

# INDIAN SEALS

(PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS)

NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF INDIA

**INDIAN SEALS**  
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## PREFACE

Among the primary sources of Indian history seals have not received the attention they deserve. No systematic work has been done on the subject so far and no steps have been taken for their preservation on scientific lines. In order to fill this lacuna the National Archives of India has embarked upon a new Project of Cataloguing the Oriental Seals found on original documents in its custody. This pioneering venture, which has been undertaken by the Oriental Records Division under the guidance of my colleague Shri A. I. Tirmizi, Assistant Director of Archives, will, it is hoped, open up new vistas of research.

Apart from the seals in the custody of this Department, quite a large number of them are found either in various official repositories of records or in private custody where they suffer from various forms of decay. If early steps are not taken to preserve them scientifically, it is feared that they will be lost to posterity, leaving a big gap in the history of our country. It is, therefore, necessary that those who are entrusted with the custody of seals should be conscious of their value and familiar with the methods of their preservation.

With the above object in view Shri Tirmizi contributed a series of two articles, viz., (1) A Saga of Indian Seals and (2) Problems of Sigillography in India. The

first article, which gives a general survey of Indian seals, was published in the *March of India*, July, 1959. The second dealing with the problems of Indian seals has been included in the *Indian Archives*, January—December, 1957. These articles serve not only as a pointer in that direction but provide the students of Indian sigillography with an essential tool for their task. In view of their importance and utility they are now reprinted in the form of a brochure.

Our thanks are due to the Director, Publications Division, Government of India, for permission to reproduce one of the articles which appeared in the *March of India*.

*National Archives of India,  
New Delhi,  
21 September, 1959.*

K. D. BHARGAVA  
*Director of Archives,  
Government of India.*



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## A SAGA OF INDIAN SEALS

Of the few primary sources of Indian history, seals provide a fascinating subject of study. Right from the second millennium B.C., to which the Indus valley civilisation belongs, down to the British times seals have been used by kings, queens, princes, high-placed officers and private individuals as well as by governments and institutions to lend authority to documents and correspondence. In ancient and mediaeval India seal was considered even more important than signature for giving validity to a document. Although in modern times their importance has waned, seals continue to be used to give official contracts and communications authenticity and legal validity.

**Ancient Seals.**—The practice of using signet-rings emblematic of love, power and sovereignty can be traced back to remote antiquity. In Indian mythology Rama is reported to have sent his *anguliyakam* (signet-ring) incised with the letters of his name, to Sita. In the *Shakuntala*, Kalidasa has made a dexterous use of the signet-ring of king Dushyanta who having forgotten his wife, Shakuntala, recognised her only after his memory was evoked by the sight of the ring which he had given her, with his name engraved on it, as a token of love. The plot of Visakhadatta's *Mudra-rakshasa*



(Rakshasa's seal) hinges upon the signet-ring of Rakshasa, fugitive minister of the last Nanda king. Similarly we are told by Bana that when Harshavardhana was about to march against the king of Gauda the *gramakshapatalika* (keeper of the village records) requested the king to issue orders for the day and presented a golden *mudra* (matrix) having the device of a bull. When Hiuen Tsiang, the Chinese pilgrim, took leave of Harshavardhana, the latter furnished him with letters written on fine white cotton stuff and authenticated by impressions of his seal made of red wax.

Not only do we have references to the practice of using seals but actual specimens of ancient Indian matrices and signet-rings have come down to us. Seal-stamps bearing legends as well as devices were discovered at Harappa. While legends on them have not yet been deciphered, the devices which they bear have life-like pictures of animals like lion, tiger, elephant, bear, deer and bull. While these seal-stamps are unilingual one having its legend in three different characters—Brahmi, Kharoshti and Greek—has also survived. In the line of signet-rings we have an actual specimen made of copper or bronze ascribed to the fourth century of the Christian era. This signet-ring of Maharaja Mahesvaranaga, the son of Nagabhata, is oval in shape and has both legend and device sunk in the surface of the signet. We have not only the specimens of seal-matrices and signet-rings but seal-impressions also have been discovered. The early Indian seals are found on clay.

While Buddhist votive tablets are the best examples of inscribed tablets they cannot technically be called seals. But the clay tablets having either device or legend can be called clay-seals and various archaeological sites abound in them. A large collection of such seals referable to fourth and fifth centuries A.D., were found at Basarh in Muzaffarpur District. This collection consists of seals of officials, corporations, guilds, temples, private individuals etc. Besides clay, copper was also used for sealing purposes and such seals are found on *tamra-sasana* (copper-plate grants). They are of various sizes and shapes, viz., circular, oval, leaf-shaped etc. The earlier copper seals are simple and contain an emblem or two, forming the royal insignia or the coat of arms. The principal device was *lanchhana* (crest) which was used on coins also. This usually took the form of a lion, a tiger, an elephant, a bull, a bear, a fish, a serpent, the bird-man Garuda, the monkey-god Hanuman etc. Besides such figures there are also engraved lamp-stands, *chhatra* (parasol), the sun and the crescent moon. The legend which is sometimes composed in verse contains the name of the ruler along with that of his father.

