

THE MEDIEVAL GLOBE

SEALS
MAKING AND MARKING
CONNECTIONS ACROSS
THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

Edited by BRIGITTE M. BEDOS-REZAK

Amsterdam University Press



### SEALS—MAKING AND MARKING CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE MEDIEVAL WORLD



#### THE MEDIEVAL GLOBE

The Medieval Globe provides an interdisciplinary forum for scholars of all world areas by focusing on convergence, movement, and interdependence. Contributions to a global understanding of the medieval period (broadly defined) need not encompass the globe in any territorial sense. Rather, TMG advances a new theory and praxis of medieval studies by bringing into view phenomena that have been rendered practically or conceptually invisible by anachronistic boundaries, categories, and expectations. TMG also broadens discussion of the ways that medieval processes inform the global present and shape visions of the future.

#### **Executive Editor**

Carol Symes, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

## **Editorial Board**James Barrett, *University of Cambridge*

Kathleen Davis, University of Rhode Island
Felipe Fernández-Armesto, University of Notre Dame
Monica H. Green, Arizona State University
Robert Hymes, Columbia University
Elizabeth Lambourn, De Montfort University
Yuen-Gen Liang, Academia Sinica, Taiwan
Victor Lieberman, University of Michigan at Ann Arbor
Elizabeth Oyler, University of Pittsburgh
Christian Raffensperger, Wittenberg University
Rein Raud, Tallinn University & Freie Universität Berlin
D. Fairchild Ruggles, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Julia Verkholantsev, University of Pennsylvania
Alicia Walker, Bryn Mawr College

#### Volume 4

# SEALS—MAKING AND MARKING CONNECTIONS ACROSS THE MEDIEVAL WORLD

Edited by BRIGITTE MIRIAM BEDOS-REZAK



Editorial Assistant Kelli McQueen

Page design and typesetting
Out of House Publishing

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

© 2018, Arc Humanities Press, Leeds

The authors assert their moral right to be identified as the authors of their part of this work.

Permission to use brief excerpts from this work in scholarly and educational works is hereby granted provided that the source is acknowledged. Any use of material in this work that is an exception or limitation covered by Article 5 of the European Union's Copyright Directive (2001/29/EC) or would be determined to be "fair use" under Section 107 of the U.S. Copyright Act September 2010 Page 2 or that satisfies the conditions specified in Section 108 of the U.S. Copyright Act (17 USC §108, as revised by P.L. 94-553) does not require the Publisher's permission.

ISBN 9781641892568 eISBN 9781641892575 FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE ONLY

https://arc-humanities.org

Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CRO 4YY

#### **CONTENTS**

List of Illustrationsv
Acknowledgements
Cultural Transactions: An Introduction to Medieval Seals from a Global Perspective BRIGITTE MIRIAM BEDOS-REZAK
Seals as Conceptual and Ritual Tools in Chinese Buddhism, ca. 600–1000 CE PAUL COPP
Imprinting Powers: The Astrological Seal and Its Doctrinal Meanings in the Latin West  NICOLAS WEILL-PAROT49
A Medieval Solution to an Early Modern Problem? The Royal Animal Seals of Jambi ANNABEL TEH GALLOP
Expressing New Rule: Seals from Early Islamic Egypt and Syria, 600–800 CE PETRA M. SIJPESTEIJN90
The Formulation of Urban Identity on Byzantine Seals  CLAUDIA SODE14
The Cloth Seal: A Mark of Quality, Identification, or Taxation?  JOHN CHERRY167
Archaeology and Sigillography in Northern Europe  MICHAEL ANDERSEN
Medieval Treaties and the Diplomatic Aesthetic  JESSICA BERENBEIM
Index 23

#### **LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS**

#### **Figures**

Figure 2.1a-b. Huangshen yuezhang seal, front and back	31
Figure 2.2. <i>Padma</i> (Lotus) seal, from a manual for the making and use of Buddhist talisman-seals (ninth to tenth centuries)	36
Figure 4.1. Seal of Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin of Jambi (r. 1742–ca. 1770)	81
Figure 4.2. Seal of Sultan Masud Badaruddin of Jambi (r. ca. 1770–ca. 1790)	82
Figure 4.3. Seal of Sultan Taha Saifuddin (r. 1855–1904)	83
Figure 4.4. Seal of Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin (r. 1886–1899)	85
Figure 4.5. Brick engraved with an eight-petalled lotus design, ca. ninth to fourteenth centuries	86
Figure 4.6. Minangkabau seal of patronage issued to the sultan of Jambi, impressed on a letter from 1799	89
Figure 4.7. Seal of Pangiran Suta Wijaya, later Sultan Ahmad Zainuddin of Jambi (r. 1742–ca. 1770)	93
Figure 5.1a-b. Arabic tax quittance and seal from Khurasan, dated Şafar 150 (March-April 767)1	02
Figure 5.2a-b. Poll tax receipt and seal, dated Ramaḍān 196 (May-June 812)	03
Figure 5.3a–b. Sealed deed recording the gift of an estate and of a female slave, dated in the month Second New-year 478 (June–July 700).  The seal that was attached to the closed document depicts the image of a male buste	<del>.</del> –5
Figure 5.4a–c. Sealed Arabic order of payment, dated 9 Ramaḍān 196 (May 24, 812), front and back, and detail of the seal, with the name of the finance director al-Ḥasan b. Saʾīd	5-6
Figure 5.5a–b. Umayyad two-sided lead seal imprint recording the poll tax payment made by the Jewish inhabitants of Tiberias	06
Figure 5.6a–b. Coptic official document from the seventh to eighth centuries and seal imprint depicting a sitting hare	07
Figure 5.7a–c. Delivery order from and sealed by the governor 'Amr b. al-'Aṣ (d. 664) to the administrator of Heracleopolis/Ihnās, front and back	8–9

