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49

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Ecclesiastical sigillography in the Czech Republic – current situation, themes and perspectives

Sigilografia eclesiástica na República Checa – ponto da situação, temas e perspectivas

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Abstract:

Sigillography is regarded in the Czech Republic as a traditional academic discipline. The history of the field shows, however, that it has yet to welcome the production of a seminal, far-reaching work. In earlier time, ecclesiastical sigillography was largely neglected, seeing little development until recent decades. The first analytical studies are now appearing which attempt to interpret sigillographical materials in a broader historical context. Researchers are now also turning their attention to modern materials, giving rise to specific terminological and methodological difficulties. This study offers a brief outline of developments in sigillography in the Czech Republic, and particularly ecclesiastical sigillography. In this specific case, it describes the research objectives and the questions being asked, while outlining proposed solutions.

Keywords:

Sigillography; Ecclesiastical Sigillography; Modern Sigillography; Historical sciences; Bohemia.

Resumo:

A sigilografia é considerada na República Checa uma disciplina académica tradicional. A história deste campo mostra, contudo, que necessita ainda de acolher a produção de um trabalho seminal e de longo alcance. Em tempos mais recuados, a sigilografia eclesiástica foi largamente negligenciada, tendo conhecido poucos desenvolvimentos até há poucas décadas. Os primeiros estudos analíticos estão a surgir agora, procurando interpretar os materiais sigilográficos num contexto histórico mais alargado. Os investigadores estão também a virar a sua atenção para os materiais da Época Moderna, que dão lugar a dificuldades terminológicas e metodológicas específicas. Este estudo oferece um breve esboço do desenvolvimento da sigilografia na República Checa, em particular da sigilografia eclesiástica. São descritos os objetivos da investigação e as questões colocadas neste campo concreto, e esboçam-se as soluções propostas.

Palavras-chave:

Sigilografia; Sigilografia eclesiástica; Sigilografia Moderna; Ciências históricas; Boémia.

Auxiliary historical sciences in the Czech Republic

The auxiliary historical sciences in the Czech Republic are independent fields of study¹ that are cultivated directly at several universities in the country². Students can graduate at all three levels of education in the field. This has traditionally been the case since the end of the 18th century, when teaching of the auxiliary historical sciences began at Charles University in Prague³. The usual model in most European countries, where a specific space is reserved for the discipline within the broader framework of historical study, has not been adopted here and is unlikely to be. The discipline nowadays faces to the lack of interest of potential students. For students are problematic especially languages, in the Czech environment it means German and Latin. For all that agree experts (archivists, most of historians) with the necessity of the independent discipline.

Position of sigillography

Despite being firmly established within the Czech research environment, sigillography has not received appropriate and systematic attention, and nor has

¹ Or, according to new accreditation rules in force from 2017, a separate study *programme*.

² These are Charles University in Prague, Masaryk University in Brno, University of Hradec Králové and the University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice.

³ Cf. Marie Bláhová, Mlada Holá, Klára Woitschová (eds.), *Pomocné vědy historické v současné historiografii a archivnictví* [Auxiliary Sciences of History in the Contemporary Historiography and Archive Studies], Praha, Karolinum, 2017. The Conference dealing with developing and teaching of the Auxiliary Sciences of History was held at the Charles University in Prag in November 2014 on the occasion of the 230th anniversary of the constitution of the first academic lectures of Auxiliary Sciences of History at the University. The Conference was aimed at meeting researchers and experts from all over the Czech Republic. It performed the latest results of the research in the field of Auxiliary Sciences of History and aimed at the education and centres of the education as well. Two papers paid attention to the sigillography: Martina Bolom-Kotari, *Sfragistika a její význam v současné výuce pomocných věd historických a archivní praxi* [Sigillography and Its Importance in the Contemporary Auxiliary Historical Classes and Archival Practice], p. 138-148 + resumé p. 334; Tomáš Krejčík, *Možnosti interpretace středověkých pečeti* [Ways How to Interpret Medieval Seals], p. 149-159 + resumé p. 335. Another Conference which took place at the Faculty of Arts, University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice in 2012 was also dedicated to the topic how to teach of Archival Science and Auxiliary Historical Sciences. Its papers were published in *Archivní Časopis*, 64 (2014), Supplementum. Martina Bolom-Kotari and Jana Vojtíšková from the Philosophical Faculty, University of Hradec Králové recently discussed the topic too. Martina Bolom-Kotari, Jana Vojtíšková, "Der gegenwärtige Unterricht der Historischen Hilfswissenschaften und der Archivkunde in Tschechien am Beispiel der Universität Hradec Králové. Stand und Perspektiven" [Contemporary Teaching of Auxiliary Sciences of History and Archive Studies in Bohemia – University of Hradec Králové. Present Problems and Outlooks], *Archiwista Polski*, 84 (2016), p. 57-70.

the discipline been mapped out in a fundamental way. Sigillographical research is currently thematically fragmented, reflecting the professional interest of individual authors and has a markedly descriptive focus.

The first major upswell of interest in Bohemia's rich sigillographical heritage coincided with the period of interwar upheaval. Czechoslovakia, as the successor state to the former Habsburg Monarchy, was obliged, within a short space of time, to establish its own institutions and define its areas of interest in academic fields. In 1919, the second year of its existence, the country founded its second university, today's Masaryk University in Brno. The same period saw the establishment of the enormously important State Archival School (*Státní archivní škola*), an institution whose main role was to train future archivists, inspired by the *Institut für österreichische Geschichtsforschung* in Austria and the *École des Chartes* in France. At the same time, university professor and Prague archivist Václav Vojtíšek laid the foundations for Czech sigillography, devoting attention mainly to urban sigillography⁴. The younger researcher and archivist František Beneš then came up with the revolutionary idea of producing a Catalogue of Czech seals, which would bring the wealth of sigillographical materials hidden away in Czech archives to the attention of experts and the wider public. Due to the huge quantity of material he had to work on, and the technological limitations of the time, the project never progressed further than the publication of a few slim notebooks⁵. Nor could the project be implemented in later years. František Beneš was also a pioneer in other ways, as it was he who first brought attention to the importance of seals as a historical source and the possibility of understanding and interpreting seals⁶. He was active in the field for many years and contributed a series of minor studies (some of which address questions of ecclesiastical sigillography), which have become foundation texts

⁴ Václav Vojtíšek, "O pečetech a erbech měst pražských a jiných českých" [On the Seals and Coats of Arms of Prague and other Czech Towns], *Zprávy památkového sboru hlavního města Prahy*, 8 (1928), p. 1-255.