The seal of Kantideva (Pl. I—No. 1), which looks like an inverted leaf, is supported by two figures of serpents whose interlaced tails are soldered to the bottom of the seal while their hoods are raised. The seal proper is divided into two panels. While the lower panel bears the legend *Sri Kantideva*, the upper one bears the figure of a lion seated in a temple. But

a more elaborate and exquisite specimen of a royal seal is that of Rajendra Chola (Pl. I—No. 2). In design it gives the appearance of a fully blossomed lotus. The circle contains the Chola coat of arms. The most conspicuous of the emblems is a pair of fish facing which is a tiger seated on a strung bow with curved side down. The string of the bow is flanked by lamp-stands with burning wicks. Above the tiger and the left fish are figured *chamaras* (fly-whisks) with a *chhatra* at the top. A miniature sun is depicted between the parasol and the left fly-whisk near which a faintly visible representation of the crescent moon can be seen. All these emblems are enclosed in a circle around which is engraved the metrical legend of Rajendra Chola which reads thus :

*Etad-Rajendra-Cholasya Parakesarivarmmanah  
rajad-rajanya-mukuta-sreni-ratneshu-sasanam*

This is the order of Rajendra Chola, alias Parakesarivarmana, on the crest-jewels of the reigning kings.

**Seals of the Sultans.**—Seals of the Sultans of Delhi are rarely to be met with. Nor is there much on record to give us an idea of the seals of that period. All grants of land were, however, sealed with the royal *tughra* which contained the name and style of the sovereign in a highly ornamental form, while the administrative orders were sealed with the royal *tauqi* (motto). When Sultan Muhammad bin Tughluq invested the Arab traveller Ibn Battuta with the office of the Qazi of the capital the latter is reported to have said, "My lord,



I am a follower of the Maliki school, while the people here are Hanafis and I do not even know their language". "I have", said the Sultan in reply, "appointed Bahaud-Din of Multan and Kamalud-Din of Bijnor your deputies and counsellors. They will give you their advice and you will have merely to stamp the documents with your seal". Under Muhammad bin Tughluq *muhrdar* (keeper of seals) was an important functionary among the officials connected with the *Diwan-i-Vikalat*.

**Mughal Seals.**—While seals of the Sultans are rare those of the Mughals are numerous and include imperial, ecclesiastical, judicial and private seals. Most of the imperial seals are lineal or dynastic in character. From Babur to Bahadur Shah II, the great seal of each emperor bears the name of the sovereign in the central ring with the names of his ancestors up to Timur in the outer rings round about. The round seal of Babur (Pl. II—No. 3) for example, consists of two circles, of which the inner circle contains the name of the Emperor while the outer one has five panels, each bearing the name of his ancestor back to Timur. In the case of each of his successors we find an increase by one in the number of outer rings.

Besides the great royal seal called *muhr-i-muqaddas-i-kalan*, the *Ain-i-Akbari* refers to four different categories of seals, viz., (i) a small square seal bearing the legend *Allah u akbar jalla jalaluhu* (God is great, exalted be His glory), (ii) a seal used for all matters connected with the seraglio, (iii) a small

round seal known by the Chaghtai name of *uzuk*, and (iv) a *mihrahi* or lozenge-shaped seal which was used for all judicial transactions. Round the name of the Emperor the *mihrahi* seal bore a Persian verse which runs thus :

*Rasti mujib i riza i Khuda ast*  
*Kas na didam ke gum shud az rah i rast*  
Uprightness is the means of pleasing God,  
I saw none lost in the straight path.

In the beginning of his reign Emperor Jahangir had a round lineal seal but later on he got engraved a rectangular dynastic seal. He is also reported to have got engraved the figures of Lord Jesus and Virgin Mary in some of his seals.

Emperor Shah Jahan reverted to the circular pattern. His round genealogical seal (Pl. III—No. 5) comprises two circles. The inner circle bears the legend :

*Abul Muzaffar Shihabud-Din*  
*Muhammad Sahib Qiran i Sani.*

At the bottom is found 1046 A.H. (1636-37 A.D.), the year of striking the seal. Round the central ring are found nine small rings containing the names of his ancestors back to Timur. The seal of Murad Bakhsh is of unique interest inasmuch as it confirms the historical record of his coronation in 1068 A.H. (1658 A.D.) on the eve of the fratricidal war. The large round lineal seal of Aurangzeb, which was engraved in 1069 A.H. (1659 A.D.), is indicative of his definitely established status as Emperor after he had emerged victorious from the war of succession.



