

Anatolian traditions were still present in pottery, structural elements, and even seal traditions. Furthermore, Assyrianizing elements began to appear in all frames of life after the conquest of the region in the latter half of the 8th century BCE, though the frequency of such objects was significantly more limited than “local” objects (Pucci 2019). Although Pucci explored this phenomenon in pottery assemblages and elaborated on the structural phases of Chatal Hoyuk (see Haines 1971), her discussion of seals was limited to general trends and cataloging rather than interpretation.

In the remainder of this paper, the Chatal Hoyuk stamp seals will be analyzed in consideration of the role of seals as intermediaries between historically situated structures and agents. This analysis will first look at the stamp seals in order to elucidate the influences of the Hittite empire before and after its demise, specifically highlighting elements of continuity. Next, I will consider how the seals reflect the conquest of the region by the Neo-Assyrians at the end of the Iron Age II period. Finally, I will consider potential explanations for why the stamp seal tradition at Chatal Hoyuk appears to be minimally influenced by the political events occurring at these transitional phases in the Iron Age and what this might tell us about the experiences of individuals living in the settlement. Throughout the following analysis, intentionality in creating and using seals will be assumed based on the theoretical discussion presented earlier. The individual choices that go into the manufacturing and use of seals will be interpreted as directly related to how the individuals and groups living at Iron Age Chatal Hoyuk experienced and constructed their own social environment. The following sections aim to explore how the choices behind the seals from Chatal Hoyuk may reflect the experiences of those residing in the settlement during the transitional phases of the Iron Age.

Continuity of Hittite Influences in Chatal Hoyuk Stamp Seals

It would be impossible to discuss the effect of transitional periods on the settlement of Chatal Hoyuk without discussing continuity; however, this begs the question, continuity of what? As briefly elaborated on in the preceding paragraphs, the Amuq Valley and its internal settlement of Chatal Hoyuk fell under the rule of the Hittite during the Late Bronze Age, acting as a periphery region that would later become an independent Syro-Hittite state after the decentralization of the Empire (Osborne 2021). In fact, this phenomenon characterizes the entire Syro-Anatolian region during the Iron Age I and II periods, with continuity of Hittite influences evident in archaeological assemblages at Tell Tayinat (Welton et al. 2019) and nearby Aleppo (Kohlmeyer 2009). This continuity was especially present in the artistic traditions, leading some scholars to develop art historical chronologies that name the period between 1200-950 BCE (Gilibert 2011) and/or 1000-950 BCE (Orthmann 1971) as stylistically continuous of earlier Hittite traditions. These interpretations are especially relevant to seal traditions, as intentional selection of culturally specific forms, styles, and iconography play a significant role in the function and designation of ownership of the technology. Consequently, I will begin the analysis on the seals of Chatal Hoyuk by noting instances that suggest a similar continuity of Hittite seal traditions within the settlement that contradicts the disappearance of the empire itself at the beginning of the Iron Age.

Biconvex Seals

Perhaps the best evidence for Hittite influences in seals following the decline of the empire is in the form of seven biconvex seals, two of which were found in Iron Age II phase O_Mid contexts. The seal shape, though appearing elsewhere in the Eastern Mediterranean, has

