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The DigiByzSeal Project: A Digital Infrastructure for Seals

In our contribution, we present the results of the DigiByzSeal project, co-funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) and the Agence nationale de la Recherche (ANR) in Cologne and Paris from 2022-2025. Aim of the project is to improve access to and usability of Byzantine seals, which provide a unique source for understanding the administrative, social, and personal networks of the Byzantine Empire. However, these artifacts are dispersed across collections worldwide, and the absence of shared standards for their study has hindered accessibility and systematic analysis. The DigiByzSeal project addresses these challenges by providing digital tools and methodologies for sigillography. A key achievement is the creation of a sigillographic search portal, which facilitates cross-corpus searches through the implementation of SigiDoc, a TEI-XML-based standard specifically designed for encoding sigillographic data. In the course of the project, approx. 4000 seals from four major collections in Cologne and Paris were encoded in SigiDoc, and several hundreds were captured with Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI), establishing best practices for managing diverse collections by balancing the autonomy and identity of individual repositories with the need for computational consistency in data modeling.

Maria Campagnolo-Pothitou, Museum of Art and History, Geneva

À qui la faute? L'usage de l'accusatif dans les légendes des sceaux byzantins

Le caractère solennel voire cérémonial que revêtent les légendes des sceaux byzantins—qui offre aussi l'occasion à leur propriétaire de faire étalage de son érudition—contraste parfois avec des fautes d'orthographe, de grammaire ou de syntaxe. Ces fautes sont souvent imputées à la distraction du graveur ou à son niveau d'instruction, sans pouvoir exclure que, pour les mêmes raisons, la responsabilité puisse en revenir au commanditaire du boullôtèrion ou à la personne qui a rédigé le texte pour lui. En réalité, nous n'avons pas d'information sur cet aspect de la création des sceaux, mais les cas de figure évoqués sont tout à fait plausibles. La faute de syntaxe la plus courante est l'utilisation de l'accusatif à la place du datif après le verbe Βοήθει, un glissement qui constitue, selon toute probabilité, une intrusion de la langue parlée dans une rédaction généralement surveillée. Toutefois les fautes peuvent relever également d'un contexte global, intellectuel, social et géographique que nous examinons dans la présente communication.

Maria Teresa Catalano, University of Cologne

The Usage of Participles on Byzantine Lead Seals

In the 11th century, participles were occasionally employed on seals to designate particular functions within the Byzantine administrative apparatus or the ecclesiastical hierarchy. The most well-known examples are *ekprosopon* and *antiprosopon*, derived from *ek prosopou*, a term that typically referred to a representative in various administrative departments (*sekreta*). This paper presents and analyses a few of these participles found in seal inscriptions, examines their meaning, and, where possible, attempts to ascertain whether they were indeed synonyms or merely forms restricted to a specific administrative context.

Pantelis Charalampakis, National Archaeological Institute with Museum - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Olga Karagiorgou, Academy of Athens
Christos Malatras, Sorbonne University

Addenda and Corrigenda in the *TAKTIKON* (2021)

The *TAKTIKON* volume on the prosopography and administrative structure of the Byzantine themata (Athens 2021) published chronological catalogues of officials who were active in the themes of Hellas, Opsikion, the Anatolikoi and the Kibyrraiotai; these catalogues relied on the combined evidence from non-sigillographic and especially sigillographic sources. More specifically, a total of 1110 thematic molybdoboulla were taken into consideration in the *TAKTIKON* volume and it is mainly on their evidence that the known (before the publication of the *TAKTIKON* volume) number of officials in these themes almost doubled. Further research in sigillographic collections and auction catalogues over the last three years has brought forward several new specimens issued by officials active in the themes mentioned above. Some of them are parallel or similar specimens of known types, while others introduce new officials, which further enrich the prosopography of the themes included in the *TAKTIKON* volume. Apart from discussing some of these new additions which attest to previously unknown officials, this paper also demonstrates the flexibility of the *TAKTIKON* online database in accommodating important new data.

