

## MULTI-SEAL DOCUMENTS, THEIR POSSIBLE ORIGIN TRANSPORT OF PREFAB SEALS

Un Tabellion dans son Echoppe  
Au Moyen-Âge



A medieval notary in his office. Two sealed documents are hanging, in a chest, whereas the notary has prepared a document with two seals. Two persons with different clothing and hence different social level, are probably swearing to confirm that the contents of the document is the truth.

Copy of a woodprint from the 15th century. Bibliothèque de Rouen, Col. Le Bov. Nr 1308 fol. 17 Source: A. Barabé,

Recherches historiqes sur le gabellionnage royal. Rouen. 1853.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Documents validated by many seals

In the 12th and following centuries it often occurred that several seals per document were applied. If the fold was full, other sides were used. Or more seals were fixed on a parchment tail or a textile string. Or the fold size was enlarged to add more tails. At the end of this paper I intend to discuss the possible methods by which multi-seal documents were sealed. Were all sigillants on “sealing day” present or were later prefab seals added?

Surfing on the internet we find several documents with a number of seals. This number may vary from two to some 300. A document of the clergy of Bohemia concerning the Concilium of Konstanz in 1414-1418 is sealed by 304 seals. The act of abdication of Queen Christina of Sweden in 1650 with 306 seals. These last seals hang on a knotted **net**. I have no pictures of these documents (01)

#### Hypotheses investigated

When a high number of sigillants have to fix their seals we may not expect them to queue up patiently waiting till their turn. For instance, if 300 sigillants have to seal there would be a row of more than 150 meter and each turn may take 5 minutes the last one has to wait for several days. Or would he appoint a trustworthy person to carry out the sealing with a prefab seal?

In case of an small number of sigillants the document could be validated:

1. If only a few sigillants has to seal they may seal immediately
2. If there are only a few sigillants some may attach their seal later
3. When a high number of sigillants has to seal some may have given their prefab seal to a clerk and leave the sealing site
4. When a high number of seals has to be attached it is possible that absent sigillants have given their prefab seal to (a) trustworthy person(s).

### THREE EXCEPTIONAL EXAMPLES AS AN INTRODUCTION

I give three examples of multi-seal documents. Below and on internet more examples are to be found. My choice I made is arbitrarily.

Maybe, in general, clerks could preliminarily make the required preparations. However, was there always sufficient time to do so?

### **Disconnected cords with 83 seals, 1301**

Paul Dryburgh of the National Archives at London (03) published a photograph of 16 cords, carrying 83 seals. These cords were disconnected from the original document, i.e.. a letter to the pope, because formerly the archive personnel did not know how to store this document. It dates from 1301 and was sealed by “barons of England”. These cords differed in colour and ways of braiding. Hence Dryburgh concluded that in general the position of the seal on the cord indicated the social level of the sigillant.(04).



93 seals on a letter addressed to the pope in 1301.

### **A document from 1512 with braided seal cords**

Every tenth year the “Schwäbischen Bundes” renewed their agreements. The document from 11 October 1512 shows a document with 86 seals. These seals are fixed to four cords (02). The size of the seals indicates probably the social importance of the sigillants, and perhaps this holds true for their shapes and colour(s).



Charter of the “Schwäbischen Bundes”.

On the average 22 seals are fixed to each cords, but the “most important” cords probably carry less than 22 seals. Hence, one or more of the other cords carry more than 22 seals.

**A document with seals fixed at three sides, 1590**

This document is a ratification of the at Oslo closed marriage of Jacob VI of Scotland (1566-1625) and princess Anna of Denmark, daughter of king Frederik II of Denmark. Jacob VI became later Jacob I of England (1603-1625), when he inherited the English crown.

