



ST. MARY THE VIRGIN

Sovereign Military Order of the Temple of Jerusalem

Templar Seals

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INTRODUCTION



Templar Seals

A seal is a device for making an impression in wax, clay, paper, or some other medium, including an embossment on paper, and is also the impression thus made. The original purpose was to authenticate a document, a wrapper for one such as a modern envelope, or the cover of a container or package holding valuables or other objects. The seal-making device is also referred to as the seal *matrix* or *die*; the imprint it creates as the seal impression (or, more rarely, the *sealing*). If the impression is made purely as a relief resulting from the greater pressure on the paper where the high parts of the matrix touch, the seal is known as a *dry seal*; in other cases ink or another liquid or liquefied medium is used, in another color than the paper.

In the middle ages, seals worked as a way to authenticate documents. They were used to make a fixed engraving in trading and official exchanges. The seals were carved in blocks that are pressed into hot wax, leaving behind a reversed image. The modern equivalent of that would be negative photos. Seals prevent the forging and imitating of correspondences and documents. Individuals, authorities, and even orders such as the Templars had their own seals.

Seals were necessary to proceed with trading transactions because most people were illiterate, but they could sign their names for agreement even if they were unable to read and write.

Despite the variety of the Templars seals, one particular image grabbed the most attention and interest. It is usually referred to as "the traditional seal," - a picture of two knights riding one mount together. But there were others, as explained in this publication.

History

Seals were used in the earliest civilizations and are of considerable importance in archaeology and art history. In ancient Mesopotamia carved or engraved cylinder seals in stone or other materials were used. These could be rolled along to create an impression on clay (which could be repeated indefinitely), and used as labels on consignments of trade

goods, or for other purposes. They are normally hollow and it is presumed that they were worn on a string or chain round the neck. Many have only images, often very finely carved, with no writing, while others have both. From ancient Egypt seals in the form



Figure 1 Mesopotamian limestone cylinder seal and the impression made by it

of signet rings, including some with the names of kings, have been found; these tend to show only names in hieroglyphics.

From the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC until the Middle Ages, seals of various kinds were in production in the Aegean islands and mainland Greece. In the Early Minoan age these were formed of soft stone and ivory and show particular characteristic forms. By the Middle Minoan age a new set for seal forms, motifs and materials appear. Hard stone requires new rotary carving techniques. The Late Bronze Age is the time par excellence of the lens-shaped seal and the seal ring, which continued into the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods, in the form of pictorial engraved gems. These were a major luxury art form and became keenly collected, with King Mithridates VI of Pontus the first major collector according to Pliny the Elder. His collection fell as booty to Pompey the Great, who deposited it in a temple in Rome. Engraved gems continued to be produced and collected until the 19th century. Pliny also explained the significance of the signet ring, and how over time this ring was worn on the little finger.

Seals have been used in East Asia as a form of written identification since the Qin dynasty (221 BC–). The seals of the Han dynasty were impressed in a soft clay, but from the Tang dynasty a red ink made from cinnabar was normally used. Even in modern times, seals, often known as "chops" in local colloquial English, are still commonly used instead of handwritten signatures to authenticate official documents or financial transactions. Both individuals and organizations have official seals, and they often have multiple seals in different sizes and styles for different situations. East Asian seals usually bear the names of the people or organizations represented, but they can also bear poems or personal mottoes. Sometimes both types of seals, or large seals that bear both names and mottoes, are used to authenticate official documents. Seals are so important in East Asia that foreigners who frequently conduct business there also commission the engraving of personal seals.

East Asian seals are carved from a variety of hard materials, including wood, soapstone, sea glass and jade. East Asian seals are traditionally used with a red oil-

based paste consisting of finely ground cinnabar, which contrasts with the black ink traditionally used for the ink brush. Red chemical inks are more commonly used in modern times for sealing documents. Seal engraving is considered a form of calligraphy in East Asia. Like ink-brush calligraphy, there are several styles of engraving. Some engraving styles emulate calligraphy styles, but many styles are so highly stylized that the characters represented on the seal are difficult for untrained readers to identify. Seal engravers are considered artists, and, in the past, several famous calligraphers also became famous as engravers. Some seals, carved by famous engravers, or owned by famous artists or political leaders, have become valuable as historical works of art.