Pantelis Charalampakis, National Archaeological Institute with Museum - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Nikolay Dimitrov, National Archaeological Institute with Museum - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
Metodi Zlatkov, National Archaeological Institute with Museum - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
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Towards a Digital Sigillographic Corpus of Bulgaria

Byzantine and medieval Bulgarian seals are of great importance to the study of history and archaeology alike, especially when discovered during systematic and rescue excavations, i.e. with known find-spots. Today, museums and private collections in Bulgaria keep approximately 4.100 Byzantine lead seals, and over 400 medieval Bulgarian seals, mostly catalogued by the late Professor I. Jordanov, in his monumental Corpora. These large numbers are, naturally, difficult to work with, especially through printed publications. Modern technologies can take this material a step forward, so that scholars can take full advantage of its potential for scientific research. A bilingual (English – Bulgarian), open access, electronic database, designed with the current methods applied on SigiDoc and including seals discovered in Bulgaria, would be an invaluable tool to scholars within and outside Bulgaria, providing necessary information for systematic research. The Project Digital Sigillographic Corpus of Bulgaria (DigiSigiCorp) is funded by the National Scientific Programme “Development and Promotion of Bulgarian Studies Abroad” and developed by the National Archaeological Institute with Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, in partnership with museums throughout the country. It aims to digitize the seals by using SigiDoc for the textual part and a QuickPix photo-scanner for the creation of high quality images, as well as to develop an interactive georeferenced map with find-spots.

Jean-Claude Cheynet, Sorbonne University

Le comte de l’Etable

Le comte de l’Etable est responsable des écuries impériales à Constantinople et à Malagina. Il a en charge—avec le logothète des troupeaux—les chevaux destinés à l’armée, à une époque où la cavalerie joue souvent un rôle décisif dans les batailles. Il a un rang toujours honorable dans les listes des *Taktika* et dispose d’une administration étoffée. Comme le logothète des troupeaux, il apparaît peu dans les sources narratives, mais en revanche, les logothètes entretenaient une correspondance suivie avec leurs subordonnés provinciaux. En conséquence, nous disposons d’un nombre assez considérable de sceaux de comtes de l’étable, qui permettent de vérifier si leur place dans la hiérarchie est confirmée par ce matériel en partie inédit. Lorsque les légendes donnent aussi un nom de famille, il est possible de situer socialement ces logothètes.

Nilgün Elam, Anadolu University
Olga Karagiorgou, Academy of Athens

New Molybdoboulla from Turkish Museums Issued by Thematic Officials in Asia Minor

The *TAKTIKON* Research Project (Academy of Athens) has initiated the development of a research framework that aspires to support the comparison of the administrative structure of individual themes in specific periods, as a major approach that can significantly contribute to the long-standing debate surrounding the emergence, scope, and evolution of Byzantine themes. In the prospect of expanding this work over the whole of Asia Minor, this paper discusses more than twenty unpublished lead seals issued by Byzantine thematic officials that have been recorded during field research in several provincial museums and private collections in Turkey. The officials represented on these seals were active in the themes of the Anatolikoi, the Armeniakoi, the Boukellarioi, Chaldia, Charsianon, Koloneia, Lykandos, Opsikion, Paphlagonia, Seleukeia, the Thrakesioi, Tziliapert and Baspourakan. This new sigillographic material will be presented geographically starting from western Asia Minor and moving to the Empire's eastern frontier.