The ratification is signed on 17th of May 1590 and validated by the seals of 30 Scottish Peers and representatives of the cities Edinburgh, Perth, Stirling, Irvine, Ayr and Linlithgow. The seals are fixed to braided cords at three sides of the document. (05)



Marriage document, 1590

**OTHER PICTURED DOCUMENTS WITH MANY SEALS**

**1 DOCUMENTS WITH SEALS OF THE SAME WAX COLOUR**

### Seven Electors: seven seals, 1298



Confirmation of the choice of Albrecht of Habsburg as **Roman king**.

[//geschichtsunterricht.wordpress.com/](http://geschichtsunterricht.wordpress.com/)

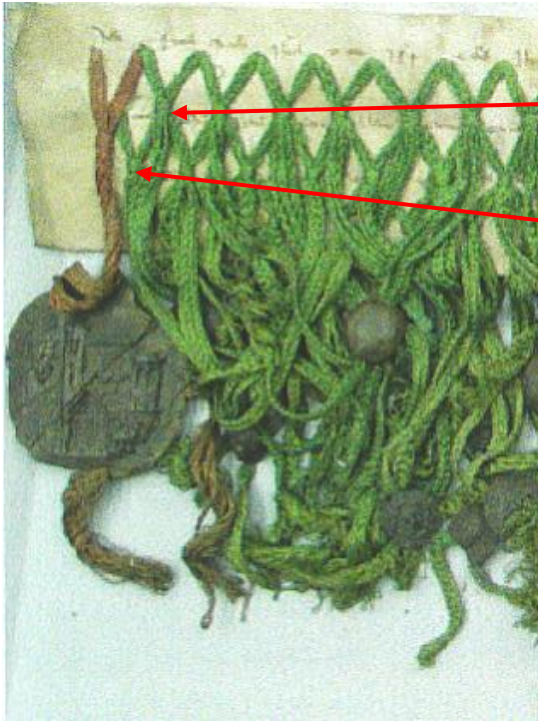
Document of 28th of July 1298 confirming the choice of the seven Electors for Albrecht of Habsburg as **Roman King**. The Electors are the bishops of Cologne, Mainz and Trier, the Palatine of the Rhine, the duke of Saxony, margrave of Brandenburg and the king of Bohemia. The seals of the bishops and the king are pointed oval, whereas the others used round seals. The seal wax is of one colour, which could point to one wax source.

### Bruges: a document with some 78 larger and smaller seals, 1298



Statute made up by the **notables** of Bruges in 1298.

Hendrikse (06) published a photograph of a statute, which was sealed by the notables of Bruges city on 19th of December 1298. In this statute the old procedure of the annual election of the burgomasters, aldermen, counselors and the treasurer was described. At that time the elections took place on Saint Denise Day (9 October). All the 78 sigillants were very likely living in or near Bruges. Hence sealing could easily take place over several days. The city probably provided the parchment, the cords, the green wax and the cost of the “art work”. The clerks will have written the names on the parchment to be sure to that all sigillants had sealed and placed the seals on the right place. The document is a beautiful piece of art work. Maybe we will find the “most important” seals on the brown cords.



fixing point of two tails, on both sides a seal, the names above and below

fixing point of one tail, together with the seals and the names



A detail with the names, every time three above each other.

## 2 DOCUMENTS WITH SEALS OF MORE THAN ONE WAX COLOUR

### Deed of arbitration between Cistercian abbeys, 1247



Deed of arbitration between Cistercian abbeys, 1247.

A deed of arbitration between Cistercian abbeys of Cheminon and Troisfontaines in connection with the rights on water for the water mill, the fishing rights, and the rights on acorns for the pigs. This deed was returned to the abbots of Clairvaux and Boulancourt on 7th of October 1247. The document was validated with seals of the abbots of 1. Clairvaux, 2. Lachalade, 3. Hautefontaine (black), 4. Montiers-and-Argonne, 5. Larivour (small), 6. Boulancourt en 7. Chéhéry (black). (07)

The abbots of the abbeys 1, 2, 4, 5 and 6 were probably present, while the black seals of the abbots of abbeys 3 and 7 were prefabricated and added (later). If that is the case the clerk likely left the last two places open until the prefab seals became arrived.

