

CONTEMPORARY PERSPECTIVES ON THE STUDY OF MEDIEVAL SEALS IN WESTERN AND ROMANIAN ACADEMIA: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

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Abstract The present paper aims to examine the main directions the historical research of medieval seals has followed in the recent decades. Starting from several sigillography handbooks developed in both Western and Romanian academic environments, but also from the published inquiries of the most important contemporary scholars active in this field of study, the present article focuses on their most relevant contributions, their historiographical impact, as well as the concepts and ideas formulated and debated on these occasions. Therefore, the purpose of this approach is not only to make a brief review of the state-of-the-art research in Western sigillography, but also to point out the main directions the Romanian sigillographic research should pursue in the years to come.

Keywords Historiography, sigillography, medieval seals, scholars, concepts, academia.

Product of a time characterised by *an intense emblematic fermentation*¹, the seal articulated itself as an instrument specific to medieval pragmatic literacy, with the role of confirming to the recipient, nominated or not, that the charters to which it was affixed to – usually by its wax imprint, or by hanging a metallic bull – reflected the will, findings or accomplishments of its owner. This happened whether he represented an institution with an individual or collective projection, or that the documents which he had drafted were issued only in his own name. At the same time, the seal shaped an avatar in the universe of the written law, with the purpose of identifying, representing and proclaiming its possessor. Generally composed of an image and a legend, both chosen by and linked to its rightful owner, the seal pointed out not only his identity and social status, but also his personality, aspirations and claims.

Sigillography, as an auxiliary science of history, and the seal, as its main object of study, represented in the last half-century a genuine wager of major European historiographies to approach both of them as thoroughly as possible. Proof

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¹ Michel Pastoureau, *O istorie simbolică a Evului Mediu occidental* [A Symbolic History of the Middle Ages] (Chișinău: Cartier, 2004), 250.

to this are the numerous handbooks and treatises emerged from the Western research milieu – from Italy,² France,³ Germany,⁴ or the United Kingdom⁵ –, works which aim to provide much more than simple revisions, restructurings and annotations of the first publications of this kind, dating back from the late 19th century and the first years of the following one.⁶ If the publishing of the first monographic works, in a positivistic manner, is due to the widening separation of the objectives of sigillography from those of diplomatic (although researches in these areas have remained and will remain deeply connected, generating each other new directions and suggestions for understanding the addressed sources), the more recent publications claim the versatility of seals and their continuous recalibration as historical sources. In other words, the constant reassessment and rediscovery of seals has produced as many paradigm shifts, arguing the need to reshape and complete the frameworks of seals in their historical dimension. Moreover, there is a growing interest in seals from the Middle Ages, as they, unlike those from any other historical period, reflect most accurately the position of their owner in the social and institutional hierarchies, in a very complex and highly regulated system.⁷ As a result, the latest approaches have aimed to go beyond the traditional objectives of sigillography, limited to studying the seal in terms of its immediate functions – closing and authenticating documents and identifying their issuers – and supplying rather partial information about its possessor or artistic trends of the era that influenced the making of this validation instrument.

Probably the most significant contribution of these recent times belongs to Michel Pastoureau. In his short paper,⁸ in addition to tackling questions of terminology, use, preservation and classification of medieval seals, Pastoureau sought to identify several research areas that could benefit from their study, not few in numbers: diplomatic, history (in its cultural, political, legal, administrative or social

² Giacomo C. Bascapé, *Sigillografia. Il sigilli nella diplomatica, nel dritto, nella storia, nell'arte*, Vol. I (Milan: Dott. Antonino Giuffrè, 1969); Josef Grisar, Fernando de Lasala, *Aspetti della Sigillografia. Tipologia, storia, materia e valore giuridico dei sigilli* (Rome: Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1997).

³ Michel Pastoureau, *Les Sceaux* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981).

⁴ Erich Kittel, *Siegel* (Braunschweig: Klinkhardt & Biermann, 1970); Andrea Stieldorf, *Siegelkunde: Basiswissen* (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 2004).

