

**SEALING
THEORIES
AND PRACTICES
IN THE
ANCIENT
NEAR EAST**

**MARCH 5-6
2020**

THE 16TH ANNUAL
UNIVERSITY OF
CHICAGO ORIENTAL
INSTITUTE SEMINAR

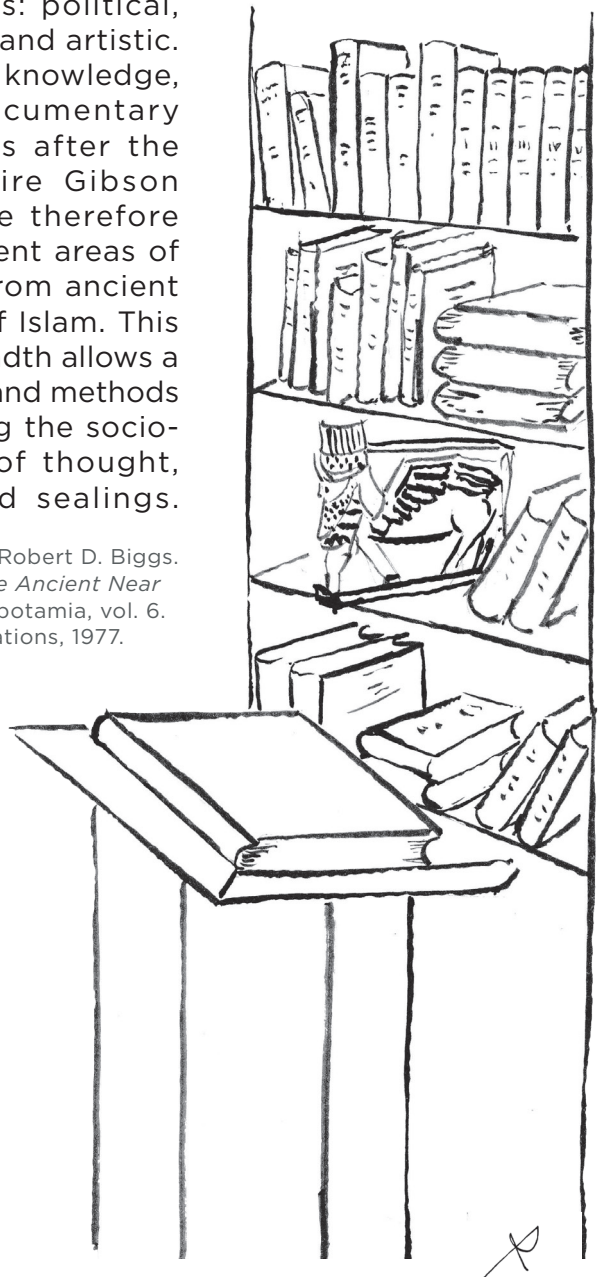


ABSTRACTS & BIOS

The seal is to the ancient Near East what the social security number and the lucky charm are to our modern societies: a key element that proves one exists within an administration; an object preciously preserved because it carries identity, validity, and even magical forces. Sealing was a common practice in the ancient Near East, but the associated customs and uses across different societies varied. The study of both its shared and diverse aspects is crucial for understanding the socio-administrative functioning of ancient societies.

Through its many facets, sealing touches several aspects of ancient societies: political, administrative, sociological, cultural, and artistic. To understand this critical source of knowledge, a multi-disciplinary and multi-documentary approach is necessary. Forty years after the ground-breaking study by McGuire Gibson and Robert Biggs,* this conference therefore brings together scholars from different areas of study: from Anatolia to China and from ancient Mesopotamia to the first centuries of Islam. This spatial, temporal, and disciplinary breadth allows a more complete picture of the sources and methods of analysis available in understanding the socio-administrative practices, systems of thought, and beliefs surrounding seals and sealings.

*Gibson, McGuire, and Robert D. Biggs. *Seals and Sealing in the Ancient Near East*. Bibliotheca Mesopotamia, vol. 6. Malibu: Undena Publications, 1977.



ALAIN BRESSON

Respondant, *University of Chicago, Department of Classics*

BIO: Alain Bresson is the Robert O. Anderson Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of Classics and the Department of History at the University of Chicago and a member at the Oriental Institute. His research focuses on ancient economy and is developed in the framework both of the standard categories of economics (capital, labor, and technological level) and of the New Institutional Economics paradigm, with a special interest in the evolution of institutions as a major factor of economic development. He has recently published *The Making of the Ancient Greek Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2016) and is preparing a new book on coinage as the specific form of money in the ancient Greek world. He also publishes regularly on the history, epigraphy, and numismatics of various regions of the ancient world, especially Asia Minor.