⁵ František Beneš, "Na okraj atlasu pečetí české šlechty, duchovenstva a měšťanů" [Towards a Compendium of Seals of the Bohemian Aristocracy, Clergy and Burgers], *Časopis Rodopisné společnosti československé*, 9-10 (1937-1938), p. 55-62 and "Atlas českých pečetí, jeho význam v českém bádání o pečetích i pro poznání minulosti vůbec a jeho rozvržení" [The Catalogue of Czech Seals, its Importance for Czech Research into Seals and for Understanding the Past Generally], *Sborník Jednoty starých českých rodů*, 9 (1946), p. 4-25. It must be stressed here that František Beneš might have drawn inspiration from French or English scholars since the idea of producing a catalogue of seals was not a new one. Comp. e.g. M. Douët D'Arcq, *Collection de sceaux*, Paris, Plon, 1863; Walter de Gray Birch, *Catalogue of Seals in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, 6 vols., London, British Museum, 1887.

⁶ František Beneš, *Význam pečeti pro bádání o minulosti* [The Importance of Seals in Historical Research], Praha, Česká grafická Unie, 1945.

for Czech sigillography, while sadly not comprising a coherent whole. The third major figure in Czech sigillography was Jiří Čarek, who began by focusing on aristocratic and guild seals⁷, but went on to initiate and foster a further attempt to create a compendium of Bohemia's sigillographical heritage⁸.

In the second half of the 20th century, all historical disciplines were subjected to ideological arm-twisting. They were supposed to justify their existence through service to the contemporary needs of society, which meant unequivocal support for the erstwhile official interpretation of Czechoslovak⁹ history and its meaning. In view of the prevailing Communist ideology, which worshipped the “working class”, and viewed with contempt and animosity other social elements, such as the traditional elites and churches, academics obviously avoided unpopular topics. In sigillography, there was a requirement to study communal and guild seals, and also, in relation to historical anniversaries, to research aristocratic seals of the Luxembourg family¹⁰. Exceptionally, some studies were carried out on the seals of the Prague and Olomouc bishops¹¹.

For a very long time, no comprehensive monograph was available. Only in the late 1980s did the husband and wife team of Jarmila and Tomáš Krejčík publish a work entitled *Úvod do české sfragistiky*¹². This was a revolutionary moment for Bohemian sigillography. Both authors were familiar with the seminal work in German, Ewald's *Siegelkunde*¹³ or Kittel's *Siegel*¹⁴, and in Polish, Gumowski's *Sfragistyku* or *Handbuch der polnischen Siegelkunde*¹⁵, as

⁷ Jiří Čarek, “O pečetích českých knížat a králů z rodu Přemyslova” [On the Seals of Bohemian Princes and Kings from the Přemysl Line], *Sborník příspěvků k dějinám hlavního města Prahy*, 8 (1938), p. 1-56.

⁸ Jiří Čarek, “Poznámky k soupisu typářů” [Notes for an Inventory of Seal Matrices], *Archivní časopis*, 23 (1973), p. 4-16.

⁹ At that time, it was still Czechoslovak history. The breakup of the former Czechoslovakia and the creation of an independent Czech Republic and Slovak Republic did not happen until 1 January 1993.

¹⁰ Pavel Brodský, “Pečeti Jana Lucemburského” [The Seals of John of Luxembourg], *Časopis Národního muzea – řada historická*, 150 (1981), p. 117-137.

¹¹ Rostislav Nový, “Pečeti pražských a olomouckých biskupů. Studie ze sfragistiky přemyslovského období” [Seals of the Prague and Olomouc Bishops. A Study in the Sigillography of the Premyslid Period], *Sborník archivních prací*, 10 (1960), p. 181-214.

¹² Jarmila Krejčíková, Tomáš Krejčík, *Úvod do české sfragistiky* [Introduction to Czech Sigillography], Ostrava, Klub genealogů a heraldiků Ostrava při DK ROH Vítkovice, 1989.

¹³ Wilhelm Ewald, *Siegelkunde* [Sigillography], München, Berlin, R. Oldenbourg, 1914.

¹⁴ Erich Kittel, *Siegel* [Seal], Braunschweig, Klinkhardt und Biermann, 1970.

¹⁵ Marian Gumowski, Marian Haisig, Sylwiusz Mikucki, *Sfragistyka* [Sigillography], Warszawa, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1960; Marian Gumowski, *Handbuch der polnischen Siegelkunde* [Companion to Polish Sigillography], Graz, Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1966.

well as other works from European researchers. By these means, researchers of following generations were able to obtain at least a basic overview of developments in the discipline, the issues addressed, standard approaches and current knowledge.

In the period of liberalisation in Czech society following the fall of the communist regime, interest in sigillography grew significantly. The idea of producing a database of all the seals¹⁶ stored in Czech archives resurfaced. Implementation would be helped by the rapid development of new technologies that made it possible to process large volumes of data. The task was arranged and sponsored by the Archival Administration Department of the Interior Ministry, the managing body for archiving in the Czech Republic. The project's authors wished to avoid the mistakes made by František Beneš, and decided to proceed systematically, dividing the work between the staff at various Czech archives. They started from the methodology proposed by Jiří Čarek¹⁷. A discussion on auxiliary sciences of history, as well as archive studies at the Congress of Czech Historians of 1993 was an impulse to start producing the database¹⁸. Work began on the creation of the database in the late 1990s¹⁹. It was published on the Internet, accessible to all interested persons²⁰. The website and database remained in operation up to 2016, when it was taken down. This attempt also

¹⁶ These are actually seals affixed to parchment documents, particularly in the case of old medieval documents in the period up to 1526.

