

Session title: EARLY STAMPS IN EUROPE

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Time: Friday afternoon

Room:

Session abstract:

This academic meeting on 'Early Stamps in Europe' is concerned with developing our archaeological understanding of the material, visual and cultural dimensions of one of the most visually striking but enigmatic categories of artefact found at Neolithic and Copper Age (8th-3rd millennia Cal. BC) sites across Europe and Asia, variously described as stamps, stamp-seals or *pintaderas*. These objects were probably used as stamps to print or impress culturally significant patterns onto a range of materials. Their repeated application to certain kinds of people and property could have been used either in socio-economic transactions, to mark identity and ownership, or in socio-ritual performances, to signify and enhance spiritual potency.

Previous studies of these objects have often been distinctly regional in character: focussing on regional corpuses of such artefacts, drawing upon regional traditions of archaeological method and interpretation, and being presented in regional publications and languages. Such studies have also tended to focus on the typological classification and stylistic comparison of the stamps' decorative motifs, at the same time as speculating on their functional and social significance.

In critical response to these studies, and in the light of dynamic new research, then, the goal of this meeting is threefold. The first aim is to bring together the key authors of these disparate regional studies, all of whom have agreed to respond to the challenge of producing a more complete, comparative and nuanced synthesis of the stylistic and functional development of clay stamps across space and time in prehistoric Europe (and Western Asia). The second aim is to bring together other scholars with a specialist interest in clay stamps, as well as interested members of the wider archaeological community, to develop a revised account of these objects, with particular reference to current theoretical perspectives on material, visual and sensual culture. New research on clay stamps is, for example, exploring their various life histories, their reciprocal relations with people, and their embeddedness in cultural processes of production and consumption, by undertaking new experimental archaeological work on the production and use of clay stamps, new studies of their surviving forms and fragmentation, and new detailed analyses of their archaeological deposition contexts and associations. The third aim is to stimulate further new research in this area. The meeting, then, will combine traditional and new datasets, approaches and scholars, with the intention of revising significantly our understanding of clay stamps and their users in Neolithic and Copper Age Europe,

for the benefit of scholars interested not only in the prehistory of seals in Eurasia, but also in artefact studies, early economies, and human intercommunicating.

Paper abstracts:

ANATOLIAN PINTADERAS WITHIN THE ‘NEOLITHIC PACKAGE’

Ali Umut Türkcan, Department of Archaeology, Anadolu University, Eskişehir, Turkey

The Anatolian stamp seals with their unique features are in an intermediary position between the earliest Levant seals with carved pebbles and more remote southeast European seals, on the basis of present evidence. Moreover, various abstract patterns on Neolithic Anatolian stamps, which share a common symbolism with murals and figurines on the site, are also reflected on Early Chalcolithic Central Anatolian and Balkan Neolithic culture seals and pottery as a continuation of a common symbolic tradition through SW Europe. Although some clear stylistic uniformity or imitation testifies to the maintenance of cross-territorial chains of habituated stylistic traditions between the Balkans and Anatolia, any direct analogy of these patterns over regions can be problematic. Rather than giving any universal meaning, these abstract symbols are more likely products of an unlimited subjectivity along with all the complexity of these symbols on their own. On the other hand, the absence of similar seals except for some sporadic finds and similar symbolism on many western and NW Anatolian contexts seems to be another issue so far. Çatalhöyük stamp seals provide us with information that any fixed definition of either function or any symbolic role is not possible, as far as one can tell from the present evidence.

PREHISTORIC “PINTADERAS”: FRAGMENTED KNOWLEDGE OF A WHOLE CATEGORY

Tanya Dzhanezova, St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria

Although well known, the category of so-called pintaderas, seals or stamp-seals comprises considerable ambiguity, resulting in various interpretations of these finds and a great number of unanswered questions.

The present work contains data, obtained mainly from Bulgarian seals. The emphasis is on how we can use the information available, compared with the various interpretations of the finds. Different opinions about pintaderas’ use and meaning are examined with reference to archaeological, ethnological and experimental data, especially including their chronological, geographical and interpretative context, the technology used, the typology of the recorded specimens (with special attention to their decorative variability), their probable connections to other categories of finds and artifact decoration, some specifics of their preservation, distribution and possibilities for exchange.

Besides presenting results using this standard approach, the work raises questions regarding the limitations of the information recorded so far. Pintaderas

ultimate purpose, to distribute various types of information on various materials and to different groups of people, is examined in relation to the latter, and additionally – necessary data for a further, more detailed, approach are outlined.

STAMP SEALS OF THE CUCUTENI-TRIPOLYE CULTURE

Dan Monah, Institute of Archaeology, Iași, Romania

Stamp seals are some of the most mysterious objects discovered in Neolithic and Chalcolithic settlements in Europe and nearby areas. It is due to their appearance (a clay disc with a handle, sometimes perforated) that they were called “Pintaderas” - an Iberic term for stamps. Starting from the beginning of the XXth century stamp seals were considered to have been used in printing the decoration in relief on the exterior side of the disc. Interpreting them as stamps seems a totally unconvincing idea, but as far as we know more credible hypotheses have not yet been formulated.