BÉATRICE CASEAU

Sorbonne Université, Faculté des Lettres

STAMPING MATERIAL AS SEALS IN ROMAN AND BYZANTINE MATERIAL CULTURE

(Session 3 | Friday, 9:30)

ABSTRACT: What Byzantinists call Byzantine seals are in fact imprinted objects, and there is some confusion in the vocabulary used. The word “seal” in most other cultures is used to indicate the stone or metal stamp with which an impression is made, while among Byzantinists, the word “seal” is used for the bulla on which text and images are impressed rather than the stamping tool itself.

Thus, publications of “Byzantine seals” are in fact publications of imprinted objects. Byzantine emperors, aristocrats, and members of the different administrations had *boulloteria*—tools engraved and struck in order to print text and images on lead, silver, or gold circular blanks.

Both Roman and early Byzantine material cultures also had stamping material, but Byzantinists hesitate as to what to call them, and most call them bread stamps, which is again somewhat confusing, as they were used on clay as well as on bread. This presentation focuses on such objects. Roman and Byzantine stamping material is interesting for more than one reason: it provides information on onomastics and iconography, and it often follows a religious agenda. The Bibliothèque nationale de France owns a collection of such objects, given in part by a German scholar working before 1870 at the Louvre Museum and in the service of Napoleon III. Examples illustrating the diversity of such objects and their possible use will be taken from this collection.

BIO: Béatrice Caseau is professor of Byzantine history at Sorbonne University and was the director of a research cluster on religions and society in the Mediterranean (2015–2019). She is now a member of the Institut Universitaire de France. Her research focuses on the history of the Byzantine world, and especially on late antique and Byzantine Christianity. She has published on a range of topics, including the history of the senses, religious violence, material culture, food culture, and the history of religious practices. In 2015 she published *Nourritures terrestres, nourritures célestes: la culture alimentaire à Byzance* (Paris: ACHCByz).



PAUL COPP

University of Chicago, East Asian Languages and Civilizations

SEALS IN CHINESE RELIGIOUS PRACTICE: METAPHOR AND MATERIALITY

(Session 3 | Friday, 10:30)

ABSTRACT: Seals—that is, stamps imagined through logics of identity—were small but revealing features of religious thought and practice in pre-modern China. As physical matrices carved from various kinds of wood or cast in bronze, or as the bodily gestures known to us mainly by the Sanskrit name *mudrā* (literally, “seal”), they were potent tools of ritualists, whether Daoist, Buddhist, or otherwise. Arising in good part from these physical practices (and in turn transforming them), conceptual images featuring seals were just as potent in Chinese religious thought. This presentation explores the ways that both forms, taken together—ritual and conceptual—formed complex assemblages that reveal much about the nature of religious practice in Tang and tenth-century China.

BIO: Paul Copp is associate professor in Chinese religion and thought in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations (University of Chicago). His research focuses

on the history of religious practice in China and eastern Central Asia during the period stretching from the eighth to the thirteenth centuries. He is most interested in the study of visual and material sources, especially in the manuscripts, xylographs, and objects of personal religious practice, such as amulets and seals, discovered at the “silk road” sites of Dunhuang, Turfan, and Khara-khoto, as well as in tombs from across the region. In 2014 he published *The Body Incantatory*, a study of the nature and history of Buddhist incantation and amulet practices in Tang China centered in archaeological evidence. He is currently writing two books focused in different ways in the study of religious seals in China. The first studies seals in Chinese religious practice both for what they show about Chinese religious history, and as a case study of the nature of “material religion” more broadly. The second book is a paleographic and material-historical study of the worlds of anonymous ninth and tenth century Chinese Buddhists, evidenced by manuscript handbooks and liturgies from Dunhuang.

MARK B. GARRISON

Trinity University, Department of Art and History

SEALS AND DOCUMENT TYPES IN THE PERSEPOLIS FORTIFICATION ARCHIVE

(Session 2 | Thursday, 2:45)

ABSTRACT: The Persepolis Fortification Archive, dating to the years 509–493 BC in the reign of Darius I, contains, with a few rare exceptions, three types of clay documents: those carrying texts in cuneiform script in Elamite language; those

carrying texts in Aramaic script and language; and those carrying no text (what we call uninscribed documents), only the impression(s) of seals. All Aramaic and uninscribed documents are sealed, while approximately 85 percent of the Elamite documents are sealed.