¹⁷ At the beginning of the seventies of the 20th century discussed Jiří Čarek in his paper published in *Archivní časopis* how to describe seal matrices which had been deposited in Archives in the Czechoslovak Republic. He suggested terminology for the different elements of the seal design, seal legend. He further offered to the archivists' information about the typology of seal matrices. Cf. Čarek, *Poznámky k soupisu...*, cit., p. 4-16.

¹⁸ Comp. to e.g. Paul Harvey, Dean Adshead, "Computer Catalogue of Seals in the Public Record Office", *Janus*, 2 (1996), p. 29-36.

¹⁹ Vladimír Růžek, "Soupis pečeti, pečetidel a sbírkových odlitků v archivech České republiky. I. část: Východiska, důvody a cíle" [Inventory of Seals, Sealing Materials and Seal Imprints in the Archives of the Czech Republic. Part I: Points of Departure, Reasons and Aims], *Archivní časopis*, 47 (1997), p. 143-158 and "Part II: Počítačový program" [Computer Program], *Archivní časopis*, 47 (1997), p. 213-233. Idem, "Zhodnocení průběhu celostátní akce soupisu (katalogizace) pečeti, pečetidel a pečetních otisků v archivech České republiky" [An Assessment of Progress in the National Effort to Registering (Cataloguing) the Seals, Sealing materials and Seal Imprints in the Archives of the Czech Republic], *Sborník archivních prací*, 50 (2000), p. 515-524. The author said (p. 516) that it had been impossible to draw upon any first-hand experience of European practice. Josef Hora, computer programmer of the Archive Administration of Ministry of the Interior, developed new computer software entitled *Pečetě – Program pro evidence a řešerše ze sfragistického materiálu* [Seals – a Software for Evidence and Research on Sigillography].

²⁰ For the brief information in English cf. Helena Sedláčková, "Cataloguing Seals, Seal Matrices and Casts by Computer: a Nation-wide Electronic Catalogue of Seals, Seal Matrices and Casts Used in Archives of the Czech Republic", *Comma*, 2 (2004), p. 1-3.

founded. The reasons were multifarious. Whilst the engagement of many specialists made it possible to process large amounts of data, it also led to a great deal of terminological divergence. Although framework rules were in place, they failed to cover the details and every researcher was forced to create his own terminology²¹. Similar types of seal stored in different archives were often described very differently by different authors. The informational value of the records was not ever great. They served rather to provide some initial guidance to the available materials. No staff was assigned to go through the records, unify their form and correct errors. The database did not include photographs, as the technical arrangements did not allow this. The limitations of a database incapable of storing photographs of study quality became very clear²².

The increasing interest of researchers and the freedom to research resulted in an upsurge in publications. Tomáš Krejčík, the current Professor of Sigillography at universities in Brno and Ostrava, produced a breakthrough publication in the late 1990s entitled *Pečeť v kultuře středověku*²³. It was based on a careful study

²¹ Vladimír Růžek claimed that the software for the seal description was designed so maximalist that it was able to show facts about a seal in a wider context. The seal could be described in not more than 54 different aspects, a scholar was allowed to fill in not more than 29 items. Růžek, *Zhodnocení soupisu...*, cit., p. 517. A scholar could describe, for example, these facts: facts about an archive, dating, owner (physical or legal entity), a kind of legal entity, whereabouts, date of issue of the document, facts about a role of seal user during the issue of the document, authenticity of the document, corroboration, seal legend, typology of seal design, description of seal design. The last three items were particularly a sticking point. It depended entirely on an archivist whether and how they indentified the seal motif, and whether, and at what level, they were able to interpret the legend. As a result of that, the seal made by the impression of the same seal matrix was interpreted in many different ways by archivists working in various archives.

²² Archivists in Slovakia are about to produce a similar on-line database too. The compendium will be supervised by members of the Heraldic Board of the Archive Administration of Ministry of the Interior of the Slovak Republic [*Heraldická komisia Archivnej správy Ministerstva vnútra Slovenskej Republiky*], however, in reality, individual archivists will make a recording of items during archival groups processing. According to the latest version of Archives Law of the Slovak Republic it is incumbent upon all archives to keep a record of seals. Cf. *Zákon o archívoch a registratúrach a o doplnení niektorých zákonov* [Law on Archives and Register Offices, Supplemented by Other Various Laws], No. 395/2002 as currently amended No. 18/2018. According to § 24, sect. 3, letter a) the Ministry of the Interior is responsible for the evidence of seals and seal matrices. § 24b, sect. 2 defines the structure of the evidence, in particular which facts should be recorded. Despite being the legal definition very general, it is of use because it says that each record must incorporate a close-up photograph of the seal. Compared to the Czech compendium, is possibility of attaching the photographs a great advantage and the “key moment” of the whole database. Personally, with the experience from the Czech Republic I look sceptically at such an on-line database. Providing the close-up photographs of the seals are available, the database will be of use, despite the (risk of) poor quality of all the metadata.

²³ Tomáš Krejčík, *Pečeť v kultuře středověku* [Seals in Medieval Culture], Ostrava, Ostravská univerzita v Ostravě, Filozofická fakulta v nakl. Tilia v Šenově u Ostravy, 1998.

of western literature. Seals were shown to be more than just items in a catalogue, as the work focused on the life of a seal and its significance for different social classes. He showed the Czech professional public that sigillography was not just a descriptive discipline but a science, the essence of which was to interpret facts in a broad historical context. Publication of the work drew an exceptional response and inspired researchers in many Central and East European countries. Karel Maráz²⁴, one of the new generation of sigillography specialists, began work on a new textbook for future researchers and archivists. He as focused on the seals of Bohemian sovereigns from the Luxembourg line and aristocratic seals. Finally, the most recent development that we can celebrate in the Czech Republic is the “Central European” version of the international dictionary of sigillography²⁵, which researchers first got to see in 2016²⁶. For Czech users it does have its pitfalls. The fact that it is a translation of the original dictionary means that it brings to the Czech language designations for things and processes that never really existed in Czech in relation to our seals. On the contrary, names and their equivalents for specifically Bohemian issues are lacking, as they were not included in the original dictionary. Nonetheless, our researchers (and also those in Slovakia and Hungary) finally have to hand a resource that will help them share their results internationally in an intelligible manner.