### **Representatives of Hainaut recognize Philips the Good, 1427**



A bunch of seals of representatives of Hainaut which recognize Philips the Good as governor, 1427. Source: Archives départementales du Nord-A.D.N. B1189/15521, Musée 16.

The representatives of Hainaut recognize Philips the Good as governor on the 22th of June 1427. I did not find a description of this document. At the right we find probably seven or eight seals, but how many seals make the bunch. Based on the seal colour we recognize some grouping. I assume that some seal owners gave their seal matrixes to a trustworthy person, and others left their prefab seals behind. Further, I assume that it took the clerk maybe several days to fix the seals on the correct place.

### **Letter of King Henry III of England, 1263**

In a letter, dated 1th of December 1263 (08) King Henry III asked King Louis XI (the Pious) to act as arbitor between him and six Barons. Originally there were 30 seals, but five (top left) seals have been stolen. Among them probably Henry's seal. As one can see there is some variation in size and colour of the seals. The colour variant may indicate to different social level of the sigillants. The size of the seal at the right hand side is quite conspicuous.



Letter of King Henry III of England, 1263.

### Union of "Wendische" and Saxon Hansa cities, 1476

On the 31st of October 1476 a document was ratified between 19 "Wendische" and Saxon Hansa cities (09) These cities used a great variation of seal types. Maybe these seals were sent by the cities as prefabs, as the responsible burgomasters did not attend the meeting. I suppose that some of these prefab seals were too thin and would break easily. Therefore, they were put in a "cake" of "virgin" wax. (10) In Dutch named "komzegel".



Union of "Wendische" and Saxon Hansa cities in 1476 with ordinary and "cake" or saucer seals

### A testament, 1470

At last a document of the 18th of July 1470 in which the order of the four testors is recorded. (11) Four witnesses seal this agreement. It is possible that the "red seal" witness was present, while the seals of the other testors were added later.



Act of 18th of July 1470 which the inheritance is recorded

### **A document with originally 32 seals, 1285**

On 27th of October 1285 32 persons signed a document in which the disputes between Floris V, count of Holland with noblemen was settled. Originally there were 32 seals. In due course 9 were lost and 18 of the remaining 23 seals were made of green wax and 5 of brown wax. A precise study of those sealing with green wax and those with brown wax and the type of cord used may give insight in the sealing procedure of this document. No “virgin” and red seals were present. Maybe the brittle “virgin” seals had disappeared, and no red wax was used?

### **A peculiar multi-seal document, 1431**

As said more sources are to be found on internet. Therefore I conclude with one peculiar one, which is the document validated by 452 Moravian and Bohemian sigillants. They sent this document to the Concilium of Bazel. This Concilium started in 1431. The 452 seals were fixed to four parchment sheets, which were bound as a book. I have no picture of this document and therefore I do not know the colour or colours of the seals.

## **THE PREPARATION OF SEALED DOCUMENTS AND THE TRANSPORT OF PREFAB SEALS**

### ***Espigurnantia***

A picture of a sealing room, the *Espigurnantia*, of the Court of Chancery at London, dated 15th century. At right we observe a black-capped person being the chief-sigillant, or the *spigurnel*, who with a roller the seal wax presses to remove the air bubbles. The wax is already attached to the tail of the document. After this treatment he presses the seal matrix into the wax and thereafter the seal is modelled. On the table we find according to Corner (12) writs to be sealed.



Details showing the *Espigurnantia* (sealing room) of the Court of Chancery at London. The man with the black cap is the *spigurnel*, the chief sigillant.

[www.innertemple.library.org.uk/collections/](http://www.innertemple.library.org.uk/collections/)

### **Seal cases for prefab seals to be transported**

The prefab seal prints transported by a trustworthy messenger should arrive undamaged. I suppose that these prints were put into small metal cases which on their turn could be sealed. Maybe, in stead of a metal case sealed leather or textile bag could have been used. Such a metal case was recently dug up at Rotterdam. In it a prefab seal of the city of Rotterdam. It dated of the 14th century. The seal itself has a middle line of 2.3 cm. Where some wax had



disappeared a part of the leather tail is seen. Through the holes in the case sealed laces could have been applied to prevent unlawful replacement by another seal print.