Of the seals of the Mughal queens those of Hamida Banu Begam and Nur Jahan have come down to us. The seal of Hamida Banu is square and comprises three vertical panels, the middle one bearing her name while the upper and the lower ones having a Persian hemistich each. The lower panel has the year 968 A.H. (1561 A.D.) engraved in it. This date is of great significance inasmuch as it coincides with the death of Bairam Khan. The seal of Nur Jahan (Pl. II—No. 4) is more beautiful and elaborate than that of Hamida Banu. It consists of four elliptical panels. The first panel contains the invocation *Allah u akbar* (God is great), while the last records the nineteenth regnal year of Jahangir. The corresponding year 1033 A.H. (1623-24 A.D.) is engraved in the second panel. This is evidently the year of striking the seal and consequently a land-mark in determining the ascendancy of the Empress. The second and the third panels contain a hemistich each of the following elegant Persian verse:

*Ze nur i mihr i Jahangir badshah i jahanban  
Nagin i Nur Jahan badshah gasht furozan*

By the light of the love of Jahangir the world-protecting monarch, the bezel of Empress Nur Jahan became resplendent.

The Mughal princes also had their own seals. Besides the names and titles of the princes, the appellations of their father along with the years of engraving in regnal era are found engraved in the legends of their seals. The seal of Prince Dara Shukoh (Pl. III—

No. 6) bears dedication to God at the top followed by the legend in Persian which means :

King of lofty fortune, Muhammiad Dara Shukoh,  
son of Emperor Shah Jahan, the holy warrior.

This seal was struck in the thirtieth regnal year of Shah Jahan, corresponding to 1066 A.H. (1655-56 A.D.). The seal of Prince Kam Bakhsh, youngest son of Aurangzeb, indicates the name of the Prince and of his father.

During the palmy days of the Grand Mughals, the seal was plain and simple, but under the latter Mughals it developed into a gorgeous illuminated piece having its imperial character emphasised by the addition of a *chhatra* over it. The circular seal of Akbar II has a decorative border of conventional flowers. A representation of a parasol overshadows the seal which contains the name and flamboyant titles of the king and his ancestors up to Timur.

**Maratha Seals.**—Among the Maratha seals we come across those of the Chhatrapati, the Peshwa and his chieftains. Some of them bear legends in the Marathi language and character, while others are in Persian. The seal of Shivaji is in Sanskrit and bears the legend:

*Pratipad-chandra-rekheva-wardhi-shnur  
vishwavandita-Shahsoonoh-Shivasya-asha-mudra  
bhadraya rajate.*

This seal of Shiva, the son of Shah, shines for the good (of people) and like the universally revered crescent of the moon of the bright fortnight (increases in splendour).

The Peshwa Madhav Rao Narayan had two seals : one in Marathi, the other in Persian. His Marathi seal (Pl. IV—No. 7) is simple and bears the legend :

*Shri-Raja-Shahu-narpati-harshanidhan-Madhav  
Rao Narayan-mukhya pradhan*

Shri Raja Shahu, king of men, treasure of joy,  
Madhav Rao Narayan, the Prime Minister.

Besides the legend we find a miniature sun and crescent moon depicted at the top. His Persian seal is more elaborate and bears a flamboyant legend which contains the title conferred on the Peshwa by the Mughal Emperor. Similarly Mahadji Sindhia got engraved on his seal the title bestowed on him by Shah Alam II. Unlike that of Mahadji Sindhia the seal of Nana Farnavis (Pl. IV—No. 8) is simple and bears the following legend in Marathi : *Shri Balaji Janardan*. The seals of other Maratha chiefs are either in Persian or Marathi and bear simple legends merely indicating their names without even the common appellation 'Bahadur'. Some of them do mention the regnal year in which they were engraved.

**Seals of the Company.**—For about two centuries after its establishment, the East India Company acted in the name of the Mughal Emperor. Even in the first two decades of the nineteenth century it did not claim sovereignty, although by that time it had emerged as a great political power. The Governor-General, like other *subahdars*, had his own seal but described himself as the 'servant of the Mughal Emperor'. He followed the convention of other Indian chiefs and had a



gorgeous seal bearing a flamboyant legend in Persian running in five and at times seven long panels. The Company's seals, which are mostly oval in shape and fairly big in size, bear the regnal year besides the Hijri and at times Christian era. In the earlier seals of the Company and the Governor-General, the name of the Mughal Emperor is found at the top while the Company or the Governor-General is described as a 'devoted servant' of the Emperor. Some of the Governors-General used to have two separate seals: one bore reference to the Mughal Emperor while the other did not.

The seal of Marquis of Hastings (Pl. VI—No. 11) bears a legend in Persian which means :

Choice of high grandees, special adviser to His Gracious Majesty the King of England, having the rank of Saturn, noblest of nobles, Marquis of Hastings, Governor-General Bahadur, administrator of the territories under the Government of the English Company Bahadur, and Commander-in-Chief of the royal armies and of the Company's Government in India, devoted servant of Emperor Muhammad Akbar, the holy warrior.

This seal was made in 1232 A.H. (1817 A.D.) as is evident from the date found in the field. Reference to the Mughal Emperor is dropped in the other seal of the Marquis of Hastings though it was engraved in the same year. This practice continued till about the end of the second decade of the nineteenth century.