Nilgün Elam, Anadolu University
Christos Malatras, Sorbonne University

Lead Seals from the Collection of the Museum of Antiocheia of Pisidia (Yalvaç)

Byzantine lead seals (bullae) are considered a significant type of historical evidence, because they provide new information about Byzantine history, prosopography, administration, as well as culture. In fact, the possibility to complete the missing administrative and ecclesiastical personnel lists of Byzantine Anatolia, through the examination of the seals belonging to the members of different ranks of administrative hierarchy, suffices to underline the importance of this discipline. By using new data offered by lead seals, the historian is able to start filling the gap left by written sources and conciliar register lists, which do not cover all the periods of Byzantine history. The majority of the sigillographic material in Turkey (except for Istanbul Archaeological Museums and a small number of provincial museums) remains unpublished to this day. Among these, one museum stands out with the unique pieces in its collection. Yalvaç (Antiochia in Pisidia) Archaeological Museum comprises 57 unpublished Byzantine lead seals (μολυβδόβουλλα) acquired in 1969–2009. Except for two bullae, which originated from the excavations in Antiochia, their provenance is unknown. The collection also holds eleven seals which belong to Michael VII Doukas (1071–1078); Empress Theodora (midst of 11th c.); Bēsēr, patrikios and stratēgos (720–741), Artavasdos patrikios and kouropalatēs (first half of the 8th c.) (before 741); Nikēphoros Melissēnos, magistros, vestarchēs, katepanos and judge of Cyprus (1067–1078); Theophylaktos, spatharokandidatos and epī tēs Megales Hetaireias (2nd half of 10th c.); Georgios, protospatharios epī tou Chrysotriklinou, judge of Hippodrome of Antiocheia (midst of 11th c.); Goudeles anagrapheus (11th–12th c.); N. Goulas, protospatharios epī tou chrysotriklinou (and) aksearches of Dipotamos (11th c.); Konstantinos Opos (late 11th c.–early 12th c.) and Leon Makedonios, basilikos protospatharios (11th c.) This paper aims to present these seals from Yalvac Museum and discuss their contribution to the history of Byzantine state.

Martina Filosa, University of Cologne

The Administrative Personnel of the Charitable Institutions in Byzantium in the Light of Lead Seals

This paper aims to examine prosopographical data relating to the individuals involved in the management and operation of charitable institutions within the Byzantine Empire, including orphanages (*orphanotropheia*), old age homes (*gerokomeia/gerotropheia*), houses for the poor and destitute (*ptochotropheia*), and hospitals (*xenon/xenodocheia* and *nosokomeia*), exclusively drawn from sigillographic sources. While hagiography and monastic *typika* are typically the primary sources considered in discussions of welfare and philanthropy in Byzantium, sigillographic sources have been completely overlooked by scholars despite offering a wealth of prosopographical information. Monastic *typika* are no more than statements of intent and may serve as evidence of aspiration rather than accomplishment. Similarly, references in hagiography should be approached with caution, as their primary focus lies elsewhere and not necessarily in

providing factual documentation of historical events. On the other hand, seals, which were used to identify the sender of a document and to confer authenticity upon it, provide an impartial source—a snapshot of each individual at the moment of signing and sending a letter, document or dispatch. Approximately 70% of the actors reviewed in this work, totaling around 200, are unknown to contemporary prosopographical works.

Eugenia Gerousi-Bendermacher, Hellenic Ministry of Culture

The Lead Seals of the Paul and Alexandra Canellopoulos Museum in Athens

The Paul and Alexandra Canellopoulos Museum is situated on the north slope of the Athenian Acropolis and exhibits a fascinating collection of about 6500 ancient and Byzantine treasures, which highlight the continuity and uninterrupted unity of Greek art. The Byzantine collection comprises various objects of miniature art, jewellery, gold and silver coins, processional crosses, blessing and processional crosses from the early Christian period to the recent times, as well as icons dating from the 14th to the 17th century. The collection presents among other objects a group of lead seals, four of which have been published by V. Laurent in BCH 1973. The lead seals of the collection, of unknown provenance unfortunately, as is the case of most seal collections, can be dated to the time period between the 7th century and the middle Byzantine era, and remain basically unpublished. This paper aims to present some of those seals which are of special interest and offer new data: a) on prosopography, since they preserve names of well-known byzantine families active for several generations such as the Glavas family and the Branas family, b) the hierarchy of political and military personnel with the names and titles of Byzantine magistrates preserved, such as Gregoras imperial kourator, Leon hypatos, Leon patrikios, Konstantinos kouropalates, imperial kandidatos, and c) on persons and church titles, such as patriarchs. Some lead seals display also a religious iconography, dominated by the figure of Virgin Mary of different types like the “Blachernitissa”, as well as other saints, such as Saint Procopios. Inscriptions in verse are also preserved, as in the case of a text in seven verses mentioning the hymn of “Agia Skepi”, during the celebration of which the maphorion of Virgin Mary was venerated.

