

Remarks on the collection of Byzantine lead seals of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts (University of Birmingham): mobility, networks, and identity in eastern Pontos

Christos Malatras 

University of Cologne

chrkak@hotmail.com

The Byzantine lead seals of the Barber Institute of Fine Arts number in total 146 pieces, mostly collected in the region of Trebizond. They offer valuable insights into the middle Byzantine society of the Pontos region, which despite its location on the easternmost borders was connected with other, even more remote, regions of the empire. The majority of these seals come from local officials and reflect their local preoccupations, perhaps as a backlash to the dominant culture of the capital. Fifteen selected pieces from the collection are published here and provided with commentary.

Keywords: sigillography; social history; communication networks; Trebizond; separatism

The collection of lead seals in the Barber Institute of Fine Arts (University of Birmingham) includes 165 specimens, of which 152 were acquired by the late Professor Anthony Bryer, the majority during his research trips in the region of Trebizond in modern Turkey in the 1970s, and subsequently donated to the museum. Thirteen additional seals were acquired later, mostly through auctions.¹ The Byzantine lead seals number in total 146 pieces, the remaining being Western and Islamic seals. In 1983, Archibald Dunn prepared a short (unpublished) handlist of these 152 specimens, without full reading or photographic documentation. The handlist was not intended as a definitive publication but as a guide for further research. I conducted a study of the collection in 2018 and present

1 I would like to express my gratitude to the curator, Dr Maria Vrij, who allowed me to conduct research on the collection and provided me with valuable information about the collection. All photographs in this article, apart from the last one, which is mine, are by the Barber Institute of Fine Arts.

the findings here. The second part of this contribution consists of a catalogue of certain pieces from the collection selected, either for their relevance to the overall discussion or for corrections to their readings.

Seals were used primarily as additional authenticators for documents and other acts (private or official) of the issuer. They were mostly used by the elite, although at times, especially in the eleventh century, their use spread to members of the upper middle class as well.² The Byzantine lead seals of the Barber collection date between the sixth and the thirteenth century, although most are from the middle Byzantine period (seventh to twelfth centuries). Of the 146 Byzantine lead seals 111 originated from Pontos. Lead seals with known provenance – even when we do not know their exact findspot in a building or a place – are a good indicator for many aspects of the culture, the society, and the politics of the region where they were found. Through examination of the Barber collection, this paper will examine how the knowledge of the place of provenance of seals can help us extrapolate interesting conclusions on the social composition of the issuers and on the political and economic significance of the region in question. It will be demonstrated that the majority of the issuers were of local extraction, but in what concerned the state administration, officials who served in other nearby and far-away provinces also had political, economic or social interests in the area which are reflected in their sealing activity.

As the old provincial system disappeared in the course of the eighth century, the thematic system was established and the area was initially allocated to the *strategos* of the Armeniakoi. By the early ninth century, however, the eastern Pontos was established as a separate *thema*, that of Chaldia, which extended from Batum to the ancient Polemonion-Byzantine Phadisane (modern Fatsa). The region around Sinope remained within the boundaries of the *thema* of the Armeniakoi which stretched inland as far as Sebasteia and Gangra. Chaldia was a second tier *thema*; its *strategos* ranked twelfth among the thematic *strategoi* and its army comprised 4000 men. Despite being a borderland *thema*, Chaldia was not located on the main route of the Arab invasions, who preferred to enter Asia Minor through Cappadocia. In the middle of the tenth century, when the Byzantine army and strategy were re-organized, Chaldia became the seat of a *doux* who controlled the northeastern frontier. Around this time, the *strategoi*, began losing their preeminence in the provincial administration, as civil officials, among them primarily the *kritai* (judges), rose in power.³

2 For an introduction to the sealing practices see J.-C.I. Cheynet and B. Caseau, 'Sealing practices in the Byzantine administration', in I. Regulski, K. Duistermaat and P. Verkinderen (eds), *Seals and Sealing Practices in the Near East: developments in administration and magic from prehistory to the Islamic period. Proceedings of an international workshop at the Netherlands Flemish Institute in Cairo on December 2-3, 2009* (Leuven, Paris Walpole 2012) 135–48.

3 On the *thema* of Chaldia see the relevant chapter by A. Savvides in V. Vlyssidou et al. (eds), *Asia Minor and its Themes: studies on the geography and prosopography of the byzantine themes of Asia Minor (7th-11th century)* (Athens 1998) 287–97, and G. Lebeniotes, *Η πολιτική κατάρρευση του Βυζαντίου στην Ανατολή. Το ανατολικό σύνορο και η κεντρική Μικρά Ασία κατά το β' ήμισυ του 11ου αι.* (Thessaloniki 2007) 260–3. On the

Trebizond was located on the so-called ‘silk road’ and was thus an important station for the eastern trade of Byzantium. It belonged into some wider commercial networks through the Black Sea (Crimea, Northern Caucasus, Paphlagonia, Constantinople) but also to the east in Iberia, in Armenia, and through the latter to the Islamic Near East. Trebizond is mentioned in Islamic sources as the major commercial transit station of eastern merchants to the Byzantine empire. The duty collected was so large that the *strategos* of Chaldia took half of his wage (20 pounds of gold) from the collection of this tax.⁴ Chaldia fell for three years to the Seljuks, only to be liberated by Theodoros Gabras in 1075, who subsequently ruled as autonomous leader, as also did other members of his family in the twelfth century, although the region was fully controlled by the Byzantine empire. In 1204 the grandsons of Andronikos I (1183–5), Alexios and David, the so-called ‘Grand Komnenoi’, founded their empire in the region.⁵

Communication networks of officials in Pontos

Unfortunately, we know the exact find-spot of only a small fraction of the more than 80,000 Byzantine lead seals preserved today. It has, however, been established that most seals (at least 80%) discovered in a certain region originated with people located there.⁶ Let us now see whether and how this works for the case of the Barber collection.

About half of the Byzantine lead seals of the Barber collection were issued by officials, that is people who mentioned on their seals their title or office in the state and ecclesiastical hierarchy. There are nine pieces issued by officials of the provincial administration, who also mentioned on their seals the area they exercised their duties.

evolution of the thematic system, see L. Brubaker and J. Haldon, *Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era, c. 680–850: a history* (New York 2011) 723–71. For the rise of the bureaucrats, see J. Shea, *Politics and Government in Byzantium: the rise and fall of the bureaucrats* (London 2020).

4 On the Pontos in general see A. Bryer and D. Winfield, *The Byzantine Monuments and Topography of the Pontos*, 2 vols (Washington D.C. 1985). On the road system see K. Belke, ‘Transports and communication’, in P. Niewöhner (ed.), *The Archaeology of Byzantine Anatolia from the End of the Late Antiquity to the Coming of the Turks* (Oxford 2017) 28–32. For the commercial activity of Trebizond see K. Durak, ‘The commercial history of Trebizond and the region of Pontos from the seventh to the eleventh centuries: an international emporium’, *Mediterranean Historical Review* 36.1 (2021) 3–41.

5 A seal of David Grand Komnenos, from the auction Sternberg 17 (9.–10.5.1986) no. 734, is one of the later acquisitions of the Barber collection (SL-160). There are several seals of David: see A.-K. Wassiliou-Seibt, *Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden*, I (Vienna 2011) nos. 600 (parallel to the Barber piece) and 589a–c (with a different legend). On the empire of the Grand Komnenoi see S. Karpov, *Istorija Trapezundskoj imperii* (Saint Petersburg 2007); A. Savvides, *Ιστορία της αυτοκρατορίας των Μεγάλων Κομνηνών της Τραπεζούντας (1204–1461)*, 3rd edition (Thessaloniki 2016); A. S. E. Asp, ‘Trebizond and Constantinople, 1204–1453’, PhD diss., University of Birmingham 2019.

6 J.-C. Cheynet and C. Morrisson, ‘Lieux de trouvaille et circulation des sceaux’, *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 2 (1990) 116–19; V. Laurent, ‘Une source peu étudiée de l’histoire de la Sicile au Haut Moyen-Age: la sigillographie byzantine’, *Byzantino-Sicula* 2 (1966) 20–50.

Three were issued by civil thematic officials of Chaldia (one *krites* in the second quarter of the tenth century, one *protonotarios* and *general kommerkiarios* in the first half of the ninth century, and one *anagrapheus* in the mid-eleventh c.: see our nos. 1–3). They reflect the preponderance of the financial and civil aspects of the administration on local affairs. An unusually large number of *kommerkiarioi* are attested in Chaldia (33), in contrast to most *themata* where few *kommerkiarioi* are indicated.⁷ This is obviously connected to the importance of international trade of Chaldia. In fact, in Chaldia more *kommerkiarioi* appear than *strategoï* or *kritai*, the two offices that usually produced proportionally the most seals related to thematic administration, since these were the actual governors of a *thema*. However, most of the lead seals of these *kommerkiarioi* of Chaldia have been discovered not in Chaldia but in Constantinople or other Black Sea regions.⁸ Only one more lead seal of a *kommerkiarios* dating from the period of Herakleios (c. 630–642: SL-46) has been found in Chaldia. Although the region of competence of the *kommerkiarios* is not mentioned it is logical to assume that it is related to Pontos. I believe that the absence of more seals of *kommerkiarioi* of Chaldia in the Barber collection should be associated with the function of Trebizond as a transit station for international trade. The *kommerkiarioi* would inspect and seal products intended as imports or exports, would issue receipts of payment of the *kommerkion* and deal with related financial issues or requests.⁹ However, the bulk of imported (especially luxury) products were not destined for the local market, but would eventually reach Constantinople with their accompanying documents and receipts (and thus with the seals of *kommerkiarioi*).