This paper briefly surveys the results of research carried out in 2018 and 2019 on the uninscribed documents, exploring the possible implications of this research for our understanding of uninscribed documents as a distinct category and the relationships between and among the three document types. This paper thus updates previous summaries published in 2008 and 2017.

To date, almost 2,200 uninscribed documents have been fully cataloged (out of a corpus of some 3,500 tablets). All uninscribed documents have been read in a preliminary manner. Of course, the principal obstacle to our understanding of this particular document type is the lack of any text written on the tablets. Sealing protocols and the seals themselves thus constitute the most critical resources in linking these documents to the archive as a whole.

It is now clear that the sealing protocols (i.e., the system determining where seals are applied to tablets and what seal placement indicates within the administrative system) are consistent across the entire archive. There are four sealing protocols:

- 1) Single-seal, generally indicating a high level of administrative oversight.
- 2) Counter-seal, having two seals—one placed on the left edge and the other on the reverse, upper, and/or bottom edges, indicating a sup-

plier and receiver. 3) Parallel-seal, having two seals—the seal on the left edge occurring additionally on another surface, generally indicating shared responsibility in a transaction. 4) Multiple-seal, having three to five seals placed on various surfaces—the exact significance of this sealing pattern being a subject of some discussion.

Fortunately, some forty seals occur on all three document types. These seals are especially critical in providing insights into the functions of both uninscribed and Aramaic documents. Additionally, some 161 seals that occur on the Elamite documents also occur on the uninscribed documents. In some instances, two seals that occur together on Elamite documents also occur together on uninscribed documents, thus virtually ensuring that we are dealing with the same types of transactions, the one bearing text, the other not.

Lastly, the four most commonly occurring seals on the uninscribed documents, PFS 48, PFS 75, PFS 142, and PFS 535*, all also occur on the Elamite tablets. These four seals may thus be especially critical in determining the principal administrative sphere of the uninscribed documents within the agency represented by the Persepolis Fortification Archive as a whole.

BIO: Mark B. Garrison holds the Alice Pratt Brown Distinguished Professorship in art history in the Department of Art and Art History at Trinity University in San Antonio, Texas. His primary research interests are the glyptic arts of ancient Iran and Iraq in the first half of the first millennium BC. He specializes in the glyptic preserved on two large archives from Persepolis: the Persepolis Fortification Archive and the Persepolis Treasury



Archive. With Margaret Cool Root, he is author of *Seals on the Persepolis Fortification Tablets*, volume I: *Images of Heroic Encounter*, Oriental Institute Publications 117 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2001). In addition to the documentary work represented in that publication, his research has focused upon social aspects of glyptic production in workshops in Persepolis, especially the issues surrounding the impact of individuals of high status and/or administrative rank on the development of glyptic style and iconography in the early Achaemenid period. His publications have also addressed the emergence and development of royal ideology in glyptic at Persepolis, religious imagery in Achaemenid art, and the relationship of glyptic of the Achaemenid period with earlier glyptic traditions in Assyria, Babylonia, and Elam. His most recent book is *The Ritual Landscape at Persepolis: Glyptic Imagery from the Persepolis Fortification and Treasury Archives*, Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization 72 (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2017), which won the 2018 Ehsan Yarshater Book Award.

McGUIRE GIBSON

Respondant, *University of Chicago, Oriental Institute*

BIO: McGuire Gibson is professor emeritus of Mesopotamian archaeology at the Oriental Institute and in the Department of Near Eastern Civilizations at the University of Chicago. He has conducted archaeological research in Iraq since 1964, mainly at Nippur, and has also worked in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, the Dhamar plain of Yemen, and in northeastern Syria, where he

directed investigations of the early city site of Hamoukar. He has authored or edited more than twelve books, including *The City and Area of Kish*, *Seals and Sealing in the Ancient Near East*, and *The Organization of Power: Aspects of Bureaucracy in the Ancient Near East*, and monographs on excavations at Nippur and Uch Tepe. He edited and added substantial text to Muzahim Mahmoud's *Nimrud: The Queens' Tombs*. Articles include "Violation of Fallow and Engineered Disaster in Mesopotamian Civilization," numerous preliminary reports on Nippur and other sites, as well as pieces on the destruction of cultural heritage. He served on fact-finding teams of UNESCO and the National Geographic Society in Iraq in May 2003, assessing the looting of the Iraq Museum and archaeological sites. He was the primary founder of the American Institute for Yemeni Studies and The American Academic Research Institute in Iraq, and served as the first chairman of the Council of Overseas Research Centers in Washington, DC.