an established tradition in the Hittite period of Anatolia. Additionally, five of the seven biconvex seals included Luwian hieroglyphic signs. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude, as Pucci does in *Excavations in the Plain of Antioch III*, that these seals may represent late imitations or heirloom objects of Hittite traditions. This is further evidenced by similar practices attested in both Arslantepe and Alalakh, albeit during the 14th and 13th centuries BCE, and contemporary Tell Afis. At Arslantepe and Alalakh, several biconvex Hittite seals with Luwian inscriptions are found, suggesting Hittite influences in the administrative spheres of the settlements (Manuelli 2020). Similarly, Stefania Mazzoni argues that biconvex seals with Hittite figural styles and degenerative signs at Iron Age Tell Afis may represent a transitional phase between Hittite control and Tell Afis independence (Mazzoni 2013). Although only a small percentage of the 234 total stamp seals found at Chatal Hoyuk, the biconvex seals found in Iron Age contexts suggest a degree of continuity from earlier Hittite occupation of the Amuq. Whether the seals were in use or even made at the site itself is uncertain, however at least one of the seals fits well with a common horned quadruped theme found at the site that will be discussed in depth at a later point in the paper. It is also possible, as Pucci notes, that these biconvex seals were heirloom objects or used as personal adornment (2019). Although this is an important consideration, I return to the idea of intentionality discussed earlier in the paper to suggest that such a designation hardly hinders the interpretation of the objects as representative of Hittite influence in the settlement. Even if the biconvex seals under review were completely absent from the administrative sphere, their presence in an archaeological context long past the disappearance of the Hittite empire suggests at the very least an association of their users or holders with the empire and its traditions. Furthermore, the perforated nature of the biconvex seals implies that the objects were meant to be adorned in some way, and likely visible to those who interacted

with their wearers. As such, the uncertainty of the particular sphere within which these biconvex seals function does not diminish their value as a form of evidence when considering preferences and influences of Hittite traditions. Rather, if these biconvex seals were used for adornment, this would reflect their intentional use as such, and thus an active (though maybe not fully conscious) continuity of Hittite influences at the settlement. Their physical attributes combined with their presence and domestic find contexts demonstrate a degree of continuity of Hittite presence at Chatal Hoyuk during the Iron Age II period, even if only in the form of artistic or amuletic influences.

Additional Chatal Hoyuk Seal Shapes

Additional seal evidence for Hittite influences permeating into the Iron Age period at Chatal Hoyuk is suggested in the other shapes that populate the seal repertoire and the glyptic themes that dominate it. Although the majority of stamp seals from Chatal Hoyuk that date to the Iron Age can be categorized as handled seals, popular throughout Syria and Anatolia, a few other distinctive shapes demonstrate ties to Anatolia more broadly and the earlier Hittite traditions. The very nature of the abundance of stamp type seals is in itself an interesting contrast to the cylinder seals that dominated most of the ancient Near East after their emergence in the fourth millennium (Aruz 2008). Stamp seals were primarily popular in the Aegean and Anatolia, appearing consistently throughout the Levant as well. Thus, that 234 of the total 320 seals from Chatal Hoyuk are stamps is an interesting phenomenon and may again suggest closer ties with the Anatolian Hittites rather than contemporary Mesopotamian powers. Additionally, some square seals with multiple carved faces are notable amongst the seals from Chatal Hoyuk. Although rare like the biconvex seals, the square seals may strengthen the suggestion of a

continuous Hittite influence well into the Iron Age as the shape is comparable to second millennium production practices in the Hittite empire (Pucci 2019). However, it is important to note that other traditions do appear amongst the stamp seals, including an abundance of scaraboid seals recalling Egyptian traditions, a few conoids (a shape is popular in Cyprus) and familiar Syrian forms (such as studs and gables) (Reyes 2001; Pucci 2019).

Glyptic Continuity

For glyptic themes, the distinction between “local” and “foreign” is often blurred for Chatal Hoyuk seals, as many of the themes are either shared amongst various Near Eastern traditions and/or the theme is crudely rendered. However, in contrast to the variability seen amongst the shapes of the Chatal Hoyuk stamp seals, the glyptic demonstrates a great degree of standardization. Four themes dominate the iconography of the Chatal Hoyuk Iron Age seal repertoire. These themes include depictions of horned quadrupeds, human figures in performance with animals, banquet scenes, and written signs (Pucci 2019). Although the written signs have already been discussed with regards to Hittite influences, the other themes also appear to demonstrate some continuity with earlier Hittite and other Late Bronze Age entities. Important to the discussion here is the parallel roles that continuity and standardization play in the Iron Age stamp seals of Chatal Hoyuk. To elaborate on this point, this paper will look specifically at the dominating and long-lasting theme of horned quadrupeds in the seal repertoire.