7 The most important *thema* and the largest sigillographically attested (364 lead seals), the Anatolikoi, merely feature two *kommerkiarioi*; other large and old *themata* not located in border regions, such as Opsikion and the Kibyrraiotai, none. For these *themata* see the contributions of Malatras and Charalampakis in O. Karagiorgou, P. Charalampakis and C. Malatras (eds), *TAKTIKON: Studies on the Prosopography and Administration of the Byzantine Themata* (Athens 2021). The sigillographic corpus of Chaldia has been studied by Pantelis Charalampakis for the purposes of the TAKTIKON Research Project on the administration and the prosopography of the Byzantine *themata*; P. Charalampakis, ‘Remarks on the prosopography of the Byzantine administration in Northeastern Asia Minor (7th–11th c.)’, *Journal of Balkan and Black Sea Studies* 2.3 (2019) 75–7.

8 Most of the seals of the *kommerkiarioi* of Chaldia are coming from the former collection of George Zacos and thus their provenance is mostly Constantinople. From the remaining seals of known (or supposed) provenance one is coming from Cherson in Crimea (N. P. Likhachev, *Molivdovuly grecheskogo Vostoka*, ed. V.S. Shandrovskaja (Moscow 1991) no. LX.1: first half of ninth century); one from Aleppo (G. Schlumberger, ‘Sceaux byzantins inédits’, *Revue Numismatique* 20 (1916) no. 310: mid-eleventh century); and one from Sozopolis in Bulgaria (V. Penchev, ‘Molivdovul na Anastasij, kommerkiarij na temata Khaldija (IX v.), nameren v Sozopol’, *Numizmatika, Sfragistika i Epigrafika* 13 (2017) 299–301: mid-ninth century). All three likely reflect sealed documents associated to exports from the empire.

9 On the role of the *kommerkiarioi* there is a huge bibliography, but see Brubaker and Haldon, *Iconoclast Era*, 682–705 (particularly 701–5 for the ninth century and after, which is here our prime concern), whose view I share.

Another two of the nine lead seals come from officials of the relatively close – though not neighbouring – *themata* of Charsianon in central Asia Minor around Kaisareia (our no. 4) and Taron, south of Chaldia and west of Lake Van. The first one was an *anagrapheus*, a tax and property assessor, and the latter the ruler of the autonomous Armenian principality of Taron who received the title *strategos* of his own principality as a dependent governor by the emperor.¹⁰

Importantly, however, the remaining four seals come from regions far from Chaldia: one belonged to a *protonotarios* from Sicily, on the other edge of the empire; one to a *strategos* of the maritime *thema* of the Kibyrraiotai in southern Asia Minor.¹¹ Two come from the Aegean: one belonged to a *kourator* on the island of Mitylene (our no. 5) and one to a *strategos* of the Islands (SL-36). We do not know the provenance of the seal of the *kourator* of Mitylene, but the seal of the *strategos* of the Islands comes from Nikaia in Bithynia, still quite far from the *thema* of the Islands that encompassed the islands of the southern Aegean.¹² What they all have in common is their origin in maritime regions, confirming that even in the most difficult times (such as the first half of the ninth century, when Arabs conquered Crete and then Sicily), maritime routes remained an important means of communication.

Three of these four seals date to the second half of the eleventh century, a period of high geographical and social mobility for provincial officials. For example, Nikephoros Botaneiates, before his accession to the throne (r. 1078–81), served in eight different *themata* with the office of *doux* across twenty years, as analysed by Olga Karagiorgou.¹³ Therefore, apart from institutional cooperation between two authorities, it is not unlikely that some of these officials were in contact with relatives

10 SL-37, published in J.-C. Cheynet, ‘Les Arméniens dans l’armée byzantine au Xe siècle’, in *Travaux et Mémoires* 18 (2014) 182, and correctly dated to the mid-tenth century. We do not understand the author’s hesitation to ascribe it ‘due to improbable longevity’ to Ashot III (*ca.* 940–67), ruler of the Armenian principality of Taron, with the office of *strategos*, like his father Grigor I (*magistros* and *strategos* of Taron), who turned his principality officially into a vassal state of Byzantium. Like his father, Ashot ruled in Taron by permission of the Byzantine emperor. He had already received the title *patrikios* before the death of his father and was probably given the title *magistros* after he became sole ruler *c.* 940. His period of rule as *strategos* of Taron (*ca.* 940–67) is synchronous with the date of the seal. For these events see Lebēniotes, *Πολιτική κατάρρευση*, 181–3; *PMBZ* II # 20645. Another Asotios Taronites was the grandson of Ashot III and lived in Byzantium. He was promoted to *magistros* by emperor Basileios II soon after 997/8, that is, well after the date of our seal.

11 SL-34: O. Karagiorgou, P. Charalampakis and C. Malatras, ‘State officials in the themes of Opsikion, the Anatolikoi and the Kibyrraiotai: new and recently revised sigillographic evidence’, *Byzantina Symmeikta* 26 (2016) no. 23.

12 For the extension of the borders of this *thema* see C. Malatras, ‘Το Αιγαίο, οι Κυκλάδες και η θέση της Πάρου στο διοικητικό σύστημα κατά τη βυζαντινή εποχή’, in D. Katsonopoulou (ed.), *Paros Through the Ages: from prehistoric times to the 16th century AD*, *Paros V* (Paros 2021) 446–8.

13 O. Karagiorgou, “ἀπὸ Λάμπης λαμπτήρα φωσφόρον ἐπιδημήσαι τοῖς βασιλείοις προεσήμανον” (Attaleiates XII 9–10, p. 175). On the way to the throne: the career of Nikephoros III Botaneiates before 1078’, in C. Stavrakos et al. (eds), *Hypermachos. Studien zu Byzantinistik, Armenologie und Georgistik. Festschrift für Werner Seibt zum 65. Geburtstag* (Vienna 2008) 105–33.

or friends who happened to be officials in these *themata*. This seems more obvious in the case of the *anagrapheus* of Charsianon, who as a tax assessor of a non-neighbouring *thema* is unlikely to have communicated with an official in Chaldia for purely administrative matters.

There are a handful of seals in the collection from provincial officials who chose not to mention their jurisdiction area, such as Kourkouas, *katepano* (SL-38),¹⁴ Ioannes Raphael, *protospatharios* and *strategos* (SL-43), and the famous Theodoros Gabras, *sebastos* and *doux* (SL-6). Theodoros Gabras is known to have been appointed *doux* of Trebizond (that is, of Chaldia), once he became an in-law of the emperor Alexios I. He had defended this region in the 1070s and 1080s against Turkish incursions and subsequently ruled, only nominally recognizing imperial authority, until he was killed by the Turks in 1098.¹⁵ Therefore, even if Theodoros does not mention the region on his seal, he used it while he was a *doux* of Trebizond. Ioannes Raphael is known to have been *katepano* of Italy in 1046–1047.¹⁶ It is not unlikely that he served before or after that date in other regions of the empire as *strategos* (that is, in or around Chaldia), whence our seal may originate. If, however, the career of Ioannes Raphael was confined to Italy, this seal, found in the region of Trebizond, would demonstrate the contacts provincial officials had between the two edges of the empire. Seals of the *katepano* Kourkouas have been found in Bulgaria, in Cyprus, and in the Crimea. The Kourkouas family was of Armenian stock and originated from the *thema* of the Armeniakoi, just west and south of Chaldia. The find of this seal in the area of Trebizond signifies either the bonds between the members of the family serving in different provinces, or the economic and social links with northeast Asia Minor that the family still maintained.

14 Published in L. Andriollo, 'Les Kourkouas (ix^e-xi^e siècles)', *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 11 (2012) 85–7: Σφραγὶς Κουρκούαν // κατεπάνω παριστᾷ (late eleventh century). I agree with Andriollo that our Kourkouas, *katepano*, should not be related to Gregorios Kourkouas, *doux* of Adrianople (c. 1090/1): I. Jordanov, *Corpus of Byzantine Seals from Bulgaria*, III (Sofia 2009) nos. 491–2. However, I believe that the other metrical seals with a bilateral inscription struck under the name of Kourkouas belonged to our Kourkouas: Δουκὸς σφραγίζω // τὰς γραφὰς τοῦ Κουρκούα (Jordanov, *Corpus* 3, nos. 1467–74; E. Stepanova, 'New finds from Sudak', *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 8 (2003) no. 8) and Γραφὰς σφραγίζω // καὶ λόγους τοῦ Κουρκούα (M. D. Metcalf, *Byzantine Lead Seals from Cyprus* [Nicosia 2004], no. 773).

15 For Theodoros Gabras, see A. A. M. Bryer, A. W. Dunn and J. Nesbitt, 'Theodore Gabras, Duke of Chaldia [†1098] and the Gabrades: portraits, sites and seals', in A. Avramea, A. Laiou and E. Chrysos (eds), *Βυζάντιο: Κράτος καὶ Κοινωνία : Μνήμη Νίκου Οικονομίδη* (Athens 2003) 51–69, where his seal was published at 64–5 (fig. 17); A. Feldmann, 'Local families, local allegiances: sigillography and autonomy in the eleventh-twelfth century Black Sea', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 42 (2018), 204–8.