The author presents and analyses stamp seals discovered in the Cucuteni Culture, mentioning the fact that they appear at the beginning of the Cucuteni A phase, especially in the Cucuteni A₂ stage and that they disappear towards the end of the phase. Moreover, stamp seals are encountered only in the Western area of the Cucuteni Culture, and never in the Eastern one, between the Prut and the Dniestr. In spite of the fact that the Cucuteni and Tripolye cultures are related, and that they have unitary religious ideas, stamp seals have not been discovered in the Tripolye area, situated East and North from the Cucuteni one. This is even more surprising when one takes into consideration the fact that stamp seals are rather frequent in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic cultures situated West and South from the Cucuteni area.

SEALED PATTERNS: THE VISUAL DYNAMISM OF THE NEOLITHIC STAMPS FROM THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

Goce Naumov, Institute for History of Art and Archaeology, University of Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

Clay stamps are present at Neolithic settlements from the Republic of Macedonia. As well those from neighbouring regions, these stamps, in order to be visually and functionally defined, often because of their unusual structure, induce multi-directional interpretations. The small dimensions and specific shape of the stamps assert these portable objects as part of social relations and visual communication between members of one or more communities in distant regions. This feature is especially emphasized by the decoration most often incised on their bottom side. The presence of definite patterns also distinguishes their function in maintaining the visual traditions of the populations inhabiting South–East Europe. In addition, they had an important role in building the Neolithic image modularity, so that they were completely fitted into the decorative structure of the Neolithic iconography. Therefore, the patterns present on the stamps are related to several aspects of Neolithic visual culture from the Balkans and Anatolia. This homogeneity of the patterns indicates that they were actively included in the transposition of cognition into visual metaphor. Also, the imagery and practical character of the stamp seals were incorporated in the interaction between members of the community, so that it

can be assumed that they were used for imprinting the decoration over surfaces and materials which further played an active role in correspondence among the practitioners in certain ceremonies. Although recently the stamps have been interpreted in different directions, in this case their interpretation can be strengthened with reference to ethnographic data, including domestic rites practiced among Slavic populations in the Balkans.

EARLY STAMP-SEALS IN SOUTH-EAST EUROPE: ORIGINS, DISTRIBUTION AND CHRONOLOGY IN THE LIGHT OF NEW DISCOVERIES

János Makkay, Archaeological Institute, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest. Hungary

(abstract not received)

STAMP SEALS, TOKENS AND Y CHROMOSOME GENETIC MARKERS: WHERE IN THE PUZZLE

Mihael Budja, Department of Archaeology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Stamp seals and tokens will be discussed in the context of a speculative hypothesis that the geographically overlapping Neolithic artefact distribution and genetically traceable Y chromosome markers dispersal reflects a single and time limited intercontinental demic diffusion of farmers at the beginning of the southeast European early Neolithic. The clines of the spatial frequencies of paternal lineages haplogroups J2, E3b1 and E3b1a2 and, 11b* will be compared with the dispersals of Early Neolithic artefact assemblages in southeastern Europe. We suggest that the dispersals of Early Neolithic materialities and Y chromosome markers and associated ancestral lineages in the modern Eurasian populations mirror the regional dynamics and insensitivity of continuous contacts and movements of hunter-gatherers and farmers, women and men along the social and demographic networks within the southeastern Europe and between the Europe and Anatolia.

AN EXPERIMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY APPROACH TO THE NEOLITHIC STAMP-SEALS OF SOUTH-EAST EUROPE

Agni Prijatelj, Department of Archaeology, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia.

This paper presents the archaeological and experimental data on the Neolithic stamp-seals of South-East Europe. An alternative view to their production, consumption and symbolic values is proposed by employing the concepts of affordances, constraints, icons, indexes and symbols. It is argued that the stamp-seal motifs probably conveyed specific information, while objects were included in various networks of meaning.

STAMPING SIGNIFICANCE: TOWARDS A REVISED ACCOUNT OF EARLY STAMPS, STAMP SEALS AND PINTADERAS IN EURASIA IN THE 8TH-3RD MILLENNIA BC

Robin Skeates, Department of Archaeology, Durham University, UK

Decorated clay stamps carrying a culturally filtered range of abstract designs are one of the most visually striking but problematic categories of portable art found at Neolithic and Copper Age sites in western Asia and southern Europe. This paper proposes a revised account of their production, consumption and changing values across space and time, by emphasising their biographies, human relations and cultural embeddedness. They were sometimes worn as amulets, but primarily designed to be hand-held printing and impressing tools, used to reproduce copies of powerful graphic images on the surface of other cultural materials. It is argued that their potent signatures repeatedly attached, revealed and reproduced significant cultural concepts and relations across different people and practices and across the material and supernatural worlds.

BOOK PRESENTATION: NEOLITHIC STAMPS, EDITED BY D. GHEORGHIU

Dragos Gheorghiu, Centre of Research, National University of Arts, Bucharest.
Romania

A new book on *Neolithic Stamps*, edited by Dragos Gheorghiu, will be presented. The book includes contributions by Robin Skeates, Giulio Calegari, Agni Prijatelj, Goce Naumov, and Dragos Gheorghiu.