

# WRITING MATERIALS MATTER

## A DISCUSSION OF THE USE OF CLAY IN THE BRONZE AGE AEGEAN

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### BACKGROUND

- Raw, unbaked clay was the primary material used to carry writing in the Bronze Age Aegean
- This idea probably came from Mesopotamia
- There is some evidence for parchment use, but it is very restricted

### WE THINK AND PERFORM DIFFERENTLY IN DIFFERENT MEDIA<sup>(1)</sup>

- Why did Bronze Age Aegean writers chose clay, rather than papyrus or the more frequent use of parchment?
- How much were the writing and administrative practices shaped by the use of clay?
- Did the ease of making / unmaking clay documents prompt experimentation, and is this why there are so many document shapes and formats, particularly sealings?

### THE AFFORDANCES OF CLAY

- Clay is widely available
- It can be easily shaped and reshaped
- It is perhaps one of the few truly neuro-compatible materials
- Together, these factors encourage making and unmaking / intelligent fumbling / creative thinging



### MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE

- The materiality of the writing surface enables and constrains the shape a script takes
- Handwriting, especially its repeated practice, is key to an individual becoming literate
- There is an accumulation of procedural and declarative knowledge specific to the material, e.g. how to make a suitable surface, how long to dry the shaped document



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Images my own  
(1) Kirsh 2014: 8

Kirsh (2014) *Pragmatics and Cognition* 22.1, Malafouris (2014) *Pragmatics and Cognition* 22.1, Malafouris (2008) in Knappett and Malafouris eds. *Material Agency*, Overmann (2016) *Cambridge Archaeological Journal* 26.2, Wynn and Coolidge (2014) *Pragmatics and Cognition* 22.1

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