⁵ Paul D. A. Harvey, Andrew McGuinness, *A guide to British Medieval Seals* (London: British Library, 1996); Elizabeth A. New, *Seals and sealing practices* (London: British Records Association, 2010).

⁶ Albert Lecoy de La Marche, *Les sceaux* (Paris: Maison Quantin, 1889); James Harvey Bloom, *English seals* (London: Methuen & Company, 1906); Wilhelm Ewald, *Siegelkunde* (München – Berlin: R. Oldenbourg, 1914).

⁷ John Cherry, "Medieval and Post-Medieval Seals," in *7000 Years of Seals*, ed. Dominique Collon (London: British Museum Press, 1997), 124-142.

⁸ Pastoureau, *Les Sceaux*, 64-76.

dimension), philology, epigraphy, palaeography, onomastics, genealogy, heraldry, archaeology, ethnology, material culture studies, religious and devotional attitudes, history of mentalities and of course art history. As a result, despite its small size, the seal has the characteristics of a historical source of extraordinary richness for historians interested in any of the phenomena indicated by Pastoureau.

The analytical perspectives enabled by the medieval seal, increasingly explored in the recent decades, have assumed it as a witness of the same cultural context that produced and used it according to specific and precise rules. Thus, the interest for the dynamics of sealing practices, for its contextualization within certain regions and social groups, or for the interaction with other methods of representation and communication of the era – such as heraldry⁹ – allowed the opening of new research topics related to regional, political, religious, ethnic or gender structures, emphasising especially the role that the use of seals played in the spread of literacy among the lay of the Middle Ages. In other words, the intense development of the use of seals during the 12th century was achieved in the background of the legal transfer from orality to the written word, in order to assimilate not only identification purposes, but also that of identity affirmation in an updated legal context. What was originally a custom of the sovereign power, which in turn replicated imperial and papal practices, became accessible to more and more members of the lay and religious social structures of the Middle Ages. Thus, the seal acted as a mean of representation engaged in the written communication, which started to be used by entities with both individual¹⁰ and collective¹¹ projection.

Therefore, the historiography of recent years – more oriented towards the publication of small-scale studies, which allow well-defined and detailed approaches, arranged in thematic sections, but without the lack of single authored volumes – has been increasingly interested in the mechanism by which seals have highlighted the identity and authority of those who owned and used them in their writing practices.¹² From this point of view, seals which belonged to individuals received

⁹ Michel Pastoureau, *Traité d'Héraldique* (Paris: Picard, 1997), 230-233.

¹⁰ Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago. Signs of Identity in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

¹¹ *Die Bildlichkeit korporativer Siegel im Mittelalter*, ed. Markus Späth (Köln-Weimar-Wien: Böhlau Verlag, 2009).

¹² *A Companion to Seals in the Middle Ages*, ed. Laura Whatley (Leiden: Brill, 2019); *Seals. Making and Marking Connections Across the Medieval World*, ed. Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak (Amsterdam: Arc Humanities Press, 2018); *Seals and Status. Power of Objects*, eds. John Cherry, Jessica Berenbeim, Lloyd de Beer (London: The British Museum, 2018); *Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages*, ed. Philipp R. Schofield (Oxford – Philadelphia: Oxbow Books, 2015); *Medieval Coins and Seals. Constructing Identity, Signifying Power*, ed. Susan Solway (Turnhout: Brepols, 2015); *Pourquoi les sceaux? La sigillographie, nouvel enjeu de l'histoire de l'art*, eds. Jean-Luc Chassel, Marc Gil Chassel (Lille: Publications de l'Institut de recherches

more attention from researchers, especially due to the aspects that could be analysed in relation to the social groups they were part of, but also due to the diplomatic background in which their seals functioned as means of identification. In this sense, probably the most important role of the seal was to shape and clarify a recognizable entity of its possessor, fully assumed by him, especially in the functioning environment of the written legal culture, but not only.