Thereafter reference to the Mughal king is omitted both in the seal of the Company and of the Governor-General.

The Company and the Governor-General had their seals in English also. The English seals, generally oval, like their counter-parts in Persian, differ from the latter in two respects. Firstly, they rarely indicate their date. Secondly, their legends are plain and simple. The legend of the English seal of Lord Bentinck (Pl. VI—No. 12) is as under :

*The Right Honourable Lord W. C. Bentinck,  
Governor-General of India.*

In conclusion it may be pointed out that the Indian seals are public and private, religious and secular. While ancient Indian seals provide excellent examples of delineation of animal figures in their devices, the Mughal seals present fine specimens of art as far as execution of legends and floral designs is concerned. Although modelling of animal figures was by and large avoided in the latter, this principle was not strictly adhered to. However, the chief characteristic of the Mughal seals is the indication of date, whose absence is very conspicuous in the ancient Indian seals. The early Mughal seals were plain and simple but gradually they developed into gorgeous pieces of art having flamboyant legends. The Persian seals of the Marathas and the East India Company are more elaborate than their counterparts in Marathi and English.



## II

### PROBLEMS OF SIGILLOGRAPHY IN INDIA

Sigillography is a well-developed science in the West while it has as yet not been born in India. Even the meaning of the term, as the name of a distinct branch of learning, is little known, except perhaps to archivists in our country. It is, therefore, necessary at the very outset, to give the exact connotation of the term. In brief the term sigillography signifies a critical study of seals. It is derived from *sigillum* which in Latin means seal. It is also known as sphragistics. The term seal is employed to describe both the implement for making the impression and the impression itself. This article relates to the latter usage except where the seal is referred to as the matrix.

**Practice.**—The practice of using seal can be traced back to remote antiquity. In the earlier ages seal was used as a taboo. Later on it became a symbol of power and was regarded as an attribute of sovereignty like the crown and throne both in the Orient and the Occident. In India seal played quite an important role throughout its recorded history. We have not only references to the practice of sealing in ancient and mediaeval India but also have actual specimens of ancient as well as mediaeval seals. With the advent

of Mughals on the Indian stage we have an unbroken series of seals till under the influence of the West the seal was supplanted by signature.

**Importance of Sigillography.**—The importance of sigillography is manifold. The archivist owes a great deal to the sigillographist but for whom many a document would have remained closed codices—undated and unidentified. It is well known that in mediaeval times the seal was more important than the signature. It used to be sworn to by witnesses and therefore served as a means of identification and an unfailing guide to authentication. But this is not all. The importance of seals for the study of art cannot be overestimated. Do seals follow the same trend in art as calligraphy, iconography and so forth or is there a substantial time lag? What is the difference in the symbology of the coins and seals? These are but a few questions on which a sigillographist would be able to provide information for the expert in art and iconography. But what is important from the historical point of view is the fact that the *sigillum* or legend which sets forth the name and style of the owner provides us with data which not only corroborates and supplements the known facts but at times alter the existing conceptions of history.

**Scope.**—In various parts of India small inscribed tablets of clay, which were baked into terra-cotta or left to harden naturally, are found in large numbers. These tablets sometimes present devices only, at

times only legends and sometimes both legends and devices. Besides clay seals of the aforesaid nature, we come across copper or bronze seals. In ancient India the most usual method of authenticating a document was by attaching a copper or bronze reproduction of the royal seal. But most of the mediaeval Indian seals are either impressed on paper or attached on sealing lac. Coming to the Mughal period the seals we meet with are almost bewildering in number and variety. Among others we find those of the Mughal Emperors, Institutions and the Nobility. We also come across seals of various local dynasties, viz., those of Oudh, Murshidabad, Mysore, Hyderabad, Travancore, Arcot, Poona, Gwalior, Nagpur, Jaipur and Jodhpur, etc. Then there are also the seals of the officials of the East India Company, viz., Governors-General, Commanders-in-Chief, etc. The seals of several neighbouring countries, viz., Iran, Muscat, China, Nepal, Burma, Tibet, Bhutan, Malaya, etc. are also found. Specimens of many of the types mentioned above are found in the custody of the National Archives of India, but a large quantity lies scattered all over the country in private custody altogether uncared for. As a result they suffer from various forms of decay, e.g., cracking, scratching, collapse, staining and perishing due to change in their constituent elements. If early steps are not taken to preserve these seals, it is feared that they will be irretrievably lost, leaving a big gap in our cultural heritage.

