

The role of bullae within the Hittite administration revisited

Willemijn Waal, Leiden University

Compared to, e.g., the Aegean and Mesopotamia, very little is known about the administrative practices of Late Bronze Age Anatolia. Excavations at the Hittite capital Hattusa and its surroundings have yielded thousands of tablets and fragments, but they hardly include any daily administrative or bookkeeping records. Various explanations have been offered for this absence. Some scholars argue that most of the administrative practices did not involve writing, whereas others assume that the economic administration was recorded on wooden tablets that have not come down to us. A central element in this discussion are the numerous clay bullae impressed with stamp seals that have been discovered in Hattusa. Their function is debated; it has been proposed that they were attached to (lost) wooden documents, or bags of goods, or that they are silent witnesses of past transactions.

Interestingly, sealed bullae are not a new phenomenon in the Late Bronze Age, but they boast a long history in Anatolia. The practice of impressing lumps of clay with stamp seals can be traced back to the 4th millennium BCE and is remarkably consistent. The fact that these sealing practices remain unchanged may point to a continuation of the administrative procedures in which they played a role. This paper will readdress the use and function of the bullae within the Hittite administration from a diachronic perspective.