Too little distinction has been made generally between seal matrices and their imprints, since the research perspectives have focused primarily on the functionality of seals as a conceptual mediator and less as an evidence of medieval material culture. In this respect, most contributions that approached exclusively seal matrices¹³ have taken into account either the recording of larger collections¹⁴ or their producers, usually goldsmiths¹⁵, but sometimes they have also investigated the objectives and techniques of the graphic representations located in the seal emblem.¹⁶

As for those who dealt with this kind of historical sources, it was estimated about three decades ago that their number in Europe and North America did not exceed 15 specialists, extremely few compared to about two or three millions seal imprints originating in the Medieval West, while the preserved matrices would count about 100 times less.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the number of researchers has improved considerably, as evidenced by the increasing frequency of collective volumes with a seal-derived theme, but also of individual contributions. This enhanced appetite is also due to authors who, through their contributions in recent decades and their research methods validated on these occasions, have established genuine micro-historiographical directions.

A pioneer in reconsidering the medieval seal, beyond its immediate functionality as a validation instrument, was Robert-Henri Bautier. His research, especially in the fields of diplomatic, also focused on the sealing practices of the

historiques du Septentrion, 2011); *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*, eds. Noël Adams, John Cherry, James Robinson (London: The British Museum, 2008); *Das Siegel: Gebrauch und Bedeutung*, ed. Gabriela Signori (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2007).

¹³ John Cherry, "Seal Matrices. Past, present and future", *The Monmouthshire Antiquary. Proceedings of the Monmouthshire Antiquarian Association*, 20(2004): 51-60.

¹⁴ Ambre Vilain, *Matrices de sceaux du Moyen Âge* (Paris: Bibliothèque National de France, 2014).

¹⁵ John Cherry, "Patronage and Purpose. Goldsmiths and the Engraving of Silver Seal-Matrices in Late Medieval England", in *Orfèvrerie gothique en Europe. Production et réception*, eds. Élisabeth Antoine-König, Michele Tomasi (Roma: Viella, 2016), 255-270; Michel Pastoureau, "Les graveurs de sceaux et la création emblématique", in *Artistes, artisans et production artistique au Moyen Âge – Vol. I: Les hommes*, ed. Xavier Barral i Altet (Paris: Picard, 1986), 515-522.

¹⁶ Ambre Vilain, "Quand le tout petit contient le grand: la virtuosité sigillaire au Moyen Âge", *Histoire de l'art*, 77(2015): 69-78.

¹⁷ Michel Pastoureau, "Les sceaux et la fonction sociale des images", *Chaiers du Léopard d'Or*, V (1996): 276-278.

French royal chancery. In an article written in the mature years of his career, the author, identifying the use of four types of royal seals between the 10th-14th centuries, considered that the succession of these categories was achieved on a larger European scale, in which sovereign chanceries influenced each other in the choice of details of their great seals, especially in the ways for representing the royal thrones, such renewals echoing even in Hungary.¹⁸ Equally interesting is his long-standing analysis of French royal seals and sealing practices between the 9th-15th centuries, establishing the influences and innovative contributions of each dynasty, as well as particular aspects such as the use of the privy seal, of the counter-seal, or of the seal belonging to the Dauphin of France,¹⁹ as the heir apparent is called.

Toni Diederich, in an extensive study, whose historiographical impact could be compared with the work of Michel Pastoureau from the early 1980s, following a careful analysis of the sigillography handbooks written especially by German scholars, proposed a new classification of seals based primarily on their rightful owners. On this occasion Diederich drew attention to the importance of the possessor for the study of seals, regardless of his secular or religious profile, or his individual or collective projection, as the choice for articulating the contents of a seal depended directly on his subjectivity, but this was done at the same time within well-established rules. Thus, the options for making a seal could be common to several categories of owners, an aspect that is often due to the fashions of the era and mutual influences.²⁰ Among Toni Diederich's interests, most of which concern with the urban environment of Rhineland and, especially, the city of Cologne,²¹ the perspectives on the study of medieval seals are a constant theme. His most recent book,²² bringing together ten studies within this domain, offers not only several methodological contributions to the sigillographic research, mainly in the field of the cult of the patron saints and forged seals, but also examples of applied research, which show that all material aspects of seals, including their emblems, legends and sizes, carry