**Preservation.**—Preservation of seals involves several operations, e.g., repairing, cleaning, restoring and



Cleaning Soft brush  
Repair - mending - same material - dist. ink colour  
Restoration  
Packing

packing. As far as repairing is concerned it is generally admitted that mending should be done with the same material as that of the original. Care should particularly be taken not to fake a broken design and hide in any way the modern work put into repairing. It is, therefore, advisable to use for repair a colour different from that of the material of the original seal. The condition of the seal at the time of repair should always be noted. As far as cleaning is concerned, it should be done with the softest available brush in order to avoid scratches. The finest watch-maker's cleaning brush is the best. Coming to packing it may be noted that it varies with the way in which seal is affixed to the document. Let us take pendent-seals first, though they are very uncommon in India. There are various methods of packing but the most elaborate according to Sir Hilary Jenkinson is the one "by which the seal along with suitable 'quilt' is placed in the cardboard box, in the sides of which a hole is cut for the tab, tongue or cords by which it is suspended. When this is used it will be wise to secure the seal by a stitch passing over the tab or cord and through the bottom of the box, and in some cases also to have an attachment to the box of cloth or some other material, which may be fastened by a stitch to the document so as to take the weight." The packing of pendent-seals though elaborate is easy but the preservation of applied seals is difficult inasmuch as the documents bearing seals are very frequently made up in bundles, files or even volumes. Shellac seals in such a position have a tendency to break. It is, therefore, necessary

to give some protection to applied seals. According to Sir Hilary Jenkinson "a simple plan is to make a small quilt, strengthen one edge with a fold of linen, and through this sew it on to the document at the side of the seal, over which it forms a hinged flap. A more elaborate plan is to insert a stout guard in the volume or file and fasten on to this a sheet of millboard having a hole cut in it to fit (with plenty of margin for possible shifting) over the seal. In the case of a loose single document, having an applied seal, it is best to put it between two boards, the top one with the hole, as described, being hinged at the side to another, to which the document itself is fastened." But from the point of view of the archivist the making of a permanent mould is perhaps the most important of all the processes connected with the preservation of seals.

**Moulding and Casting.**—According to Sir Hilary Jenkinson the only satisfactory substance for making moulds is plaster of Paris, the finest obtainable quality being used (that known as Dental) and even this being sifted through fine gauze. It is not impossible to use warm gelatine even on wax seals, and gelatine moulding is an easy process. Mr H. S. Kingsford recommends modelling of paraffin wax for making moulds but according to the same authority a better composition consists of 1 lb. of well-dried and sifted whitening, with 4 oz. of bees-wax and 4 oz. of lard. The last two are to be melted and the whitening added by degrees and stirred in. Mr Kingsford writes, "The more the mixture is worked after getting cold, the



better it gets. To make a mould, a large enough piece should be worked in the hands until fairly soft. Then flatten it out to a little over the size of the seal, and squeeze it all over, not too hard at first, but afterwards firmly, especially over the deep parts and inscriptions. Wet it before applying to the seal, to prevent it sticking, and let it get cold before removing." Casts can then be made. There are various methods of making casts but the four materials generally used are metal, sulphur, plaster and wax. Casts of seals can be made on metal by means of electrotyping but it does not adequately represent a waxen original. Sulphur is inflammable and is not very satisfactory as it gives a slightly blurred rendering of the finer lines. While plaster casts are cheaper in material, they cost more than wax ones in time and labour. The ordinary way of using wax for casts is to pour it molten into the mould. But a better method, according to Sir Hilary Jenkinson, is to place the cake of wax on the table and have the mould pressed into it in a strictly vertical direction. The cake of a wax should be from a quarter to half an inch thick, according to the depth of relief in the mould. The use of casts has many advantages. It saves handling and consequently risk to the original is avoided. They are very beneficial to the photographer inasmuch as they are easier to adjust and can be made in any colour. It will not be preposterous to suggest that the photographs or casts of every seal not in the National Archives of India should be made and deposited in some central place. But this is not the end of the problem of seals. Many a time we are con-

fronted with the problem of seeking confirmation of a certain seal; the impression before us may be damaged or partly legible and yet we do not know where to find a perfect impression. The problem can only be solved by preparing comprehensive catalogues of seals in public and private custody.

**Cataloguing.**—A catalogue of scientifically arranged seals will provide a good deal of valuable information. The catalogue, in order to be worth its name, should give the following details :—

1. No.
2. Illustration
3. Location
4. Type
5. Sigillum
6. Translation
7. Date
8. Shape
9. Device
10. Design
11. Direction of the sigillum
12. Dimensions
13. Language
14. Script
15. Material
16. Colour
17. State of preservation
18. Method of attachment
19. Any other information
20. Remarks including references to other seals.

The following explanation of respective items will facilitate the understanding of the above proforma.

2. Illustration.—No written description can possibly enable a reader to visualise a seal unknown to him. A photograph or sketch can be more communicative than words.

3. Location.—This means the exact position of the seal in the document. In case of clay-seal the site where it is found may be mentioned. If the seal is affixed on a document or manuscript, a brief account of the latter may be given.

4. Type.—This means the particular group or groups to which the seal can be assigned, as shown under Classification, q.v.

5. Sigillum i.e. legend.—If legends are on both obverse and reverse, they must be carefully distinguished. Illegible letters should be enclosed in square brackets.