Figure	5.8a-c. Arabic sealed tax receipt dated 291 (904), front and back, and seal imprint with the name of the tax official Yalhawayh109
Figure	5.9a-b. Sealed letter and sealing from the governor Qurra b. Sharīk to Basileios, administrator of Ishqūh/Aphroditō, dated Ṣafar 91 (December 709-January 710)110-11
Figure	5.10a-b. Two-sided lead seal imprint recording the tribute or poll tax paid by the inhabitants of Seville, early eighth century
Figure	5.11a-b. Two-sided lead imprint recording the tribute paid by the inhabitants of the town of Jaen and its hinterland, early eighth century116
Figure	5.12. One-sided lead seal imprint recording an order of 'Anbasa b. Suhaym, governor of al-Andalus (in office 721–725)116
Figure	5.13a-b. Two-sided lead seal imprint recording the order by al-Ḥurr, governor of Andalusia (in office 715-718)117
Figure	5.14a-b. Sealed Arabic legal document from Khurasan recording the emancipation of a slave, dated Sha'ban 146 (October-November 763) and the clay sealing showing multiple imprints118
Figure	5.15a-b. Tax quittance from Khurasan, dated Rabī' II 147 (June-July 764), with clay seal imprint119
Figure	5.16a–b. Two-sided lead seal imprint from the district of 'Amwās in Palestine, eighth century
Figure	5.17. Textile covering or container with the name of the addressee, ninth century or later
Figure	6.1. Seal of Constantine, <i>proedros</i> (Metropolitan) of Thessaloniki, twelfth century151
Figure	6.2. Seal of the <i>koinon</i> of Sinope, seventh century
Figure	6.3. Seal of the <i>koinon</i> of the Dekapolis of Isauria, seventh century
Figure	6.4. Seal of Apameia and Antioch, sixth to seventh centuries
_	6.5. Seal of John, <i>protospatharios</i> and <i>strategos</i> of Cherson, tenth century
	6.6. Seal of John Komnenos Dukas (1240–1242)156
	6.7. Seal of Michael, bishop of Charioupolis, eleventh century
_	7.1. Lead cloth seal folded over and still attached to a piece of

#### viii LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 7.2. Drawing of blank two- and four-part seals
Figure 7.3. Obverse of lead seal for the Dutch immigrant community in Colchester
Figure 7.4. Lead cloth seal for the United East India Company
Figure 7.5. Lead cloth seal for Wesel, Germany
Figure 7.6. Stone sculpture from Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden, showing guild officials inspecting cloth
Figure 8.1. Pilgrim badge in the shape of a seal, from Rocamadour,  France; found at Tårnborg, Denmark196
Figure 8.2. Lead seal impression found in the tomb of Bishop Ulger of Angers (d. 1148)
Figure 8.3. Seal of bell founder on a fourteenth-century bell from Lumby Church, Denmark
Figure 8.4. Seal matrix of Bishop Henrik of Stavanger, Norway  (r. 1207–1224), found at the site of the demolished Mejlby  Church near Randers, Denmark
Figure 8.5. Seal matrix of Bishop Magnus of Växjö Sweden (r. ca. 1292–1319), found in the churchyard of Fakse Church, Denmark 203
Figure 8.6. Seal matrix of Bishop Jon of Skalholt, Iceland (r. ca. 1406–1413), found at the site of the demolished Carmelite monastery in Aarhus, Denmark
Figure 8.7. Seal matrix of an unidentified Bishop Henrik, found at Hemsedal Church, Norway204
Figure 9.1. Ratification of the Treaty of Windsor (1387), now in England219
Figure 9.2. Detail of Figure 9.1: initial letter
Figure 9.3. Detail of Figure 9.1: seal
Figure 9.4. Detail of Figure 9.1: notarial mark
Figure 9.5. Ratification of the Treaty of Windsor (1387–8), now in Portugal $\dots$ 222
Figure 9.6. Detail of Figure 9.5: initial
Figure 9.7. Detail of Figure 9.5: notarial mark
Figure 9.8. Articles of Agreement for the Treaty of Windsor
Figure 9.9. Ratification of the Treaty of Troyes, now in England
Figure 9.10. Detail of Figure 9.9: seal

Figure 9.11. Ratification of the Treaty of Troyes, now in France
Figure 9.12. Detail of Figure 9.11: initial
Мар
Map 4.1. The Sultanate of Jambi and its neighbours
Plates
Plate 2.1. Eleven-headed and six-armed Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) standing on a lotus. China, Tang dynasty (618–907), ca. ninth century
Plate 2.2. Detail of Plate 2.1: the hand bearing a stamp seal
Plate 5.1a-b. Copper seal recording a tribute or poll tax payments
made by the inhabitants of Egypt in the year 95 (713/14): front and back133
Plate 7.1. One half of a stone mould, used for casting four lead blanks
at a time
Plate 7.2. Face of the fifteenth-century copper alloy matrix, and a modern cast from it, for the subsidy for Kent
Plate 7.3. Modern impression from the late fifteenth-century copper alloy matrix for the subsidy for Wiltshire
Plate 8.1. Seal matrix of Roskilde Cathedral: walrus ivory, twelfth century194
Plate 8.2. Die sheet for stamping metal ornaments (Lund, Sweden)197
Plate 8.3. Three seal-shaped lead tablets, Ribe Cathedral, Denmark, second half of the twelfth century
Plate 8.4. Lead seal matrix of Baldwin IV, count of Flanders (r. 988–1035), found at Læborg, Denmark
Table
Table 4.1. Rulers of Jambi, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This volume owes its existence to many. Carol Symes assumed the risk of opening her journal, *The Medieval Globe*, to seals, a subject matter that until recently still belonged to the domain of specialized connoisseurship and technical *Historische Hilfswissenschaften*. By enabling the work of scholars from different times and places to appear in a single volume informed by the conceptual framework of global history, she has provided both a forum and a challenge, which each contributor has taken up with exceptional scholarship and flair. Mike Richardson and Linda Paulus shepherded the volume to publication. To all I extend my thankful appreciation.

Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak

FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE ONLY

# CULTURAL TRANSACTIONS: AN INTRODUCTION TO MEDIEVAL SEALS FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

#### BRIGITTE MIRIAM BEDOS-REZAK

When considering metals, in book XXXIII of his *Natural History*, Pliny the Elder (d. 79 CE) broached the topic of sealing:

For my own part, I do not find that any rings were used in the days of the Trojan War; at all events, Homer nowhere makes mention of them; for although he speaks of the practice of sending tablets by way of letter, of clothes and gold and silver plate being kept laid up in chests, still he gives us to understand that they were kept secure by the aid of a knot tied fast, and not under a seal impressed by a ring. ... And even at the present day, the greater part of the nations known to us, peoples who are living under the Roman sway, are not in the habit of wearing rings. Neither in the countries of the East, nor in Egypt, is any use made of seals, the people being content with simple writing only.<sup>1</sup>

Pliny's remarks are not entirely accurate but his perception that the use of seals was sporadic and culturally contingent, rather than sequential and universal, contrasts sharply with the modern understanding of the practice.

The use of seals, both for authenticating and closing, descends, in unbroken succession, from the cylindrical seals of Assyria and Babylon and the cone shaped ones of Persia and the Sassanians, through the scarabs of the Egyptians and Etruscans, to Greece .... Either from Greece or Asia Minor, the seal passed to the Romans ... The Frankish kings ... affixed a signet to their acts, thus forming the connecting link between the use of the signet by the Romans and its revival as a seal in mediaeval times.<sup>2</sup>

Thus wrote Charles Hunter Blair (d. 1962) in an excellent article informed by his deep knowledge of medieval seals acquired while cataloging the seals attached to the

I Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, XXXIII, 4, 6. *Naturalis Historia*, XXXIII, 3, 7. The Latin terms used to designate the seal ring and the action of sealing are *anulus* and *signare*: "Equidem nec iliacis temporibus ullos fuisse anulos video. Nusquam certe homerus dicit, cum et codicillos missitatos epistularum gratia indicet et conditas arcis vestes ac vasa aurea argenteaque et eas colligatas nodi, non anuli, nota .... nullosque omnino maior pars gentium hominumque, etiam qui sub imperio nostro degunt, hodieque habeat. non signat oriens aut aegyptus etiam nunc litteris contenta solis."

<sup>2</sup> Hunter Blair, "Durham," 246-47.

charters of the Benedictine monastery at Durham. Not specific to Blair, such vision of a linear and agentless flow of spatiotemporal continuity has engendered its own permanence. Permeating the European study of seals from its beginnings as a discipline in the *De Re Diplomatica* (1681) of Dom Jean Mabillon, this idea has, indeed to this day, dominated the perception of medieval sealing in manuals of sigillography,<sup>3</sup> symposia and proceedings,<sup>4</sup> essays,<sup>5</sup> and exhibition catalogs.<sup>6</sup> Along the way, the topos of continuity has acquired the connotation of universality,<sup>7</sup> although many cultures, some of them literate, functioned without seals,<sup>8</sup> and even within societies that utilized seals, their role ranged widely, from marginal to highly significant.<sup>9</sup>

To a considerable extent, modern sigillographic scholarship still clings to the nineteenth-century anthropological goal of investigating cultural phenomena to find universal laws of human behavior, in the case of seals, the need for a universal device "to make honesty unnecessary."

It is true that by their extensive geographic coverage of China, South East Asia, Arabia, Sasanian Persia, the Muslim Empire, the Byzantine empire, and Western Europe, the essays gathered in this volume offer some support to the notion of a

- 3 For instance Kittel, Siegel.
- 4 Collon, "Introduction" to 7000 Years of Seals, 9-10.
- 5 Bautier, "Cheminement."
- **6** Most recently, in the catalog of an exhibition showcasing the sealed documents preserved in Normandy, in the departmental archives of the Seine-Maritime, *Empreintes du passé. 6000 de sceaux*, 13: "Si l'étymologie du mot 'sceau' vient du latin *sigillum* …, l'usage du sceau remonte toutefois aux Sumériens vers -4000 av. J.-C. Cette pratique du scellement, largement répandue dans de nombreuses zones géographiques [Europe, Asie, Afrique du Nord, etc.] depuis l'Antiquité, est toujours en usage actuellement."
- 7 In Sceaux et usages de sceaux, 25, an entire section is titled : "Le sceau, une pratique universelle."
- **8** Jewish society in Talmudic times, or the later Roman Empire (see note 9 below), for instance.
- **9** As in Merovingian and Carolingian times, and Anglo-Saxon England. The essays in *7000 Years of Seals* document uninterrupted seal presence from the Ancient Near East to the nineteenth century, but some authors note interruptions, Henig, "Roman Sealstones," 93.
- **10** On the movement of anthropology away from this conception, Schnegg, "Anthropology and Comparison." The interpretation of similarities that appear in different contexts, and the needs to challenge master narratives and to explain the structures of diversity are discussed in Belich et al., *The Prospect of Global History*, 10-12.
- **11** Collon, "Introduction," 9. A desire echoed by Pliny's lament, *Historia Naturalis*, XXXIII, 7: quae fuit illa vita priscorum, qualis innocentia, in qua nihil signabatur! nunc cibi quoque ac potus anulo vindicantur a rapina. *The Natural History*, XXXIII, 6: "How happy the times, how truly innocent, in which no seal was ever put to anything! At the present day, on the contrary, our very food even and our drink have to be preserved from theft through the agency of the ring."