How to make seals stored in archives available for public in the form of a catalogue or on-line database is still a topical issue. Whereas thousands of historical documents were published in the database entitled *Monasterium*²⁷, seals still wait for a similar database. The *Moravský zemský archiv v Brně* [Moravian Provincial Archives in Brno] which made available documents from one of its archival groups *A1 – Stavovské listiny* [A1 – Charters of the Estates] is a pioneering institute within the Czech Republic. The most important and unique part of this endeavour, above all for scholars, is the fact that seals, not only documents, can be displayed in high resolution²⁸. Experts from the

²⁴ Karel Maráz, *Sfragistika. Studijní texty pro posluchače pomocných věd historických a archivnictví* [Sigillography. Study Texts for Students of Auxiliary Historical Sciences and Archive Studies], Brno, Masarykova univerzita, 2014.

²⁵ Stefania Rici Noe (ed.), *Vocabulaire international de la sigillographie* [International Dictionary of Sigillography], Roma, Ministero per i beni culturali e ambientali, 1990.

²⁶ Karel Müller, Ladislav Vrteľ (eds.), *Vocabularium internationale sigillographicum* [International Dictionary of Sigillography], Bratislava, Veda, 2016.

²⁷ See <http://www.monasterium.net> (accessed at 2018.07.01).

²⁸ See <http://www.mza.cz/a8web/A8SL4/?qsc=01M9u64rTFnwG2ZL8N2xszdj-TuVjgGutZDNmTG3dtOs%3D> (accessed at 2018.07.01). There are also cases where seals include the metadata based on the research, which was conducted in pursuance of above-mentioned sealsdatabase.

National Archives in the Czech Republic, as well as those from the network entitled ICARUS have worked on making available one of the most precious charter collections in the Czech Republic, and presumably in Europe, *Archiv České koruny* [Archives of the Czech Crown]. Its digitalisation has run since 2015 and the results are keenly awaited by not only Czech scholars²⁹. How to process and make available the sigillographic material is much discussed question now. Whereas scholars in Sigillography need to have free access to their subject of research, archivists are responsible for preserving historical sources for the future generations. True is that a direct analyse of a seal can be substituted by a close-up photography only. For that reason, the use of modern technology is an object of archivists' attention; experts put emphasis chiefly on an affordable, effective and quick solution. Although high precision 3D scanning solution, perfect for capturing small objects with intricate details, exists in the Czech Republic, it is not (and it will not be such for a long time) as spread as it should be there. More likely, the RTI (Reflectance Transformation Imaging) method will win out there³⁰.

Czech studies of ecclesiastical seals today

It is clear from the foregoing that, in the past, the ecclesiastical sigillography failed to make much progress. Publications were mainly small-scale studies running to just a few pages in length which lacked reasoning or deepening insights. Over the past thirty years, the situation has changed, and interest has grown among researchers. Attention is again drawn to the seals of the bishops of Olomouc, the foremost experts on this topic being Professor Tomáš Krejčík and the archivist and historian Jan Štěpán³¹. Tomáš Krejčík in his last contribution to

²⁹ Jitka Křečková, Kateřina Zenklová, "Zpřístupňování pečeti Archivu České koruny – digitalizace a zpracování databáze" [Seals of the Archives of the Czech Crown Processing – Digitalisation and Development of Their Database], *Paginae Historiae*, 25/1 (2017), p. 128-131. On the progress of the digitalisation, see Daniel Jeller, "Past and Future. Seals of the Archive of the Bohemian Crown and Their Representation in Monasterium.net", *Paginae Historiae*, 25/1 (2017), p. 132-136.

³⁰ Franz Fischer, Stephan Makowski, "Digitalisierung von Siegeln Mittels Reflectance Transformation Imaging (RTI)" [Digitalisation of Seals through RTI], *Paginae Historiae*, 25/1 (2017), p. 137-141; Graeme Earl and Co., "Reflectance Transformation Imaging Systems for Ancient Documentary Artefacts", in *Electronic Visualisation and the Arts*, London, BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, 2012, p. 147-154. Comp. also John Alexander McEwan, "The challenge of the visual: making medieval seals accessible in the digital age", *Journal of Documentation*, 71/5 (2015), p. 999-1028.

³¹ For example, Jan Štěpán, "Typologie pečeti olomouckého biskupa Stanislava Pavlovského z Pavlovic" [Typology of the Seals of the Olomouc Bishop Stanislav Pavlovský z Pavlovic],

the problematics of the bishops' seals paid attention to their seals in second half of 14th century and first half of the 15th century and described them in detail³². He discussed the iconography, development and change in the motif, but the analysis within wider context is missing. T. Krejčík is the undisputed leader in the field, and his thematic reach is wide, covering many other questions within the framework of ecclesiastical sigillography³³. The seals of the bishops of Litomyšl have also been researched by the director of the local State district archives, Oldřich Pakosta³⁴. O. Pakosta described them in detail and compared them to the seals of Prague archbishops and bishops of Wrocław and bishops of Olomouc³⁵. Likewise Tomáš Krejčík paid O. Pakosta attention to the seals of archbishops and bishops in the 14th and first half of the 15th century. He focused on the association of the seals and contemporary fine art and architecture³⁶.

The more popular research topics in sigillography include the seals of various religious orders and their leading members. Tomáš Krejčík has also worked in this area³⁷. The seals of the Premonstratensians in Chotěšov have

Archivní časopis, 60 (2010), p. 5-27; Tomáš Krejčík, Jarmila Krejčíková, "Typologie pečeti olomouckých biskupů a arcibiskupů 12. – 19. století" [Typology of the seals of the Olomouc bishops and archbishops of the 12th–19th century], in *Sborník příspěvků III. setkání genealogů a heraldiků*, Ostrava, Klub genealogů a heraldiků Ostrava, 1986, p. 85-89; Tomáš Krejčík, "Vztahy mezi mincemi a pečeti olomouckých biskupů v druhé polovině 17. století" [Relationships between the Coins and the Seals of the Olomouc Bishops in the Second Half of the 17th Century], *Historická Olomouc a její současné problémy*, 5 (1985), p. 323-327.

