

THE SEALS OF MEDIEVAL HUNGARIAN KINGDOM AS MEANS OF COMMUNICATION IN COURT PRACTICE AND PROPERTY PROTECTION ¹

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Abstract: GLEJTEK, Miroslav. *The Seals of Medieval Hungarian Kingdom as Means of Communication in Court Practice and Property Protection*. In medieval society seals used to be important instruments, bearing a wide range of applications. Closer attention is usually paid to their connection to documents with legal content. When attached to charters and letters they fulfilled several functions such as authenticating, authorizing and enclosing them. Researchers usually do not pay as much attention to other uses of seals that have no direct connection to written documents. In the Early Middle Ages, seals were also used for court summons and for sealing the wounds during ordeals. In the Late Middle Ages, we know of their application for property protection against unauthorized manipulation. Seals used to safeguard cases with seal matrices, money or insignia as well as reliquaries. This study introduces the ways seals had been used based on written legal, diplomatic and narrative sources from specific periods.

Keywords: *seal, Middle Ages, Hungarian Kingdom, court, property protection, communication*

Introduction

At the beginning of my study of seals, as widely used “instruments” in the medieval society, I was influenced by Tomáš Krejčík’s inspiring monograph – *Seals in Medieval Culture (Pečeť v kultuře středověku)* (Krejčík 1998). A lot of time has passed since I first read it. In the meantime, I kept coming back to this topic. I began to pay much more attention to the modest mentions in the sources of Hungarian provenance. Their collection and sorting show a really wide use of this artefact in the life of the medieval society. Naturally, the researchers’ attention was and still is mainly focused on the connection of a seal to documents of a diplomatic nature. However, I will omit this subject in my analysis. I will deal exclusively with the use of a seal (seal matrix) independently of a paper document. Some Hungarian researchers have already partially addressed this issue. They focused mainly on seals of summons and seals used in ordeals (Jakubovich 1933, 56-74; Kumorovitz 1993, 16-20). The following text will address some other ways of using seals in the medieval society. I am obliged to point out beforehand that following examples do not exhaust the topic. They only suggest some references offered by Hungarian sources.

I am aware of the study’s paradox, which is to analyse the use of seals independently of the written forms. Although I neglect the relationship between a seal and a written document, it still remains the basic source for us. These are, in particular, royal decrees and provisions, entities

¹ The study was created at the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra as part of the project VEGA No. 1/0241/21 *Communication strategies of the clergy in the medieval Kingdom of Hungary*.

statutes, documents and more modest narrative sources. This is given by the nature of artefacts' usage. The moment a seal lost its function, it was destroyed and thus lost forever for the purpose of research. For example, breaking a seal on a chest containing documents or money also meant the end of the seal itself. However, there are exceptions, as for example some still preserved metal seals of summons. Similarly, seals of clerical dignitaries, which used to seal reliquaries, were sometimes preserved as well. This was mainly in those cases where there was no need to open them.

Unfortunately, there is a certain risk of overestimation when studying one particular type of source. It may happen that because of a too narrow and in-depth analysis, it will lose contact with the "real man of flesh and bones", which is the main goal of historians' research (Gurevič 1978, 12-13). However, references in question provide information of a practical nature. So, perhaps this risk is not imminent. The following analysed sources refer to some specific activities that were associated with the use of seals. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that a written document or regulation may not truly reflect reality. They often reflected an ideal that society sought to achieve.

I. Seal as a means of court summons, authorization and a person's verification

Various ways of using a seal are already mentioned in royal codes from the turn of the 11th and 12th centuries. They were mainly in connection with case law (OBRUSÁNSZKY 2008, 72-73). An authorised bailiff used the seal of summons to summon a person in question. This seal served as a means of communication. In a non-literate society, a seal impression with a seal design apparently represented sufficient verification of the bailiff's authority. King Coloman's provisions explicitly mentioned two groups of these owners of seals. Clerics were to be summoned to come to an ecclesiastical judge that is an archbishop or bishop, through his seal (DRHM I 1999, Colomanus: V, 25).² In the event of a dispute between a cleric and a secular person, a secular judge sent his seal to the secular person and an ecclesiastical judge to the cleric (DRHM I 1999, Colomanus: VI, 25).³ It seems that such instrument of court summoning, meaning a separate seal without a document, was used in Hungarian Kingdom (Takács 2012, 16), as well as in other European countries (Ewald 1914, 24; Kittel 1970, 126; Stieldorf 2004, 35; Bedos-Rezak 2011, 79).⁴ The seal of summons – *sigillum citationis* – remained popular for a long time. Another uniquely preserved seals are the gilded bronze bullas of the king Andrew I (1046 – 1060) (fig. 1). The