¹⁸ Robert-Henri Bautier, "Échanges d'influences dans les chanceliers souveraines du Moyen Âge, d'après les types des sceaux de majesté," *Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, CXII/2(1968): 192-220.

¹⁹ Idem, "Le sceau royal dans la France médiévale et le mécanisme du scellage des actes," in *Corpus des sceaux français du Moyen Âge. Les sceaux royaux*, Vol. II, ed. Martine Dallas (Paris: Archives Nationales), 15-34.

²⁰ Toni Diederich, "Prolegomena zu einer neuen Siegel-Typologie," *Archiv für Diplomatik, Schriftgeschichte, Siegel- und Wappenkunde*, XXIX (1983): 242-284.

²¹ Idem, *Die alten Siegel der Stadt Köln* (Köln: Greven Verlag, 1980); Idem, *Rheinische Städtiesiegel* (Neuss: Neusser Druckerei und Verlag, 1984); Idem, "Das große Siegel der Kanonissenstiftes St. Ursula zu Köln," *Archives et Bibliothèques de Belgique*, LVIII/1-2(1987): 91-110.

²² Idem, *Siegelkunde. Beiträge zu ihrer Vertiefung und Weiterführung* (Wien-Köln-Weimar: Böhlau Verlag, 2012).

deliberate messages of their rightful owners. This work also contains an interesting comparative analysis between seals and tomb effigies from the Middle Ages.

Michel Pastoureau returns to the attention of those interested in sigillography with a thorough contribution published in the mid-1990s, which considers the medieval seal to be at the same time an object and an image.²³ Both valences sum up in the author's view a series of determining functions and characteristics, which in turn are listed, detailed and exemplified across his paper. The numerous information transmitted by medieval seals, as means of legal responsibility and social credibility of their owners, doubled by the possibility to date and locate them precisely due to the diplomatic context in which they appear, gives them the particularities of complex historical sources, little known even to other medievalists. This contribution can undoubtedly be considered a welcomed addendum of the micro-synthesis published by Pastoureau more than a decade earlier.

Probably the most prolific and innovative author of the contemporary sigillographic research is Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak. North American scholar of French origin, Bedos-Rezak entered the field of sigillography by editing the medieval seals of French cities, as the first volume of an extremely large and daring corpus.²⁴ Her research focuses on strategies of representation and communication derived from the use of seals, whose role was to encapsulate the expression of authority and identity.²⁵ One of the frames of interpretation that the author applied to medieval seals was semiotic anthropology, a recently formulated concept that pays attention to communication without being limited to a single linguistic code. In the case of seals, the ratio *sign – object – meaning* was highlighted, aiming to analyse the established relationships between medieval theories of signs, on one hand, and notions and instruments for recording identity, on the other hand.²⁶ As a result, Bedos-Rezak considers that a seal imprint can be seen from multiple perspectives, as an object, ritual or metaphor, since each of these layers reveals a series of concerns of the Late Medieval civilization to symbolically define itself.²⁷ The expertise and

²³ Pastoureau, "Les sceaux et la fonction sociale des images," 275-308.

²⁴ *Corpus des sceaux français du Moyen Âge. Les sceaux des villes*, ed. Brigitte Bedos-Rezak (Paris: Archives Nationales, 1980).