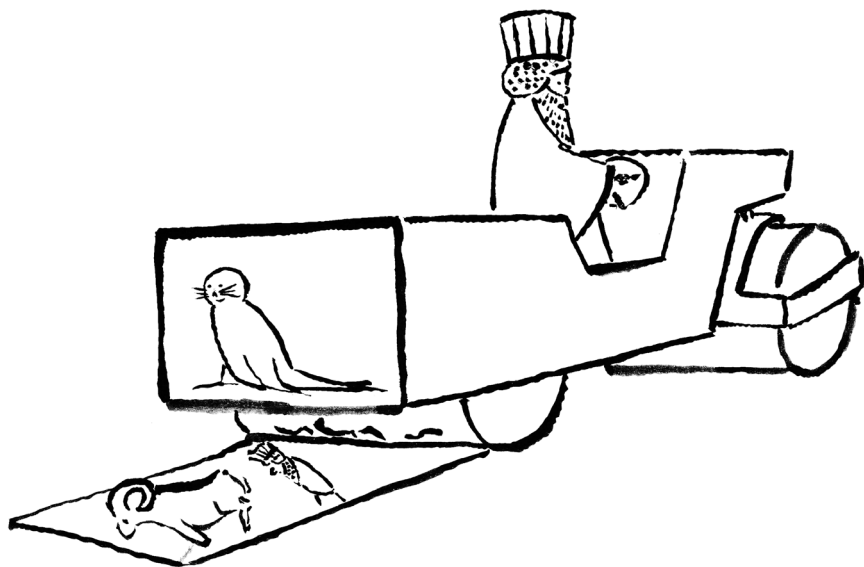
WOUTER HENKELMAN

Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes, Section des Sciences Historiques et Philologiques

IRDABAMA AND HER SEALS: THE ROOTS OF THE ACHAEMENIDS AND THE FORTIFICATION ARCHIVE

(Session 2 | Thursday, 3:45)

ABSTRACT: The royal woman Irdabama is the most prominent member of Darius's household in the Fortification Archive. Both her personal seal and the seal held by her steward define a corpus of texts that document Irdabama's table, her travels, her estates, and the many dependent workers in her service. The seals, both of which have been identified as heirlooms by Mark Garrison, also open a view to an older past. They potentially link Irdabama herself to a local dynasty at Šullaggi in southeastern Elam, where Irdabama herself still had an estate. They invite reflections on the origins of complex administrative structures in the highland of Fārs and, most crucially, on the narrative and identity-building



qualities of inherited seals, including those of Kuraš of Anzan or Aršāma, son of Darius.

BIO: Wouter Henkelman is associate professor at the Ecole Pratiques des Hautes Etudes, section des Sciences Historiques et Philologiques. He is a specialist in the history and cultures of the Achaemenid Empire and of the Achaemenid Elamite language. His research focuses particularly on the critical study of classical sources on the Achaemenid Empire and the analysis of the archive of the fortifications of Persepolis and its implications for Achaemenid history. He is a member of the Persepolis Fortification Archive (PFA) Project team at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. In 2008 he published *The Other Gods Who Are: Studies in Elamite-Iranian Acculturation Based on the Persepolis Fortification Texts*. He is currently publishing the Elamite tablets of the Persepolis Fortification Archive with R. T. Hallock[†]: *The Persepolis Fortification Archive: Texts, Translations, Commentary and Lexicon*, 3 vols., Oriental

Institute Publications (Chicago: Oriental Institute).

DENİZ KAPTAN

*University of Nevada Reno,
Department of Anthropology*

SEALING PRACTICES IN ANATOLIA UNDER ACHAEMENID RULE

(Session 1 | Thursday, 12:00)

ABSTRACT: Archaeological evidence of seal use in Anatolia during the Achaemenid period (ca. 550–330 BC) primarily consists of seal impressions on lumps of clay traditionally known as “bullae.” Unlike Mesopotamia and Iran, where record keeping on cuneiform tablets was continuous, practices in Anatolia during the Achaemenid period were different. Correspondence of any sort, including bookkeeping, was carried out on lightweight, perishable material that could not survive as cuneiform tablets did. That difference makes the significance of bullae even greater, since they can indicate what economic, administrative, and bureaucratic activities occurred where they were excavated. Furthermore, this opens

a gateway for aspects of visual communication. This paper first summarizes the terminology used in previous scholarship and then focuses on the bullae from Daskyleion (the satrapal center in Hellespontine Phrygia) and Seyitömer Höyük (a recently excavated site in Phrygia). Our findings show that the typology of the bullae could offer clues for the application process of a seal and the function of the “finished product” that is the clay object with seal impression(s). While the majority of bullae from Daskyleion can be classified as letter-bullae, others from both sites suggest different functions based on the observations about the application process of seals—in some cases on both sides—and the use of multiple seals on some, showing close connections to the practices in the center of the empire. Overall, the bullae from Daskyleion and Seyitömer Höyük shed light on the presence of administrative and economic activity in the region within the imperial network.