Tommaso Giuliodoro, Durham University

The Praetorian Prefecture of North Africa in the Mid-7th Century: The Case of Marinus, *praefectus et commerciaris*

At the end of the year 641 the praetorian prefect of North Africa George was recalled in Constantinople by an order of the imperial court. According to six lead seals first published in 1982 by C. Morrisson and W. Seibt, George was replaced by Marinus, who took service in Carthage between the end of 641 and the beginning of 642. However, Marinus’ seals attest that administering the praetorian prefecture of North Africa was not his only responsibility. In fact, while being titular of the prefectural office, Marinus was also a *commercarius*. Characterized by this singular combination of offices (*praefectus et commerciaris*), Marinus’ seals are rather known among specialist. Nonetheless, although there have been some attempts to understand the nature of his duties and the circumstances of his activity, several questions remain open. By reassessing Marinus’ functions within the evolving landscape of Byzantine administration in mid-7th century North Africa, this contribution seeks to re-evaluate both the administrative context in which he operated and the implications of the central government's choice to delegate the North African prefecture to him amid challenging circumstances. Combined with other relevant evidence, the analysis of Marinus’ seals will in fact provide new data on both the North African praetorian prefecture and the activities of the North African *kommerkiarioi* in the mid-7th century, highlighting the relations between the two institutions and the rationale behind their joint administration - as well as the benefits resulting from it.

Andreas Gkoutzioukostas, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Alexandra-Kyriaki Wassiliou-Seibt, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki/Austrian Academy of Sciences

Remarks on Seals Found Along the Danube (7th–9th c.)

Seals with known findspot in the territory of modern Bulgaria, corresponding largely to Byzantine Thrace, were examined in the framework of the project “Lead Seals in Byzantine Thrace: Re-examination of data, mapping the distribution of findings and tracing the communication networks (LSByT)” funded by the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (HFRI) for three and a half years. In this paper, we examine seals found along the Danube, mainly in the area of Dorostolon, dating from the late 7th to the 9th century and published by I. Barnea and I. Jordanov. Some of these seals have been used in conjunction with the evidence of narrative sources to document the continuity of Byzantine rule on the Danube, in the local towns and fortresses from Dorostolon to the Danube Delta, despite the creation of the first Bulgarian state. The present paper attempts a critical approach to the above view through the re-examination, re-dating, and interpretation of the distribution of all seals found in the above-mentioned area.

Andreas Gkoutzioukostas, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Dimitris Drakoulis, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

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The Distribution of Seals in Early Byzantine Thrace (6th–8th c.): An Interdisciplinary Approach

Seals with known findspot in the territory of modern Bulgaria, corresponding largely to Byzantine Thrace, were examined in the framework of the project “Lead Seals in Byzantine Thrace: Re-examination of data, mapping the distribution of findings and tracing the communication networks (LSByT)” funded by the Hellenic Foundation for Research and Innovation (HFRI) for three and a half years. In order to describe and clarify the regional context of the seals found in the Early Byzantine Thracian provinces of Rhodope, Thrace, Haemimontus, Moesia Secunda and Scythia Minor and dated between the 6th and 8th c., a general digital cartographic representation of the historical topography has been created. This paper undertakes a deeper analysis of the data according to the geographical and cultural features of the findspots, their proximity to the communication and settlements networks of each province during the Early Byzantine period, and their clustering into four distinct geographical zones. The new database and its cartographic visualization are presented and a comparison between the 6th and the 7th c. made regarding the quantitative and qualitative distribution of findings, that will shed further light on the Byzantine presence in the above provinces.