² "V. *Episcoporum et comitum capellani vel reliquorum, per sigillum episcopi vel archiepiscopi ad causandum cogantur.*"

³ "VI. *Si clericus cum laicis causam habet, per sigillum iudicis laicus cogatur; si vero laicus habet causam cum clerico, per sigillum episcopi vel archipresbiteri clericus cogatur, ab eis que coram iudice suo examinentur.*" Other provisions mentioned an obligation to obey the royal summons, accompanied with a seal, and to appear in a royal curia. Failure to do so meant severe sanctions for a summoned person: "*Quicumque ergo regis et principum decreta fregerit, si episcopus est, secundum voluntatem regis diiudicetur; si comes, a comitatu degradetur; si centurio, honore privetur et insuper LV pensas solvat; si miles, similiter LV pensas solvat. [...] XXV. Possit iudex sigillum suum mittere super quoscumque, exceptis presbiteris et clericis necnon comitibus. Si quis autem iudicem iniuste iudicasse proclamaverit, et non probaverit, V pensas solvat; si vero iudex convictus fuerit, iudicium in dupplum restituat et insuper V pensas persolvat. Iudex pro suo iudicato, nisi in se, uno anno, postea non introducatur. [...] XXVI. Si quis sigillum iudicis negligens ad causam non venerit, primo V pensis puniatur; si secundo, totidem; si tertio, rationem perdat et tonsus vendatur pro debito.*" (DRHM I 1999, Ladislaus III: XV, XXV, XXVI, 20-21; Lehotská 1986, 35-36).

⁴ Parallels from the Czech environment are interesting as well. We can mention the preserved seal of Czech provenance with the image of St. Wenceslaus and its circular text: † S. IVSTICIE TOCIVS TERRE SCI WENCEZLAI DVCIS BOEM. || WENCESLA CITAT AD IVDICIVM (Jakubovich 1933, 72-73).

upper borders of these seals were finished with a lug, which could be laced through and worn on the neck by an authorized person (Takács 2012, 80-81, Nr. 5; Jakubovich 1933, 63, 70) (fig. 2). Other preserved seals from the 13th century stated their function directly in a circular text. Reconstruction of the hitherto unpreserved seal from 1264 was published several times. It was supposed to be used by the Veszprem Chapter. Its circular text stated: † SIGILLVM CITATIONIS (Pray 1805, 5, tab. I, fig. I). Credible evidence of a similar seal is a source from 1255: † COMES TRISTANVS ME MISIT (MNL OL DL 421; Koller 1734, 194; Jakubovich 1933, 71-72; Kumorovitz 1993, 17) (fig. 3). The preserved exemplars were attached directly to documents, which helped us to accurately date them. However, their text component probably indicates that they were used without these documents. The first one was undoubtedly the seal of summons. The text of the second seal indicates that it was used by the envoys of *comes* Tristan as a verification symbol of an authorization for a certain act. The seal of summons was used by *pristaldus* ('bailiff') in order to summon a person to a royal court, as well as by the highest county dignitaries, who used them for the same purpose (Novák 2005, 85). The development of a written culture increased the importance of a document itself, which had undeniable advantages over a seal used without one. Nevertheless, even in documents from the 14th and 15th centuries, that summoned to some (most often a court) instance, we could encounter verbal reversals of court summons through a seal: "*mediante sigillo nostro*" (MNL OL DL 60289, in the year 1362) or "*mediante sigillo et homine nostris*" (MNL OL DL 39448, in the year 1438). In some cases, an investigator actually proved himself with a seal of an authority that recognized him to the act. After the act, it was to be returned to the authority (Rábik 2007, 115-116).