widespread, though differential, presence of seals and sealing practices between 400 and 1500 CE. They even implicitly recognize the standardization of typology that has permitted the establishment of seals as a general category. However, the essays collected here refrain from assuming that shared material culture implies shared values; indeed, they even suggest that classificatory mutability in the medieval world may well challenge our modern typology. 12 Furthermore, these essays convey no sense that the practices described and analyzed therein represent the ongoing duplication of a single historical model of behavior. Of course, their authors are well aware that sealing constitutes a superficially convergent transnational practice, <sup>13</sup> but they seek to identify the relationships between the modalities of seal operations, and the contexts and directionality of the processes mediated by seals -representation, authorization, identification, transmission, translation, negotiation. In so doing, they expose rather than assume the inter-subjective, transnational, and transcultural connectivity at work in these processes. What emerges from their approach is an understanding that seals functioned in liminal, transitional situations that arose through encounters between different entities involved in legal, administrative, martial, mercantile, or diplomatic exchange. In the course of such often unstable and potentially disruptive encounters, seals upheld personal credentials (Anderson, Sode) and signaled the quality of transnationally circulated goods (Cherry); they enabled dialogue between myth and politics (Gallop) and between competing religions and philosophies (Copp, Weill-Parot); and they facilitated interchange in cases of enmeshed identities (Sijpesteijn) or entangled religious and political settings (Copp, Sijpesteijn, Gallop, Berenbeim).

In the global perspective embraced by this volume, cross-cultural sealing networks connect particular sealing practices, which undergo change as a result but do not necessarily fuse. Such practices remained in tension, involving resistance (Weill-Parot), but also compromises (Berenbeim) and accommodation (Sijpesteijn, Copp). The extension of or adaption to particular forms of seals and seal usage, the co-option and conversion of motifs manifest the force of seals as objects and images that generate sociocultural identification through mutual exchange and visual hybridity.<sup>14</sup>

**<sup>12</sup>** Van Oyen, *How Things Make History*, 4-8, 11-31, 112-113, for a criticism of typology and suggestions of alternative methodological approaches. I am indebted to Feldman, *Diplomacy by Design*, for the notion of classificatory mutability.

**<sup>13</sup>** In the words of Belich et al., *The Prospect of Global History*, 12, discussing the political role of the Church in 1000 or of Islam today in different countries.

<sup>14</sup> Feldman, Diplomacy, 8; Flood, Objects of Translation, 3-4, 15.

#### A Class of Objects in Global Perspective

The acknowledgment of non-western cultures as sources of medieval European sealing suggested that this practice was the product of ongoing global interactions over millennia. Yet, once these origins were granted, the notion of global interaction faded from seal study, while western seals, their functions, materials and forms become the implicit norm, the standard used for comparison with seals and sealing in the rest of the world.

The seals that circulated in the medieval world present a varied landscape of shape, form, and materials. This volume considers that the category "seal" comprises objects whose composition diversely encompasses multiple elements, to the point where it becomes possible to refigure the normal as atypical, 15 or better even, to dispense altogether with such polarization so as to concentrate on the array of possibilities offered by the global.

All seals discussed in the essays imply the use of a device engraved intaglio to imprint a malleable support. The stamping device is called seal, seal-matrix or die; the resulting imprint is termed seal or seal impression, with the term "seal" thus applicable to both elements of the sealing process.

Medieval seal-dies were made of durable materials (stone, brass, silver, iron, tin, ivory, wood) used either as block stamps, or as tongs (boulleterion) or, in the case of precious stones, set within rings. In Malay, no seal-matrix survives before the eighteenth century, when they are metallic.<sup>16</sup>

In his paper on Scandinavian seals of the central Middle Ages, Anderson focuses on Danish metallic seal-matrices, which have recently been unearthed in great numbers by metal detectorists and archaeologists. The resultant corpus, Anderson points out, has changed the nature of seal studies, which heretofore was focused on documentary seals primarily housed in archives, and now has moved into the field of archaeology. John Cherry, in his contribution on cloth seals, Petra Sijpesteijn, in her essay on early seals from Islamic Egypt and Syria (600–800 CE), and Claudia Sode's study of Byzantine seals also stress the implications of archaeological seal findings. In addition to bringing to light much new material, these situated discoveries help delineate zones of seal circulation, a mobility made possible by the seal as a portable object. However, both Anderson and Sijpesteijn warn against equating the finding of seal-like artefacts in a given locale as proof of sealing

#### **FOR PRIVATE AND**

**<sup>15</sup>** Belich et al., "Introduction," in *The Prospect of Global History*, 14, where the authors also emphasize, in their discussion of comparative history, that "Looked at with a comparative eye, every society of the past, across the globe, gives us a new set of questions to pose of other societies, and a new set of alternatives. The global becomes, indeed, an array of possibilities."