Olga Karagiorgou, Academy of Athens

Byzantine Thematic Officials in the WWW: The *TAKTIKON* online

The *TAKTIKON* Research Project realised at the Academy of Athens by Olga Karagiorgou (Director), Pantelis Charalampakis and Christos Malatras (Scientific collaborators), studies the prosopography and administrative structure of the Byzantine themes, based on sigillographic and non-sigillographic evidence. The first significant results of this project on the themes of Hellas, Opsikion, Anatolikoi and the Kibyrraiotai, including chronological catalogues of officials active in a specific sector of the thematic administration per theme and office, were published in the collective volume *TAKTIKON*. Studies on the prosopography and administrative structure of the Byzantine themata (Athens 2021). The presentation of these results also in digital format has been a major concern since the conception of the *TAKTIKON* Research Project. The development of a high-standard database successfully presenting the complexity of the collected data presupposed a fruitful collaboration with experts in Digital Humanities and (the more demanding task of securing) funds. Thanks to the financial support that the *TAKTIKON* Research Project received from the Research Committee of the Academy of Athens in 2022 and 2024, and the expertise of the “EPAPHOS New Technologies” company, the *TAKTIKON* online was finally launched in December 2024. The *TAKTIKON* online database operates on the interaction of specifically designed and interconnected Prosopography Cards (one for each thematic official)

and Molybdoboullon Cards (one for each seal issued by a thematic official). The Prosopographic Cards offer information on the career (number and duration of career stages) of each thematic official, as attested on the available sigillographic and non-sigillographic evidence. The Molybdoboullon Cards offer a detailed description of each thematic seal, including (if copyright allows) the necessary photos. This paper explains how the *TAKTIKON* online works and presents the methodological principles that aspire to make it a reliable reference tool to all scholars interested in the political, military, and social history of Byzantium.

Ioanna N. Koukouni, Independent Researcher

Two New Byzantine Lead Bullae from the Island of Chios

Two lead bullae, relatively recent finds, enrich the sigillographic record of the island of Chios (Greece). The first mentions a certain George, archon of Chios, whereas the second mentions a certain Nonnos. Although undated, the two bullae aim to shed further light in our poor knowledge of the early medieval history of the island. Additionally, they add one more piece to the puzzle regarding the debated position of Chios in the Byzantine thematic circumscriptions of the imperial provincial administration. The presence of an archon (magistrate) of Chios is known only from the sigillographic record. With the specimen under consideration, the total number of seals mentioning an archon of Chios rises to six. The striking coincidence is that five out of the six known bullae belong to a "George archon of Chios". These new finds enrich the historical, archaeological and sigillographic record of Chios and contribute to the few epigraphic information and prosopography of the military and civil authorities of this Byzantine province. In the light of these two new finds, this paper will discuss the scholarly debate and the main questions regarding the position of Chios in the Byzantine provincial administration.

Nikolaos Mastrochristos, Independent Researcher

Byzantine Lead Seals from Rhodes, Greece. New Data from Old and Recent Finds

The publication of the lead seals found in Rhodes started a few years ago (2021), with an article of mine published in the *Delton* of the Christian Archaeological Society of Athens. Nine specimens of known provenance, found in excavations, were studied there. In this presentation a group of eight, so far, new, all unpublished lead seals are examined from Rhodes, Greece. Some of them were found in excavations after the first publication, such as one with an eagle on the obverse found at the harbor of Rhodes and another one with saint George found in Phileremos; others were handed to the Ephorate of Antiquities of the Dodecanese, such as a very interesting and intriguing specimen with Saint Elias on the obverse found in Archangelos, or one with a metrical inscription of the sebastos Georgios Chamakon found at the area of Charaki. In addition, others are stray finds with provenance from Rhodes, confiscated by the authorities as products of illegal possession, such as one of a basilikos kandidatos and archon of Rhodes, or one of Alexios Kassianos, sebastos. Their study is still an ongoing project. By placing the seals in a wider context and co-examining them with the other finds from the excavations and parallels, the publication of the seals offers new historical data concerning the ecclesiastical and administrative history of the island and its position in the Byzantine Empire.