²⁵ Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak, "L'empreinte. Trace et tracé d'une médiation (1050-1300)," in *Matérialité et immatérialité dans l'Église au Moyen Âge*, eds. Stéphanie Diane Daussy, Cătălina Gîrbea, Brîndușa Grigoriu, Anca Oroveanu, Mihaela Voicu (București: Editura Universității din București, 2012), 127-141; Eadem, "Imprinting Matter, Constructing Identity (France, 1100-1300)," in *Courts and Courtly Cultures in Early Modern Italy and Europe*, eds. Simone Albonico, Serena Romano (Roma: Viella, 2016), 21-36.

²⁶ Eadem, "Medieval Identity: A Sign and a Concept," *The American Historical Review*, CV/5(2000): 1489-1553.

²⁷ Eadem, "In Search of a Semiotic Paradigm: The Matter of Sealing in Medieval Thought and Praxis (1050-1400)," in *Good Impressions*, 1-7.

innovation brought by her research recommended Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak for authoring a medieval sigillography handbook,²⁸ published by Brepols in the prestigious collection “L’Atelier du Médiéviste”, which unfortunately has not been yet completed. In the Western historiographical milieu of sigillography this work remains a most awaited contribution.

However, Martine Fabre has previously published a less ambitious volume, proposing an analysis of the medieval seal from a cultural perspective, related to the period of the 12th-15th centuries.²⁹ Her book, organised in seven chapters, takes on aspects of the history, typology and constituent elements of medieval seals, which she exemplifies with numerous situations from the French sealing practices. The last chapter, probably the most interesting, is an apology for a new approach to sigillography from the perspective of the accumulated testimonies – deliberate and spontaneous, symbolic and physical – that medieval seals record and communicate. In general, Fabre’s work calls for a double reflection. On the one hand, each seal imprint on a written document is simultaneously a testimony of judicial and social requirements of the era, a representation of individual or collective identity, but also an object made in accordance with the artistic trends of the time. On the other hand, the same seal is an assumed and strongly codified sign, which enables intrinsic coherence to the document to which it was affixed to. Therefore, the study of this specific category of historical sources, as the author observes, implies both the deepening of technical aspects and of the profound reasons and intellectual backgrounds behind the use of seals.

Last but not least, it is worth mentioning a work that, although not in the line with the already named historiographical trends, had made nevertheless a major contribution in the revival of the sigillographic research. Compiled at the initiative of the Committee on Sigillography of the International Council on Archives, the international sigillography vocabulary has the great merit of grouping together and describing over 300 specialised terms and concepts.³⁰ Although this endeavour covers only formal aspects related to a most accurate description of seals, the ambitious attempt to find equivalents in no less than 13 languages – including Romanian throughout the efforts of Maria Dogaru – suggests its much broader objectives, beyond the perspectives for standardising a scientific language. A small part of these notions was also included in an international diplomatic vocabulary,³¹

²⁸ Olivier Guyotjeannin, Jacques Pycke, Bennoît-Michel Tock, *Diplomatique Médiévale* (Turnhout: Brepols, 1993), 46.

²⁹ Martine Fabre, *Sceau Médiéval. Analyse d’une pratique culturelle* (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2001).

³⁰ *Vocabulaire International de la Sigillographie*, ed. Stefania Rici Noè (Rome: Ministero per i Beni Culturali e Ambientali, 1990).

³¹ *Vocabulaire International de la Diplomatie*, ed. Maria Milagros Cárcel Ortí (València: Universitat de València, 1997).

an equally complex and daring work containing several correspondents in Romanian as well.

Finally, it can be appreciated that the current Western historiography of the sigillographic research reveals to be through its dynamics extremely interested in the phenomenon of medieval sealing practices as a whole, understanding and equally exploring the multitude and variety of information that seals contain and further transmit. In essence, it marks the transition from a type of research focused on the idea of *seal archaeology*, in which aspects related to the physicalness and strictly diplomatic role of these instruments are emphasised, to one oriented according to the concept of *seal sociology*, in which the profile of the rightful owner plays a central role in defining the semiotic and anthropological ritual of sealing medieval charters, without completely ignoring its formal aspects, all these being integrated as deliberate attitudes within the entire representation process.