<sup>16</sup> Gallop, Lasting Impressions, 74, 88-89.

practiced in that particular locale. Sijpesteijn's cautionary is based on the fact that in the regions under her consideration rings offering the appearance of signets may well have served as jewels rather than seals. Anderson's caveat derives from archaeological theory, which informs his argument that the specific patterns of seal fragmentation, burial, and deposition he has identified are evidence for legal ceremonies of seal destruction that brought people to specific courts, and for international diplomatic encounters on Danish lands. Anderson further emphasizes the distinction between loss and waste on one hand, and deliberate acts of breakage and deposition on the other, with the latter articulating connections between people, places, and objects (seals among them), and thus being integral to the generation of distinct social relations.<sup>17</sup>

Sijpesteijn suggests a distinction between stamp-like ornaments and sealmatrices, defining the latter as devices that produced imprints for the authentication of shipments and documents in the early Muslim Middle East. Paul Copp, in his essay on seals in Chinese Buddhism (ca. 600-1000 CE), also notes that seals were a distinct group within the broader category of stamps. Chinese stamps were used to imprint texts and images, from which they derived their significance. Chinese seals, by contrast, bore the identity of individuals and institutions whose personhood they extended and from which they derived a power of being that imbued both the state officials responsible for them and the documents sealed with them. Such ontological and referential distinctions were, as is further discussed below, central to the metaphorical use of seals in Chinese Buddhism. Both Sijpesteijn and Copp demonstrate an overlap between seals and stamps, with their definitional borders changing as these devices passed through different contexts of utilization and networks of signification. This mutability of category is explored in depth by Nicolas Weill-Parot in his essay on the Christian reception of astrological talismans. Of Greek and Arabic provenance, such talismans were brought to the attention of Christian Europe by the Speculum astronomiae (ca. mid-thirteenth century), whose author classified astrological talismans as astral seals. This projection of magical elements onto a pre-existing practice, sealing, that had governmental and legal resonance threatened destabilization and prompted scholarly reflections on royal and astral seals and their modes of agency.

Contributors to the present volume have focused much of their attention on seal impressions. Hand-formed clay registered fingerprints before receiving the impressions of Arab-Muslim seals. The wax impressions that predominated in

**<sup>17</sup>** The term 'fragmentation' has been coined to designate this archaeological approach. From among a growing bibliography: Chapman, *Fragmentation*; Brittain and Harris, "Enchaining Arguments."

Northwestern Europe (France, Northern Spain, England, Germany, Scandinavia) were also stamped while held in the hand, thus recording fingerprints as well. Ink seal impressions, on paper and silk documents, and on paintings, circulated widely in China. Lead impressions, or bulls, produced by metallic tongs, were preponderant in Byzantium and throughout the early Muslim empire.

The lead, clay, and (extremely rare) wax imprints found in lands newly brought under Muslim control, such as the provinces of Syria and Egypt and the Sasanian empire discussed by Sijpesteijn, offer a diversity of materials that attests to the circulation of Arab, Byzantine, and Sasanian cultures in these lands. However, the persistent usage of a particular material may have signified pride in asserting a conqueror's custom, or else the retention of a local tradition resisting encroachment by a foreign administration that sought to impose standardization in the form of specific texts, languages, and images. The material composition of seals thus may well have articulated regional identities independently of seals' linguistic and iconographic inscriptions. Avoidance of specific seal materials may even have expressed distancing from a particular practice. For instance, early Muslim bulls, like Byzantine bulls, served as commercial closure and fiscal verification. Additionally, Muslim bulls served as taxation marks (also known as neck-sealing) worn by non-Muslim subjects around their necks to show that they had paid their poll-tax. 18 Lead documentary sealing, however, so prominently practiced in Byzantium, was not the mode in the early Islamic period. Clay was initially affixed to Muslim documents. The clay sealings produced by Arab conquerors in Egypt broke with Byzantine and Sasanian practices by displaying pictures rather than texts, but utilized motifs borrowed from Byzantine and Sasanian iconography. The strengthening of Arabicization and Islamization from the late seventh century onward gradually promoted the withdrawal of images and the exclusive use of Arabic texts on seals, which began to display features that cannot be traced to Sasanian or Byzantine practice.

In Northwestern Europe too, metallic imprints were primarily trademarks, <sup>19</sup> as illustrated specifically by the cloth seals analyzed by John Cherry whose essay brings into focus the nature of the relationship between seal materials and functions. Made of two lead discs joined by connecting strips, cloth seals were riveted through the

**<sup>18</sup>** Sijpesteijn points out that it was common in the Sasanian empire to have slaves and captives carry a seal around their necks or on their hands. In the early Muslim empire, the practice was extended, and translated since payment of the poll-tax offered protection and peaceful co-existence with Muslims.

**<sup>19</sup>** After their renovation of the empire, the Carolingians sealed solemn documents with metallic bulls, in imitation of the Byzantine emperors, and they were in turn imitated by the Germanic emperors. Fees, "Die Siegel;" Erben, *Rombilder*.

textile, and were imprinted with information about the cloth's quality and provenance as well as the payment of tax duties. Cherry notes that European cloth seals, in use between the late thirteenth and the nineteenth century, have been discovered in far-flung parts of the medieval and modern world. Their metallic composition has ensured their durability far better than wax would have. Although early cloth seals may also have been stamped in wax, no such seals have survived. Following Cherry's lead, one may speculate about the influence lead commercial sealing from the Byzantine and Muslim empires may have had upon western usage. In any case, throughout the Middle ages, there was an internationally recognizable form of good labelling that facilitated the transnational circulation of goods. The standardization of seal materials may have been crucial for such objects, which were also expected to impart specific, local information.