³² Tomáš Krejčík, Richard Psík, "Pečeti olomouckých biskupů v období 1351–1457" [Seals of the Olomouc Bishops in the Period 1351–1457], *Historica: Revue pro historii a příbuzné vědy*, 4 (2013), p. 65-81.

³³ Tomáš Krejčík, "Ikonografie církevních pečeti v českém státě ve 13.–15. století" [Iconography of Ecclesiastical Seals in the Czech State in the 13th–15th Century], in *Sacri canones servandi sunt. Ius canonicum et status ecclesiae saeculis XIII.–XV.*, Praha, Historický ústav AV ČR, 2008, p. 525-530, "Poznámky ke středověkým církevním pečetím" [Notes on Medieval Ecclesiastical Seals], *Universitatis Ostraviensis Acta Facultatis Philosophicae – Historica*, 5 (1997), p. 5-23.

³⁴ Oldřich Pakosta, *Pečeti litomyšlských biskupů* [Seals of the Litomyšl Bishops], Litomyšl, Státní oblastní archiv v Zámruku - Státní okresní archiv Svitavy, 2003.

³⁵ Oldřich Pakosta, "Typologické srovnání pečeti arcibiskupů pražských, biskupů olomouckých, litomyšlských a vratislavských z let 1344-1421, s důrazem na ikonografii" [The Typological Comparison of seals of Prague Archbishops and Bishops of Olomouc, Litomyšl and Wrocław from 1344 to 1421 with the Accent on the Iconography], *Východočeský sborník historický*, 6 (1997), p. 139-164.

³⁶ Oldřich Pakosta, "Arcibiskupská a biskupská pečeť lucemburského období v českých zemích z uměleckohistorického hlediska" [Seals of Archbishops and Bishops in Czech Land in the Luxembourg Era from the Fine Arts Point of View], *Vlastivědný sborník Ústí nad Orlicí*, 9 (1998), p. 82-94.

³⁷ Tomáš Krejčík, *Siegel im klösterlichen Leben des Mittelalters* [Seal in the Monastery Life in the Middle Ages], In *La Vie Quotidienne Des Moines et Chanoines Régulier Au Moyen Age*

been investigated by Jitka Křečková and Petra Oulíková Nevímová³⁸. Petra Oulíková Nevímová has also mapped out the seals of the Czech Benedictines³⁹. The Cistercians and their estates have been the focus of Milan Hlinomaz⁴⁰. The author of this article, Martina Bolom-Kotari, has long devoted herself in particular to the seals of the Premonstratensians in Moravia⁴¹, but also the seals of other orders – Carthusian, Dominican and Augustinian. In contrast to most authors, she studies the seals of the late medieval and modern periods⁴². The community of academics studying ecclesiastical sigillography in the Czech Republic today includes about ten members, who publish their findings on an occasional basis. Most of them are employees of an archive, who may have had an unfeigned interest in the subject, but the core of their work duties lies elsewhere. University lecturers have a wider field of operation, better opportunities to learn about the latest foreign works and the ability to take part in international forums and compare their findings against those of colleagues. Their task is therefore to plan research in this area, pose questions and offer answers reflecting the current state of knowledge.

Most texts have a very similar structure. They begin by presenting a summary of individual preserved seals with the most accurate descriptions

et Temps Modernes, Wrocław, Institut d'Histoire de l'Université de Wrocław, 1995, p. 523-532.

³⁸ Jitka Křečková, Petra Oulíková Nevímová, "Pečetí proboštů a konventu premonstrátek v Chotěšově" [Seals of the Provosts and Nunnery of the Premonstratensians in Chotěšov], *Minulostí Západočeského kraje*, 38 (2003), p. 113-153.

³⁹ Petra Oulíková, "Konventní pečetí svatojiřského a břevnovského kláštera v Praze" [Convent Seals of the Saint George and Břevnov Monastery in Prague], *Paginae Historiae*, 24 (2016), p. 219-232.

⁴⁰ Milan Hlinomaz, "Nástin problematiky heraldizace pečetí vyšebrodských opatů do roku 1800" [Outline of the Gradual Introduction of Heraldic Motifs into the Seals of the Abbots in Vyšší Brod up to 1800], *Heraldická ročenka*, 2017, p. 99-110.

⁴¹ Moravia formed a traditional part of the Czech state along with Bohemia and Silesia, forming a separate territory or "land" ruled either by a margrave closely related to the Czech duke/king, or by the sovereign himself. The main cities of Moravia were Brno and Olomouc. Olomouc had been the seat of a bishop since the second half of the 11th century, and in the 18th century its bishopric was elevated to an archbishopric. At the same time, a bishopric was established in Brno.

⁴² Martina Bolom-Kotari, *Pečetí hradiských premonstrátů v pozdním středověku a raném novověku* [Seals of the Hradisko Premonstratensians in the Late Medieval and Early Modern Period], Červený Kostelec, Pavel Mervart, 2015; "Seals of Moravian Premonstratensian Canonries in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries", *Analecta Praemonstratensia*, 92 (2016), p. 65-101; "Seals of Moravian Premonstratensian Canonries from the Second Half of the Fifteenth Century till the End of the Sixteenth Century", *Analecta Praemonstratensia* 90: 1-4 (2014), p. 29-65; Martina Kotlíková [Bolom-Kotari], "Carthusian Seals in the Early Modern Period (15th-18th Century): Carthusians in Brno", in *Central European Charterhouses in the Family of the Carthusian Order (Analecta Cartusiana)*, Levoča-Salzburg, Kláštorisko / Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik Universität Salzburg, 2008, p. 197-210.

possible. The development of the seals is then summarised. The remaining section comprises an analysis of the individual features of the seal, and in a few cases, they are compared with the seals of other comparable owners. More profound structural and contextual analysis, however, is usually not included. Bohemian sigillography is only with difficulty ridding itself of its reputation as an “auxiliary historical discipline”. The fact that it has its own methods, its own terminology and it can define its own goals and pose relevant questions that directly require an interdisciplinary approach is still not taken for granted in the Czech Republic. Another problem is the tendency to stick in particular to medieval materials, although there has been some movement away from this in recent years⁴³. Researchers are discovering that seals have their own value even after 1526⁴⁴. Admittedly, medieval seals are generally more attractive from an iconographic and aesthetic perspective, but society still used seals, of course, in other periods. In this respect, the Czech archives represent both an opportunity and an obstacle. The Czech archiving system is well organised and well arranged. The materials are very well looked after. A huge number of seals are conserved, both medieval and modern, including modern ones that must be looked up in the files. Thanks to the high standard of archival care they are also in good condition. The archives usually allow research to be pursued without unnecessary obstacles. Researchers may take their own digital photographs, requiring permission from the archive only for publication. For researchers, this approach is vital. Comparative documentation is available on request. This factor contributed to the growing interest shown in the discipline by the next generation of researchers. On the contrary, sigillographic material is very fragile. It does not benefit from repeated transport from depository to the researchers in study room. Each manipulation with the document and attached seal can perform a risk of damage. The natural light is risky too. Therefore, archivists try to reduce handling of most valuable (mostly medieval) documents and researchers need a special permission to be able to study those documents.