One of the most popular themes on Chatal Hoyuk seals is the horned quadruped motif, either used as filling or accompanied by filling patterns such as wedges and branches. The first appearance of this theme dates to a find context at the beginning of Phase N, roughly around 1200 BCE, and appears as late as the Roman Period in the archaeological record (Pucci 2019).

What is significant about this motif is that it does not appear to be correlated with any one seal shape. Rather the iconography can be found on any seal shape and is rendered in various styles throughout the N and O phases. What's more, a specific motif that pairs the quadrupeds with a branch-like (or wing-like) element appears to be unique to the Amuq valley, with a specific iteration that uses a triangular filling motif between the quadruped's legs having few parallels outside of Chatal Hoyuk (Meyer 2008). One version appears to be nearly identical in style, form, and composition on three different seals, two dating to the O_Mid period and the other to the O_Late period. The three seals have a square sealing face and can be classified broadly as knob handled seals. Interestingly, the handles of two of these seals resemble the "pillar seals" typically classified under "hammer seals". These seals are generally associated with early Hittite models and imitations of earlier metal seals (Meyer 2008). All three seals appear in the same structural area that was likely devoted to the domestic sphere of the settlement (Pucci 2019).

At Chatal Hoyuk, we not only see continuity of forms, but standardization of glyptic over the entire Iron Age period. But where did this glyptic repertoire come from? And why did it persist for centuries at Chatal Hoyuk? With regards to the first question, it is likely that the glyptic is an amalgamation of various traditions that existed in the North Syrian repertoire and its surrounding regions. Along with the horned quadruped themes mentioned above, popular Near Eastern themes such as the hero or Master of Animals, banquet scenes, and hunting scenes also appear within the Chatal Hoyuk assemblage. These themes all appear in the final stages of the Late Bronze Age repertoire, and thus further suggest a tendency towards continuity at the Iron Age settlement. Furthermore, the popularity of the horned quadruped scene should not be overlooked. Appearing frequently at Chatal Hoyuk and surrounding Amuq sites, the horned quadruped imagery may also be tied to the deer imagery popular in Anatolia. Believed to

primarily represent the divine, the deer, along with the lion and the bull, were frequently employed in Anatolian art and on seals. The deer or stag specifically was a principal deity associated with the hunt or the hunting god and had a protective function (Gunter 2002). This interpretation is consistent with evidence for transmission of Hittite religious iconography persisting in the Iron Age kingdoms of Anatolia at sites such as Karasu, Malatya and Kultepe (Collins 2002). Further support for this interpretation of the Chatal Hoyuk seals can be found in the use of the “branch-like” motif that accompanies many of the horned quadrupeds depicted in the seal repertoire. The position of this “floral” element on the backs of the quadrupeds in many of the depictions, including the near identical ones discussed above, may not be floral at all. Rather, one interpretation of this motif may be that they represent wings. Wings are especially prevalent in Near Eastern iconography to evoke a sense of the divine and may have had their iconographic origins in the nearby Syria-Palestine culture of the Bronze Age (Caubet 2002). Thus, the popularity of the horned quadrupeds with wing-like elements, most clearly identified with cervids and caprid species, may once again demonstrate a continuity of general Bronze Age imagery and Anatolian traditions. Although other animal figures common to the broader Near Eastern repertoire do appear (such as lions, bulls, dogs and even winged sphinxes and griffins), an overall Anatolian connection for early glyptic traditions may be a reasonable conclusion and would fit well with the LBA position of Chatal Hoyuk as falling under the rule of the Hittite empire.

