Seals and Sealing Practices in the Near East. Developments in Administration and Magic from Prehistory to the Islamic Period

Proceedings of an International Workshop at the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo on December 2-3, 2009

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DESCRIPTION:
The cultural and historical setting of the Near East provides a unique opportunity to study a longer usage of sealing practices in administration and magic, which extends beyond the constraints of a specific time period or region. Comparing ancient practices with more recent ones can offer important insights into the development of sealing practices and provide answers to specific questions related to the handling of seals and the social status of the seal bearer. This collection of papers is the result of the workshop "Seals and Sealing Practices from Ancient Times until the Present Day. Developments in Administration and Magic through Cultures". The meeting was organized by the Netherlands-Flemish Institute in Cairo on December 2-3, 2009, on the occasion of the annual Cleveringa lecture, delivered by Prof. Dr. Petra Sijpesteijn from the University of Leiden. It had the financial support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Cairo. Since the initiative towards the workshop was taken by staff members of the NVIC, the focus was on Egypt but other cultures in the Near East and Central Asia were also considered. Following up on the workshop, the present volume retains the geographical and chronological scope, but added a few contributions dealing with the Greco-Roman and Byzantine periods. Glancing at the content, the reader will be struck by the diachronic and spatial persistence of the use of seals for administrative and other purposes, and by their multi-functionality. Indeed, sealing practices appear to be at least as consistent as writing systems, from their first appearance to modern times. One of the reasons for their success is their ability to adapt to the diverse political, social and cultural peculiarities of the multicultural societies at the time.