16 Anonymous Barrensis, *Chronicle*, ed. L. A. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum scriptores* V (Milan 1724) 151. The seal of Ioannes Raphael has been published in A.-K. Wassiliou-Seibt, 'Philologisch-historische "Delikatessen" aus dem Siegelbefund', *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 12 (2016) 14.

It is conceivable that some of the civil officials were not located in the provinces but remained in Constantinople, especially in cases when they were simultaneously holding a post in the central administration. The *anagrapheus* of Charsianon, in our case, was also serving as an imperial *notarios* of the herds. These officials could have remained in the capital, sending their employees to fulfill their tasks, while they would in turn seal the most important documents.¹⁷ This may have worked smoothly in some services, such as tax collection or assessment; however, it could not operate for military or judicial offices, and especially in provinces not located more than a few days journey to Constantinople. Even when they held concurrently an office in the central administration, they would either commute from time to time between Constantinople and the provinces or take a break for their Constantinopolitan tasks. Besides, the correspondence of Byzantine authors, such as Michael Psellos, reveals that some provincial officials were indeed moving, at least temporarily, to the provinces and that there was no commutation for their period of term.¹⁸ Therefore, the provincial officials of the seals of the Barber collection had probably relocated to the particular province where they had been appointed.

The links between widespread regions are confirmed by the relative lack of seals from the Constantinopolitan heartland. There are no imperial seals in the collection and few seals of officials from the central administration in Constantinople: a *krites* of both the hippodrome and of the *belon* and *mystographos* (our no. 7), a *chartoularios* of the Orphanotropheion (our no. 8), and a *symponos* (SL-60).¹⁹ All these are middle-ranking officials; there is only one seal of a high-ranking official included in the collection, that of *sakellarios* Leontios, and it is from Carthage (SL-26).

Of the ecclesiastical seals of the collection two were issued by metropolitans of Trebizond, Konstantinos (ca. 1027–28)²⁰ and Niketas (late twelfth century).²¹ At the same time, however, there is the seal of a metropolitan of Sardeis (our no. 9), the seal of an abbot of the monastery of Kedron, possibly in Bithynia (our no. 10), the seal of a *kouboukleisios* and *oikonomos* of the Great Church (SL-53, which was found in Amaseia, inland Pontos), and a seal issued by the bishopric of Konstantia in Cyprus

17 For the mobility of the bureaucrats in the eleventh century, see Shea, *Politics*, 35–37.

18 G. Weiss, *Oströmische Beamte im Spiegel der Schriften des Michael Psellos* (Munich 1973) 38–41. On the relationship of Michael Psellos with provincial judges see also J. Nilsson, ‘Strengthening justice through friendship and friendship through justice: Michael Psellos and the provincial judges’, in N. S. M. Matheou, T. Kampianaki, and L. M. Bondioli (eds), *From Constantinople to the Frontier: the city and the cities* (Leiden 2016) 98–108.

19 The reading of this seal was corrected by Wassiliou-Seibt, *Metrischen Legenden*, no. 648.

20 SL-50. More seals of Konstantinos have been published: E. McGeer, J. Nesbitt and N. Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art* (henceforward *DOSeals*), vol. 4: *The East* (Washington D.C. 2001) no. 39.1; V. Laurent, *Le corpus des sceaux de l’empire byzantin*, vol. V.3: *L’Eglise, supplément* (Paris 1972) no. 662; G. Zacos, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, compiled and edited by J. W. Nesbitt (Bern 1984) no. 802.

21 SL-51: O. Lampsides, ‘Nicetas, évêque inconnu de Trébizonde’, *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 57 (1964) 380–81; Laurent, *Corpus* V.3, no. 1759.

(SL-52). The seal of one more archbishop of Cyprus, Epiphanius (*ca.* 870), is included in the collection, but was found in Constantinople.²²

The analysis of the collection thus demonstrates that, although many seals found in a region were issued by officials of that same region, there is a relatively high number of seals from other regions of the empire. Whether these seals testify to a correspondence of a private or of an official nature cannot be ascertained, but they date mainly to the eleventh century, a time of high social and geographical mobility in the empire, as we have noted.

The local provenance of sealers

Seals without any indication of a place name or an office are predominantly local. Only the most prominent members of the local elite were able to acquire the higher dignities. The only such example in the Barber collection is the *sebastos* Theodoros Gabras, an imperial in-law. Instead, the dignities held by our Pontic sample of sealers – whether or not they held office – were almost exclusively lower and middle ranking. Other than the explicitly provincial officials mentioned above (who likely were not locals), most sealers between the seventh and the tenth centuries held the dignities of *spatharios* and *spatharokandidatos*. Only one with the high dignity *patrikios* is recorded and he was not local: Theophobos, a general during the reign of Theophilos (829–842), of Persian or Kurdish stock, whose seal may relate to a failed expedition he undertook against the nearby Abasgia (modern Abkhazia).²³ In the eleventh century, the most frequent dignities that appear on the seals of the Barber collection are *spatharokandidatos* and *protospatharios*. Both dignities were no longer prestigious: they had declined rapidly in status, and after the middle of the eleventh century were only ascribed to lesser officials of the central and provincial administration.²⁴ In the twelfth century, the mention of dignities on seals declined, as the fashion of literary metrical seals and the praise of family origin grew. Now usually only the higher dignities, those associated with the Komnenian clan (derived from the epithet *sebastos*), were recorded on seals and these people almost exclusively resided at Constantinople. No twelfth-century dignities are recorded on our Pontic sample of seals.

In contrast, the largest collection of Byzantine lead seals, at Dumbarton Oaks – formed primarily of Constantinopolitan and not provincial finds – includes a broadly equal number of seals mentioning the higher dignities of *magistros* and *patrikios* and those identified with the middle-ranking dignities of *spatharios* and

22 SL-49: A. Bryer, 'A seal of Epiphanius, Archbishop of Cyprus', *Κυπριακαὶ Σπουδαὶ* 24 (1970) 19–24; Laurent, *Corpus* V.3, no. 2015.

23 SL-4: J. Signes Codoñer, *The Emperor Theophilos and the East, 829–842: court and frontier in Byzantium during the last phase of iconoclasm* (Farnham 2014) 164 and 249–55.

24 On this phenomenon see Shea, *Politics*, 11–19 and 161–7.

spatharokandidatos.²⁵ The higher dignities were largely confined to Constantinople apart from a few higher officials who were sent to the provinces, mainly the *strategoi* and the *kritai*. Besides, officials of all ranks in the provinces would communicate with Constantinople, the government and the palatine services, which brings the balance to the Dumbarton Oaks sample of seals. A simple dignitary, with no office, would in normal conditions remain in one place and would not have to move because of his office. His correspondence would be primarily of a private nature with few contacts away from his place of residence. Most of the simple dignitaries whose seals are now in the Barber collection were then, probably locals and held no higher dignities.²⁶

That most of the Barber seals were owned by locals is also supported by the relatively few seals with a patronymic, only one of which names a renowned Constantinopolitan family: a Promoundenos of the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, hailing probably from an originally Constantinopolitan family that produced quite a few civil officials in the middle and late eleventh century.²⁷ Thereafter, however, the family did not retain its position. There are only two Promoundenoi known in the twelfth century, Theophanios (without any office or dignity) and Theodoros, probably a simple notary in the central ministries,²⁸ plus two Promoundenoi in Makedonia in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, one of whom was a servant to the despot Ioannes Palaiologos.²⁹ Trebizond was the centre of an entirely different state (the Grand Komnenoi). Rather than positing a connection with the contemporary Promoundenoi in distant Makedonia, we would thus favour a local origin, a view supported by the fact that a few Constantinopolitan families migrated after the fall of Constantinople in 1204 to other Greek states, including to the Pontic empire of the Grand Komnenoi.³⁰ In short, the seals of people who do not mention any office or dignity seem to come primarily from the Pontos.

25 This rough estimate has been calculated on the basis of the 15,328 Byzantine lead seals uploaded on the Dumbarton Oaks online catalogue (see https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals#b_start=0), last accessed 13/06/2022.

26 The preponderance of lesser dignities ascribed to members of the local society is also evident in Thebes. See n. 55 below.

27 For the Promoundenoi, see W. Seibt and A.-K. Wassiliou-Seibt, *Die byzantinischen Bleisiegel in Österreich. 2. Teil, Zentral- und Provinzialverwaltung* (Vienna 2004), 178–9. The family name is derived from the neighbourhood τὰ Προμότου/Προμόντου.

28 Theophanios: Wassiliou-Seibt, *Metrischen Legenden*, no. 219 (DO BZS.1958.106.4981). Theodoros Promoundenos: C. Otten-Froux, 'L'enregistrement du Chrysobulle de 1192 aux Pisans', *REB* 42 (1984) 241–8.

29 G. Dagron, P. Lemerle and S. Ćirković (eds), *Actes de Saint-Pantéléèmon* (Paris 1982) no. 9 (1271 ?); J. Lefort, N. Oikonomides, D. Papachryssanthou, V. Kravari and H. Métrévélis (eds), *Actes d'Iviron IV: de 1328 au début de XVI^e siècle* (Paris 1995) 134 (the donation of Makarios Promountenos took place before 1328).