The existence of the seal of summons as a court instrument was quite long as it was used till the modern times (Jakubovich 1933, 74; Ewald 1914, 30). Jozef Novák pointed out an interesting type of modern artefacts. He mentioned some so-called guild convening charts used to convene members of guilds in the 18th and 19th century. The principle of their use was very similar to that of the seal of summons. The date of a meeting was announced orally accompanied with this kind of a chart, or a written notice was later inserted directly into a customized table (Novák 2005, 86-88).

II. Seal as a means of verification and person's identification

Pavol Hudáček has recently noticed another way of using a seal, stated in royal provisions. It concerned the movement of persons across borders (DRHM I 1999, Colomanus: LXXXII, 31).⁵ According to the decree of King Coloman, any person who wanted to leave borders of the kingdom had to claim a seal of a royal tax collector as well as a tax collector of *comes*. The person who did not have such a seal confirming the consent of both tax collectors was supposed to be financially penalized (Hudáček 2016, 256).

I will mention another non-traditional way of using a seal or rather a seal matrix known in the Hungarian Late Middle Ages legislation. The decree of Vladislaus II from the year 1498 tried to solve, among other issues, also falsification of documents by clerics working at a place of authentication. After proven guilty, a forger was not to receive death penalty (due to his clerical status), but his forehead and both cheeks were to be branded with a hot seal matrix (DRMH IV 2012, June 2nd 1498: XIV, 94, 96).⁶ This form of punishment is also mentioned in the Hungarian

⁵ "*Egressuri de Hungaria a theloneariis tam regis, quam comitis, qui exitus tenent, sigillum querant, quod telonearius regis ab una parte cum sigillo comprimat, ab altera parte thelonearius comitis figura comitis sui concludat. Si quis absque tali sigillo egredi temptaverit, ut legis prevaricator L pensas persolvat.*"

⁶ "*Item de falsariis, qui in capitulis vel conventibus literas falsas obsignant, ut stigma sigilli igniti in frontibus*

customary law – Tripartitum from 1514 (DRMH V 2005, pars II, tit. 16, § 3-4, 266). Similar practice is known from Early Middle Ages when branding in the sign of the cross was done with a hot key of a church. The purpose of such punishment was, in addition to the caused physical pain, to easily identify a forger. However, it is questionable whether such punishment was actually applied.

III. Seal as an instrument of ordeals

In addition to the use of seals for the purpose of authorizing a bailiff, a seal had one more significant use for the enforcement of law in the oldest period of the Hungarian Kingdom. It had an important role during ordeals. We may learn about this way of proving guilt and innocence in the oldest Hungarian provisions which inform us that it took place in residences of bishops (near cathedral chapters) and larger provostries, among others in the residences of Bratislava and Nitra provosts (1095 – 1116) (DRHM I 1999, Colomanus: XXII, 26; Rábik 2010, 32).⁷ Mentions of the exact course of ordeals were available already in an early period. The unique Oradea Register is of particular importance, as it stated ordeals taking place in the Oradea Chapter in the first half of the 13th century. It is an extraordinary source important not only for regional but also for European history (Schelle 1980, 128). Ordeals in Oradea were executed with iron. After performing all the precisely defined acts (holy mass, prayers, oral proceedings), a tested person had to carry a hot piece of iron in their hand. Subsequently, the injured hand was bandaged and, more importantly, the bandage was sealed with a chapter seal. The seal guaranteed that no one would touch the wound and affect its healing. After an allotted time, the seal was broken, the bandage removed, and the wound examined. Depending on the state of the wound healing or purulence, the tested person was found guilty or innocent (Schelle 1980, 128). Records in the Register state a number of such tests. There are various cases of damage caused to the seal (RV 1903, 172, Nr. 50).⁸ In such case, canons did not examine the hand. Similarly, wounds on hands were not examined in a case of a broken seal (RV 1903, 183, Nr. 83).⁹ We may even encounter a case when false Chapter's seals were found on hands of a tested person (RV 1903, 258, Nr. 280).¹⁰