Neo-Assyrian Influences in Chatal Hoyuk Stamp Seals

The continuity of Late Bronze Age Anatolian influences and “local” traditions observed after the decline of the Hittite empire contrasts with the evidence for Assyrian influences; even

after the conquest of the Amuq Valley in the late 8th century BCE, there is minimal evidence for Assyrian influences in the seal repertoire at Chatal Hoyuk. Within the stamp seal collection at Chatal Hoyuk, only two stamp seals demonstrate a distinct Neo-Assyrian influence in their iconography, contrasting with their more Egyptianizing scaraboid forms and their local stone material (Pucci 2019). Although this medley of qualities may indicate a local production, and thus a purposeful inclusion of Neo-Assyrian iconography on seals, these examples lack a secure find context and their limited number inhibits a definitive conclusion. Similarly, only six seals demonstrate clear influences from the later Achaemenid empire. Of these six seals two were found in O_Late contexts, aligning well with the dates attributed to the Achaemenid empire's proliferation. However, these two seals are both conoids made of quartz material. Due to the rarity of both quartz and conoids at the site, and especially in stamp seals, it has been suggested that seals of this material are of a foreign provenance (Pucci 2019). Of the other undated Achaemenid influenced seals, only one scaraboid form is made of local stone; the other examples include two more quartz conoids and a ring of silver composition. The characteristics of this sub-ensemble are suggestive of minimal incorporation of both Neo-Assyrian and Achaemenid influences at Chatal Hoyuk even after the Amuq region fell under the sway of these late Iron Age empires. Rather, in Iron Age Chatal Hoyuk the “local” stamp seal repertoire seems to have the most ties to the LBA period and Anatolia, continuing well into the late Iron Age III period with little interruption.

Chatal Hoyuk Cylinder Seals

Up until now, cylinder seals have been ignored in favor of the stamp seal tradition, largely due to the small number of cylinder seals that were found at the site during the Iron Age.

However, juxtaposing the cylinder seals of Chatal Hoyuk is essential as a point of comparison since, in contrast to the stamp seals, only a few of the cylinder seals have influences that can be attributed to the local culture. The most common stylistic provenance of the cylinder seals found at Chatal Hoyuk is Assyrian. Two of the seals found in secure Iron Age I contexts and one found in the Iron Age II context are stylistically attributed to the Old or Middle Assyrian period. Six other Assyrianized cylinders were found in the Iron Age II context, three of which were created out of a faience material, the other three of dark stone. Additionally, two stamps of Assyrian style are attributed to the Neo Assyrian period and were found in the Iron Age III context along with an Achaemenid seal. These Neo-Assyrian seals were made of faience and limestone, and the Achaemenid seal made from quartz. Significantly, this assemblage demonstrates that in spite of a proportionately large number of the cylinder seals having associations with Assyrian stylistic traditions, the majority of the seals dating between Iron Age I and III were made of materials other than local stone, such as faience and quartz. Similarly, four out of six stylistically Mitanni cylinder seals from the site were made of faience. In contrast, cylinder seals that exhibit more local styles were primarily made of local stone. Of the seven cylinder seals that exhibit local/North Syrian iconography, six are made of local stone such as hematite, steatite, and greenstone. This fits with the overall site statistic: of the 320 seals at Chatal Hoyuk, 264 are made of local stones (Pucci 2019). Using this evidence, the foreign material of many of the cylinder seals that exhibit non-local glyptic styles may suggest that they were imports. Although the presence of these seals is indicative of some level of influence from the surrounding regions and later empires, the manufacturing of said seals may not have occurred frequently at Chatal Hoyuk. Returning to the idea of intentionality, I argue that the seal traditions of Chatal Hoyuk, both stamp and cylinder, reflect a lack of influence on the settlement even after the Neo-Assyrian

conquest in the late 8th century BCE. Instead, there appears to be a preference for continuous use of their local style that recalls LBA North Syrian and Hittite influences even after the “collapse” of the empire.