Marco Muresu, University of Cagliari

Framing Byzantine Culture in Medieval Sardinia Between Continuity and Storytelling. The Seals of the 'Carte Volgari'

The paper aims to propose a critical re-assessment of a corpus of 15 lead seals from Sardinia (Italy), known as 'Carte Volgari' seals. Each object features a cruciform, type V, invocative monogram on the obverse. On the reverse, ten read in Greek letters 'Torkotorios, archon [of] part [of] Kálarí' (+TOPK / OTOPHW / APXUNTH / MEPEHCK / APAVEWC) and the other five read: 'Salousios, archon [of] part [of] Kálarí' (+CAAOVCIW / APXONTI / ME PEHCKA / PAAEWC). The seals are appended to the 'Carte Volgari' ('Vernacular Charters'), consisting of 21 documents drafted in Vernacular Sardinian by a thirteen-century hand. The Carte Volgari purport to confirm transactions and settlements of the bishopric of Suelli, in mid-

southern Sardinia, once made by the Calaritan iudikes. The fact that they were attached to seals bearing Greek legends form a vital plank in two arguments of noteworthy historiographical debate: first, that at least some of the iudikes had derived authority from the erstwhile Byzantine archons. Second, that instead of a single ruling archon of the island, there had been a subdivision of regional authority prior to the rise of the iudikes. In any case, the received wisdom was the latter would have referred to the ‘ancient’ Byzantine authority to affirm their power on a cultural level. These arguments are, indeed, based on assumptions and demand further clarification. So far, historiography produced poor discussion on the seals and their features in terms of production, metrology, usage of the letters, as well as their links to the documents to which are appended. For this, the paper aims to assess both old and new evidence to produce an updated critique and to gauge the extent of the seals’ admissibility as evidence of the shifting in power from Byzantium to the medieval iudikes.

Lucia Maria Orlandi, École française de Rome

***Signacula*-Markers, the “Poor Relation” of Seals?**

Signacula or markers are matrices made of metal, ceramic, stone or wood, bearing text, signs, and/or iconographic motives, and designed to stamp various materials. Their use is particularly widespread in the Roman Empire, especially in the Italian peninsula, it continues well into the Early Byzantine times and, for certain Christian developments, even today. They share many similarities with Byzantine seals (and their matrices), especially with the earliest examples of the latter, bearing shorter texts: the stamped writing is standardized and therefore well identifiable, combining information and validation. Markers were used by individuals, as well as institutions and communities (e.g., professional guilds or religious bodies) to assert ownership, specify provenance, guarantee authenticity and/or integrity, especially of commodities. Markers may also have a magical-religious function, displaying prophylactic/apotropaic features, and play a role in religious rituals (e.g., Christian Eucharistic bread-stamps). Despite these similarities, the study of signacula-markers has had until recently a rather limited focus, either on the Roman period, or on the Christian artefacts for the later period, and has never been brought into dialogue with other sphragistic material. The MSCA PF project “SIGN-IT- Signacula in Roman and Post-Roman Italy: marking religious and cultural identity (2nd–11th c. CE)”, funded by the EU, aims to bridge this gap, by implementing a new database of signacula, built upon the EpiDoc and SigiDoc standards, fostering comparisons with other types of sphragistic writing and objects, such as seals. Based on the first data gathered by the SIGN-IT project, the proposed paper will present the areas where the study of the late Roman and the earliest Byzantine lead seals can contribute to the study of signacula-markers, and vice versa: from the possible reconstruction of the field of use, to the type of text and information conveyed.