Mentioned examples show that the seal had an irreplaceable place during ordeals executed with hot iron. The fact that ordeals were actively used in the Hungarian judiciary in the 11th and 12th centuries also proves that many important ecclesiastical institutions – Chapters already used their own seals in this period (Rábik 2003, 325-326). Unfortunately, there are only few preserved seals known to us referring directly to ordeals, as we may assume from a circular text (Solymosi 2009, 359-375; Fejérpataky 1895, 159).¹¹ The resolution of the IV Lateran Council from 1215

et utraque facie omnium capitularium seu conventualium, qui tempore falsificacionis de conventibus vel capitulis talia agentes intererunt, inuratur et insuper beneficia talitum amittantur eo facto.”

⁷ „Iudicium ferri et aque in aliqua ecclesia fieri interdiximus, nisi in sede episcopali et maioribus preposituris, necnon Posenii et Nitrie.”

⁸ “[...] canonici manum eius non inspexerunt, quia sigillum non sanum invenerunt.”

⁹ “[...] Naluc et Ceca manus non sunt inspectae, quia sigilla eorum fracta sunt inuenta.”

¹⁰ “[...] manus vero trium, scilicet, Visam, Virsint et Mil, fracto sigillo Capituli, falso sigillo fuerant sigillatae. Qui pro iniustus habiti sunt. Petrus vero fur, propter infirmitatem ferrum levare non potuit.”

¹¹ A circular text of a seal used by the Veszprem Chapter in the late 12th and early 13th centuries is also interesting: [†] FORTITUDO MEA ET LAVS MEA DOM[INVS]. There is an obvious parallel with biblical quotations: “The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.” (Exodus 15:2); And see also: Psalm 118:14; Isaiah 12:2. Such circular text is rare and atypical in the Hungarian environment. It can be assumed that the seal with such text was used during ordeals, its nature was between a legal and a sacral-liturgical act.

forbade the participation of clergy in ordeals (DSP II 2007, 256, art. 18.2; Vladár 2017, 246). This was also the beginning of their decline in the residences of Hungarian ecclesiastical institutions. The number of preserved institutional seals began to grow in the 13th century, when they became part of documents issued by Chapters (Takács 1992).

IV. Seal as a means of intactness guarantee and property protection

A seal was also used in a wide range of practical functions related to the items protection. A medieval man knew many inspiring ways of its use thanks to Holy Scripture which suggested an inexhaustible number of life situations in which they could be used. Following are just a few Bible quotes that speak of the use of a seal beyond the diplomatic field: “*Have I not kept this in reserve and sealed it in my vaults?*” (Deuteronomy 32:34); “*So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.*” (Matthew 27:66) and “*Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?*” (Revelation 5:2). Three excerpts from three different biblical writings speak of the sealing of a vault, a tomb, and a scroll. Certainly, these texts are symbolical in the first place. However, through these figurative words, a medieval man also perceived the practicality of a seal and possibilities for its use (Glejtek 2013, 82-83). In this spirit, we can observe the diverse use of a seal in the environment of secular (royal) dignitaries, private persons, cities and ecclesiastical institutions.

The sealing of seal matrices at places of authentication

Firstly, I would like to analyse the last-mentioned group. Due to their status as places of authentication, the Hungarian Chapters owned authentic seals used to seal issued documents of legal nature. The importance of this seal was emphasised for its deposit, protection and regulations for its manipulation. Some preserved medieval particular chapter norms mention it also. The Zagreb Chapter statutes from 1334 state that a seal was deposited in a metal case. Interestingly, the case was secured with seals of the canons. In order to take out the seal matrix, at least seven canons had to be present. After the seal matrix was used in a cathedral’s sacristy, it was placed into the case sealed with the personal seals of these canons (MHEZ 1874, 14-15).¹² A seal of the Bratislava Chapter was similarly secured. According to the statutes from 1521, the seal matrix was safeguarded with locks and three keys. The case was also sealed with canons’ seals (Knauz 1866, 325-326).¹³ A similar method of seal matrices’ protection was apparently applied in some places of authentication near monastic convents. Miloš Marek analysed in detail an event from the convent of Hronský Beňadik (1417), concerning the accusation of a seal matrix’s misuse. The storage of the seal matrix in a case is mentioned as well. It was sealed with the signet rings