Chatal Hoyuk Seal Functions

I turn now to a potential explanation for why the stamp seal tradition at Chatal Hoyuk exhibits continuity in the face of external political circumstances occurring throughout the Iron Age Near East. Primarily, I suggest that although administrative activity undoubtedly occurred at Chatal Hoyuk, the preserved seals may indicate a common apotropaic or adornment function. The primary evidence for this includes the lack of preserved sealings, the contradictory nature of theme standardization in glyptic and variability of stamp seal shapes, and the commonality of animal themes related to hunting.

Amongst the 320 seals found at the site of Chatal Hoyuk, only two seal impressions were collected during the excavations process. The first was a cylinder seal impression found on what is likely the shoulder of a vessel and dating to Phase M. Unfortunately, the impression is too worn to make any conclusive remarks, with only four robed figures partially visible. The second impression is a round stamp seal, likely impressed on a pot. Again, the impression is worn and difficult to make out, however three horned animals are visible around the edges of the sealing (Pucci 2019). Given the poor preservation of the seal impressions and the small number, little can truly be said about the practice behind seal impressions at Chatal Hoyuk. What can be noted is that seals appear to be used at least occasionally for marking vessels, a security practice attested throughout the Near East, and that both cylinder and stamp seals were used for this purpose. An alternative interpretation for the lack of sealings and seal impressions found at

Chatal Hoyuk could be that the seals had a primarily apotropaic, amuletic function pertaining to bodily adornment. However, the small quantity of sealings could be due to preservation issues, being overlooked in excavation, or even a practice of tying perforated seals to vessels that might not be visible in the archaeological record. A possible contradiction to this is that only a small number of the seals were found in association with pottery assemblages in domestic contexts, but this evidence is tentative at best due to the lack of detail used in excavation documentation related to seals and sealings (Pucci 2019). Although the sealings are difficult to interpret, I found it important to consider the potential implications of limited seal impressions and sealings in relation to functionality.

In contrast to the tentative conclusions drawn from seal impression at Chatal Hoyuk, evidence for an apotropaic and/or amuletic function is best supported by the standardization of glyptic and diversity of seal shapes. This argument draws on the musings of Marina Pucci in her brief discussion on seal functions at Chatal Hoyuk. Noting the variation of seal shapes, Pucci suggests that the morphology of a seal may indicate a more personal nature for the objects and a function that prioritizes identification of its individual wearer rather than administrative or property identification (Pucci 2019). Building off this suggestion, I return here to the common themes present in the glyptic repertoire of the site and juxtapose them with seal shapes and forms. Specifically, common themes such as the horned quadruped with a branch or wing at the back demonstrate the trend of similar or identical glyptic appearing on various shapes of stamp seals. Other minor themes such as banquet scenes, Master of Animal scenes, hunting scenes and more also appear commonly on a diversity of seal shapes.

Of the common themes found at Chatal Hoyuk, the horned quadruped with a branch or wing at its back appears on several seals. Each seal has minute differences with how they render

the theme, however the primary form of differentiation is in the shape of the seals themselves.

One variation of this theme includes a quadruped with short horns in a prancing position with the branch-like or wing-like motif extending out from its back.



Figure 1: *Bow Handled Stamp Seal with Rectangular Face.* Source. Meyer 2008, Catalog No. 217.



Figure 2: *Knob Handled Stamp Seal with Square Face.* Source. Pucci 2019, Catalog No. 892.

This theme appears almost identical on three different stamp seals (**Figure 1**; **Figure 2**; **Figure 3**) and one highly stylized version on a scaraboid (**Figure 4**). However, there are key differences in each of these stamp seals: the Iron Age II stamp seal in Figure 1 has a rectangular face with an attached bow handle while the Iron Age III seal in Figure 2 has a squarer face with a knob handle and an additional small element in between the quadruped's legs. These seals both differ in form from the seal in Figure 3 (undated), which has a significantly smaller square face and a “pillar seal” handle.



Figure 3: *Pillar Handled Stamp Seal with Line Drawing.* Source. Meyer 2008, Catalog No. 285.



Figure 4: *Scaraboid Stamp Seal with Horned Quadruped.* Source. Pucci 2019, Catalog No. 984.