6. Translation.—If the sigillum is in a language other than English, it must be translated into English.

7. Date.—It is that of the seal, i.e., one which occurs in the field. The date, in whatever era it might be, should be defined and converted into Christian era. The discrepancies, if any, should be indicated in footnotes.

8. Shape.—The seals are of various shapes, viz., circular, vesica, oval, hexagonal, octagonal, rectangular, triangular, square, lozenge-shaped etc., which should be indicated accordingly in the catalogue.



9. Device.—This includes emblem, insignia and other charges, and an appropriate indication about it is necessary.

10. Design.—Some seals have floral, geometrical and other designs which should be noticed.

11. Direction of the sigillum, i.e., whether the legend is to be read vertically, horizontally, clockwise or anti-clock-wise. In the last two cases it should be clearly indicated at which point the legend commences. This information can be illustrated by means of an arrow—the tail to begin at the appropriate point and arrow-head to indicate the direction.

12. Dimensions, i.e., greatest height and width or diameter. Measurements should be taken carefully with dividers. Measurements in millimeters should refer only to the impression and not to the whole of the wax.

13. Language.—The seals found in India are in various foreign as well as Indian languages, e.g., Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, English, Chinese, Hindi, Bengali, Marathi etc. While most of the Indian seals are unilingual we do come across bilingual and trilingual seals also. All these particulars about language are to be noted.

14. Script.—This means the style of writing which is called seal-character.

15. Material.—Clay, copper, wax, shellac etc. generally provided the sealing material. It would be interesting in this connection to find out when shellac sealing first appeared in India and the chemical changes, if

any, produced in it by age. According to Abul Fazl sap of the trees like Kunar, Bar, Pipal etc., provided lac which like wax gets warm when exposed to fire but gets afterwards cool and hard.

16. Colour.—The colour of the seal may be mentioned. In the case of the majority of Indian seals, the colour is either black or red.

17. State of preservation.—It should be clearly stated whether the state of preservation is good or bad and whether the impression is incomplete, damaged, blurred or chipped. If the seal is mutilated or fragmentary, the actual size of the fragment and its relation to the complete seal should roughly be indicated.

18. Method of attachment.—Whether affixed direct on the document or appended on a tongue, or tag or laces. If the last be the case, the colour of the laces should be noted.

This is the bare outline of a catalogue of seals. But an ideal catalogue would be one wherein seals are classified on scientific lines as defined below in detail.

**Classification.**—Seals are of various kinds, and can be classified according to the material of which they are made and on which they are impressed as also the manner in which they are affixed, such as (i) Clay-seals: When an impression is found on clay tablets it is called clay-seal; (ii) Metal-seals: These are technically called "bullae" (Lat. bulla, a boss, or circular metal ornament) and they are suspended from the documents. Most of the ancient Indian seals are



Classification of seals  
 (i) Official  
 (ii) Institutional  
 (iii) Private

I Material  
 Clay  
 Metal  
 Wax  
 Wafer or wafer

II Design  
 Single-sided  
 Double-sided  
 Counter

Shape  
 Round  
 Oval  
 Rectangular  
 Square  
 Hexagonal

found on copper; (iii) Wax-seals: When an impression is affixed on sealing wax, it is called a wax-seal; (iv) Wafer-seals: When the seal is formed on the document by means of wafer and not wax, it is called a wafer-seal.

Seals can also be classified according to the design of the matrix as follows: (i) Single seal or seal with an impression on one side only, produced by the use of one matrix, (ii) Double seal or seal with impressions on both sides which can be distinguished as obverse and reverse, (iii) Counter seal or seal with impressions on both sides produced by two matrices of different shape and size.

Another classification of seals can be based on their shapes as (i) Round or circular, (ii) Vesica or pointed oval, (iii) Rectangular, (iv) Square, (v) Triangular, (vi) Lozenge-shaped, (vii) Hexagonal, (viii) Octagonal etc.

As far as the subject-matter is concerned the seals are classified in accordance with the text of the document and designation in the legend thus: (i) Official seals which indicate rank or office, (ii) Institutional such as Ecclesiastical seals which relate to the church, (iii) Private seals which relate to individuals in their private capacity. The catalogue of seals in the British Museum is arranged more or less on the preceding lines. But official seals can also be sub-divided into Central (Imperial) and Local (Dynastic). The Institutional seals can be sub-divided into Ecclesiastical and

Judicial. The final arrangement is a matter of opinion but a chronological arrangement within a geographical framework appears to be the most satisfactory as far as the seals found in India are concerned. It is, therefore, suggested that they should be classified as : 1. Foreign, and 2. Indian. They can be divided into (i) Central, (ii) Local, and then sub-divided into Imperial, Public, Institutional and Private as mentioned above. The classification will not only be convenient but will also facilitate the study of sigillum or seal-character as developed at different places as well as the art of seal-engraving as practised in different regions.