¹² “[...] *sigillum nostrum et specialiter novum, quod est erectum et autenticatum anno domini MCCCXXIII, nonis mensis julii, adminus septem canonici in etate et discrecione positi sufficienti, possint, ruptis impressis sigillis, de pixide excipere et cum eo litteras comunis iusticie in camera sacristie sigillare et iterum statim reponere in pixidem et sua sigilla superponere, prout fieri consuevit. Ad sigillandas autem litteras gracie vel alias qualescumque non liceat tot personis sigillum excipere de pixide, nisi ut iuris est, ex maioris partis capituli consensu quid iam fuerit diffinitum, et sic littere huiusmodi fuerint sigillande [...]*”

¹³ “*Item posteaquam litterae scriptae et per Notarium ad sigillandum exhibitae, impressione dicti sigilli consignatae extiterint, statim ipsum sigillum in pixidem, seu Corbanum ligneum, cum diligentia imponatur et sigillis Canonorum, sigillationi tunc interessentium, more solito idem Corbanum obsignetur et obsignatum ad suum locum, ut praefertur, in muro sacristiae paratum, toties quoties reponatur sub firmatione dictarum trium Clauium.*”

of the convent members (ZsO VI 1999, Nr. 622, 202).¹⁴ This is an interesting fact, given that the seals of ordinary convent members are very rare and only the seals of the superiors are known (abbots, provosts and priors). During this complicated investigation, the convent was forbidden to use the seal matrix. It was even sealed in a case with the seal of the Nitra bishop Hincó (who was himself a convicted forger of documents), in order to prevent an unauthorized manipulation (Marek 2017, 179-180).

Understandably, a plain seal on a case could not prevent someone from breaking it. However, a “passive” protection not only symbolically but also practically prevented unauthorized manipulation. Its function was to prevent the sealing of unauthorized documents, or in other words, the creation of a counterfeit directly in an office of an institution.¹⁵

The sealing of reliquaries

The relics of saints were important part of the religious life of medieval and early modern society. Therefore, great attention was paid to their preservation and protection. For instance, the list of the Veszprem Chapter’s treasure mentions reliquaries and relics from the first half of the 15th century (MNL OL DF 201633; Fejérpataky 1886, 563).¹⁶ According to the record, relics of various saints were originally sealed with the seal of the canon-cantor Gregory, later vicar Nicholas. Other treasures were in the richly decorated chest sealed with the major provost Nicholas’ seal (MNL OL DF 201633; Fejérpataky 1886, 563).¹⁷ The guarantors of the authenticity and intactness of a relic were, in these cases, seals of ecclesiastical dignitaries working in an institution that owned the relic.

The sealing of reliquaries is also closely related to the sealing of remains. An interesting case which I, unfortunately, did not manage to analyse more closely is mentioned by G. Fejér with reference to G. Pray. After lifting the body of the deceased Princess-Saint Elizabeth of Hungary (1236), her coffin was supposed to be sealed with seals of the present prelates (CDH IV/1 1829, 48).¹⁸

The sealing of baptismal fonts

The oldest preserved canonical visitation of the Esztergom Archdiocese from 1397 mentioned that a baptismal font in a church was safeguarded with a seal of a sub-custodian of the Esztergom Chapter (Kollányi 1901, 249).¹⁹ It can be assumed that in churches frequently visited by believers (pilgrims) the holy water was safeguarded with a seal and thus supposedly prevented from contamination as well as desecration. Esztergom Cathedral, as the residency of the highest Hungarian prelate, was

¹⁴ “[...] *pixidem seu tecam, in qua sigillum eorum sub eorum signetis more solito clausum diligenter habebatur.*”

¹⁵ For more information on the storage of seal matrices of places of authentication see: Glejtek 2019, 23-36.