BIO: Deniz Kaptan is adjunct faculty in the Department of Anthropology, University of Nevada, Reno. She received her PhD in classical archaeology at Ankara University, was a research associate at the Institut für Ur- und Frühgeschichte, Heidelberg University, a visiting scholar at the Department of the History of Art, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, and taught at Bilkent University, Ankara. Her publications include *Daskyleion Bullae, Seal Images from the Western Achaemenid Empire* (Leiden, 2002), and numerous articles. Her fieldwork experience includes excavations at Arycanda and Phaselis in Lycia, and the survey of the Hacimusalar Höyük on the Elmalı plain in northern

Lycia. She is currently preparing a publication about seals and seal use in Anatolia during the first millennium BC, based on her research project on the Achaemenid period seals in the collections of regional museums in Turkey.

AGNETE WISTI LASSEN

Yale University, Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations

SEAL COLLECTING AND REUSE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

(Session 1 | Thursday, 10:00)

ABSTRACT: Seals were symbolically charged works of miniature art as well as personal signatures in the ancient Near East. In spite of a deeply personal relationship between owner and seal—going well beyond the relationship between patron and other types of artwork—they were also enduring pieces of material culture with significant object biographies, many of them having multiple owners and users and going through several iterations of recarving and modification. This presentation addresses antiquarianism and the reuse of seals in the ancient Near East and presents examples of seals whose imagery and legends clearly signal that they were of significant age and pedigree. Through a study of seal biographies, this presentation follows the journey of a selection of seals through changing owners, and the ensuing recarving of imagery and legends.

Bio: Agnete Wisti Lassen is the associate curator of the Yale Babylonian Collection, Yale University. Her research has concentrated on seals and seal use in the ancient Near East and expressions of identity in material culture, primarily attested through seal style as well as

textiles and dress. She has curated a series of thematic exhibitions on the culture and society of ancient Mesopotamia.

BRIAN MUHS

University of Chicago, Oriental Institute

A DIACHRONIC SURVEY OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN SEALING PRACTICES FROM THE PREDYNASTIC THROUGH THE GRAECO-ROMAN PERIODS

(Session 1 | Thursday, 11:30)

ABSTRACT: Ancient Egyptian seals and sealing practices changed continuously throughout Egyptian history. Cylinder seals appeared in the late fourth millennium BCE and were replaced in the late third millennium BCE by scarab seals. Ring seals appeared in the late second millennium BCE and gradually became the dominant form. The earliest cylinder seals predated hieroglyphic writing and were purely figural designs. Hieroglyphic inscriptions first appeared in the early third millennium, but figural designs persisted. Inscriptions initially only identified kings, then expanded to include offices and officials, and finally private individuals.

Seals were impressed on lumps of clay or mud to produce sealings on bags, boxes, baskets, jars, doors, and papyri, often over cloth or cords tying the objects shut. In the late third and early second millennia BCE, sealings are sometimes found in deliberate ancient hoards, separated in antiquity from the objects to which they had been attached after they were opened, perhaps as a form of accounting. From the late second millennium BCE onwards, however, such hoards are rare, perhaps because they had been replaced by written accounts.

Seals and sealings had two main functions: seals were used for identification, to associate the bearer of the seal with an institution or office; sealings were used for accountability, associating objects or texts with offices or individuals in order to hold them accountable when the objects were opened.

Bio: Brian Muhs is associate professor of Egyptology at the Oriental Institute, the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, and the College at the University of Chicago. He received his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania in 1996, and was lecturer at the Papyrological Institute of Leiden University from 1997 to 2011 before coming to Chicago. He has published two books on taxation in Ptolemaic Egypt and a third on the ancient Egyptian economy.