In Jambi, whose eighteenth-century Islamic seals are studied by Annabel Gallop, impressions were obtained by blackening a metallic die with the flame of a wax candle, and by stamping the die and the lampblack produced on it by the soot of the flame onto a moistened piece of paper. The use of lampblack as a medium for imprinting seals was specific to the Malay Archipelago, where it remained in use for three hundred years, until it was replaced by ink in modern times. The material uniqueness of the lampblack seal imprints from South East Asia stands as a distinctive identifying cultural trait noted in 1819 by an English official present at the treaty that led to British settlement in Singapore, who remarked that "their [the Malay chiefs of the area] mode of sealing is peculiar." <sup>20</sup>

Essays in this volume have mostly focused on the seal impressions of ruling elites and their administrations whose seals, with their sensitive combination of materials and graphic features, were attuned to adjust cultural encounters with a flexibility of imitation, translation, and imposition. Given the sociology of such official seals, it is worth asking whether the private seals of common individuals who lived in multi-ethnic and multi-religious environments may have retained more composite styles, being less affected by political strategies of connectivity.<sup>21</sup>

#### Sealing as Cultural Technology

The connectivity engineered by seals may be said to begin with and within their mode of production. A seal impression is an assemblage of prints left by material bodies, both human and otherwise, simultaneously coming into contact with a malleable support. Forming a nexus of durable and reliable traces, the seal impression

**<sup>20</sup>** Gallop, *Lasting Impressions*, 114, where the full description of lampblack sealing is given.

<sup>21</sup> Wasserstein, "Coins as Agents of Cultural Definition in Islam."

is an indexical sign, linked to its several originating agents by an actual haptic connection and its resulting combination of organic bodily marks and identifying designs. On a seal impression, marks and design are not so much represented but actually reproduced as a replicated likeness. The technique of seal imprinting thus fuses bodies and artefacts, embodiment and representation, a crucial outcome since, for the seal impression to be revealed, both the die and the hands have to be lifted up. The existence of a seal impression is predicated upon the absence of its originating cause, whose traces of agency are nevertheless indubitable.<sup>22</sup>

The modalities of seal production epitomize the transmission of likeness. Moreover, they exemplify a complex model of causality, providing explanatory patterns of inference that have been variously harnessed to formulate definitions of reality, articulate beliefs in the supernatural, and inform religious and talismanic rituals. Key metaphors inspired by seals were fundamental to Buddhism during its expansion out of India and eastward. Indeed, Copp argues, during the formative phase of Buddhism in China's later Tang empire (seventh through tenth century CE), seals circulated Indic and central Asian elements, translating them into idioms more closely related to local Chinese culture, which included long established Daoist and Confucian sealing practices. In Indic rhetoric, the seal of the Buddha was the seal of truth. Impressed on the world and on scriptures, it creates an axis of resemblance with true reality that guides the fundamental relationship between truth and appearance, and shapes modes of learning, meditation, and human behavior and interaction. Copp demonstrates that the metaphor was crossbred with the local styles of Chinese literati who transferred truth to the Chan master. Nevertheless, the metaphor of sealing deeply influenced Chinese notion of reality and extended beyond Buddhism to enter the thought of Daoism. In this encounter, the metaphorical sense shifted to a different aspect of sealing, the contrast between a single seal-die and the multiple imprints issued from it, paralleling in Daoism the unchanging and singular true reality and the imprints of its responses to the infinitely diverse phenomena of the world. As seals migrated into new intellectual contexts, their metaphorical import mutated to fit specific ontological probes but along a trajectory afforded by the properties of the seals themselves. Thus Muhammad who, as Sijpesteijn reminds us, is identified in the Qu'ran as the seal of the prophets, is positioned metaphorically as a closure, the ultimate prophet sent by God.

> FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE ONLY

**<sup>22</sup>** The metaphorical dimensions of seals and of the imprinting process in Christian culture is discussed in Bedos-Rezak, "Medieval Identity," 1522–26, *When Ego was Imago*, "Semiotic Anthropology," and "Status."

As their rhetorical valence situated seals at the confines of the spiritual and the material, they were also experienced as possible conduits for supernatural forces. In the Buddhism of Tang China, seal dies inscribed with the names of gods and buddhas were believed to channel their divine power, and were thus worn as protection, applied for healing, used in ceremonies of exorcism, and even stamped into the earth in order to rejuvenate it. Such practices had long been established in Confucianism and Daoism, from which they entered Chinese Buddhism. Nevertheless, it seems that seals became standard tools of the Daoist priesthood by the Tang period, at the end of which they were systematically incorporated into the religious rituals of Daoism. Thus, the Buddhist borrowings of existing practices fused with Buddhist imagery and conceptualization of seals, in turn reshaping Daoist sealing practices and moving them to a position of centrality within Daoist ritual. This hybrid culture of sealing optimized exchanges and facilitated diffusion, possibly promoting competition but also providing a common tool by means of which to enter relationships with the self, others, the world, and the gods across specific religions.