¹⁶ “*Item in uno panniculo crocei coloris sunt reliquie diverse sanctorum sub sigillo quondam domini Gregorii cantoris [et nunc sub sigillo domini Nicolai vicarii.]*”

¹⁷ “*Item una ladula cristallina et in parte lignea deaurata, cum margaritis seu lapidibus preciosis, carens uno lapide, prout prius, plena reliquiis sanctorum. In qua etiam inter cetera continetur balsamum et rosa de Jerikó; donata per dominum Michaellem episcopum, sigillata sigillo domini Nicolai prepositi maioris.*”

¹⁸ “*Accedentes vero viri religiosi et deuoti huic ministerio deputati, ossa sacrosancta cum deuotione multa de terra sustulerunt, ea in arca plumbea collocantes, quae clausa Episcoporum sigillis et fideliter consignata anno domini MCCXXXVI.*”

¹⁹ “[...] *quod fons baptismatis tenetur sub bona custodia et clausura, sub sigillo domini Martini succustodis, ac debita et munde conservatur.*”

undoubtedly one of those churches. In some cases, holy oils were kept directly at the baptismal font. Therefore, a canon's seal protected them from improper manipulation as well.²⁰

The sealing of coin minting tools and precious metals

King Charles Robert's monetary reforms included introduction of a precise procedure for manipulating with the tools for coin minting as well as the bars of precious metals (gold and silver) from which these coins were to be minted. Royal decrees concerning Kremnica and Smolník Chambers mentioned three people responsible for minting of coins: a Count of the Chamber, an Esztergom Archbishop and a Master of the Treasury. For example, according to a document from 1338 but also other similar documents, a Count of mining had to have two treasure chests in towns where royal coins were minted. The first one contained tools for coin minting and the second held bars for minting. The chests were safeguarded with three seals and three keys. These were the seals of a Count of the Chamber and deputies of an Esztergom Archbishop and a Master of the Treasury. They could be opened only in the presence of these representatives (Szekfü 1911, 20; Štefánik 2009, 43).²¹ Reasons for these procedures were the protection against unauthorized manipulation, and an attempt to prevent the production of counterfeit coins.

The sealing of stored goods in towns

In an urban environment seals were used in two ways. The first concerns a provision from the so-called Minor Decree of Sigismund of Luxembourg from the year 1405. According to this decree, goods stored in a town had to be always sealed by two burghers (DRMH II 1992, 15. April 1405: XV, 41; Bartl 2001, Nr. 63, 132).²²

The sealing of town insignia

In Bratislava, the town insignia were on the feast of St. George presented to the whole community and then taken to the town hall where they were stored in the town chest. Later, the chest was sealed with the seals of two or three German lords and taken to the Church of the Virgin Mary

²⁰ I express my gratitude to Prof. PhDr. ThDr. Petr Zubko, PhD. from Jan Stanislav Institute of Slavistics SAS for drawing my attention to this possibility.

²¹ *“Item ipse comes camerarum nostrarum in prenominitis civitatibus nostris, ubi monete nostre fabricantur, debet habere duo scrinia, in quorum uno ferramenta formalia sub sigillis hominum eorundem archiepiscopi et magistri tavarnicorum conserventur, in altero vero virgule pro monetis fuse, absque monetis novis, sub sigillis tribus et clavibus tribus eorundem trium hominum debent conservari et semper in presencia hominum ipsorum archiepiscopi et magistri tavarnicorum apperiantur, nec possint aliquo ipsorum absente apperiri, vel opera monetarum exerceri, ita quod si idem comes camerarum nostrarum ipsis duobus testibus absentibus vel aliquo ipsorum absente fractis clavibus et sigillis monetas faceret fabricari, per ipsum magistrum tavarnicorum nostrorum tanquam falsarius puniatur [...]”*

²² *“[...] ut in qualibet civitatum, opidorum et liberarum villarum dou iurati cives ad id idonei per iudicem et cives eligantur, qui quibuslibet ligationibus et obstructionibus ballarum, vasorum et aliourm ponderum ligandorum interesse et eisdem conspiciere debeant, sine quibus civibus ad id deputatis nulli mercatores, institores ac alii quicunque commutatores ipsorum ballas ac alia pondera ligare aut concludere presumant, quas quidem ballas et pondera ligare aut concludere presumant, quas quidem ballas et pondera iidem duo cives eorum sigillorum appositoine consignare debeant et munire [...]”*

to a local priest. The key to the chest was given to a town scribe for safekeeping (OS 1864, 58-59; Lysá 2016, 186).²³