The pillar seal handle is also found in two other Iron Age II examples of the horned quadruped theme discussed here (**Figure 5; Figure 6**). These two seals are nearly identical in shape and form and their differences instead lie in small differences in the glyptic. The seal in Figure 5 displays a horned quadruped with its feet tucked underneath it and a triangular wedge filler between its legs. From its back protrudes a branch-like element that resembles the feathered end of an arrow. Similarly, the seal in Figure 6 exhibits the same quadruped, however its horns are branched and the branch-like protrusion on its back is significantly more floral in nature. However, although these two seals may themselves be connected, potentially to the same individual or family unit as they were both found in the same domestic structural level and excavation grid, their glyptic also appears on an entirely different seal form from an entirely

different area of the site (**Figure 7**) (Pucci 2019). Instead of exhibiting a pillar handle and square face, this seal has a triangular face and a knobbed handle with a carved capped (potentially a rosette design), a form design that appears frequently throughout the site with various other themes. The only differences in glyptic that this seal exhibits from the Figure 6 seal are in the direction of its branch-like back element, which appears more forward oriented likely due to shape restrictions, and horns that resemble the seal shown in Figure 5. Clearly, the shape of a seal had just as much, if not more, bearing on the choices underlying the creations and use of stamp seals as their glyptic elements.



Figure 5: *Pillar Handled Stamp Seal with Square Face.* Source. Meyer 2008, Catalog No. 282.



Figure 6: *Pillar Handled Stamp Seal with Square Face.* Source. Meyer 2008, Catalog No. 281.



Figure 7: *Knob Handled Stamp Seal with Triangular Face and Rosette Cap Design.* Source. Pucci 2019, Catalog No. 940.

Similarly, other common themes used in Chatal Hoyuk appear amongst various seal shapes. The banquet scene is one of these examples, with four clear banquet scenes appearing amongst the Chatal Hoyuk seal assemblage. The first is a large square seal from an Iron Age III context with an intricately carved rectangular handle (**Figure 8**). Similar glyptic designs also appear on an undated conoid seal (**Figure 9**), a triangular prism seal with a triangular face and a clearly carved rosette on the cap of the handle (**Figure 10**), and a smaller knob handled square seal much more crudely rendered (**Figure 11**).



Figure 8: *Large Square Stamp Seal with Banquet Scene.* Source. Meyer 2008, Catalog No. 288.



Figure 9: *Conoid Stamp Seal with Banquet Scene and Line Drawing.* Source. Meyer 2008, Catalog No. 30

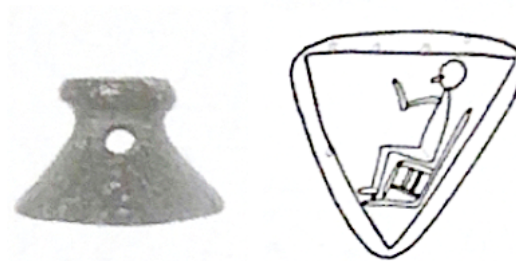


Figure 10: *Triangular Prism Stamp Seal with Banquet Scene and Line Drawing.* Source. Meyer 2008, Catalog No. 311.



Figure 11: *Knob Handled Square Stamp Seal with Banquet Scene.* Source. Pucci 2019, Catalog No. 949.

Additionally, this theme-shape phenomenon also appears in seals with hunting scenes. On one circular faced, knob-handled seal (**Figure 12**), a human is depicted either riding or standing beside a quadruped in a shooting position; the same scene also appears in a slightly cruder style on a square faced pyramidal knob-handled seal (**Figure 13**). Similarities such as this are found throughout the seal repertoire of Chatal Hoyuk, with themes such as the Master of Animals,

animal hunting scenes, crouching animal scenes and more appearing on a variety of different, unique, and often intricately carved seal shapes.



Figure 12: *Knob Handled Circular Stamp Seal with Hunting Scene.* Source. Pucci 2019, Catalog No. 868.