30 See S. Karpov, *Istoria Trapezundskoi Imperii* (St Petersburg 2007) 97; Savvides, *Ιστορία*, 91.

Iconography and local particularities

The importance of faunal iconography on the seals of the Barber collection is noteworthy. About 20% of the Byzantine seals that come from the area of Trebizond are decorated with depictions of animals, and these all date between the late ninth and the eleventh century. One can find lions, peacocks, eagles, birds, ducks, and the mythical griffin. Faunal iconography was not uncommon on seals of the tenth century, but it seems to have persisted longer on the Pontic seals. In contrast, on the ninth- to eleventh-century seals in the collection of the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, faunal iconography barely reaches 1%. This is true of other collections as well, such as in the private collection of Y. Tatis, formed primarily of seals coming from Western Asia Minor, and the collection at Dumbarton Oaks.³¹

Whether these kinds of motifs on Byzantine seals adapt contemporary eastern (not necessarily Islamic) motifs reflecting a cosmopolitan court, or revive classical motifs and thus reflect the cultural learned spirit of the period, is uncertain.³² An analysis of their attestation reveals that these motifs proliferated more among certain groups of officials, primarily the *epi ton barbaron* (heads of foreign mercenary units) and some *kommerkiarioi* not only restricted to the East,³³ that the same kind of officials used sometimes clearly classical (and not eastern) motifs on their seals,³⁴ and that faunal iconography was not uncommon among Roman and early Byzantine seals until the seventh century, that is before the rise of Islamic art.³⁵ This iconography is found

31 J.-C. Cheynet, T. Gökyıldırım and V. Bulgurlu, *Les sceaux byzantins du Musée archéologique d'Istanbul* (Istanbul 2012); J.-C. Cheynet, *Les sceaux byzantins de la collection Yavuz Tatis* (Izmir 2019). The calculation for the Dumbarton Oaks collection has been made, as above, on the basis of the online catalogue.

32 On faunal iconography in sigillography see V. Penna, 'Μη θρησκευτικές παραστάσεις σε βυζαντινές μολύβδινες σφραγίδες (10ος αιώνας): Καταβολές και ερμηνευτικές προσεγγίσεις', in G. Xanthaki-Karamanou (ed.), *Η πρόσληψη της Αρχαιότητας στο Βυζάντιο, κυρίως κατά τους Παλαιολόγειους Χρόνους* (Athens 2014) 275–97; A. Walker, 'Islamicizing motifs in Byzantine lead seals: exoticizing style and the expression of identity', *Medieval History Journal* 15.2 (2012) 381–408. Walker also publishes a seal from the Barber (SL-8), issued allegedly by Ioannes, imperial *protospatharios*, bearing on the obverse a depiction of a griffin (p. 388), reproducing the erroneous reading in the handlist. One reads rather a hitherto unattested surname and not a title: +KERIOHΘHΙΩIANHTOΘIPAC.OΛIAPHΩ. The last letter on the third line may have been also an Ε, the last on the fourth line a Δ (certainly not an Α), and the second letter on the last line a Π. The second part of the surname may read Scholarios, a renowned Trapezuntine family in the Late Byzantine period. Possible reconstructions could be: Thrascholarios, Thraskolabios, Erastolabios, etc.).

33 *Kommerkiarioi* of Thessalonike and of the West with animal motifs on their seals are attested, for example: J. Nesbitt and N. Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine seals at Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. 1: *Italy, North of the Balkans, North of the Black Sea* (Washington D.C. 1991) nos. 1.23, 18.36, 18.44.

34 Such as portraits in profile (like imperial portraits on Late Roman coins) or even athletes (see <https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1951.31.5.1238/view>).

35 Eagles were the commonest, but lions, birds and other animals are also attested: e.g. Cheynet, *Tatis*, no. 8.10; <https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1958.106.3409/view>; <https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1947.2.1771/view>. The Barber collection includes a seventh-century seal of a certain Andreas, decorated with a peacock (SL-67).

seldom in seals of higher officials, although classical motifs were certainly familiar to the educated elite of Constantinople in the tenth century.

Of the published seals of thematic officials of Chaldia, the seals of just three officials (out of a total of ninety-eight) display an animal motif: two *kommerkiarioi* and one *domestikos*, a lesser military official.³⁶ We cannot know the place of origin of the *kommerkiarioi*, but lesser military officials mostly originated from the region in which they served. This small number is nonetheless important, for in other *themata* of the central and western Asia Minor with even larger corpora of officials (such as Opsikion and the Anatolikoi) there is barely an official with faunal iconography on his seal.³⁷ Faunal iconography is met with on seals of provincial officials from Chaldia and Seleukeia to Sicily, the Peloponnese and Nikopolis. It is difficult to establish a geographical pattern, although officials of the southern Balkan provinces exhibited seemingly more faunal iconography in proportion to officials of the Asia Minor provinces.³⁸ If the motifs were indeed related to contacts with the Islamic East, why they cannot be found in *themata* neighbouring the southeastern frontier: Kappadokia, Charsianon, Lykandos and the Anatolikoi, or even Mesopotamia?³⁹ It is worth remarking that the Barber collection includes no seal of a provincial official (who might have been sent to Chaldia from Constantinople) or other higher dignitary/official who used such motifs on his seal. The faunal motifs exclusively decorate seals of medium-ranking and lesser dignitaries or the so-called ‘private people’, that is people who probably originated from Pontos (for example, our nos. 11, 12, 14).

It would be, however, a mistake to consider that the ‘private persons’ (i.e., those not mentioning any office or title on their seals) who displayed such motifs on their seals, were necessarily merchants, considering that they used on their seals motifs found on

36 *DOSeals* 4, nos. 32.5, 32.18, 32.25.

37 In the Anatolikoi, among a corpus of 228 officials attested by 364 seals (cf. note 4): Karagiorgou, Charalampakis and Malatras, ‘State officials’, no. 12. In Opsikion none among 166 officials and 277 lead seals.

38 From my sample of the about 60 published lead seals (with faunal iconography, mentioning a province and dated from the ninth to eleventh century), more than half are associated to the southern Balkan provinces: Thrake (4), Makedonia (1), Thessalonike (14, 11 of which were seals of *kommerkiarioi*), Drogoubiteia (1), Nikopolis (1), Hellas (4), Thebes (1), Samos (1), Peloponnese (3), West (2, both *kommerkiarioi*). See for example, *DOSeals* 1, nos 5.17, 8.40, 71.29; Cheynet, Gökyıldırım, Bulgurlu, *Istanbul*, no. 3.55.

39 For comparison, 130 lead seals have been excavated and published in Corinth. 95 date from the ninth to the eleventh century; only six feature faunal iconography (6% against 20% of the Barber collection): G. R. Davidson, *Corinth XII: the minor objects* (Princeton 1952) 311–27. From corpora of seals with safe provenance along the southeastern frontier (84 lead seals), there is only one seal with faunal iconography, an *ichthyocentaurus*, clearly adopted from the classical tradition: Z. S. Altınoluk, ‘Silifke Arkeoloji Müzesi’nden Bir Grup Bizans Kurşun Mühürü’, *Çanakkale Araştırmaları Türk Yıllığı* 30 (2021) 147–72; J.-C. Cheynet, E. Erdoğan and V. Prigent, ‘Sceaux des musées de la Turquie orientale: Karaman, Nevşehir, Malatya, Maraş’, *Revue des études byzantines* 74 (2016) 287–326 (*ichthyocentaurus*: no. 21); S. Metivier, ‘Sceaux des musées de Kayseri et de Niğde (Cappadoce byzantine)’, *Studies in Byzantine Sigillography* 10 (2010) 61–74.

products (such as clothes) they were selling.⁴⁰ Some of these ‘private persons’ were in fact officials who did not bother mentioning all or any of their offices and titles on their seals.⁴¹ Secondly, the few merchants and other artisans who issued seals did mention their occupation (e.g. *σηρικοπράτης*, *πραγματευτής*) on their seals. With just two exceptions, I know of no other Byzantine merchants who used such motifs on their seals.⁴²

The appearance of such motifs may be indeed associated to the trade routes and the contacts with foreigners, and thus they decorate proportionately seals of officials such as the *epi ton barbaron* and the *kommerkiarioi*. Their persistence on Pontic seals, however, much more than any other region of the empire, seems to reflect more a local fashion, which in turn may show an opposition to the more traditional values and fashion of the capital.

Otherwise, there is little local iconography. Although Eugenios was a local saint, his portrait is encountered on just one late thirteenth-century seal (SL-85). Even someone named Eugenios in the eleventh century preferred to portray St Niketas on his seal (SL-72).⁴³ Curiously, no middle Byzantine metropolitan of Trebizond ever bore on his seals a depiction of St Eugenios, the supposed patron of the city.⁴⁴ As Jan Olof Rosenqvist has argued, the cult of St Eugenios, although firmly established and connected with Trebizond since the sixth century, was limited until the advent of the Grand Komnenoi. All this changed once these rulers turned the cult of St Eugenios from a popular to an imperial one from the middle of the thirteenth century and later, making him the patron-saint of their capital and their empire.⁴⁵ The Barber seals pre-date this expansion.