The sealing of documents

We also know of a case in which documents intended for thorough examination and investigation were stored and sealed in a special chest. This is the most well-known (or most extensive) case of documents forgery in the Medieval Hungary. In 1391, a special royal commission was assigned to investigate the counterfeiting activities of John Literatus from Madočany and his accomplice. All evidence confiscated from John Literatus' house in the Liptov County was stored in a special chest. Later, it was sealed with the royal council members' seals and handed over to the Liptov Count Emeric Bebek, who further investigated the case (CDH X/1 1834, Nr. CD, 725-727; Húščava 1936, 35-36).²⁴

For the purpose of an investigation, documents of various kinds were also stored in canvas bags, which were subsequently sealed (Eckhart 1913, 162).²⁵ Such manipulation is similarly described in a document of the judge royal Paul from the year 1340 (CDHA IV 1884, Nr. 48, 65).²⁶ Sources mention numerous cases like this. Frequently in the cases under investigation in order to prevent from any improper manipulation, relevant documents were also safeguarded with a seal.

The sealing of money

Several sources testify to a fact that a seal was commonly used as a protection of money in various transactions. For example, in the year 1396, *comes* George and Nicholas, the son of Nicholas, had remitted one hundred marks and one hundred pounds of Viennese denarii, kept in the Bratislava Chapter, to *comes* Temmel, *comes* Peter and another *comes* Temmel. The document states that this money was kept intact under seal in a vault (*conservatorium*) of the Chapter (Wertner 1908, Nr. XXV, 516).²⁷

²³ “Alle zeit zu sand Jörgen tag, in der zeit, als oben geschriben stet, sol man das gemain insiegel zu dem rathaus pringen verslossen in der lad. Do sol man es aus nemmen, und sol es zaigen der gemain. Darnach sol man es wider ein legen und versliessen und versigellen mit zwayr oder dreyr deutschen herren sigil, dy des rats gewesen sein, und also verslossen und versigt sol man es antwurten dem pfarrer zu unser hauppharkirchen, zu Unser Lieben Frawn zu pehalten, untz das der richter und der rat pesten werden; sunder den slussel sol der statschreiber pey ym haldenn.”

²⁴ “In cuius videlicet domo et scrinio nuper multa falsa sigilla, litterae nequitiose et registra inventa fuerant et reperte, prefatoque domino nostro regi ac prelatis et baronibus suis ad Budam extiterunt apportata et exhibite, per ipsosque dominum nostrum regem prelatos et barones suos stupenda admiratione revisa et perlegi facte, sub eorumdem sigillis incluse, nostris manibus ad conservandum et ad dictum comitatum de Thuroc deferendum et subscripto modo coram universitate nobilium exponendum et promulgandum erant tradite et assignate [...]”

²⁵ “[...] in trapellum sub capite sigilli nostri includendo[...]”

²⁶ “Nihilominus idem dominus episcopus quoddam transscriptum predicti domini nostri regis, et eodem domine quoddam privilegium domini Ladislai olim regis Hungarie sub capite sigilli nostri in trapellum intercludendo, eodem terniino exhiberi faciant ad iudicium coram nobis.”

²⁷ “[...] nunc vero praedictas centum marcas et centum libras denariorum wyennensium cum illis, quorum sub sigillis reclusae existerant, sub impressionibus eorumdem sigillorum, de dicto conservatorio praefati capituli Posoniensis integraliter recepimus et easdem praedictis comitibus Temmel, Petro et altero Temmel assignavimus.”