**Sigillum.**—In engraving the sigillum the seal-engraver often indulged in flourishes, embellishments and variations making it difficult for a layman to decipher it. He also displayed much ingenuity in the arrangement and treatment of the legend which in many ways is the most important part of the seal. The sigillum usually sets forth the name of the owner. Sometimes it contains the name as well as the designation and titles of the owner. These titles are either official or honorary, civil or military, temporal or ecclesiastical. They are generally indicative of the relation of the holder with his social surrounding or the sphere of his political and moral authority or jurisdiction. In some cases the name of the master is added to the personal name as an additional attribute. In some seals the name of the owner is followed by that of his father while others give the pedigree of the owner. Such

seals are called lineal seals. Some of the seals bear a motto, a rhyming verse or a pious ejaculation often indicative of humility.

**Date.**—The Indian seals generally have a tendency to record the dates in broad terms only. These dates are rarely the dates of the documents to which they are affixed, but are usually earlier. Mostly they are the dates of accession of the reigning monarch. Usually the date is located at one place but sometimes the figures forming the dates are scattered amongst the letters of the legend. This date is useful as it provides us with a clue as to the age of the seal. The names and titles along with the date contained in the sigillum provide us with a source-material which has hitherto remained unexploited.

**Device.**—Some seals have only a legend and some other only a device, but some bear both legend and device. A few words may be said regarding the different kinds of devices which were employed in ancient and mediaeval Indian seals. The ancient Indian seals contain an emblem or two forming the royal insignia or coat of arms. But the Muslim rulers of India usually avoided delineation of animal figures in their seals and devoted their artistic ingenuity to creating rhythm in lines. Their sense of mathematical precision is well displayed in the execution of the legend and the geometrical as well as floral designs. The device and the legend wrought in the field provide us with data for the study of the art of seal-engraving as it developed at different places.



**Seal-engraving.**—Seal-engraving was an art and the seal-engravers like their brother craftsmen had to undergo training which was long and difficult. In the mediaeval period apprentices having good education used to take lessons from the calligraphists of the day and then served for several years with a master-engraver. Great care was taken to ensure the genuineness of a seal. The engravers were forbidden to engrave two exactly similar seals for the same person. Whenever a seal was lost the owner got some trifling alterations made in the new one such as a change in design or date so that the forgery could easily be detected. The shops of the seal-engravers were regularly searched by the police so that they might not be tempted to put their skill to illegal use. It is, however, to be regretted that the names of only a few celebrated seal-engravers of the mediaeval period have come down to us. Altun at the court of Timur was reckoned a master of this art. Abul Fazl gives the names of the following masters of the craft at Akbar's court.—1. Maulana Maqsud of Harat, 2. Tamkin of Kabul, 3. Mir Dost of Kabul, 4. Maulana Ibrahim, and 5. Maulana Ali Ahmad of Delhi. Ghulam Muhammad, the author of *Tazkira-i-Khushnavisan*, refers to Mirza Muhammad Ali, who, according to him, was unrivalled among the seal-engravers of his age. Like all other arts the engraving of seals in the mediaeval period of Indian history underwent certain changes characteristic of different times and regions. It would be interesting in this connection to undertake comparative study of the seals and coins of the mediaeval

period. Such a study would provide useful data for an expert in art and iconography.

**Matrix.**—While seals are found in large number we know very little about the instrument with which they were made, i.e., matrix. As instances of matrices we must mention first some objects from Harappa of which an account of only two of them has been published. From Sankisa in Farrukhabad District, U.P., we have a steatite or soap-stone seal-stamp. In this line, however, perhaps the most important find is the rock-cut seal matrix, found at Rohtasgarh in Shahabad District, Bihar, which dates back to the early seventh century. The material most commonly used for making matrices was, however, silver or copper. Gold was used very rarely. The mounted stones bearing the sigillum were of various kinds, viz., cornelian, garnet, agate, coral, turquoise etc. It is, however, a matter for regret that the matrices of Mughal seals have not come down to us. The practice of erasing from the matrix the name of the king immediately after his death probably explains this lacuna. If the name could not be conveniently erased the engraving was entirely removed in order to make room for another sculpture upon a new superficies. This proves that particular care was taken to see that the seal of one person was not used by another. It would, in this connection, be interesting to know something about the custody of seals.