To conclude, the Barber seals are associated primarily with people from the eastern Pontos. At the same time, they reveal that, owing to the sea routes, eastern Pontos had contacts with other provinces of the empire, even as far as Sicily, and that these contacts were not strictly institutional, but also social. In turn, the Byzantine state had minimal interest for this region, other than its governance and taxation, particularly the levy of the trade tax through the *kommerkiarioi*. This lack of interest was

40 Durak, ‘Trebizond’, 20, citing Walker, who does not repeat it, however, in her recent article ‘Islamicizing motifs’.

41 For example, Symeon, *protospatharios* and *ek prosopou* of Thessalonike and Strymon used an anonymous seal, and Ioannes Belisariotes, the highest minister of the empire in 1196 (*logothetes* of the *sekreta*), did not bother to include his office or dignity on his seal, although he used them in his signature: P. Lemerle, A. Guillou, N. Svoronos and D. Papachryssanthou (eds), *Actes de Lavra I, des origines à 1204* (Paris 1970) nos. 6 and 67.

42 Ioannes: DO BZS.1951.31.5.1059 (Walker, ‘Islamicizing motifs’) and Solomon: DO BZS.1951.31.5.3080.

43 Apart from the Theotokos and St Nikolaos, other rare iconography includes St Sophia, St Thomas, St Eustratios and St Niketas, but none of these were locals.

44 See Laurent, *Corpus*, V.1, nos. 659–64; V.3, nos. 1758–9; *DOSeals* 4, no. 39; Zacos II, no. 555.

45 J. O. Rosenqvist, ‘Local worshipers, imperial patrons: pilgrimage to St. Eugenios of Trebizond’, *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2003) 193–212.

manifested on the low integration of the local elite to the imperial system, as very few of the locals had access to the most prestigious offices and dignities. The side-effect of this practice was the growth of local particularities in culture, which, once the central control thinned in the late eleventh century, evolved into separatism, represented by the autonomous rule of Theodoros Gabras.

Catalogue

Provincial officials⁴⁶

1. Nikephoros, *protonotarios* of Chaldia and *genikos kommerkiarios* (Fig. 1)

SL-32. Dunn, Handlist, no. 32 [ninth century].

Provenance. Trabzon.

Dating. Early ninth century.

Obv. Cruciform invocative monogram of Κύριε βοήθει (Laurent type VIII) with inscription in the quarters: .Ω - .Ω|ΔΔ - ΛΩ

Rev. Inscription in four lines:

+ΝΙΚΗ|Φ/Α/ΝΟΤ/Χ|ΑΛΔ/ΣΓΕΝ/ΙΚΩΜΕΡ/

(Κύριε βοήθει) [τ]ῷ [σ]ῷ δούλω //

+ Νικηφ(όρω) (πρωτο)νοτ(αρίω) Χαλδ(ίας) (καὶ) γεν(ικῶ) κωμερ(κιαρίω)

This seal dates to the first half of the ninth century and probably from the 820s or 830s since the epigraphy recalls that of the imperial *kommerkia* of Makedonia and Thrake of 820/821 or of Makedonia of 831/832.⁴⁷ This makes Nikephoros one of the earliest *protonotarioi* of Chaldia. The thematic *protonotarioi* were financial officials who supervised the collection of taxes and the provision of the army.⁴⁸

2. Konstantinos, *imperial protospatharios* and *krites* of Chaldia (Fig. 2)

SL-30. A. Bryer, 'A molybdo bull of the imperial protospatharios Constantine, Krites of the Thema of Chaldia', *Αρχαίον Πόντου* 27 (1966) 244–6; Dunn, Handlist, no. 30 [tenth century].

Provenance: Trabzon.

Dating. Second quarter of the tenth century.

Obv. Cruciform invocative monogram of Κύριε βοήθει (Laurent type X) with inscription in the quarters; three borders of dots, the middle of which with larger and less dense dots: ΤΩ - CΩ|ΔΔ - ΛΩ

Rev. Inscription in four lines; three (?) borders of dots, the middle of which with larger and less dense dots: ✠|+ΚΩ. C|TANT, R' AÇI. AΘ, SKPI. |XΑΛΔΙΑC|✠

46 Arranged alphabetically according to the name of the *thema* and then chronologically. All other categories are arranged alphabetically according to the name of the official.

47 DO Seals 1, nos. 43.17–18.

48 D. S. Borovkov, 'Protonotarii fem v Vizantii IX-X vv.: proiskhozhdenie instituta i osnovnye funktsii', *Античная древность и средние века* 42 (2014) 90–100.



Fig. 1. Nikephoros, *protonotarios* of Chaldia and *genikos kommerkiarios*.



Fig. 2. Konstantinos, *imperial protospatharios* and *krites* of Chaldia.

(Κύριε βοήθει) τῷ σῷ δούλῳ //

+ Κωνσταντ(ίνῳ) β(ασilikῷ) (πρωτο)σ[π]αθ(αρίῳ) (καὶ) κρι[τ(ῆ)] Χαλδίας

Twenty-two *kritai* of Chaldia have been identified.⁴⁹ The majority were active in the eleventh century and only three (including our own) date to the tenth century. The *kritai* appeared in the late ninth century and soon assumed the civil governance of a *thema*, superseding the *strategoï* by the mid-tenth century.⁵⁰ Most of the tenth-century *strategoï* of Chaldia bore the same title as Konstantinos, which reflects the growing importance of the *kritai*.

This type of an invocative monogram and the multiple dotted border appear on other seals after the beginning of the tenth century. Exactly the same invocative monogram decorates the obverse of the seal of Samonas, *spatharokandidatos*, *asekretis* and *krites* of Thessalonike (November 922) and an identical border

49 As above note 6.

50 V. Vlyssidou, 'Quelques remarques sur l'apparition des juges (première moitié du X^e siècle)', in S. Lampakis (ed.), *H Βυζαντινὴ Μικρὰ Ἀσία (6ος-12ος αι.)* (Athens 1998) 59–66. Tenth-century *kritai* of Chaldia include: Gregorios, imperial *protospatharios* and *krites* of Chaldia (Seibt and Wassiliou-Seibt, *Österreich* II, no. 206) and Ioannes, imperial *protospatharios epi ton oikeiakon* and *krites* of Chaldia (*DOSeals* 4, no. 32.8).

appears on the seal of Zoetos, imperial *protospatharios* and *epi ton oikeiakon* (943).⁵¹ The epigraphy of the inscription too suggests a dating the same period; characteristic is the form of the diphthong ου (Ϝ), where a full circle is topped by two diagonal lines not united at their bottom end.

3. Kosmas, imperial (?) *spatharokandidatos*, imperial *notarios* of the *sakelle* and *anagrapheus* of Chaldia (Fig. 3)

SL-31. Dunn, Handlist, no. 31; read as Dositheos, *spatharokandidatos*, imperial *notarios* of the herds and *anagrapheus* of Chaldia [tenth century].

Provenance. Trabzon.

Dating. Mid-eleventh century.

Obv. St Nicholas (bust) holding a book (?) (l. hand) and blessing (r. hand):

Θ|Η|Η| – Κ|Λ|Λ|Ϝ. ; circular inscription: ΚΕΡ...

Rev. Inscription in five lines:

.ΚΟCΜΑ|Ι. CΠΑΘ,ΚΑ.Ι. RNOTAP,Τ,Ç|Ι. ΚΕΛSANAΓ|Ι.ΧΑΛΔ

’Ο ᾧ(γίος) Νι[κ]όλ[α]ο[ς]. + Κ(ύρι)ε βο[ή]θει τῷ σῷ δούλῳ] //

[+] Κοσμᾶ [β(ασιλικῷ)] σπαθ(αρο)καν[δ(ιδάτω)] β(ασιλικῷ) νοτ(αρίῳ) τ(ῆς) σ[α]κέλ(λης)
(καὶ) ἀναγ[ρ(αφεῖ)] Χαλδ(ίας)

The name of the official was read by Dunn as Dositheos (i.e. ΔΟCH[Θ]); however, detailed examination reveals the triangular remains of the last letter, pointing to an A, rather than a round letter such as a Θ, while the H read by Dunn is actually a M, thus forming the name Kosmas. Before the dignity *spatharokandidatos* there is enough space (either at the end of the first line or in the beginning of the second) for an R that would give the epithet ‘imperial’ (βασιλικῷ) to the title, with which it is often associated. Furthermore, the first letter of the first line is a K (not a Γ), which makes Kosmas an imperial *notarios* of the *sakelle* ([CA]ΚΕΛ), and not of the herds, i.e. *agelai* ([A]ΓΕΛ). The imperial *notarioi* were the immediate subalterns of the *epi tou sakelliou*, responsible for the state treasury; the *logothetes* of the *agelai* did not have *notarioi* on his staff. Another possible reading could be imperial *notarios* of the *sakellarios*; the *sakellarios* maintained *notarioi* in most departments of the finance sector in the central administration.⁵²

The seal epigraphically comes from the first half of the eleventh century. Other *anagrapheis* of Chaldia are known from this period; however, the jurisdiction of these officials was usually combined with neighbouring *themata*, Derzene and Taron.⁵³

51 N. Oikonomides, *A Collection of Dated Byzantine Lead Seals* (Washington D.C. 1986) nos. 60 and 67.

52 Oikonomides, *Listes*, 113 (for the *notarioi* of the *sakellarios*), 121 (for the imperial *notarioi* of the *sakelle*).