Current research and open questions

⁴³ For example, Marie Ryantová, “Pečeti nižšího duchovenstva v první třetině 18. století” [Seals of the Lower Ranking Clergy in the First Third of the 18th Century], *Genealogické a heraldické informace*, 19 (2014), p. 2441.

⁴⁴ The year 1526 marked a major turning point in Czech history. Following the battle of Mohács, the Jagellonian dynasty was replaced on the Bohemia throne by the Habsburgs. Insofar as Czech history can be divided into periods, this date is favoured by historians as a boundary marker.

The author of this text, Martina Bolom-Kotari, within the framework of her PhD. thesis, investigated the seals of superiors and convents of the Premonstratensian monasteries in Moravia from the 1430s up to the end of the 18th century⁴⁵. The aim was to produce the most comprehensive possible compendium of sigillographical materials from the Moravian Premonstratensians stored in Bohemian archives (and individually in foreign archives), and to provide a detailed description of the development of these seals and the internal and external changes in the features of the seals. The seals were analysed in detail in terms of the documents to which they were appended to. The author also examined the ways in which seals outlined and mapped the micro-histories of their owners. In total, she studied several thousand documents and brought together more than three hundred types of seals⁴⁶. No-one had hitherto attempted such a study in the Czech Republic, and certainly not one focusing mainly on modern materials. In the Slovakia maintains a similar methodological position Miroslav Glejtek, who nevertheless examines primarily medieval sources⁴⁷.

The findings presented by the author provoked many responses – both critical and supportive. They led to new ideas and provoked new questions. First and foremost, it was shown that existing terminology of sigillography was deficient.

⁴⁵ Turning points were made by the Czech History. In the 1430s the Hussite wars were gradually drawing to a close, after bringing much destruction to the country's monasteries. The end of the 18th century saw many monasteries closed by the Habsburg Emperor Joseph II, under the influence of Enlightenment ideals. See Martina Bolom-Kotari, *Pečetí moravských premonstrátů v letech 1436–1784. Sfragistika představených a konventů v kontextu jejich diplomatického materiálu* [Seals of the Moravian Premonstratensians in 1436–1784. The Seals of Superiors and Convents in the Context of Diplomatic Materials], PhD. thesis, Brno, 2013. Only part of this work has so far been published, in the form of a monograph, concentrating on the seals of the abbots and convent of the Premonstratensian canonry in Hradisko, close to Olomouc. Martina Bolom-Kotari, *Pečetí hradiských premonstrátů...*, cit..

⁴⁶ Two brief summaries have been published in English, while another section of the work has been published in the form of a German study, as has the final part, which is still in print. For English papers cf. notes above. German papers: Martina Bolom-Kotari, "Die Siegel der mährischen Prämonstratenser als Quelle zur Geschichte der Zirkarie" [Seals of Moravian Premonstratensians as a Source to the Circary History], in *Ordenshistoriographie in Mitteleuropa. Gestaltung und Wandlung des institutionalen und persönlichen Gedächtnisses in der frühen Neuzeit*, Praha; St. Pölten, Historický ústav AV ČR / Diözesanarchiv, 2015, p. 332-360.

⁴⁷ Miroslav Glejtek, *Středověká církevní pečat'. Pramen křesťanské ikonografie* [A Mediaeval Ecclesiastical Seal – A Source of Christian Iconography], Hradec Králové, Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Hradec Králové, 2013. In addition, Miroslav Glejtek describes the use and function of a seal within the former Kingdom of Hungary. The comparison of the Bohemian and the Hungarian state shows that both states underwent very different development from a sigillographical point of view. However a Czech scholar can be thanks to proximity of Czech and Slovak languages inspired by Glejtek's works with ample iconography, his original way of thinking, and his attitudes to a social context of the use of seals, his research results cannot unfortunately be used in the case of Czech sigillography.

In connection with the new concept of a seal (defined by its motifs, its handle, the articulation of the image on the seal and text of the seal) and in connection with the changing function and significance of seals in society, there was a lack or at least lack of a unified terminology for the elements in a seal design and legend, and for features hitherto unknown in sigillography.

The most significant terminological “quandary” appeared in the attempt at a systematic classification of modern sigillographical materials. The use of different seals of the same significance by most individual owners of seals can be seen from the second half of the 16th century. The assumption no longer holds that only non-functional (lost, destroyed) seals were replaced with other seals. On the other hand, a number of seals of very similar composition with the same value for the owner can be seen, which were used at the same time. In the case of some abbots in the 17th century, we can also discern the use of several dozen seal matrices. In order to make sense of such a quantity of seals and understand their significance and function for a specific owner, a proposal was made to narrow down the meaning of the term *type* in relation to seals. The author takes the “type” of a seal to mean all of the impressions created with the use of that one seal matrix. In the interests of drawing more precise distinctions, a proposal was made to introduce the term “*kind*” of seal. One kind of seal then encompasses all the seals that have the same significance and function for one and the same owner. An enumeration of the kinds is currently limited to the traditional⁴⁸ division into large seals (*sigillum maius*), small seals (*sigillum minus*), secret seals (*sigillum secretum*), signets and eventually *contrasigillum*. Miroslav Glejtek used the same classification of the available sigillographic material⁴⁹.