Figure 2 Royal seal with knob in the form of a turtle, late 16th-17th century, cast bronze with gilding

There is a direct line of descent from the seals used in the ancient world, to those used in medieval and post-medieval Europe, and so to those used in legal contexts in the western world to the present day. Seals were historically most often impressed in sealing wax (often simply described as "wax"): in the Middle Ages, this generally comprised a compound of about two-thirds beeswax to one-third of some kind of resin, but in the post-medieval period the resin (and other ingredients) came to dominate. During the early Middle Ages seals of lead, or more properly "bullae" (from the Latin), were in common use both in East and West, but with the notable exception of documents ("bulls") issued by the Papal Chancery these leaden authentications fell out of favor in western Christendom. Byzantine Emperors sometimes issued documents with gold seals, known as Golden Bulls.



Figure 3 The Golden Bull of 1356 issued by Holy Roman Emperor Charles IV



Templar Lead Seals

Either extreme heat of the Middle Eastern climate or a continuation of Byzantine tradition may explain the use in Palestine of seals made of lead rather than more meltable wax. The seal dies may have been made of steel strong enough to resist damage when impressing lead seals. After the Templars were expelled and relocated to Acre, a seal of the two knights design was appended to a 1255 document by Templar Grand Master Renaud de Vichiers.

Wax seals were being used on a fairly regular basis by most western royal chanceries by about the end of the 10th century. In England, few wax seals have survived of earlier date than the Norman Conquest, although some earlier matrices are known, recovered from archaeological contexts: the earliest is a gold double-sided matrix found near Postwick, Norfolk, and dated to the late 7th century; the next oldest is a mid-9th-century matrix of a Bishop Ethilwald (probably Æthelwold, Bishop of East Anglia). The practice of sealing in wax gradually moved down the social hierarchy from monarchs and bishops to great magnates, to petty knights by the end of the 12th century, and to ordinary freemen by the middle of the 13th century. They also came to be used by a variety of corporate bodies, including cathedral chapters, municipalities, monasteries etc., to validate the acts executed in their name.

Traditional wax seals continue to be used on certain high-status and ceremonial documents, but in the 20th century they were gradually superseded in many other contexts by inked or dry embossed seals and by rubber stamps.

Templar Seals

The Grand Masters of the Knights Templar during the later 12th and the 13th century used a double-sided seal which showed a representation of The Dome of the Rock (or a circular dome of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre) on one side, and the Order's symbol of two knights on one horse on the other side. This design is first attested as in use by Bertrand de Blanquefort, the order's sixth Grand Master, in 1158, forty years after its foundation, and it remained in use until the dissolution of the order in 1312.

There was also a smaller, single-sided seal, which showed the Dome of the Rock (or the Holy Sepulchre), only.

Different seals were used by provincial masters of the order. According to a papal bull issued by Innocent IV in 1251, it was customary for successive provincial masters to use the same seal. The master of Provence continued to use an Agnus Dei seal, while the seal of the Aragonese master William of Cardona and his successors depicted a knight on horseback, carrying a lance and shield, on which was a cross bearing the legend: *S. MINISTRI TEMPLI 1 ARAGON 7 CATALON* ("Seal of the minister of the Temple in Aragon and Catalonia").

Seal Themes

Dome of the Rock



The reverse of Bertrand de Blanquefort's seal, Master of the Temple 1168 in Staatsarchiv Amberg. The reverse of Grand Master William de Chartres seal from 1214 also depicts the Dome of the Rock.

Figure 4 Medieval armorial seal with the Templar Dome of the Rock



Sealing Wax

In the Middle Ages sealing wax was typically made of beeswax and "Venice turpentine", a greenish-yellow resinous extract of the European Larch tree. The earliest such wax was uncolored; later the wax was colored red with vermilion. From the 16th century it was compounded of various proportions of shellac, turpentine, resin, chalk or plaster, and coloring matter (often vermilion, or red lead), but not necessarily beeswax. The proportion of chalk varied; coarser grades are used to seal wine bottles and fruit preserves, finer grades for documents. In some situations, such as large seals on public documents, beeswax was used. On occasion, sealing wax has historically been perfumed by ambergris, musk and other scents.