53 *DOSeals* 4, nos. 32.1, 61.1 and 76.1.



Fig. 3. Kosmas, imperial (?) *spatharokandidatos*, imperial *notarios* of the *sakelle* and *anagrapheus* of Chaldia.

4. Anonymous, (proto?)*spatharios* and *anagrapheus* of Charsianon (Fig. 4)

SL-33. Dunn, Handlist, no. 33 [eleventh century].

Provenance. Trabzon

Dating. Mid-eleventh century.

Obv. Two unidentified bearded saints (bust), possibly SS Cosmas and Damian.

Rev. Inscription in five lines (four surviving):

...Ι.ΣΠΑΘ...Ι.ΑΝΑΓΡΑ...Ι.ΟΝΧΑΡ...ΙΑΝΟΥ

[...] [(πρωτο)?]σπαθ(αρίω) [(καὶ)] ἀναγρα[φ(εῖ) τ]οῦ Χαρ[σ]ιανοῦ

On the obverse the seal bears the portraits of a pair of unidentified and almost identical bearded saints, a rather rare iconographic motif on seals. The details are not clear, but the figures seem to hold an object that is not a book, a cross (of a martyr) or the weapon of a military saint, but could represent the medical box of the two saints *Anargyroi*, Cosmas and Damian.⁵⁴ However, since the inscription that would identify them has not survived, this identification remains tentative.

Based on the epigraphy (the particular shapes of Γ and Π) and the iconography the seal dates to the eleventh century, and probably from the middle of that century. Unfortunately, it was struck on a smaller blank disc which resulted in the loss of at least one line above containing the first name of the owner. Our anonymous official was an *anagrapheus* of Charsianon. His dignity was most likely *protospatharios*, rather than simply *spatharios*, a title that due to inflation was vanishing already by the turn of the eleventh century. By this period, it is attested mostly in some very low-ranking officials or in rural society.⁵⁵

54 For similar iconography see Cheynet, Gökyıldırım and Bulgurlu, *Istanbul*, no. 2.54.

55 Petros Thymiamares: N. Svoronos. 'Recherches sur le cadastre byzantin et la fiscalité aux XIe et XIIe siècles: le cadastre de Thèbes', *BCH* 81.1 (1959) 19 (l. 79); Konstantinos Anemas, *spatharios* and *episkeptites* of the Armeniakoi: *DOSeals* 4, no. 22.14.



Fig. 4. Anonymous, (*proto?*)*spatharios* and *anagrapheus* of Charsianon.

Charsianon was located in the heart of Asia Minor, more or less around the ancient province Cappadocia I.⁵⁶ A number of additional *anagrapheis* of Charsianon from the second half of the tenth and the eleventh century are known.⁵⁷

5. Symeon, *patrikios*, *anthypatos*, *bestes*, *krites* and *kourator* of Mitylene (Fig. 5)
SL-35. Dunn, Handlist, no. 35; read as Symeon, *protoanthypatos*, *bestitor* and *kourator* of Mitylene [twelfth century]

Provenance. unknown.

Obv. St Theophanes Graptos (standing) on the left, bearded and wearing elaborate dress and a headcover, and St Symeon of Lesbos (standing) on the right, bearded and wearing a tunic but without a headcover, both orantes and turned to the inner side towards an icon of Christ (bust) on the top; vertical identifying inscription on the back side of each saint; signs of sigla on either side of the Christ portrait; border of dots:

ΘΙΘΙΕΙΟΙΦΙΝΙΗΙÇ – .Ι.Ι.ΙΜΙΕΙΟΙΝ

Rev. Inscription in seven lines; border of dots:

†ΚΕΡ,Θ,ΙCΥΜΕΩΝΙΠΡΑΝΘΝΠΙΡΕCΤΗΚΡΙ ΙΚΑΙΚΟΝΡΑ Ι · ΜΙΤΥΛΗ · Ι – ΝΗC –

Ὁ ἅγιος Θεοφ(ά)νης – [Ὁ ἅγιος Συ]μεὼν // + Κ(ύρι)ε β(οή)θ(ει) Συμεὼν π(α)τρι(κί)ω
ἀνθυπ(ά)τ(ω) βέστη κριτ(ῆ) καὶ κουράτ(ορι) Μιτυλήνης

Our specimen finds a parallel in the Dumbarton Oaks collection, where the figure on the right is identified as St Symeon, archbishop of Persia, and the figure on the left as his co-martyr the eunuch St Gousthazat, based mainly on his more richly-decorated

56 Konstantinos Porphyrogenetos, *De Administrando imperio*, 50.90–91, ed. G. Moravcsik and R. J. H. Jenkins (Washington D.C. 1967) 236. On Charsianon, see the relevant chapter of S. Lampakis in Vlyssidou *et al.*, *Asia Minor*, 299–305.

57 Nikolaos: *DOSeals* 4, no. 40.1 (second half of tenth century); Michael Aboukes: *DOSeals* 4, no. 40.3 (late tenth– early eleventh century); Nikolaos: *DOSeals* 4, no. 40.2 (mid-eleventh century); Anonymous: J.-Cl. Cheynet, C. Morrisson and W. Seibt, *Les sceaux byzantins de la collection Henri Seyrig* (Paris 1991) no. 203 (first half of eleventh century).



Fig. 5. Symeon, *patrikios*, *anthypatos*, *bestes*, *krites* and *kourator* of Mitylene.

dress.⁵⁸ There are several saints with the name Symeon; three of them are stylites (Symeon Stylites, fifth century; Symeon Stylites the Younger, sixth century; Symeon of Lesbos, ninth century), in addition to Symeon archbishop of Persia (fourth century), the Theodochos (contemporary of Christ) and the Neos Theologos (eleventh century). I would argue that the figure on the right is St Symeon the Stylite an iconophile monk from the island of Lesbos (Mitylene), on account of our official's service in Mitylene.⁵⁹ Moreover, the inscription on our specimen reveals that the figure on the left is St Theophanes. There are two saints with this name, both ninth-century iconophiles: Theophanes the Confessor and Theophanes Graptos, metropolitan of Nikaia (842–845). The portrait of Theophanes the Confessor, quite different from this one, can be found on seals of abbots of the monastery *tu Agrou* that he founded.⁶⁰ Theophanes Graptos, while in exile on the island Aphousia in the Sea of Marmara, met St Symeon of Lesbos, also there for his iconophile tendencies. This link between our two saints leads us to identify the holy figure on the left as Theophanes Graptos rather than Theophanes the Confessor. Both saints died in 845.⁶¹

58 J. Nesbitt and N. Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine seals at Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. 2: *South of the Balkans, the Islands, South of Asia Minor* (Washington D.C. 1994) no. 51.5.

59 On Symeon, see the *Life of Sts David, Symeon and Georgios of Lesbos*, ed. J. van den Gheyn, 'Acta graeca ss. Davidis, Symeonis et Georgii Mitylenae in insula Lesbo', *Analecta Bollandiana* 18 (1899) 209–59, and A.-M. Talbot, *Byzantine Defenders of Images: eight Saints' Lives in English translation* (Washington D.C. 1998) 143–7, where the local nature of the cult of the saint is noted.

60 J. Nesbitt and N. Oikonomides, *Catalogue of Byzantine Seals at Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art*, vol. 3: *West, Northwest and Central Asia Minor and the Orient* (Washington D.C. 1996) nos. 42.3 (St Theophanes Graptos); 42.1 and Hermitage M-5544 (unpublished; but see V. S. Shandrovskaja and W. Seibt, *Byzantinische Bleisiegel der Staatlichen Eremitage mit Familiennamen. 1. Teil. Sammlung Lichačev – Namen von A bis I* [Vienna 2005] 28, note 34) (Theophanes the Confessor). Theophanes Graptos wears no head-covering (as in the Barber example) and bears the martyr's cross (the *graptoi* are described as martyrs in the *Life of St Michael Synkellos*, ed. Cunningham, 96). Theophanes the Confessor, in contrast, wears a triangular headcover, has quite different facial features and is not holding anything.

61 On Theophanes Graptos see the *Life of Michael Synkellos*, ed. M. Cunningham, 52–114.

Until the eleventh century Mitylene was part of the *thema* of Aigaion Pelagos, whose *strategos* sat in Abydos. However, the presence of at least one more *krites* of Mitylene, again in combination with the office of *kourator*, indicates that the island may have formed a separate administrative district. The *kourator* even assumed the defence of Mitylene against the Turks in the late eleventh century, creating the impression that he was actually the governor of the island.⁶² Our official, Symeon, is not known from any other sources. The combination and accumulation of these titles, as well as the epigraphy of the seal suggest a dating around the third quarter of the eleventh century.

6. Theoktistos, *hypatos* and *protonotarios* of Sikelia (Fig. 6)

SL-117. Dunn, Handlist, no. 117; read simply as Theoktistos [seventh/eighth century].

Provenance. Trabzon.

Dating. Early ninth century.

