

PAST AND FUTURE. SEALS OF THE ARCHIVE OF THE BOHEMIAN CROWN AND THEIR REPRESENTATION IN MONASTERIUM.NET

DANIEL JELLER

Introduction

This paper tries to give an insight into the representation of seals in the charter database Monasterium¹ in general and the seals of the *Archiv České koruny* (= Archive of the Bohemian Crown, short AČK)² therein in particular. It summarizes the general approach to presenting seal imagery alongside meta-data in the portal as well as the current state of the AČKs' seals and changes to this specific collection within Monasterium in the near future.

Seals in Monasterium

Founded 2002 as an Austrian regional project, Monasterium, with its currently over 600.000 datasets, has become one of the biggest online resources for medieval and early modern charters. These historical documents cover an important part of European history and are provided by over 130 archives in 14 European countries. Depending on the data provided by the owner archives, charters in Monasterium are represented online both with one or more digital images as well as searchable meta-data for their contents and context. This data can not only be browsed and searched but also edited and improved by the Monasterium-community using its online visual XML-editor *editMOM*. The digital images created for Monasterium are focussed on accurately portraying all visible aspects of the charters, mainly its text area, its back side where archival remarks might be located as well as any attached seals. These images are usually either provided by the archives themselves or made on behalf of the Monasterium project in situ with specialized equipment. The main challenge during the digitisation is to find a balance between staying true to the original documents but keeping the digitisation costs per image in check by not spending too much time with each individual image. This implies that if possible, only one picture of each side of the charter is taken. Any seals are therefore usually part of the same image as the main charter body.³

¹ <http://monasterium.net> [21. 2. 2017].

² <http://monasterium.net/mom/CZ-NA/AČK/fond> [21. 2. 2017].

³ See figure 1.

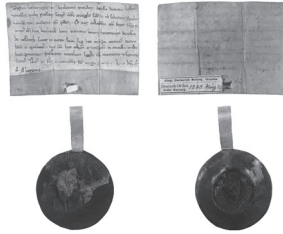


Figure 1: Two images portraying a charter and its disconnected seal from the front and the back. Source: Monasterium; HStAM-Urk37-124



Figure 2: Different seal materials in comparison. Source: Monasterium; NA-AČK-2



Figure 3: Digitisation with Monasterium-Equipment. Source: Photo of the author

The resulting image quality is heavily dependent on the material, colour and structure of the seal.⁴

Darker materials (green, dark brown) have less contrast than lighter ones (red, amber). This effect can be somewhat lessened by using lighting able to give existing features more contrast. Images directly made by Monasterium are therefore usually created by using a specialized overhead book scanner with lights positioned on the left and right of the object to be digitised.⁵ This way the overall structure of both the charter and any seal is captured with more contrast than with frontal lighting.

The images are accompanied by a wide range of information in the charter database, depending on the particular charter. This information, the so called *meta-data*, is stored encoded in *CEI*, an XML-dialect specifically created to describe charters.⁶ This way

⁴ See figure 2.

⁵ See figure 3.

⁶ <https://www.cei.lmu.de/index.php> [21. 2. 2017].

information about a charters' issuer, issuing date, signature, its content and much more can be made accessible and searchable for Monasterium's users. This also includes information about any seals. Its material, owner, measurement, etc. can be therefore be described. For a short example of an encoded charter see listing 1.⁷

Listing 1: Basic charter data encoded in CEI-XML

```
1 <cei:text type="charter">
2 <cei:front/>
3 <cei:body>
4 <cei:idno id="8">8</cei:idno>
5 <cei:chDesc>
6 <cei:abstract>Wenceslaus I donates to a monastery.</cei:abstract>
7 <cei:issued>
8 <cei:dateRange to="12421231" from="12420101">1242</cei:dateRange>
9 </cei:issued>
10 <cei:witnessOrig>
11 <cei:traditioForm>Original</cei:traditioForm>
12 <cei:archIdentifier>
13 <cei:arch>National Archive Prague</cei:arch>
14 </cei:archIdentifier>
15 <cei:physicalDesc>
16 <cei:material>Parchment</cei:material>
17 <cei:condition>Damaged</cei:condition>
18 <cei:dimensions>24 x 14,5 2,5 cm</cei:dimensions>
19 </cei:physicalDesc>
20 <cei:auth>
21 <cei:sealDesc>
22 <cei:seal>
23 <cei:sigillant>Wenceslaus I</cei:sigillant>
24 <cei:sealDimensions>74mm</cei:sealDimensions>
25 </cei:seal>
26 </cei:sealDesc>
27 </cei:auth>
28 </cei:witnessOrig>
29 <cei:lang_MOM>Latin</cei:lang_MOM>
30 </cei:chDesc>
31 </cei:body>
32 <cei:back/>
33 </cei:text>
```

The Archiv České koruny and its seals

One of the first Czech archival holdings to be included in Monasterium is the Archiv České koruny, the archive of the Bohemian Crown. It has been digitized between 2007 and 2008.⁸ Its 2525 charters document the history of the Bohemian Crown from the 12th all the way up to the 20th century⁹ and are „probably the [sic] one of the most precious archives holdings in the Czech Republic“.¹⁰ Due to their status as czech cultural heritage access to these documents is highly restricted,¹¹ making the publication via Monasterium very beneficial for researchers and the general public.