Agnus Dei

In heraldry, a Lamb of God (or paschal lamb, or agnus Dei) is a lamb passant proper, with a halo or charged with a cross gules, and the dexter forelimb reflexed over a cross staff from which a pennon of St. George (Argent a cross gules) is flotant. The seals of the Masters of the Temple in England: of Aimery de St Maur, 1200, Robert of Sandford, 1241, Richard of Hastings, 1160–85, and William de la More, 1304, showed the agnus Dei.



Figure 5 Medieval armorial seal matrice with the Templar Agnus Dei

Some of the seals of the English Templars were a semi-typical Pascal lamb bearing sometimes, not the flag of St George (or the cross), but the Beauseant, the battle banner of the order.



Figure 6 Seal of Robert of Sandford, the Master of the Temple in 1241

Two Riders

According to legend, Hugues de Payens (the first Grand-Master of the Templars) and Godfrey were so poor that between the two of them they had only one horse, and this gave rise to the famous image on the seal of the Templars, of two men riding a single horse. Contemporary legend held that the symbol represented the initial poverty of the order; that they could afford only a single horse for every two men. Still, the Rule of the Order from the outset permitted three horses and no more for each knight, as well as no Templars sharing the same horse.

The seals of the Grand Masters using the two-rider seal have textual differences.

Double-Headed Eagle

In heraldry and vexillology, the **double-headed eagle** (or **double-eagle**) is a charge associated with the concept of Empire. Most modern uses of the symbol are directly or indirectly associated with its use by the Byzantine Empire, whose use of it represented the Empire's dominion over the Near East and the West. The double-headed eagle or double-eagle is a motif that appears in Mycenaean Greece and in the Ancient Near East, especially in Hittite iconography. It re-appeared during the High Middle Ages, from around the 10th or 11th centuries, and was notably used by the Byzantine Empire, but 11th or 12th century representations have also been found originating from Islamic Spain, France and the Serbian principality of Raška. From the 13th century onward, it became even more widespread, and was used by the Seljuk Sultanate of Rum and the Mamluk Sultanate within the Islamic world, and within the Christian world by the Holy Roman Empire, Serbia, several medieval Albanian noble families and Russia.



Blanchefort's – Grand Master 1156-1169 – seal (left): SIGILLUM MILITUM (Latin, Seal of the Soldiers) obverse; CHRISTI DE TEMPLO (Latin, of Christ of the Temple) reverse.



Vichiers's – Grand Master 1250-1256 – seal (right): SIGILLUM MILITUM XPISTI (Latin, Seal of the Soldiers of Christ)

Although the phrase is written using the Latin alphabet, the first two letters of Christ's name are the Greek XP (Chi Rho) rather than the Latin CHR. The XP symbol's origin lies in the early roots of Christianity, but came into popular use after the Emperor Constantine had a vision of it and, according to legend, converted to Christianity in the early 4th century. From the time of Constantine, it became one of the most significant symbols of Christianity, surpassed only by the cross itself. Its early associations with the military make it the more apt of the two symbols for the Templars. In fact the Chi Rho can also be seen on the shields of the knights on de Vichiers' seal.

Double-Headed Eagle

The “Double Headed Eagle” is another image dating from the thirteenth century. The oldest example is that of the seal affixed in 1222 by Guillaume de l'Aigle, Master of the Temple in France (right). Bertram von Esbeck, Master of the Temple in Germany, 1296 depicts an eagle with two six-pointed stars.



Cross Patée

The “Cross Patée” was frequently used in Templar Seals. Knights themselves might embellish their own seal with images to confirm their membership of the Order – Etienne de Til-Chatel, Preceptor of La Fontanotte, used a seal bearing an image of a dove bearing an olive branch in its beak; an unknown English Knight in 1303 used a seal with the Lion of England together with a Cross Pate; and William, Master of the Temple in Hungary and Slovenia in 1297 depicted a winged griffon.



Figure 7 Fra Arnaude de Banyuls seal; Aragon; Gardeny; Yellow wax, depicting a cross patee, with stars in two angles and shields with crosses in the other two. Legend: S. AR.....GARDENNI.

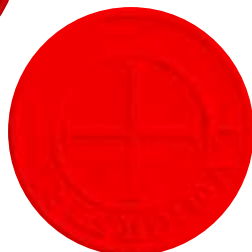


Figure 8 Fra Bernard de Montlor 1248 seal



Figure 9 The Masters of Poitou used this seal. It has been used from the middle of the 12th century to the end of the Order.