Obv. Cruciform invocative monogram of Θεοτόκε βοήθει (Laurent type V) with inscription in the quarters: ΤΩ - ΩΙΔΘ - ΛΩ

Rev. Inscription in four lines:

.ΘΕΟΙΚΤΙΣΤΩΠΙΝΣΑΝΟΤΑΙΙΚΕ

(Θεοτόκε βοήθει) τῷ σῶ δούλ(ῳ) //

[+] Θεοκτίστῳ ὑπ(άτῳ) (καὶ) (πρωτο)νοτα(ρίῳ) Σικε(λίας)

The dignity of the owner is uncertain, though the letter Π at the beginning of line three indicates that the dignity can only have been *hypatos* or imperial *spatharios*. Nevertheless, the remains of the last letter in the second line (a diagonal line is visible) point more to an V rather than a B. The elongated, rigid, and well-positioned letters with few serifs suggest a date around the early ninth, rather than the late eighth century with its less rigid and well-positioned letters, and the mid-ninth century when letters become squarer.

In the former G. Orghidan collection there is a similar seal read by Laurent as 'Theoktistos, *bestitor* and *protonotarios* of Sikelia'.⁶³ Although there are many similarities in the alignment of the letters and the inscription between the two items, in fact they come from two distinct *boulloteria* (compare the positioning of the letters between the first and the second line) that quite probably belonged to the same official. After personal examination of the specimen I would not, however, reconstitute the dignity of the owner as *bestitor* on the Orghidan specimen due to the lack of space, but rather as imperial *spatharios* (i.e., Β[СП]).

62 Jordanov, *Corpus*, no. 1356; Anna Komnene, *Alexias*, 7.8.1, ed. D. Reinsch and A. Kambylis, *Annae Comnenae Alexias* (Berlin 2001) 222.

63 V. Laurent, *La collection C. Orghidan* (Paris 1952) no. 233.



Fig. 6. Theoktistos, *hypatos* and *protonotarios* of Sikelia.

Other officials

7. Anonymous (Laktantios?), *krites* of the hippodrome, of the *belon* and *mystographos* (Fig. 7 a–b)

SL-29. Dunn, Handlist, no. 29 [sixth–seventh century]; read as Konstantinos, ... hippodromou (?)...

Provenance. Unknown.

Dating. Mid-eleventh century.

Obv. Inscription in five (?) lines (four surviving):

....Θ|...ON|...TA|...ΤΗΝ|....

Rev. Inscription in six lines (four surviving):

....|...IT...|...ΔΡΟ...|...ΗΛ...|...ΕΜ...|....

SL-108. Dunn, Handlist, no. 108 [eighth–ninth century]; read simply as Konstantinos.

Provenance. Trabzon.

Dating. Mid-eleventh century.

Obv. Inscription in five (?) lines (four surviving):

....|...ON|...KTA|...ΚΤΗΝ|...ΛΦΩ

Rev. Inscription in six lines (four surviving):

....|.....|...ΔΡΟ...|...ΡΗΛ...|...ΜΒ...|ΓΡΑ.

Combined reading of the reverse: [κριτ(ῆ) ἐπ]ι τ(οῦ) [Ἰππ(ο)]δρό[μ(ου) τ(οῦ)] βήλ[ου κ]ῆ μ[στ(ο)]γράφ[φ(φ)]

Close examination of these two specimens reveals that they were struck by the same *boulloterion*. In both, the seal was struck on a surface smaller than the die, which was also damaged (partially flattened), and this has caused the loss of most of the original inscription. On the reverse the combined reading can be safely reconstituted as *krites* of the hippodrome, of the *belon* and *mystographos*. I was unable, however, to restore the inscription on the obverse containing the first name and possibly an additional office of the owner. The surviving letters do not support



Fig. 7. Anonymous (Laktantios?), *krites* of the hippodrome, of the *belon* and *mystographos*.

Dunn's reading of the name as Konstantinos, nor do the last two lines support the reading of any known title, though the letters -κτην on the fourth line may indicate the office *epeiktes* (in accusative).

A different overall structure of the inscription, such as invocation – name – surname (obverse), offices (reverse), is possible.⁶⁴ If so, the ending -λφω in the last line of the obverse (which cannot represent any known office or title), would belong to a surname, and the letters κτᾱ on the third line could indicate the first name of the owner, perhaps Laktantios.

A *mystographos* was a secretarial official possibly assigned to record the proceedings of imperial councils. The office remained closely connected to the judicial administration, and many *mystographoi* served also as judges (*kritai* of the hippodrome and/or of the *belon*) as here.⁶⁵

64 As on the seal of Theodoros Makrys, *protospatharios* and *strategos* of Hellas, see Karagiorgou, 'Τὴν τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀρχὴν πιστευθεῖς...: the *corpus* of the strategoi of Hellas on the evidence of sigillographic and non-sigillographic sources', in *TAKTIKON*, 197–9.

65 For the office of *mystographos*, see N. Oikonomides, *Les listes de préséance byzantines des IX^e et X^e siècles* (Paris 1972) 325, whose identification of the role as a judicial official has been contested by A. Gkoutzioukostas, 'Some remarks on *mystographos* and *mystolektes*' in C. Stavrakos and B. Papadopoulou (eds), *HIIEIPONAE: Proceedings of the 10th International Symposium of Byzantine Sigillography* (Ioannina, 1–3 October 2009) (Wiesbaden 2011) 191–200, 204–13 (list of all known *mystographoi*); Shea, *Politics*, 77–8.

8. Nikolaos, *protospatharios* and *chartouarios* of the Orphanotropheion (Fig. 8)
SL-28. Dunn, Handlist, no. 28; read as Nikolaos, spatharios and chartouarios of the
... (?) [tenth/eleventh century].

Provenance. Istanbul.

Dating. Mid-eleventh century.

Obv. St Nicholas (bust) holding a book (l. hand); vertical inscription on the right side:
... – ΚΙΟΙΛ, ; border of dots

Rev. Inscription in six lines; border of dots:

+ΚΕΡ,Θ,|ΝΙΚΟΛ,Α|Ι|CΠΑΘΑΡ.Ι|ΧΑΡΤΟ..Ι|ΤΗΟΡ...Ι – ΤΡ...

[Ὁ ἅγιος Ν[ικολ]ά(ας). // + Κ(ύρι)ε β(οή)θ(ει) Νικολ(άφ) (πρωτο)σπαθ(αρίφ) (καί)
χαρτο[υλ(αρίφ)] τ(οῦ) Ὁρ[φαν(ο)]τρ[οφ(είου)]

The *orphanotrophos* was a civil official ranked relatively highly, among the other ministers of the empire (the *logothetai*); he had his own *sekreton* associated with one of the greatest charitable institutions of the empire, the orphanage of St Paul in Constantinople. The office of *orphanotrophos* is attested since the fifth century; the most famous was undoubtedly the eunuch Ioannes the Orphanotrophos, a leading figure in the politics of the empire around the period that our seal was engraved; he managed to raise to the throne his brother Michael IV (1034–1041) and his nephew Michael V (1041–1042).⁶⁶ Curiously, a significant number of *orphanotrophoi* are associated with the Pontos region. At least three were also, and at the same time, judges in the Armeniakoi;⁶⁷ another *chartouarios* of the Orphanotropheion was bishop of Ionopolis on the Black Sea;⁶⁸ while Ioannes Orphanotrophos came from Paphlagonia. It is not unlikely that the Orphanotropheion possessed estates in the region with which it funded its charitable activities. Our seal may have been related to these activities in the Pontos region.

Ecclesiastical seals

9. Niketas (metropolitan) of Sardeis (Fig. 9)
SL-123. Dunn, Handlist, no. 123; read as ‘... of Sardis’.

Provenance. Trabzon.

Dating. Mid-twelfth century, probably after 1147 and c. 1166.

66 R. Guiland, ‘Etudes sur l’histoire administrative de l’Empire byzantin. L’orphanotrophe’, *Revue des études byzantines* 23 (1965) 205–21; J. Nesbitt, ‘The orphanotrophos: some observations on the history of the office in the light of seals’, *Studies in Byzantine sigillography* 8 (2003) 51–61.

67 Two with the name Ioannes (Zacos II, no. 827: late tenth-early eleventh century; Nikephoros Ouranos, no. 14, ed. J. Darrouzès, *Épistoliers byzantins du Xe siècle* (Paris 1960) 224: later tenth century), and Pothos Monomachos (*DOSeals* 4, no. 22.18: early eleventh century). The first two may be the same person. No connection between the Orphanotropheion and any other province can be established in this period.

68 *DOSeals* 4, no. 18.3.



Fig. 8. Nikolaos, *protospatharios* and *chartoularios* of the Orphanotropheion.



Fig. 9. Niketas (metropolitan) of Sardeis.

Obv. Indistinct figure of a standing holy figure wearing a long heavy tunic, possibly Theotokos; border of dots.