⁷ Seal data on lines 21–26.

⁸ Křečková, Jitka: Charters of the National Archives in Prague on Monasterium.net. In: Aigner, Thomas et. al. (edd.): Archives on the Web. St. Pölten 2011, pp. 147–153, here p. 149.

⁹ Ibidem, p. 149.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Ibidem.

The charters of the AČK are represented in Monasterium as described in section 2 of this text. The meta-data was provided by the National Archives and the images were created by Monasterium staff in situ using a specialized scanner.¹²

The main difference to other fonds both inside and outside of the collections of the National Archives consists in the special way the charters are stored: they are smoothed out by a restorer and mounted hanging on racks in a climate-controlled room wrapped in protective plastic film.^{13,14} To avoid traction, some seals are additionally packaged in a clear plastic shell of matching size.¹⁵ Due to the preservation guidelines of the National Archives charters were at the time of digitisation only allowed to be removed from the protective casing if absolutely necessary.

This means that in Monasterium, the quality of the seals' depiction is very much dependent on whether or not the charter was allowed to be taken outside of its casing and whether or not the seal was additionally protected. The effect of this can be observed comparing figures 2, 4 and 5. While in theory the casing is transparent, in practice the dual layers of plastic can cause the seal to appear blurry. Figure 5 shows that in some cases the image quality is not as good as it could be when only taking the condition of the seal itself into account. The meta-data currently available for the seals of the AČK matches those of comparable archival collections. It mainly describes the seal in a general way without making use of the advanced elements of the CEI-XML dialect used to describe charters in Monasterium. The following three examples illustrate the general range of currently available data:

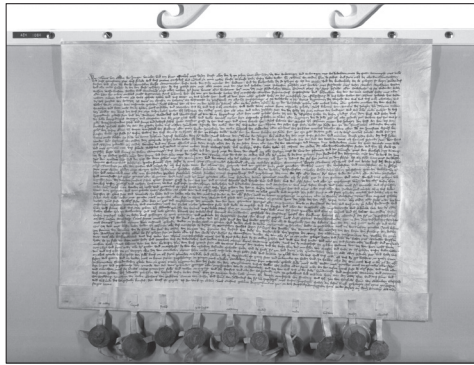


Figure 4: A charter protected by plastic film. Source: Monasterium; NA-AČK-1084

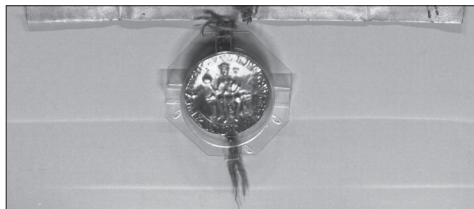


Figure 5: A seal from in a protective casing. Source: Monasterium; NA-AČK-3

¹² See figure 3.

¹³ See figure 4.

¹⁴ Křečková, J.: Chartres, p. 149.

¹⁵ See figure 5.

1. <cei:sealDesc>bullae aureae Friderici II ., regis Siciliae , 56 mm fere illaesa in filis sericis pallide rubri coloris appendet.</cei:sealDesc>¹⁶
2. <cei:sealDesc>sigillum Friderici marchionis 37 mm in filis sericis flavi et rubri coloris appendet.</cei:sealDesc>¹⁷
3. <cei:sealDesc>1 řěšpivená čtpee</cei:sealDesc>¹⁸
- 4.

The data suffices to give users a way to search for specific seals but only in a very basic way. Using the full range of available CEI-XML Elements would enable visitors not only to use the full text search but to specifically look for seals that are made of a certain material, of a specific colour or are associated with a specific person.

Planned developments

Soon after finishing the digitisations for Monasterium, the National Archive was faced with „quite many researchers’ inquiries concerning the seals”.¹⁹ While participating in projects to physically reproduce the seals for the interested public, the archive started planning²⁰ a new digitisation project. New high quality photos of only the seals taken outside of their protective wrapping were to be taken by a photographer.²¹ Currently the digitisation is under way. For an example of the achieved image quality see figure 6 as compared to figure 5. There are much more details visible and the whole blur caused by the plastic casing is gone.

The new images are complemented by a new database with in-depth meta-data of the seals. Having already reached more than 2530 database records in October 2016 the project is planned to go on for another two years.²²

After the planned end of the project in 2018 the new meta-data and images will be incorporated into the already existing charter data on Monasterium. This way, the current database can be enhanced further and users of the charters get access to high quality seal descriptions and images.



Figure 6: NA-AČK-3, newly digitized. Source: National Archive; NA-AČK-3

¹⁶ NA, Archiv České koruny (AČK), inv. č. 3, monasterium.net, 1212, url: <http://monasterium.net/mom/CZ-NA/ACK/3/charter> [31. 1. 2017].

¹⁷ NA, AČK, inv. č. 30, monasterium.net, 1289, url: <http://monasterium.net/mom/CZ-NA/ACK/30/charter> [31. 1. 2017].

¹⁸ NA, AČK, inv. č. 1500, monasterium.net, 1423, url: <http://monasterium.net/mom/CZ-NA/ACK/1500/charter> [31. 1. 2017].

¹⁹ Křečková: Charters of the National Archives in Prague on Monasterium.net (see n. 8), p. 152.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 152.

²¹ J. Křečková (personal communication, 10/11/2016).

²² J. Křečková (personal communication, 10/11/2016).