Cross Pattée and Fleur-de-lis

The fleur-de-lis has been used in the heraldry of numerous European nations, but is particularly associated with France, notably during its monarchical period. As France is a historically Catholic nation, the fleur-de-lis became "at one and the same time, religious, political, dynastic, artistic, emblematic, and symbolic," especially in French heraldry. The fleur-de-lis has been used by French royalty and throughout history to represent Catholic saints of France. In particular, the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph are often depicted with a lily.



Figure 10 Brother Hugues de Rochefort (Hughes from "ROCAFORTI") 1204 seal. With a star and a "fleur-de-lis", this cross, hart bounded, was the Preceptor's Temple seal.



Figure 11 Brother Giraud de Chamaret 1234



Figure 12 The seal of the preceptor of Poitou Legend = S. PRECEPTORIS TEMPLI VALECE. Year: 1287. Appears on a charter from Saint Victor lès Valence.

Single Knight on a Horse

The seal of Brother Roustan de Comps (right), commander of the Order of the Temple at Richerenches, 1232, shows a single knight on horseback, bearing a shield with a cross: probably St. George.



Head

Seals of Brother Widekind (right), Master of the Temple in Germany, 1271, and Brother Frederick Wildergrave, 1289, showed Christ's head (or John the Baptist's head by other opinions)



Tower or Castle

The seal of Templar officials in Yorkshire c.1300 (left) shows a tower with a pointed roof. Legend: S. COMMAND.....BARBERA



The Lion as a Templar Symbol

The Templar Rule, while prohibiting hunting and falconry, permitted the Knights to hunt lions because “the lion comes encircling and searching for what he can devour.” The lion is an ancient and powerful symbol, well represented in medieval European heraldry. It is not surprising that lions can be observed on some Templar seals. They were also used as architectural elements. Thus, according to the historian known as the “Templar of Tyre”, the tower of the Templars’ bastion in Acre was topped with four gilded lions *passants*, each the size of a donkey, costing fifteen hundred bezants — certainly a sight capable of conveying the notion of the Order’s might and wealth. However, the Knights Templar probably chose this popular symbol not just because of its commonly accepted connotations of strength and military valor. Bernard of Clairvaux, in his famous tract *In praise of the new knighthood*, specifically compared the Knights Templar to ferocious lions, while also pointing out their lamb-like meekness (one might remember that the lamb is another symbol that the Knights Templar often used, as evident in some of the Order’s seals.

Abraxas

Perhaps the most unusual is a 13th Century Knight Templar seals depicting the “Abraxas”. This figure, popular in the 2nd Century, enjoyed resurgence in medieval times but was considered to be a demon. Images often showed a composite creature, with the head of a rooster, a man’s body and limbs made of serpents. Frequently shown holding a whip and shield, allegedly to represent wisdom and power, the figure might also be depicted driving a four horse chariot representing the four Elements of the Universe.

Abraxas appears on the seal of a Templar Grand Master in a French charter dated 1214 (right). The Templars' use of Abraxas as a seal was most likely a result of their expansive treasuries containing a number of ancient gemstones.



Dove

Doves appear in the symbolism of Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Paganism, and of both military and pacifist groups. Doves are shown on cultic objects associated with Inanna as early as the beginning of the third millennium BC.



The seal of Etienne de Til-Chatel (left), lord of Pichanges, Preceptor of La Fontenotte. Has a representation of a dove, facing backwards and grasping an olive branch within its beak.



Star and Crescent Moon

The seal of Frater Robert (left) from the land of Retz, from English 13th century was discovered in the 19th century, in the city of St Père en Retz, at Biais, Loire Atlantique, on the site of a Templar Commandery.

Lions and Griffons

Seal of Brother Otto of Brunswich, commander of Suppligenburg, shows a lion. A seal of one Knight Templar, England, 1303 (right) shows the Lion of England and the cross pattée and the crescent moon of the Mother Goddess with stars. William, Master of the Temple in Hungary and Slovenia, 1297, depicts a winged griffon.



Unusual

The seal illustrated on the left is from the period of Hugh de Payens – Grand Master 118-1136. Wax imprints were found on official documents addressed to Hugues de Payens.

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