The exchange between the religious and the talismanic presented by Copp in Tang China indicates a fluidity absent from comparable encounters in western Christendom. In his essay, Weill-Parot considers the debate among late medieval Christian scholars surrounding the talismanic legitimacy of the astrological seals encountered in new Latin translations of Arabic texts. There they were described as obtaining magical and healing powers from the stars. Weill-Parot is particularly interested in theologians, physicians, and philosophers who addressed the issue by establishing parallels between magical and documentary seals. Those scholars arguing for a demonic source for the power of astrological seals constructed a definition of the royal seal that differentiated its semiotic logic and causal principles from that of magical seals. They stipulated two categories of irreconcilable and incomparable objects in the face of an awareness of their similarities.<sup>23</sup> Significantly, scholars invested in the legitimacy of astrological seals eschewed comparison between the two types of seals. They favored exploring the agency of Nature in imprinting stones, an agency that could be effectively transmitted by a craftsman engraving a seal in the likeness of a star at the proper astrological time under natural influences. Seals stood at the boundary of demonic and natural magic, of politics, religion and natural philosophy, serving both as powerful objects in themselves, and as concepts illuminating the ability of likeness and imprinting to channel the power of their originating referent.

**<sup>23</sup>** For an interpretation emphasizing the semiotic and political implications of the comparison between astrological and documentary seals, Bedos-Rezak, "The Ambiguity of Representation."

#### **Identity and Hybridity**

Deployed as a tool for thought and for establishing channels of communication between different cultures, sealing is thus thematized, in a pragmatics of recursion that generated techniques for the formation and formulation of identity.<sup>24</sup> This issue is taken up by Claudia Sode, Annabel Gallop, and Jessica Berenbeim.

Pursuing an understanding of Byzantine identity, Sode focuses on the empire between the tenth and the twelfth century, when seal usage underwent a dramatic growth, possibly associated with a revival of urban and provincial life supervised by a greater number of civil and ecclesiastical officials whose official correspondence required authentication.<sup>25</sup> Many seals from this period displayed images, rather than limiting themselves to the textual inscriptions of names, titles, and invocations that were typical of earlier Byzantine seals. Such iconographic seals mainly display holy figures and religious scenes, suggesting that personal identity manifested itself by the expressions of personal piety and apotropaic concerns. On the basis of a newer trend she identified, where some individuals introduced urban architectural imagery on their seals, Sode sees these seals as offering evidence of civic identity in Byzantium, as indicating that a sense of personal identity could arise from membership in corporate bodies such as cities. Civic identity could also appear on seals in the shape of a religious edifice or patron saint, or as poems praising a personification of the city. Nevertheless, the rarity of civic references on personal seals in the empire highlights a large consensus in locating identity within the sphere of the devotional, in conversation with holy models and divine figures.

In the Malay Archipelago of the eighteenth century, seal usage was extensive and Malay seals are a part of the substantial body of Islamic seals around the world, with which they share inscriptions in Arabic. Nevertheless, from the viewpoint of Islamic culture, Malay seals have a distinctive identity of their own, consisting of large metallic matrices, lampblack impressions, and a floral iconography reminiscent of local pre-Islamic Hindu-Buddhist artworks. Annabel Gallop explores a particular case of a historicizing seal that, introduced by the Sultan of Jambi in the mid-eighteenth century, exceptionally displays four animals in four floral petals despite the traditional avoidance of the depiction of living creatures in official Muslim contexts. The animals on this seal evoke the mythical origin of the prestigious Minangkabau kings as claimants of descent from Alexander the Great. Their patronage of the Jambi court was counterbalanced by the influence of

<sup>24</sup> Macho, "Second-Order Animals," 30-32, 44.

<sup>25</sup> Cotsonis, "Narrative Scenes," 55.

Javanese elites, also represented on the seal by the inscription of the Javanese title of the sultan in the other petals. As a site of encounter between two rival factions, this seal's hybridity navigates several frontiers. It transgresses the custom of Islam while creating a visual mode of parity between two local factions, both of which inhabit the seal as constitutional elements of the power yielded by the sultan. Transcending the circumstances of its creation, this seal design persisted until the early twentieth century, its formula successfully embodying the unity of the state.

Jessica Berenbeim examines the medieval world of European diplomacy from the perspective of sealed documents that were exchanged between sovereigns engaged in the negotiation and ratification of treaties. She demonstrates that, irrespective of their contents, the manufacture of such documents negotiated mutually meaningful forms of authentication between transnational chancery traditions. The resulting "diplomatic aesthetic," to quote Berenbeim, was a visual hybridity, whereby incorporated aspects of all traditions involved co-existed in the documents, merging their multiple origins without universalizing them. The idea was that no diplomatic tradition was to predominate, so the exchange of treaties and ratifications constructed a world of reciprocity among rulers. <sup>26</sup> The hybridity of these state documents thus conceived of national boundaries positively, as idealized sites of equal exchange - even when, as was the case with the treaty of Troyes (1420) between the kings of England and of France, the latter was being dispossessed of his kingdom in the aftermath of military defeats.

The essays in this volume expand and transform our knowledge of medieval seals and sealing practices. They offer a panorama, not "of a world of sealing" but of sealing in the world, where seals specified and connected people, ideas, and goods, tracing transactions across boundaries of subjectivity, time, space, societies, and cultures.



<sup>26</sup> Feldman, Diplomacy by Design, 13-17.