Below two parts of a yellowcopper case and above and right the wax seal of the 14th century. The legend runs CLAVIS SIGILLI. We see a (whitish) river, the Rotte, with rectangular dikes on both sides and in front, horizontally, a dam (13). On this site Rotterdam started.

## **NON-DESTRUCTIVE RESEARCH OF SEALS, SEAL WAX, PARCHMENT OF THE DOCUMENT AND OF THE TAILS**

A quite recent method of research is to collect finger and hand prints on seals, to identify the sigillants. These could be stored in a data file to search for identical and different prints. And hence for identical and different sigillants. Such research catches the eye of the seals of the city of Speyer, where during the 13th to the 17th century, that is some 500 years, in each reverse side three thumb prints are pressed into the wax. With new techniques the three-dimensional thumb prints in the pits can be read (14).

In addition, the pigments used to colour the wax should be investigated, seal by seal. Also when the colours appear the same (15). The presence of pollen grains, the plant species and the time of flowering may indicate the time of collecting the beeswax (16). The same for added hairs of possibly the sigillant and animals. Further, maybe (new) techniques as radiography and scanning can be more applied to investigate the wax composition, and the structure of the seal (17).

Recently, a new non-destructive method was developed to know more of the parchment of the documents. This research is based on the DNA of micro-remnants of the investigated parchment. This result may point to the animal species used, its age and sex, the still present remains of bacteria, fungi and human DNA. The research of human DNA may point to a habit of a monk when he was ready: he kissed the document "Finally done". More data are to be found in literature (18).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

My conclusions are:

1. When the first draft of this paper was ready I obtained a copy of the book *Seals and status: the power of objects* (2018), edited by John Cherry, Jessica Berenbeim and Lloyd de Beer. with chapter 5: *Studies in the materiality of English royal and governmental seals, 1100-1301*, by Elke Cwiertnia & Paul Dryburgh. They came to the same conclusion about absent sigillants.
2. Sealing of a multi-seal document may take several to many days.

3. Not all sigillants, who are mentioned in the document as sigillants were present on the “sealing day”. Either they had already left leaving behind a prefab seal, or had sent a trustworthy representative with a prefab seal print.
4. An absent witness, but named in the document, could have given his seal matrix or a prefab seal to a representative.
5. The date mentioned in the document is probably the first day of attaching seals.
6. These documents were often characterized by a variation of seal colours
7. The wax of the seals of one document with seals of the same colour could derive from the same wax source.
8. Analyse of the composition of the seal wax of each seal, even if they have the same colour, should be carried out.
9. To prevent damage of a prefab seal to be transported, it was kept in a case, which was sealed on its turn.

### Endnotes

1. Lecoy de la Marche, A. *Les sceaux*. Paris 1889; W. Ewald. *Siegelkunde. Handbuch der mittelalterlichen und neuen Geschichte*. München. 1914.
2. Communication with Mario Felkl, Archivoberinspektor, Stadtarchiv Augsburg, mail dated 1 August 2018. [www.Stadtarchiv.Augsburg.de](http://www.Stadtarchiv.Augsburg.de). Archivale des Monats October 2011. Including explanation and literature.
3. Paul Dryburgh. *Wax, cord and ink: the materiality of records*. Part: *Seals and their cords*. <https://blog.nationalarchives.gov.uk/blog/>. A letter of 1301. Copy A cat. E/25.2. The disconnected cords with seals were fixed to a separate plate. See also note 19.
4. A copy of a letter was validated by 87 seals. Elke Cwiertnia & Paul Dryburgh. *Studies in the materiality of English royal and governmental seals, 1100-1301*, p 35-44 in John Cherry, Jessica Berenbeim & Lloyd de Beer. *Seals and status: the power of objects*. 2018. The British Museum.
5. Researcher Joy Boutrup. National Archive of Denmark. The document is 58,5 cm wide and 69 cm high.
6. Hendrikse mentioned 78 zegels (26 fixing places x 3 seals). Photograph H. Hendrikse, in his *Zegelstempels en zegelringen uit Zeeuwse bodem*. Zaltbommel 2003. Afbeelding 54. (Seal matrixes and seal rings of Zeeland soil).
7. Archive dept./AD Marne 17 H 21/4. Pictures in *Sceaux et usages de sceaux*, by J.-L. Chassel (ed.). 2003. p 18.
8. Paris, Archives Nationales. No further information.
9. Internet. Archiv der Hansestadt Lübeck, Lübeck. Access lost. There are more multi-seal documents with similar seals.