As for the Romanian historiographical milieu, the first interests for the study of medieval seals were initially oriented according to their most significant owners, such as voivodes or princes of Wallachia and Moldavia, important officers of the two courts or representative communities.³² The research of these historical sources, or better said just their simple remark and acknowledgement, unsurprisingly predated the national efforts to define sigillography as a scholarly discipline of history. The first attempts to draw the theoretical lines of this field of study developed, in a first phase, by reference to numismatics. Constantin Moisil published in 1922 a

³² August Treboniu Laurian, "Pecetea lui Mihai Radu v.v." [The Seal of Mihai Radu v.v.], *Magazin istoric pentru Dacia*, II (1846): 187; Vasile Alexandrescu Urechia, "Sigiliul târgului Pietrei (județul Neamț). Notiță istorică" [The Seal of the town of Piatra (Neamț County). Historical note], *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, X/II (1887-1888): 235-245; Idem, *Schițe de sigilografie românească* [Sketches of Romanian Sigillography] (Bucharest: s.n., 1891); Ioan Bogdan, "Fondul de documente dela Brașov și descrierea lor diplomatică" [The Documents Fund from Brașov and their Diplomatic Description], in *Documente privitoare la relațiile Țării Românești cu Brașovul și cu Țara Ungurească în secolele XV și XVI, Volumul I (1413-1508)* [Documents Regarding the Relations of Wallachia with Brașov and the Hungarian Land in the 15th-16th Centuries (1413-1508)] ed. Ioan Bogdan (Bucharest: Institutul de Arte Grafice Carol Göbl, 1905) XLIX-LXXVIII; Idem, *Album paleografic cuprinzând douăzeci și șase de facsimile de documente românești din secolul al XV-lea* [Palaeographic Album Containing Twenty-six Facsimiles of Romanian Documents from the 15th Century] (Bucharest: Librăria Socecu, 1905); Dimitrie Onciul, "Sigiliul lui Mihai Viteazul ca domn al Țării Românești, Ardealului și Moldovei" [The Seal of Michael the Brave as Prince of Wallachia, Transylvania and Moldavia], *Analele Academiei Române. Memoriile Secțiunii Istorice*, XXVII/II (1904-1905): 169-170; Grigore Tocilescu, "O nouă pecete a lui Mihai Viteazul" [A New Seal of Michael the Brave], *Buletinul Societății Numismatice Române*, II (1905): 10-13.

suggestively entitled article,³³ which drew attention to the similarities between numismatics and sigillography, more precisely the research perspectives that could be developed in the fields of political, cultural and social history by studying coins and seals.

Several academic lectures integrated relatively soon sigillography within the auxiliary sciences that aimed the scrutiny of historical written documents, as is the case of the University of Bucharest, where such an attempt was made in the academic year of 1926/1927 through the efforts of Nicolae A. Constantinescu.³⁴ He is also the author of a first Romanian textbook dedicated to *helpful sciences of history*.³⁵ According to his textbook, although the seal is part of the diplomatic research since it serves as an instrument for authenticating charters, it still needs a separate discipline to study it, as seals sum up a series of peculiar characteristics that evolved throughout history.

On the other hand, at the Archival Science School in Bucharest, sigillography has been, since the founding of the institution in 1924, one of the eight fundamental disciplines of study. The already named Constantin Moisil, as the one in charge for drafting the curricula, divided the discipline into three main categories, each with several subdivisions: *Overview*, *General Sigillography* and *Romanian Sigillography*.³⁶ Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, in the opening lecture for his course in diplomatic, considered that the auxiliary sciences of history are divided into major and minor disciplines.³⁷ The main difference between the two groups is not their importance, but the fact that historians can directly use the results of the former, while the mastering of the minor sciences would provide them the ability to properly investigate the sources of the past, a challenge which is essential for a genuine historical research. If the major sciences include geography, archaeology, geology, philology, sociology, law or philosophy, the minor sciences, as specific working tools for each historian, are archival science, palaeography, diplomatic, graphology, chronology, sigillography, heraldry, numismatics, phaleristics, genealogy, epigraphy and bibliography. The same author, trying a brief definition for each of these

³³ Constantin Moisil, "Două științe surori: numismatica și sigilografia" [Two sister sciences: numismatics and sigillography], *Buletinul Societății Numismatice Române*, XVII/43-44 (1922): 75-86.