Figure 13: *Pyramidal Knob Handled Stamp Seal with Hunting Scene and Line Drawing.* Source. Meyer 2008, Catalog No. 261.

What I hope to demonstrate through my analyses in this section is the potential apotropaic/amuletic nature of the Chatal Hoyuk seals, specifically the stamp seals. The standardization of themes in Chatal Hoyuk glyptic parallels a diversity of forms amongst the assemblage. I exemplified this point here by looking at similarities and differences within the horned quadruped theme, noting that other common themes such as banquet and hunting scenes also demonstrate this pattern. What I wish to indicate through the analysis here is that the individuals who created, used, or wore stamp seals appear to have explicitly made or commissioned their seals to express their individuality through form and style more so than

iconography. As such, the function of marking may not have been the primary function of the stamp seals used in the Iron Age, as standardized designs would be difficult to assign individual or familial ownership to. From this, I propose two interpretations, with my own partiality leaning towards the second. The first interpretation is that the seals used at Chatal Hoyuk were standardized as mass-media imagery used to express affiliations with the settlement in bureaucratic circles that extended outside of the settlement. This phenomenon is seen elsewhere in the Near East, where a particular theme is associated with higher authority (Beck 2000). Such an interpretation may also be supported by the presence of a singular seal found in an Iron Age III context at Tell Ta'yinat that is nearly identical in both theme and form to the horned quadruped scene from the Figure 5 seal (**Figure 14**) (Meyer 2008). The presence of this seal may suggest that some individuals or offices from Chatal Hoyuk may have been connected to the capital city of the Amuq (Meyer 2008). Additionally, that no more than two seal impressions were found at Chatal Hoyuk could be due to marked products being sent outside of the settlement instead - however the domestic context of the seal impressions found would contradict, or at least limit, this conclusion. Rather, I suggest that a second interpretation of the Chatal Hoyuk stamp seals is better supported: that the stamp seals from the Iron Age settlement were more amuletic and/or apotropaic in nature. Not only would this follow general trends for stamp seals in the Near East toward the end of the Iron Age (Mazzoni 2013), but it would also explain the diversity of forms for stamp seals. A variety of seal forms would serve little purpose functionally unless the function is individual identification. When considering the close nature of seals with the body, furthered by nearly all Chatal Hoyuk seals having perforations, it would be practical to alter seal shape to act as a visual cue for identification, even if the intaglio of the face is identical to other seals. As such, I suggest that the stamp seals used at Chatal Hoyuk were

intentionally varied in order to act as signs for identity. However, although this accounts for an amuletic function for seals, the apotropaic function is more tentatively suggested. This attribute is primarily evidenced by the various themes presented on the stamp seals. The majority of themes include, in some way or another, animals of wild, domestic, and mystical natures. In addition to a variety of hunting scenes, and at the very least tentative ties with Anatolia, it is possible that the glyptic used in Chatal Hoyuk was linked to hunt-related ritual themes, protective deities and/or hunting gods, and overall talismanic attributes. This is supported by trends described by Stefania Mazzoni in her work on Iron Age seals and sealings, where she notes that stamp seals especially became popular in the Iron Age as magic objects (Mazzoni 2013).

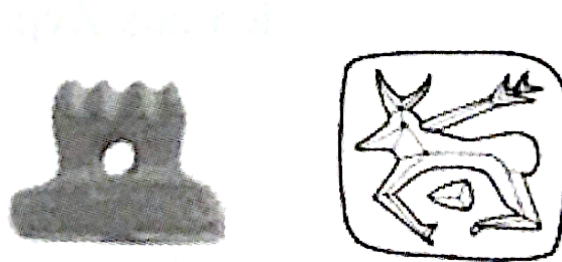


Figure 14: *Tell Ta'yinat Pillar Handled Stamp Seal with Square Face with Line Drawing.* Source. Meyer 2008, Catalog No. 215.