An example of a “saucer seal”, with a clear independent position of the red seal. I lost the internet source.

10. Other names in Dutch are: two-coloured seal and seal in a bowl; in German: Siegel in Siegelschüssel; in French: berceau. Bautier does not give an English term. Bautier, R.H. *Vocabulaire international de la sigillographie*. Rome. 1990.

11. [www.flarchives.com.uk/cataloguing/hulton.html](http://www.flarchives.com.uk/cataloguing/hulton.html) DDHU/18/2

12. Corner, G.R. *Observations on four Illuminations representing the Courts of Chancery, King's Bench, Common Pleas en Exchequer, at Westminster, from a MS. of the time of King Henry VI*. *Archaeologia* 19, 1863: 375-377. Corner is according to John Cherry (mail London, August 2018) the only one who wrote a good paper about these four pictures. Corner was especially interested in the clothing of the pictured persons. At that time the sigillant was named *spigurnel* and the sealing room *Espigurnantia*.

13. Bouwkundig Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek Rotterdam-BOOR. Middle line seal 2,3 cm. Dimensions of the case: width 4,5 cm, height 3 cm. See description by Guus van Breugel. *De sleutel van het zegel: een klein Rotterdams mirakel*. *Genealogie* jrg 6 nr 4 2013: 26-29. Further, mails by Cees Herweijer (July 2018).

14. Berg, Ute & Hans W. Berg. *Materialtechnisch Untersuchung von Fingerabdrücken auf der Rückseite mittelalterlicher Stadtsiegel von Speyer mit der  $\mu$ CT als Grundlage für die forensische Analyse*. BMB Gesellschaft für Materialprüfung 2016.

15. Zeven, Anton C. *De productie van zegelwas*. *Blazoen* 4 (2018): 38-40. Further, a paper to be published about colours of wax seals. [The production of sealing wax]

16. Zeven, A.C. *Herkomst en productieseizoen van zegelwas*. *Heraldische Tijdschrift* 19 (2013): 11. [Origin and production season of sealing wax]

17. Comparing the wax chemical composition of seals, even of the same colour, would give astonishing result. For more information see endnote 4, and P. Jacquet. *Radiographie, scanner et sigillographie*, p. 93-103 in M. Gill & J.-L. Chassel (eds). *Pourquoi les sceaux*. 2011.

18. Timothy L. Tinson (North Carolina State University). *Knowledge of the flesh using DNA-analysis of unlock bibliographical secrets of medieval parchment*. *The Papers of the bibliographical Society of America*. Vol. 103 (4) 2009: 435-453. In 2009 for the research pieces cut-off parchment were needed. Matthew Collins (University of York) is mentioned in various scientific columns. See Theo Toebosch. *Het dier achter het perkament. Uit perkament zijn nu eiwitten, DNA en bacteriën te isoleren zonder schade aan te richten*. *NRC-Wetenschap* 30 juni 2018. [Daily newspaper NRC with column Science: The animal behind the parchment. Parchment (of charters) can be investigated for proteins, DNA and bacteria with non-destructive methods]