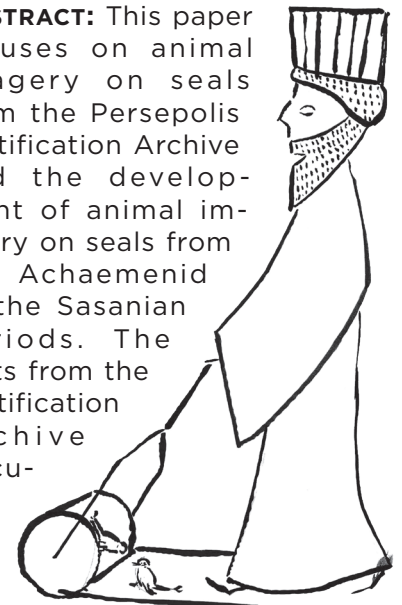
DELPHINE POINSOT

Organizer, University of Chicago, Oriental Institute

SEALING WITH ANIMALS IN IRANIAN GLYPHTIC, FROM THE ACHAEMENID TO THE SASANIAN DYNASTY

(Session 2 | Thursday, 4:15)

ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on animal imagery on seals from the Persepolis Fortification Archive and the development of animal imagery on seals from the Achaemenid to the Sasanian periods. The texts from the Fortification Archive docu-



ment the collection and distribution of commodities used principally as rations for workers in the region of what is approximately today the modern province of Fars. The archive dates to the years 509–493 BCE in the reign of Darius I. There are thousands of tablets, many of which carry impressions of seals representing officials and offices in the administrative system. To date, just over four thousand distinct and legible seals have been identified.

Similar archives consisting only of sealings exist from the late Sasanian period at Takht-e Soleyman and Qasr-i Abu Nasr. Sealing protocols in the Fortification Archive have been the subject of several studies (e.g., Root 2008, Garrison 2017, Garrison and Henkelman in press). Sealing protocols within the various Sasanian corpora have only recently been undertaken; e.g., Yousef Moradi (post-doctoral fellow, SOAS) is studying sealing protocols on the sealed material from Takht-e Soleyman.

My own project seeks to provide a diachronic study of animal imagery on seals, both art historical and archival, in order to trace the development of both imagery and sealing protocols from the Achaemenid to the Sasanian periods. As an initial step, the analysis will focus particularly on animal imagery occurring on stamp seals in the Fortification Archive; rather remarkably, the archive preserves some six hundred examples of stamp seals carrying animal imagery. Many of these seals, in their form, style, and imagery, exhibit many parallels to seals of the Sasanian period. By careful study of both the imagery and sealing practices in

Achaemenid and Sasanian archival contexts, it may be possible to understand how a distinctive theme was transmitted within the particular context of sealed archives in ancient Iran.

BIO: Delphine Poinot is an art historian specializing in the iconography and sigillography of Iran in late antiquity. Her research focuses on the human-animal relationship as reflected in these corpora, a relationship that is considered a testimony as to how societies perceive and understand the natural environment, whether familiar or foreign. She is currently working on the representation of the bestiary in the tablets of Persepolis (in collaboration with the Persepolis Fortification Archive Project) during the Achaemenid period. The purpose is to study its links with the Sasanian glyptic's bestiary in order to describe the transmitted iconographic traditions and their mode of diffusion.

KARL R. SCHAEFER

Drake University, Cowles Library Department

ADMINISTERING MAGIC IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM

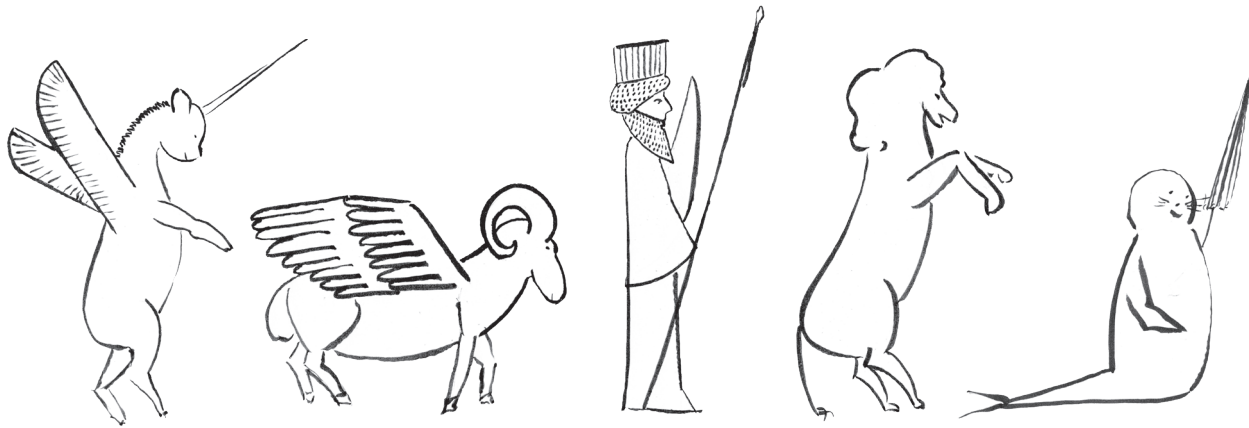
(Session 3 | Friday, 10:00)