In the modern period, of course, the traditional methods of classification are rather misleading. Individual kinds of seal often resemble each other very much in their method of execution, so that precise designation is impossible. Additionally, the seals must be assessed in the context of the user’s everyday habits. For example, a seal used by one owner as a secret seal, we would regard in the case of another user as a small seal. The targeted use of entire *seal sets* has also been established. One owner would have a set of seal matrices produced

⁴⁸ Valid for medieval sources.

⁴⁹ Miroslav Glejtek, *Středověká církevní pečeť...*, cit., p. 43–49. See also Isabelle Guerreau, *Klerikersiegel der Diözesen Halberstadt, Hildesheim, Paderborn und Verden im Mittelalter (um 1000–1500)* [Seals of Clerics in the Dioceses of Halberstadt, Hildesheim, Paderborn and Verden in the Middle Ages, ca 1000–1500], Hannover, Verlag Hahnsche, 2013, p. 185–189.

in one year, which formed parts of a single scheme⁵⁰. These seals differed in detail – in size, sometimes in shape, in the sophistication of the seal image and in the seal text.

A transformation in the perception of seals, their significance and method of use is very closely connected with levels of education in life⁵¹. As the number of people capable of reading and understanding written text, and also of writing, increases, a logical consequence is an increase in numbers of documents. The sharp growth in writing was also aided by increasing availability of paper as a cheap writing material, and the discovery of printing. Human relationships, the most important aspects of which formerly culminated in the issuing of documents, now began to play out in documentary form from the beginning. What was the effect of this on seals?

Seals were formerly a high-level means of communication, mainly used by elites, while being intelligible to the general mass of the population. They were also a form of self-presentation. Gradually, they became devices tying together entire bureaucratic processes, devices that were traditionally affixed to documents, but the emphasis on their real and symbolic value declined noticeably.

In the case of the Moravian Premonstratensians, seals became devices of the highest importance for the purposes of identification and confirmation in the mid-15th century, unique items with a unique designation and great symbolic value. Items strictly protected by the applicable written and unwritten laws, firmly anchored in the society of the time, but not meant for everyone. The position of seals and the status of their keepers were reflected in the chosen seal motif and its execution, together with the corresponding text. A seal made up of these elements belonged to a uniquely identified keeper, who would be the only person with proper authority to use it.

The significance of seals is illustrated by a precise and detailed corroboration formula. In the 16th century, a number of ambivalent processes were at work. On the one hand it was a time of stagnation when people stuck to what was familiar, but on the other it was a time of gradual adaptation to new trends. Most users already owned, along with their main seal, other seals with simplified motifs and text. Such seals tended to be used mainly in private matters or in

⁵⁰ Cf. Martina Bolom-Kotari, “Seals of Moravian Premonstratensian Canonries...”, cit., p. 74-76.

⁵¹ Cf. Martina Bolom-Kotari, “Pečeť jako obraz individua. Několik příkladů z prostředí představených moravských klášterů v raném novověku” [Seal as the Mirror of an Individual. Few Examples on Moravian Monasteries in the Early Modern Age], *Studia Historica Nitriensia*, 21/2 (2017), p. 298-301.

matters of only temporary relevance. For the first time, armorial seals were used by the Premonstratensians, although the large seals still retained the symbolic meaning and value. Corroboration, however, was not affected by the changes. The linguistically rich formula still contained the same expressions and the status of seals was not questioned in any way. A major change came at the beginning of the 17th century. The Premonstratensians introduced, for all *kinds of seals* heraldic motifs⁵². From this moment, an unmistakable gradual decline began in the importance of seals⁵³. The regression was accompanied by a well-documented gradual reduction in the size of seals, a process of unification in the seal designs on all *kinds* of seals, a reduction of the text on seals and the more frequent use of *lower kinds* of seal⁵⁴, even for important documents, without any loss of their legal validity. The role of verification increasingly came to be performed by signatures, which would also be set down in the corroboration. The wording of the corroboration gradually accorded equal significance to both methods of confirmation. Seals and signatures functioned as integral components of document confirmation. In the 18th century this trend continued to gather pace.

Specifically, a wealth of material shows that, in their written communications, the Premonstratensians made a clear distinguished between the people they communicated with in documentary form and a *kind* of seal. Abbots with convents used the written form mainly when dealing with the property-related affairs of their monasteries, and for documents concerning intra-monastery and intra-order affairs. In addition to this they were actively involved in the private legal formalities of the landed aristocracy in the role of necessary witnesses, dispute adjudicators and mediators. They issued deeds for their subjects and persons with whom their subjects entered into a legal relationship concerning

⁵² The introduction of motifs in the form of coats of arms should not be considered a general symptom of the initial decline of seals. An exception to this rule can, however, be made in relation to the Premonstratensians or other users of seals within the church. Men of the church were not soldiers who needed their coats of arms in order to be identifiable on the battlefield. With regard to their social role they had no need either for a visible sign declaring their membership of a particular powerful family. On the contrary, they would have been better served by motifs of a more spiritual nature, clearly identifying the keeper of the seal as the member of a religious order or institution, leaving coats of arms to aristocrats. The introduction of armorial seals was a logical and understandable step for members of the aristocracy, but for men of the church it reflected submission to a general pressure to conform, or rather “collude”, which both presaged and illustrated the declining role of seals.

⁵³ The decline in importance of seals became apparent in different ways with different users. The above applies only to the case of Moravian Premonstratensians.

⁵⁴ For the description of the term *kind* see above. To the *higher kinds* of seals we can count above all great/large seal of an individual owner and in the late Middle Ages and Early Modern Period also small seal. Under the term *lower seal* we can then understand secret seals and signets.

property. In these affairs, they often acted as trusted authorities. From the start of the 17th century in particular, it becomes clear that they distinguished between documents intended for public knowledge and possibly public discussion, and those intended for internal needs. They also drew a distinction between documents from important individuals, relating to their assets and status, and documents of less significance, drawn up for their subjects and urban neighbours. The documents they assessed as important from the perspective of personal or social interests were furnished in most cases with a *higher kind* of seal (large abbatial, large conventual or small seals). For other documents, they mainly used secret seals and signets, as they also did for closing their papers.