Another example of money protection is described in a document of the Spiš Chapter from 1413. Master Martin deposited money which he had for his brother Paul in a canvas bag sealed with his personal seal (MNL OL DF 268476).²⁸

The sealing of books and precious items

A list of jewels in the Veszprém Chapter contained, among other things, an inventory of books. The value of these manuscripts is also evident in the fact that they were protected with a seal, just like jewellery. Thirteen books with legal and other content were placed in a chest (*cista*) and sealed with a seal of provost Nicholas (MNL OL DF 201633; Fejérpataky 1886, 574).²⁹

An unusual source is a thrilling narrative of Helen Kottaner – the court lady of Queen Elizabeth. This unique source whose author was a woman, which was atypical for the Middle Ages, was written in circa 1450 and captured the events of 1439 – 1440 (SHK 2008, 11). In her narrative, from the period of the Hungarian King Ladislaus the Posthumous, she described the theft of the Royal Crown from the Visegrád Castle and also the means of its protection (SHK 2008, 28-31).³⁰ She writes how the most important symbol of the Hungarian monarchs, the Royal Crown, was protected. The castles made of stone were supposed to prevent violent theft. An unauthorized manipulation was secured with seals of important dignitaries. They sealed both the door of the vault where the crown was and also the crown's casing. Interesting is the reference to the double sealing, when seals of dignitaries were additionally wrapped with a cloth and sealed with a seal of the Visegrád castellan.

Conclusion

Presented sources reflect on various ways of using seals in medieval society. Although a seal became an essential part of legal documents and later a standard attachment of private letters, its use was not limited only to this area. In the earliest period of the Hungarian Kingdom, when the writing of legal acts was still in its infancy, a seal was used otherwise. We learn about two functions of seals from legal sources as well as from physically preserved seals. Provisions emphasized its use as a communication instrument of court summons by both secular and ecclesiastical judges. They also reveal the practical form of communication between courts and summoned persons. The period of its use is also admirable seeing that in the modern age some numerous reminiscences of the artefact can be found reaching its peak in the 11th and 12th centuries; until it was replaced by document. The Oradea Register very precisely described the use of seals for sealing the

²⁸ “*Idem magister Martinus, ut asseruit suas pecunias in quedam trapello sub suo sigillo pro Paulo fratre suo prenotato deposuit coram nobis [...]*” I express my gratitude to doc. Mgr. Peter Labanc, PhD. from the Department of History, Philosophical Faculty of The Trnava University in Trnava for pointing out this source.

²⁹ “*Item in quadam cista ad modum Bakoniensium facto sub sigillo domini Nicolai prepositi sunt libri tredecim in iure canonico et in aliis materiis.*”

³⁰ “*They brought the Holy Crown and carried it to the pentagonal vault. [...] I saw how and where the Holy Crown was stored. Then the vault was locked and the door was well sealed with many seals. [...] All seals were intact, and that is what they wrote to the noble queen as well. [...] They went to the vault, brought out the chest with the Holy Crown, and took out the Holy Crown with its casing having many seals on it. They broke them and placed the Holy Crown in a smaller chest. [...] Then they resealed the door, however there was not so many seals as before. [...] Then castellan came to the door, wrapped a small piece of linen cloth around the seals, tied the cloth and pressed his seal on it.*”

wounds during ordeals. Using seals in both ways represents valuable evidence of contemporary court practice for us. In a later period, when a seal was already widely used in the issuance of documents, its popularity was not limited by the office walls. A number of sources state that a seal was a full-fledged protective instrument. It protected, physically and symbolically, against illegal and uncontrollable manipulation of items that were of considerable value to an owner; whether it was used to protect seal matrix, money, relics or various insignia. In all these cases, a seal proves to be a significant and widespread cultural and social phenomenon. Despite the fact that I have tried to cover all the important possibilities of using seals, I am well aware that there will occur other cases of their use. Sphragistics has so far dealt with these topics only very marginally. A comprehensive understanding and evaluation of seals and their use will require a broader interdisciplinary approach. However, this will have to go beyond the research of written records. We are mainly failing to see the potential of preserved monuments of material culture. Undoubtedly, legal archaeology will also have a significant position in this research. These are all topics that will need to be given more space in the future. Eventually it will help us understand the issue comprehensively.

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Appendix



Fig. 1. Bronze bulla of Andrew I (Jakubovich 1933, 63).



Fig. 2. Profile of a bulla with a distinctive lug, that was used for a cord, and thus it was possible to wear the seal directly on the neck (Jakubovich 1933, 70).



Fig. 3. The seal of comes Tristan from 1255 (Váczy 1939, 182).