**Custody.**—People of humble rank used to carry their seals in their breast-pocket. Some of them sus-

pended it round their neck. But the dignitaries in mediaeval India used to have a confidential seal-bearer called *muhrdar* who carried the signet in a small bag in his breast-pocket and produced it whenever required. There was a regular post of royal *muhrdar* under the Mughals. During the early part of Akbar's rule the great seal was in the charge of Khwaja Jahan but the small round seal called *uzuk* was in the charge of one of the queens. The great seal was also transferred to a queen after the fall of the Khwaja in the eleventh year of Akbar's reign. When Khan-i-Azam Mirza Aziz Koka became *vakil* in the fortieth year of the reign he was given the charge of the great seal. Jahangir refers to the custody of his seal only once in his *Tuzuk*: "When I was a prince I had entrusted in consequence of my extreme confidence in him (Amirul-Umara Sharif Khan) my own *uzuk* seal to the Amirul-Umara, but when he was sent off to the province of Bihar I made it over to Parwiz. Now that Parwiz went off against the Rana, I made it over, according to the former arrangement, to the Amirul-Umara. Under Shah Jahan the *uzuk* was first in charge of Mumtaz Mahal and after the coronation of the king, it was given to Asaf Khan at the request of the Queen herself. When he was sent to the Deccan in the second year it was again handed over to the Queen, and he received it back on his return. But when he went for the second time to the Deccan, after the death of the Queen it was given over to Begam Sahiba (perhaps Jahan Ara) who retained the seal and the duty of sealing the *farmans* till the end of the reign. The



limited scope of this article does not permit multiplication of examples. It is, however, certain that under the great Mughals the *uzuk* seal generally remained in the female apartment.

**Methods of attachment.**—We may conclude this study with a discussion of the method of attachment. In the case of records on *tamra-sasana* covering more than one plate, it was customary to string the plates together by one or two copper rings passing through round holes in them. A bronze reproduction of the royal seal was attached at the point where the two ends of the ring met. In the case of records on single plates it was customary to weld or otherwise fasten the seals on to the plates themselves—sometimes on the left side before the lines of the inscription and sometimes at the top. In case of documents on paper, various methods of attachment were adopted. One method was as follows :—At one end of the document a strip of stiff paper was attached, and a small portion of it near the edge was cut separating it from the rest of the strip. The seal was affixed to this small portion with impression on both sides and looked like a modified version of the pendent-seal. In most cases the seal was put *en-placard*—that is, the seal was impressed directly on the face of the document. Abul Fazl informs us that the royal seal was affixed on the *farmans* which were rolled up from the bottom into several folds and sealed at prescribed places by various officials from the *vazir* downwards. The two edges of the document were made to meet and a knot of

paper was put over them. The seal was affixed on the knot in such a manner that the contents could not be seen. When thus sealed the *farman* was put into a golden cover. *Kharita* or diplomatic bag generally served as a receptacle for documents. The mouth of the *kharita* tied with coloured strings and seal was affixed thereon. This proves that seals in mediaeval India were used to authenticate a document or to close it. In most cases, however, the seal was used to authenticate a document which was not closed. The Germans have adopted the term *untersiegeln* for this method of attachment. Sometimes the seal was employed to authenticate as well as to close a document so as to prevent it from being read by any one except the person to whom it was addressed. In German this method is called *versiegeln*.

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No. 1. Seal of Kantideva



No. 2. Seal of Rajindra Chola

Plate II



No. 3. Seal of Babur



No. 4. Seal of Nur Jahan





No. 5. Seal of Shah Jahan



No. 6. Seal of Dara Shukoh



No. 7. Seal of Madhav Rao Narayan Peshwa



No. 8. Seal of Nana Farnavis

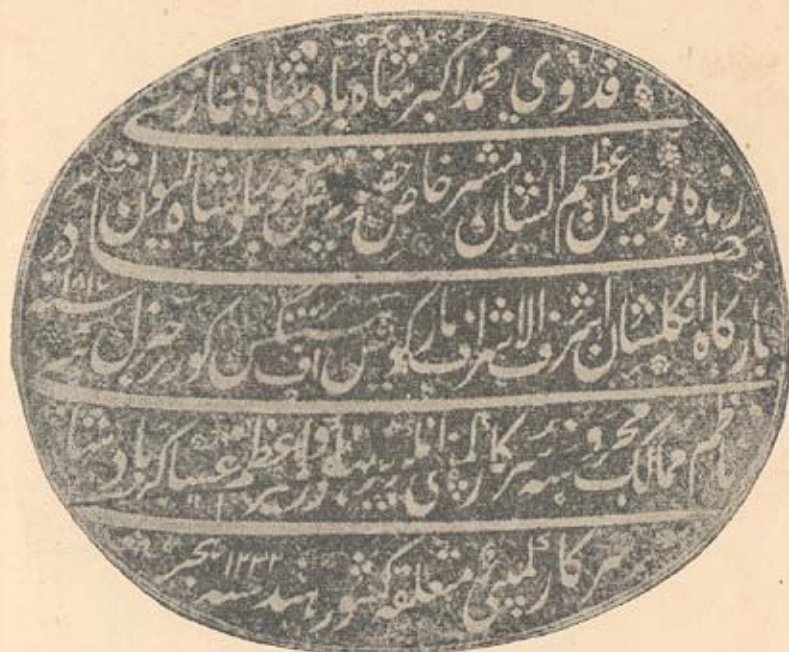


No. 9. Seal of Kamaleshwari Devi



No. 10. Seal of Braja Nath Sinha





No. 11. Seal of Marquis of Hastings



No. 12. Seal of Lord Bentinck



No. 13. Pendant Seal of R. Christian VIII

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