Yet, it remains unclear why elucidating functional trends for stamp seals matters in interpreting how the transitional periods of the Iron Age influenced the settlement of Chatal Hoyuk. Through this section, I mean to suggest that such a distinction matters because an apotropaic and/or amuletic function could help to explain why continuity appears to be the main theme amongst seals traditions, and why there appears to be limited evidence of Chatal Hoyuk feeling the effects of the tumultuous political sphere of the Iron Age. Should the stamp seals of

Chatal Hoyuk primarily have an apotropaic/amuletic function, then whether the administrative sphere was influenced by the political shifts at key stages of the Iron Age period would not be apparent in the seals analyzed. Although at first glance this may appear to hinder the argument presented in this paper, since a lack of evidence in seals in no way means that these transitional periods did not have greater influence elsewhere, I assert that it does not. Rather, when considering the unique qualities of seals and their association with human bodies, I view the intentional use of local and LBA continuity on amuletic seals well into the Iron Age as a reflection of the more intimate associations held by the population of Chatal Hoyuk. Thus, even after the collapse of the Hittite empire in the LBA and the conquest of the Neo-Assyrians at the end of Iron Age II, the population of Chatal Hoyuk appears to have had minimal foreign intervention on their daily life and demonstrated their own socio-cultural preferences through amuletic seals.

Conclusion

Through an analysis of Chatal Hoyuk stamp seals, I assert the validity of an interpretation of the settlement as relatively uninfluenced by the political turmoil that characterizes the Iron Age period in the ancient Near East. Through an analysis of both glyptic and form of stamp seals from the Iron Age context of Chatal Hoyuk, it became evident that the settlement exhibited a great degree of continuity from earlier influences during the focused period. At Chatal Hoyuk we see a continuation of seal traditions from the earlier Hittite occupation, even after the collapse of the empire in the Late Bronze Age. Furthermore, after the Neo-Assyrian conquest of the Amuq Valley around 738 BCE, Neo-Assyrian influences were rarely found amongst seal traditions, with the few exceptions indicating foreign origins rather than local production. Putting these

trends into perspective, it was suggested that this continuity may have been a result of two factors: the peripheral position of the site within the Amuq Valley and the amuletic character of the stamp seal. Located toward the eastern border and determined to be a secondary center, the settlement of Chatal Hoyuk was distinct from the capital city of Tell Ta'yinat and thus removed from the political center. As such, it is unsurprising that the fall of the Hittites and the emergence of the Amuq Valley as a Syro-Hittite polity, followed by the Neo-Assyrian conquest in 738 BCE, had little influence on seal traditions at this relatively isolated site. Furthermore, the lack of sealings, the contradictory nature of standardized glyptic and variety of forms, as well as the cultic scenes used on many of the seals suggests that the stamp seal tradition might have had a more amuletic character. Considering this, it is also unsurprising that we see minimal influences of political occurrences on the seals, as amuletic or apotropaic seals are more likely to reflect the internal beliefs, practices and traditions of the settlement. Through the seals, we can identify a significant devotion to early Anatolian religious iconography and hunting scenes that may indicate an affinity or preference for such ideologies and practices.

Combining the evidence presented in this paper with notions of intentionality in seals, I argue that the stamp seals from Iron Age Chatal Hoyuk demonstrate minimal influences from both the transitional political events that plagued the period and, to a degree, the political capital of the Amuq, Tell Tayinat. Such an interpretation is significant in scholarship pertaining to the Amuq Valley as well as the larger field of empire dynamics. It is my hope that the conclusions drawn here are useful in thinking about how urban and domestic settlements and their people experienced the larger political sphere of the ancient world and the larger scale “events” that dominate academic studies. Furthermore, this paper serves to demonstrate the utility of seals as a form of “experience-near” evidence when interpreted through the lens of intentionality and their

intermediary position between structures and agents. Especially in the absence of textual or large-scale visual objects, seals are an invaluable form of evidence to theorize the everyday experiences of ancient populations.

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