ABSTRACT: Under Islam, people made use of seals from the very beginning. Research on sealing practice in the Islamic realms indicates that seals were used for a variety of personal and administrative purposes over the entire range of Islamic history. While there seems to have been little question about the propriety or legality of the application of seals for most purposes, there was much debate about their acceptable form when it came to creating seals in the form of talismans.

While handwritten Arabic/Islamic talismans frequently carry arcane symbols, including so-called secret languages, there is an almost absolute absence of such characters on block-printed charms. This phenomenon appears to be closely related to the efforts of medieval Islamic philosophers and theologians to propagate and administer a form of magic that would adhere to Islamic principles. In this presentation, I discuss the role played by block-printed talismans in the debate over what constituted a “valid” Islamic talisman.

BIO: Karl R. Schaefer, MA (1980), PhD (1985) in Near Eastern Studies from New York University, MLIS (1992) from the University of Oklahoma. Reference and instruction librarian, professor (emeritus), Cowles Library, Drake University, Des Moines, Iowa. Taught at the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma (1988–1991) and served as a cataloger of Arabic and Persian manuscripts in the Robert Garrett Collection of Near Eastern manuscripts, Firestone Library, Princeton University (1993–1995). Author of several articles on medieval Arabic block printing and of *Enigmatic Charms: Medieval Arabic Block Printed Amulets in American and European Libraries and Museums* (Brill Academic, 2006), the first comprehensive study of Arabic block printing. Held a Fulbright Fellowship at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, Alexandria, Egypt (2009–2010), helping to create collection development protocols for its various divisions. Awarded a Petra Kappert Fellowship at the Center for the Study of Manuscript Cultures, University of Hamburg, Germany (2017) for further research on Arabic block printing.





TORBEN SCHREIBER

University of Münster, Institute for Classical and Early Christian Archaeology

ONLY LUMPS OF CLAY? SEAL IMPRESSIONS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THE RECONSTRUCTION OF HELLENISTIC AND ROMAN BUREAUCRACY

(Session 2 | Thursday, 2:15)

ABSTRACT: From Hellenistic and Roman times, approximately more than two hundred thousand seal impressions have been preserved. The way in which these impressions survived is quite paradoxical: in most cases the archives were destroyed by fire, and while the conflagration irrevocably destroyed the documents made of papyrus and parchment, the document closures made of initially unfired clay were made durable—similar to the firing of pottery. Completely preserved documents with seal impressions prove that the names of the persons who sealed the documents were usually written next to or under their seal impressions and that it was sometimes stated in which function the appearing parties sealed the documents.

For the sealings no longer attached to documents, all this information is lost. The numerous finds from Hellenistic and Roman times thus form a broad

material basis with an almost inexhaustible iconographic repertoire, but the decontextualization described poses numerous problems for research concerning central questions about the process of administration, sealing, seal usage, and archiving. Information about the finds must be drawn from the finds themselves, as there are hardly any external indications for the classification of these seal impression inventories. In the past, this inevitably led to negligent handling of the material.

This lecture gives an overview of the state of the art on Hellenistic and Roman archives and their seal impression inventories. As an example, the archive of Doliche, which is located at the transition from Mesopotamia and the Levant to Asia Minor and dates from about 100 BC to the second century AD, will be discussed.

BIO: Torben Schreiber studied classical archaeology, ancient history, and prehistory at the University of Münster and at the Università degli Studi Suor Orsola Benincasa in Naples (2004–2011). His master's thesis about Ptolemaic artifacts in the collection of the Archaeological Museum of the University of Münster was followed by a doctorate, which was completed in 2018 with a thesis on Hellenistic and Roman seal-impression

inventories. From 2011 to 2017 he was a research assistant in the Doliche Project at the Asia Minor Research Centre at the University of Münster. During 2017–2018, Schreiber was one of the curators of the exhibition *Eirene/Pax: Peace in Antiquity* (Münster). In 2018 and 2019 he was a postdoc fellow at the German Archaeological Institute in Istanbul and initiated the project, Hellenistic and Roman Seal Impressions from Asia Minor and Adjacent Regions. Since the beginning of 2020, Schreiber is a research assistant at the Institute of Classical Archaeology at the University of Münster and co-director of the Armenian-German Archaeological Project, which focuses at the moment on the Hellenistic city of Artaxata in the Ararat valley.