³⁴ Gheorghe Z. Ionescu, "Predarea științelor auxiliare ale istoriei în Universitatea din București" [Teaching Auxiliary Sciences of History at the University of Bucharest], *Analele Universității Bucharest. Istorie*, XIII (1964): 64-74.

³⁵ Nicolae A. Constantinescu, *Curs de științe ajutătoare istoriei* (Course of Helpful Sciences of History) (Bucharest: Facultatea de Filozofie și Litere, 1929-1930), 326-339.

³⁶ Constantin Moisil, "Din istoria Școlii de Arhivistică" [From the History of Archival Sciences School], *Hrisovul*, I (1940): 11-45.

³⁷ Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, "Științele auxiliare ale istoriei" [Auxiliary Sciences of History], in *Îndrumări în cercetări istorice* [Guidelines for Historical Researches], ed. Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu (Bucharest: Casa Școalelor, 1945), 7-26, especially 21.

disciplines, considered sigillography as a methodical study of seals by reference to their type, legend, size, shape and affixing method.

After the Second World War, the interests for theorising auxiliary historical sciences diminished in the Romanian academic environment, a direct consequence determined by the establishment of the communist regime. The initiative for their revitalization and renewal, beyond the specialised and on-site courses, will be taken this time by the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj. In 1977, Nicolae Edroiu published an introduction in history and its auxiliary sciences, indicating fourteen fundamental disciplines, including sigillography.³⁸ Taking into consideration a series of particular sigillographic researches within the national historiography carried out in the previous decades, Edroiu managed a fairly even synthesis, organised in four parts, which aim to clarify the establishment of sigillography as a scholarly discipline, different categories of seals and their representations, several ways of sealing and the problem of forged seals. At the University of Bucharest, the discipline of sigillography was resumed in an academic textbook in 1988, drafted only in a first part, which was authored by Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu.³⁹ Bringing together seven auxiliary sciences of history in as many chapters, the sigillography chapter, although approached without an obvious structure, has the merit of addressing not only more specific terms, but also much better limited to the present-day sigillographic discipline (such as *hagiographic seal*), to mention some of the earlier but very important scholars (such as Wilhelm Ewald) and even to point out contemporary challenges or accomplishments, national or international, in this field of study (such as the establishment in 1959 of the International Committee on Sigillography).

After 1990, both Nicolae Edroiu and Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu resumed in several consecutive editions their previously published university textbooks, operating a series of changes in the structure of the new publications and less in the contents of the parts assigned to sigillography or other historical disciplines. In fact, the only innovations consisted, in the case of the first author,⁴⁰ in more compelling conclusions and minimal revisions of the bibliography and the critical apparatus,

³⁸ Nicolae Edroiu, *Introducere în istorie și științele auxiliare ale istoriei* [Introduction in History and Auxiliary Sciences of History] (Cluj-Napoca: Sectorul de multiplicare al Universității Babeş-Bolyai, 1977), 129-139.

³⁹ Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, *Științele auxiliare ale istoriei, Partea I* [Auxiliary Sciences of History. Part I] (Bucharest: Tipografia Universității Bucharest, 1988), 96-111.