Heraldry and its permeation through sigillography when one analyses seals of ecclesiastical institutions and dignitaries is also a discussion topic within Czech (and Slovak) sigillography⁵⁵. Miroslav Glejtek is an expert at this topic who goes after interaction among seals and heraldry in the region of Central Europe since the Middle Ages. Coats of arms on seals of ecclesiastical dignitaries can be tracked back to the late 13th century. At first, they occurred in the case of members of the Knightly Orders⁵⁶; in the case of bishops of Olomouc from the second half of the 15th century on⁵⁷. Members of religious orders⁵⁸ started to use them not until 16th century. Nonetheless, it is necessary to analyse the relationship between crest on a seal and a coat of arms itself. Miroslav Glejtek therefore asks legitimately: “Were all of shields with crests depicted on seals the true coats of arms?”⁵⁹. Ecclesiastical dignitaries, as well as institutions

⁵⁵ Research on the relationship between heraldry and sigillography is old-established in western Europe. Cf. e.g. John Cherry, “Seals and Heraldry, 1400-1600: Public Policy and Private Post”, in *The Age of Transition. The Archaeology of English Culture 1400-1600*, Oxford, Oxbow Books, 1997, p. 251-263 or Marc Dykmans, “Les sceaux et les armoiries du cardinal Ferry de Clugny, évêque de Tournai”, *Revue Belge d’Archéologie et d’Histoire de l’Art Anvers*, 52 (1983), p. 23-42.

⁵⁶ Tomáš Krejčík, *Úvod do české sfragistiky...*, cit., p. 67. In the Hungarian Kingdom had occurred the crests on seals of the ecclesiastical dignitaries since the first half of the 14th Century. Cf. Miroslav Glejtek, “Niekoľko poznámok k vzťahu medzi cirkevnou heraldikou a sfragistikou s dôrazom na obdobie stredoveku” [A Few Comments on the Relationship among the Ecclesiastical Heraldry and Sigillography with the Accent on Middle Ages], *Genealogicko-heraldický hlas*, 27 (2017), p. 16. In the Roman Empire had occurred the heraldic elements on seals since the 13th Century. Cf. Isabelle Guerreau, *Klerikersegel...*, cit., p. 261.

⁵⁷ Tomáš Krejčík, *Pečeti olomouckých biskupů...*, cit., p. 66; Miroslav Glejtek, “Niekoľko poznámok k erbú a pečatiam olomouckého biskupa Stanislava Turza” [A Few Comments on the Coat of Arms and Seals of the Bishop of Olomouc Stanislav Turzo], *Studia historica Tyrnaviensia*, 9-10 (2010), p. 86. In the Hungarian Kingdom heraldic seals were already prevailing at that time. Cf. Miroslav Glejtek, *Niekoľko poznámok k vzťahu...*, cit., p. 17.

⁵⁸ Comp. Milan Hlinomaz, *Nástin problematiky...*, cit., p. 102-107, esp. 107.

⁵⁹ Miroslav Glejtek, *Niekoľko poznámok k vzťahu...*, cit., p. 23.

began also to introduce heraldic motifs into seals due to growing popularity of heraldic seals among other and other social classes. The heraldic motif was simply placed on a shield, i.e. instead of being the independent motif it became the piece of the crest⁶⁰. We talk about process of *heraldization*. Admittedly, it did not have to be used as a coat of arms of the person or institution in this form. There are scanty historical sources for that.

Other specifics, to the contrary, occurred throughout the Early Modern Period, e.g. the heraldic charter for a chapter, which depicts de facto the seal matrix instead of a common heraldic miniature⁶¹. Above-mentioned examples show the close relationship between heraldry and sigillography even in an ecclesiastical milieu, they show how important is the clear understanding to a self-expression and a self-presentation of a seal owner through both his coat of arms and his seal.

Some Czech researchers take the view that modern sigillography is of little interest and that modern seals are not worth examining in detail⁶². In the opinion of these observers, represented for example by Tomáš Krejčík, the role of seals was marginalised by the increasing use of signatures. Seals gradually lost their symbolic significance and never found a new purpose⁶³. While there is some truth in this, the overall assertion cannot be supported. The demythologised seals were actually more a matter of everyday needs, applied “unthinkingly” and more from habit than anything else. On the other hand, seals continued to provide a space for self-presentation which an “ordinary” signature could never provide⁶⁴.

⁶⁰ Cf. Martina Bolom-Kotari, *Pečeti hradiských premonstrátů...*, cit., p. 95-98 and Miroslav Glejtek, “Náčrt vývoja ikonografickej skladby pečatí nižších klerikov v Uhorsku” [An Outline of Development of an Iconographic Arrangement of Seals of Hungarian Minor Clerics], in *Čriepek z dejín Slovenska*, Nitra, Nitra Univerzita Konštantina Filozofa v Nitre, 2011, p. 49-64.

⁶¹ An example of the heraldic charter of Maria Theresa intended for the Chapter of Rožňava in Upper Hungary (present-day Slovakia) is again described by Miroslav Glejtek. Miroslav Glejtek, *Niekoľko poznámok k vzťahu...*, cit., p. 25.

⁶² Comp. Tomáš Krejčík, *Pečeť v kultúre stredoveku...*, cit., p. 310.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Seals were responsible for the creation of miniatures reflecting the spirit of Baroque pomp. The combination of many decorative elements – decorated cartouches, tiny angels’ heads or the emblems of established ecclesiastical orders, can look like an incomprehensible mixture of voices – a cacophony – or also as the materialisation of a Baroque fugue. The question is whether these were socially-sanctioned theatrical displays devoid of content, or a natural reflection of the way the world and reality were understood at the time. Researchers may, of course, feel disappointed at the sight of a seal displaying a perfect symphony of medieval symbols. The expectations of one age cannot always be communicated to another age.

The debate over this topic continues. Further comprehensive studies are required, which will confirm much but also clarify and amend much that has emerged from earlier findings. Czech researchers should not be afraid of collecting and describing seals, or of analysing, comparing and interpreting them. Inspiration is coming from the analytical and interpretive texts of researchers from France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy and Portugal. They are opening new horizons and gradually changing the terms of discourse. Ecclesiastical sigillography is attracting great interest – it would be a pity not to put this enthusiasm to good use.