Eugen Paraschiv-Grigore, The National History Museum of Romania

Ioana Paraschiv-Grigore, The National History Museum of Romania

Commercial Links between the Western Black Sea and Western Asia Minor 4th–6th Centuries AD

An impressive number of lead seals was discovered in Dobroudja, which spans a time period of roughly twelve centuries and covers a variety of functions (commercial, private, imperial etc.). There are over 150 commercial lead seals coming from western Asia Minor, a good indicator of an extensive trade between these two regions, especially in the Late Roman period. In this paper we analyse the Late Roman commercial lead seals based on the provenance, also creating a stylistic classification and briefly discuss the merchandise that those seals might have accompanied.

Margherita Elena Pomerio, University of Bologna

From Prefect to Exarch of Italy: The Seals of Theodore Calliopa

Theodore Calliopa is known to have been exarch of Italy twice in the mid-seventh century, but before that he was also a praetorian prefect. Besides the written sources, in fact, his career in the Byzantine administration of Italy is also attested by some known, albeit controversial, seals. To these a bilingual seal can be added belonging

to a patrikios called Theodore, previously attributed to a praetorian prefect in Africa in the second half of the sixth century. However, the recent discovery of a similar specimen among the seals of the National Museum in Ravenna and a re-examination of the available sources allow us to propose its reattribution to same Theodore Calliopa. This research is part of the project for the revision and digitisation of Byzantine seals of the exarchal period preserved in Italian museum institutions, supported by the CHANGES partnership: “Cultural Heritage Active Innovation for Next-Gen Sustainable Society”.

Max Ritter, University of Silesia

The Seal of Patronage: Monograms in the Architectural Sculpture of Sixth- to Tenth-Century Constantinople

In close association with sealing practises, monograms were widely employed in Byzantine architectural sculpture from the early sixth to the tenth century as a sign of possession, particularly in Constantinople. The name of the building’s patron was encoded along with other vital information to aid communication between patron and beholder. Patrons used them as effective means of self-expression and employed them as a lasting record for their built achievement. Monograms, like inscriptions, had a distinct aesthetic quality, but were more space-efficient and easily recognisable to the illiterate. Because they were spread out and repeated throughout the building, they also posed a greater challenge to erase than inscriptions. Such monograms mostly occur in church contexts. With few exceptions, the positioning of monograms within church space is a matter so far largely neglected in scholarship. In the churches, monograms were typically placed on column capitals, altar screen slabs, lintels and other highly visible parts of the building at ground level for maximum impact on the believers looking at transitional or symbolically charged spaces. By being public and repetitive, the monograms helped in fostering a dialogue between visitors and patron through the edifice. Relating the monograms on seals to those in sculpture would certainly advance scholarship of both mediums. As a matter of fact, the monograms in sculpture are often crucial for dating architecture, yet architectural historians tend to neglect their significance, as has been for instance recently highlighted by Fabian Stroth. Deciphering a patron’s name is just one aspect of such a work. Probably even more important for the study of Byzantine architecture would be a better understanding of the development of monograms along various types and letter shapes. Sigillography can offer valuable insights, as architectural practices in the use of monograms appear to have been heavily influenced by sealing practices. Yet almost the same can be said regarding sigillography, as the stylistic development of architectural sculpture in the sixth century, for example, is much more refined than that of seals, and could assist in a more refined understanding of monograms on seals.

Thanasis Sotiriou, Institute for Mediterranean Studies/FORTH

Exploring the Seals of Late Byzantine Sebastoi, 1204–1350

The honorific title of *sebastos* held a central position within the Byzantine title system from the eleventh to the fourteenth century. However, its evolution during the Late Byzantine period remains relatively unexplored by modern scholarship. Consequently, our understanding of the social characteristics of the *sebastoi* following 1204 is limited, hindering our ability to comprehend their seals and develop typologies or accurately date them. To address this gap, I conducted a survey of literary and archival sources spanning the period between 1204 and 1350. This involved examining approximately 200 *sebastoi* mentioned in texts related to the empire of Nicaea and the early Palaiologan empire. The results revealed the widespread distribution of the title across both the central imperial court and the provinces, extending to both civil and military officials. Moreover, it highlighted the practice of emperors bestowing the title upon middle and lower aristocrats, excluding descendants of the prominent families that shaped the extended imperial family. Building upon this dataset, my research extends to a systematic study of seals bearing the title of *sebastos* and dating from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. In this paper, I will present key findings derived from the analysis of seal data juxtaposed with information from written sources. The focus will primarily be on prosopography, familial networks, and the administrative and military positions held by the *sebastoi* in the period between 1204 and 1350. Additionally, I will explore the potential for re-dating seals based on insights extracted from written sources.