Rev. Inscription in five lines: Η ΣΦΡΑΓΙΣ ΑΥΤΗΣ [Ε]ΛΑΧΕΝ [Ν]ΙΚΗΤΗ(Α) ΤΟΝ ΣΑΡΔΕΩΝ ; border of dots: Η σφραγίς αὕτη [ἐ]λαχεν [Ν]ικήτ(α) τον Σαρδ(έων)

This seal was allotted to Niketas (metropolitan) of Sardeis

This seal was only partially read by Dunn and therefore not indexed in the Corpus of metrical seals; nor does it appear in prosopographical studies. Although the seal is worn and the surface corroded, the inscription is quite clear; we hesitate only between the reading of τοῦ or τῶν before Σαρδέων. The omission of the metropolitan office from the inscription is quite common, particularly on metrical seals of the eleventh century and later. Another metropolitan of Sardeis in this period wrote on his seal: Τὸν Σάρδεον Στέφανον, Ἀγνή, με σκέποις (Oh Pure [Virgin], protect me, [metropolitan] of Sardeis).⁶⁹

The long heavy tunic of the figure on the obverse is the usual dress of the Theotokos. This is compatible with the fact that, with one exception, all known

⁶⁹ *DOSeals* 3, no. 32.7.

metropolitans of Sardeis portrayed the Theotokos on the obverse of their seals.⁷⁰ A metropolitan of Sardeis named Niketas participated in the Synod of 1166 in Constantinople,⁷¹ and may have been the owner of our seal. If so, Niketas was appointed metropolitan after 1147, when another metropolitan of Sardeis, Ioannes, participated in a synod.⁷²

10. Timotheos, abbot of Kedron (Fig. 10)

SL-55. Dunn, Handlist, no. 55 [eleventh century].

Provenance. Trabzon.

Dating. Mid-tenth century.

Obv. Cross patriarchal on four steps, flanked by fleurons rising up to lower vertical crossbar; circular inscription: ΚΕΡΟΗΘΗΤΩΨΩΔΔΛ, ; border of dots

Rev. Inscription in four lines; border of dots:

+Τ.ΙΜΟ..ΩΙ.ΓΔΜΕΝΩΙ.ΔΚΕΔΡΙΟΝΟC

Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθη τῷ σῷ δούλ(ω) // + Τ[ι]μο[θε]ῳ [ῆ]γουμένῳ [τ]οῦ Κεδρόνος

A monastery by the name τῶν Κεδρώνων, not located in Constantinople or its immediate environs, is known from three letters, all dated sometime before 870/871, of Patriarch Photios to its abbot Dorotheos.⁷³ Another abbot of the same monastery from the mid-ninth century, Iakobos, is known from a seal located in the Dumbarton Oaks collection.⁷⁴ The name of the monastery on that seal appears as ΚΕΔΡΟΝΟ/, which the editors (faithful in the edition of the Letters of Photios), transcribed as [τ(ῶν)] Κεδρόνο(ν). Nevertheless, we prefer to transcribe Κεδρόνος, due to the spelling of our seal, and to the reading of a letter that is likely a C instead of the abbreviation sign.

Nothing else is known about this monastery; however, the editors of Photios' letters suggested that, since Dorotheos opposed Photios, it may have been located on Mount Olympus in Bithynia, near several other monasteries that opposed the patriarch. This proposition is strengthened by John of Ephesos, who noted a toponym 'Qerdonian' near Pythia in Bithynia. Indeed, in the same area several centuries later existed the toponym [ῆ] Κεδρωνέα.⁷⁵

70 The only exception is V. Laurent, *Le corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin*, V.1: *L'Eglise* (Paris 1963) no. 368.

71 S. N. Sakkos, *Ο πατήρ μου μείζων μου ἔστιν*, II. *Ἐριδες καὶ σύνοδοι κατὰ τὸν ἰβ' αἰῶνα* (Thessaloniki 1966) 179.

72 G. A. Ralles and M. Potles, *Σύνταγμα τῶν θείων καὶ ἐρῶν κανόνων*, V (Athens 1855) 310.

73 Photios, *Letters*, nos. 229 and 268–69, ed. B. Laourdas and L. Westerink, *Photii Patriarchae Constantinopolitani Epistulae et Amphilochia* (Leipzig 1983–8).

74 *DOSeals* 3, no. 49.1.

75 J. Zepos and P. Zepos (post C. E. Zacharia von Lingenthal), *Νεαραί καὶ Χρυσόβουλλα τῶν μετὰ τὸν Ἰουστινιανὸν Βυζαντινῶν Αυτοκρατόρων* I (Aalen 1962) 662; John of Ephesos, *Ecclesiastical history*, II.46, tr. R. P. Smith, *The Third Part of the Ecclesiastical History of John, Bishop of Ephesus* (Oxford 1860) 76–7.



Fig. 10. Timotheos, abbot of Kedron.



Fig. 11. Esdrael of Ioannes or Esdraelioannes.

This foundation should not be, however, related to the monastery τὰ Καθαρά.⁷⁶

Seals only with names

11. Esdrael of Ioannes or Esdraelioannes (Fig. 11)

SL-112. Dunn, Handlist, no. 112; read as Ioannes [tenth/eleventh century].

Provenance. Trabzon.

Dating. Early tenth century.

Obv. Lion facing left; border of dots

Rev. Inscription in four lines; border of dots:

+ΚΕΡΘ|ΗΘ|ΗCΔΡ|ΑΗΛΙΩ|ΑΝΝΗ

+ Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθ(ει) Ἡσδραήλ <τοῦ> Ἰωάννη

76 R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantine. Les églises et les monastères des grands centres byzantins* (Paris 1975) 158–60; J.-C. Cheynet and B. Flusin, 'Du monastère Ta Kathara à Thessalonique: Théodore Stoudite sur la route de l'exil', *Revue des études byzantines* 48 (1990) 205–7.

A seal similar to this belonged to the former G. Zacos collection. It bears the same decoration of the obverse (an advancing lion) with only minor differences (for example, the Zacos seal is framed with entwined tendrils between two borders of dots) but the owner identifies himself as ‘Esdrael, son of Ioannes’,⁷⁷ whereas on our seal the name appears united, without the article τοῦ. In Greek popular tradition sons often assumed as a single name the compound of their first name with their patronymic and this might have been such a case. Esdrael is of Hebrew origin and means ‘God is my helper’; it is not elsewhere attested as a name in Byzantium.

12. Sisinnios Hagiopolites (Fig. 12)

SL-61. Dunn, Handlist, no. 61 [11th c.].

Provenance. Trabzon.

Dating. First half of tenth century.

Obv. Lion facing left; border of dots.

Rev. Inscription in four lines; border of dots:

.KER., ICICINHOLΓHOΠIQΛHT,

[+] Κ(ύρι)ε βοή[θ(ει)] Σισινῆο [Α]γιοπολήτ(η)

Note again the unusual lack of the definite article (τῷ) before the surname. The course of the border on the reverse leaves insufficient space on the left of the third line or on the right of the second line for yet another letter, that is, for an abbreviated T.

The surname Hagiopolites is attested in other sources. On ascending the throne in 886, Leo VI ordered Ioannes Hagiopolites, *magistros* and ex *logothetes* of the *dromos*, to evict Photios from the patriarchate and send him to a monastery. He later took part in the trial of Photios.⁷⁸ The seal of another Hagiopolites, Elias (equally without the definite article τῷ) from the 11th c. is located in the Hermitage.⁷⁹

13. Stephanos Baltomerites (?) (Fig. 13)

SL-62. Dunn, Handlist, no. 62; read as Stephanos Latmo.ites

Provenance. Trabzon.

Dating. First half of eleventh century.

Obv. Theotokos (bust) holding with both hands a Christ in medallion; remains of a circular invocation: [...] ΔΟΝΛ; border of dots

Rev. Inscription in four lines; border of dots:

.ΤΕΙΦΑΝΟΡΙΑΛΤ, ΜΕΙΡΙΤΙ

[Θ(εοτό)κε βοήθει τῷ σῷ] δούλ(ω) (?) // [+ Σ]τεφάνο Βαλτ(ο)μερίτι (?)

⁷⁷ Zacos II, no. 919.

⁷⁸ Theophanes Continuatus, ed. I. Bekker (Bonn 1838) 353–5.

⁷⁹ Shandrovskaja and Seibt, *Byzantinische Bleisiegel*, no. 96.



Fig. 12. Sisinnios Hagiopolites.



Fig. 13. Stephanos Baltomerites (?).

Dunn had read *Latmo.ites*; however, in the first letter of the third line one can see the middle line of the A, while the second letter has no middle line and thus is a Λ. The first letter of the surname is not well preserved and could either be Π or R. We would favour R (the open form of Beta) and read the first part of the word as βαλτο-, (i.e., βάλτα/βάλτος; marsh).

14. Strategios, ... (Fig. 14)

SL-45. Dunn, Handlist, no. 45; read as Isaak, strategos [10th c.].

Provenance. Trabzon.

Dating. First half of tenth century.

Obv. Peacock in frontal position with an open tail; border of dots.

Rev. Inscription in four lines (three surviving):

+ΚΕΡΟΙΗΘ/CTP.ΙΤΙΓΗ...Ι...

+ Κ(ύρι)ε βοήθ(ει) Στρ[α]τηγή[φ ...]

Dunn read the owner's name as Isaak and his office as *strategos*, however, it is clear that the first name, Strategios, follows immediately after the invocation. At the bottom of the third line there are remains of letters from the fourth line that probably contained the dignity, the office or even the surname of the owner.



Fig. 14. Strategios, ...

Christos Malatras earned his PhD at the University of Birmingham with the thesis 'Social structure in fourteenth century Byzantium' (2013). He was awarded postdoctoral fellowships in Greece (Academy of Athens), Turkey (Koç and Boğaziçi Universities), USA (Dumbarton Oaks), and Germany (University of Cologne and Karl Eberhard University of Tübingen) and taught Byzantine History at the Democritus University of Thrace, the University of Thessaly and the University of Ioannina. He has authored a monograph (Edinburgh, 2023) and several articles on the social, cultural, and administrative history of Byzantium and sigillography.