OYA TOPÇUOĞLU

Northwestern University, Middle East and North African Studies

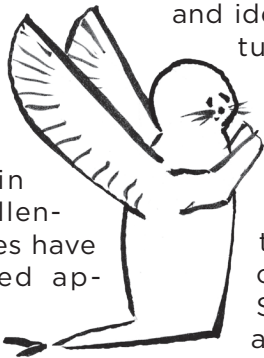
ONE SEAL, TWO SEAL, RED SEAL, BLUE SEAL: MULTIPLE SEAL OWNERSHIP IN MESOPOTAMIA IN THE EARLY SECOND MILLENNIUM

(Session 1 | Thursday, 9:30)

ABSTRACT: Seals have been used in administrative practice as markers of identity and ownership for millennia. Although

the ancient Greek historian Herodotus reports that in the Persian period “every man in Babylonia owned a seal,” in reality not everyone in the ancient Near East owned or even needed a seal. Ownership of a seal, often carved in stone and hence an expensive commodity, indicated an individual’s social and economic position, and was a sign of prestige. Given this, what are we to make of individuals who owned and used not just one, but multiple seals throughout their lifetimes? By bringing together seal imagery, textual evidence, and archaeological information, this paper explores the practice of multiple seal ownership in northern Mesopotamia in the early second millennium. As recent studies have shown, an integrated approach can provide ample information regarding seal owners, their social and professional identities, and different sealing practices.

Attested both in the archaeological and textual record of Mesopotamia since the Akkadian period, multiple seal ownership was a common phenomenon observed across millennia, especially in official contexts. Several examples suggest that individuals owned and used different seals, often simultaneously, for different purposes, such as official vs. personal business. However, the reasons behind this common practice appear to more complicated and diverse. This paper focuses on a number of cases attested at Tell Bi’a, Tell al-Rimah, Tell Leilan, and Mari to discuss the visual, functional, social, and ideological aspects of multiple seal ownership, as well as questions of agency of the owners.



The paper aims to show how a holistic approach that integrates iconography, texts, and archaeological context can shed light on this complex practice, and the relationship between seal owners and their seals.

BIO: Oya Topçuoğlu is a lecturer in the Middle East and North African Studies program at Northwestern University. She holds a PhD in Near Eastern art and archaeology from the University of Chicago. Her research addresses issues of identity and cultural exchange, and the effects of political change and ideology on the visual culture of the ancient Near East. She specializes in cylinder seals and sealing practices, focusing on the role of seal imagery and inscription in the construction of political power and ideology. She also studies political and pedagogical uses of the ancient past, its role in the formation of national identities in the modern Middle East, and the history of museums and archaeology in the region. Her recent work also explores the looting and trafficking of antiquities from Syria and Iraq, and Mesopotamian antiquities on the internet market.

THEO VAN DEN HOUT

*University of Chicago,
Oriental Institute*

PREVENTING FRAUD AND FORGERY OF SEALS IN THE HITTITE KINGDOM

(Session 1 | Thursday, 10:30)

ABSTRACT: A hoard of over 3,400 seal impressions was found in situ in the Hittite capital Hattusa in 1990–91 (and a few smaller ones that were already known). The function of these seal impressions has been

much debated since then and the various explanations offered still leave many fundamental questions unanswered. This presentation discusses the views expressed thus far and proposes an alternative that sheds an interesting light on a thus far unknown aspect of the workings of the Hittite administration.

BIO: Theo van den Hout (PhD, University of Amsterdam, 1989) is the Arthur and Joann Rasmussen Professor of Western Civilization and of Hittite and Anatolian Languages at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, and chief editor of the *Chicago Hittite Dictionary* (CHD). He is the author of several books, most recently *The Elements of Hittite* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), and many articles. His latest book, *A History of Hittite Literacy: Writing and Reading in Late Bronze Age Anatolia*, is due out in 2020. Theo is a corresponding member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Arts and Sciences, a 2016 fellow of the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation, and a senior fellow at the Institute for the Study of the Ancient World at New York University.

TASHA VORDERSTRASSE

Respondant, University of Chicago, Oriental Institute

BIO: Tasha Vorderstrasse is the University and Continuing Education Program coordinator at the Oriental Institute. She received her PhD in Near Eastern archaeology from the University of Chicago in 2004. Her work concentrates on the material culture of the Middle East, Caucasus, and Central Asia and the relations between these areas and China.