Christos Stavrakos, University of Ioannina

The Byzantine Lead Seals from the Acropolis of Athens

During the works for the construction of the new Acropolis Museum at Athens, excavations took place which brought to light a complex of buildings from the Middle Byzantine period. Among the excavation finds there are some lead seals. In this paper we will present for the first time the hitherto unknown sigillographic excavation findings, we will highlight their value as a historical and archaeological source, and we will interpret the network of contacts that they prove to us.

Alexandra-Kyriaki Wassiliou-Seibt, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki/Austrian Academy of Sciences

Χρυσὸς κοσμεῖ δάκτυλον... Neue Aspekte zu Inhalt und Funktion vier spätbyzantinischer Goldringe

Zu den Insignien der gesellschaftlichen Elite in Byzanz gehören unter anderen Objekten (Gewänder u. dgl.) wertvolle Juwelen und Schmuck als visuelle Ausdrucksmittel des Reichtums. Broschen, Ohrgehänge, Armreifen, Halsketten, Ringe aus byzantinischer Zeit finden sich in öffentlichen, aber auch in privaten Sammlungen weltweit. Einige dieser Juwelen sind mit Inschriften versehen, die eine Botschaft überbringen. In diese Gruppe gehören vier Goldringe aus spätbyzantinischer Zeit, deren Inschriften bisher nicht ausreichend gelesen bzw. analysiert und gedeutet wurden. Demzufolge werden sie unsererseits einer kritischen Revision unterzogen, erneut interpretiert und in Relation zur ikonographischen Darstellung, die sie begleiten, gestellt. Schließlich wird auf die Relation zu verwandten Pendants im sigillographischen Repertoire eingegangen.

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The Problem with ‘being’ King David: Reassessing the Seals and Letters of David Grand Komnenos of Paphlagonia (1204–c.1212)

The career of David Grand Komnenos, grandson of Emperor Andronikos I (1183–85) and the enigmatic co-founder of the Empire of Trebizond in 1204, remains poorly understood. The major antagonist of the early Empire of Nicaea, David’s popularity eclipsed that of the emperor-in-exile Theodore Laskaris (1205–1221) at several points. However, through his alignment with the Latin occupiers of Constantinople he also threatened the very existence of a Byzantine revival and was omitted from the chroniclers of Trebizond. When he met a murky if sudden end in 1212 the destruction of his domain allowed for his opponents’ expansion and changed the course of the thirteenth century in Anatolia. David as the seventeen-year-old prince produced a series of seals and inscriptions that staked his claim to exist outside of the imperial model and relied instead upon a double effect of his name. Portrayed on his seals utilising his youth as a latter-day biblical King David the Prophet, David Grand Komnenos broke with the artistic traditions of multiple centuries and created an innovation that pitted this heir of Andronikos I against that of Alexios III (1195–1203) in a struggle to be the ‘true’ King David. Yet this developing use of King David also sat alongside an Orthodox consolidation of local cults that by 1206 had made David’s principality one of only two safe havens reported by Constantinopolitan exiles. Supporting this expansion through local ties of loyalty to the Komnenoi name in Paphlagonia that stretched back to the 1050s, the outrage David’s rivals felt at the success of the upstart youth is preserved in their letters with no little venom. Most fascinating of all is the relationship that can be drawn between his opponents’ letters, civic inscriptions, sermons, and the sigillographic evidence of David’s actions which demonstrate an iconographic response. Together this helps illuminate the suppression of this fascinating yet often overlooked figure.