#### **Bibliography**

- Bautier, Robert-Henry. "Le cheminement du sceau et de la bulle des origines mésopotamiennes au XIIIe siècle occidental." Revue française d'héraldique et de sigillographie 54–59 (1984–1989): 41–84. Reprinted in Bautier, Chartes, sceaux et chancelleries. Etudes de diplomatique et de sigillographie médiévales, vol. 1: 123–66. Paris: Ecole nationale des chartes, 1990.
- Bedos-Rezak, Brigitte Miriam. "The Ambiguity of Representation: Semiotic Roots of Political Consent in Capetian France." In *The Capetian Century, 1214 to 1314*, edited by William Chester Jordan, and Jenna Phillips, 151–82. Turnhout: Brepols, 2017.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Medieval Identity: a Sign and a Concept." *The American Historical Review* 105 (2000): 1489–533. Reprinted in Suzan Solway, ed. *Medieval Coins and Seals. Constructing Identity, Signifying Power*, 23–64. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Semiotic Anthropology: The Twelfth-Century Approach." In *European Transformations: The Long Twelfth Century*, edited by Thomas F. X. Noble, and John van Engen, 426–67. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2012.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Status. An Impression." In *Seals and Status: The Power of Objects*, edited by John Cherry, Jessica Berenbeim, and Lloyd de Beer, 45–53. London: The British Museum, 2018.
- \_\_\_\_. When Ego was Imago. Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages. Leiden: Brill, 2011.
- Belich, James, John Darwin, Margret Frenz, and Chris Wickham, eds. *The Prospect of Global History.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.
- Blair, Charles Hunter. "A 'Note' upon Mediaeval Seals with Special Reference to those in Durham Treasury." *Archaeologia Aeliana* Ser. 3, vol. 17 (1920): 244–313.
- Brittain, Marcus, and Oliver Harris. "Enchaining Arguments and Fragmenting Assumptions: Reconsidering the Fragmentation Debate in Archaeology." World Archaeology 42 (2010): 581–94.
- Chapman, J. Fragmentation in Archaeology: People, Places and Broken Objects in the Prehistory of South-Eastern Europe. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Chassel, Jean-Luc, ed. *Sceaux et usages de sceaux: images de la Champagne médiévale*. Châlons-en-Champagne: Archives départementales de la Marne and Paris: Somogy, 2003.
- Collon, Dominique. 7000 Years of Seals. London: British Museum Press, 1997.
- Cotsonis, John A. "Narrative Scenes on Byzantine Lead Seals (Sixth-Twelfth Centuries): Frequency, Iconography, and Clientele." *Gesta* 48 (2009): 55–86.
- Erben, Wilhelm. *Rombilder auf kaiserlichen und päpstlichen Siegeln des Mittelalters*. Graz: Leuschner & Lubensky, 1931.
- Fees, Irmgard. "Die Siegel und Bullen Kaiser Friedrichs I. Barbarossa." *Archiv für Diplomatik* 61 (2015): 95–132.

- Feldman, Marian. *Diplomacy by Design*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. Gallop, Annabel Teh, Heba Nayel Barakat, and Venetia Porter. *Lasting Impressions: Seals from the Islamic World*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, 2012.
- Henig, Martin. "Roman Sealstones." In *7000 Years of Seals*, edited by Dominique Collon, 88–106. London: British Museum Press, 1997.
- Kittel, Erich. Siegel. Braunschweig: Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1970.
- Macho, Thomas. "Second-Order Animals: Cultural Techniques of Identity and Identification." *Theory, Culture & Society* 30 (2013): 30–47.
- Maroteaux, Vincent, Caroline Dorion-Peyronnet, and Michaël Bloche, eds. *Empreintes du passé: 6000 ans de sceaux*. Rouen: Point de Vues, 2015.
- Pliny the Elder, *Naturalis Historia*, edited by Karl Mayhoff. Stuttgart: Teubner. 1906. Perseus Digital Library: www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0138 (accessed April 11, 2018).
- Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, edited by John Bostock, and H. D. Riley. London: Taylor and Francis. 1855. Perseus Digital Library: www.perseus.tufts. edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus:text:1999.02.0137 (accessed April 11, 2018).
- Schnegg, Michael. "Anthropology and Comparison: Methodological Challenges and Tentative Solutions." *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 139 (2014): 55–72.
- Van Oyen, Astrid. *How Things Make History: The Roman Empire and its Terra Sigillata Pottery*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994.
- Wasserstein, David. "Coins as Agents of Cultural definition in Islam." In *Medieval Coins and Seals: Constructing Identity, Signifying Power*, edited by Susan Solway, 109–30. Turnhout: Brepols, 2015.



**Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak** (bbr2@nyu.edu) is a Professor of History at New York University (NYU). Her most recent research on seals, signing practices, imagistic scripts, and charismatic art has appeared in *When Ego was Imago: Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Brill, 2011), *Sign and Design: Script as Image in a Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Dumbarton Oaks/Harvard, 2016, co-edited with Jeffrey Hamburger), and *The Faces of Charisma: Image, Text, Object in Byzantium and the Medieval West* (Brill, 2018, co-edited with Martha Rust).

**Abstract** Extensive geographic coverage, including China, South East Asia, Arabia, Sasanian Persia, the Muslim Empire, the Byzantine empire, and Western Europe allows the essays gathered in this volume to offer a well differentiated examination of seals and sealing practices between 400 and 1500 CE. Contributors expose rather than assume the inter-subjective, transnational, and transcultural connectivity at work within the varied processes mediated by seals and sealing representation, authorization, identification, and transmission. These essays encourage an understanding that seals operated in liminal, transitional situations arising from legal, administrative, martial, mercantile, or diplomatic encounters, creating cross-cultural sealing networks in which adaption and accommodation underlay the force of seals as objects and images that generate sociocultural identification through mutual exchange and visual hybridity.

**Keywords** global history, seals, archaeology, material culture, sigillography, trademarks, identity, hybridity, diplomacy, magic, Islam, Buddhism, Daoism, scholasticism

FOR PRIVATE AND NON-COMMERCIAL USE ONLY