⁴⁰ Nicolae Edroiu, *Introducere în științele auxiliare ale istoriei* [Introduction in Auxiliary Sciences of History] (Cluj-Napoca: Sectorul de multiplicare al Universității „Babeş-Bolyai”, 1992), 117-131; Idem, *Introducere în științele auxiliare ale istoriei* [Introduction in Auxiliary Sciences of History] (Cluj-Napoca: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 1999), 214-231; Idem, *Introducere în științele auxiliare ale istoriei* [Introduction in Auxiliary Sciences of History] (Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2003), 206-222.

while the latter⁴¹ added a comprehensive bibliography of the Romanian sigillographic research, organised in nine thematic groups, but each time updated only to 1990, a list of titles that has been previously disseminated through equally old contributions.⁴²

Starting with the 2000s, the first textbooks elaborated within smaller Romanian universities started to be published, in context of the development of particular study domains in which was needed a more or a less broad expertise in the traditional auxiliary sciences of history (such as archival and library studies, sociology, museology and so on). Generally, they do not exceed the level of the similar works previously authored by Nicolae Edroiu and Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, being rather compilations of the two. The particular approach of sigillography made in these university textbooks from Suceava,⁴³ Braşov⁴⁴ or Constanţa,⁴⁵ or intended for the professional reconversion of the teaching staff of secondary education⁴⁶, did not bring anything new to the theoretical aspects of the discipline itself. However, trying to manage their own genuine perspective, some authors end up making a series of errors, especially of terminology, concepts and designed categories.

⁴¹ Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, *Științele auxiliare ale istoriei* [Auxiliary Sciences of History] (Bucharest: Editura Universității București, 1994), 101-112; Eadem, *Arhivistică și documentaristică. Științele auxiliare ale istoriei. Partea I* [Archival and Documentary Studies. Auxiliary Sciences of History. Part I] (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2000), 116-131; Eadem, *Arhivistică și documentaristică* (Archival and Documentary Studies) (Bucharest: Credis, 2001), 237-247; Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, Gheorghe D. Iscru, *Introducere în știința istorică și în științele auxiliare ale istoriei – surse info-documentare* [Introduction in the Historical Science and the Auxiliary Sciences of History – Info-documentary Sources] (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2005), 119-126.

⁴² Maria Dogaru, "Din bibliografia sigilografică românească" [From the Romanian Bibliography on Sigillography], *Revista Arhivelor*, LXVI-4 (1989): 410-425; Maria Dogaru, Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu, "Sigilografie românească. Bibliografie" [Romanian Sigillography. Bibliography], *Caietul seminarului special de științe auxiliare ale istoriei. Opuscula bibliografica, genealogica, numismatica*, II (1990): 93-113; Eadem, "Sigilografie românească. Bibliografie I" [Romanian Sigillography. Bibliography I], *Revista Muzeelor*, XXVII/6-7(1990): 104-109; Eadem, "Sigilografie românească. Bibliografie II" [Romanian Sigillography. Bibliography II], *Revista Muzeelor*, XXVII/8-9-10 (1990): 132-136.

⁴³ Ștefan Purici, *Științe speciale ale istoriei* [Special Sciences of History] (Suceava: Editura Universității din Suceava, 2000), 59-69.

⁴⁴ Mariana Borcoman, *Științele auxiliare ale istoriei. Curs practic și note de seminar. Partea I* [Auxiliary Sciences of History. Practical Course and Seminary Notes] (Braşov: Editura Universității Transilvania, 2001), 40-43.

⁴⁵ Daniel Flaut, *Introducere în științele auxiliare ale istoriei* [Introduction in Auxiliary Sciences of History] (Constanța: Ovidius University Press, 2001), 69-80.

⁴⁶ Florentina Nițu, *Științe auxiliare. Geografie și demografie istorică. Numismatică și arheologie* [Auxiliary Sciences. Historical Geography and Demography. Numismatics and Archaeology] (Bucharest: Ministerul Educației și Cercetării, 2005), 91-95.

The most recent university contribution of such kind belongs to Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă. Starting from the classification of Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, the author considered the minor sciences as auxiliary disciplines for museology, library and archival sciences, whereas sigillography was integrated as a component part of the third one.⁴⁷ Unfortunately, this attempt to theorise sigillography failed to come with an updated and fresh perspective, being as a whole even less challenging than the previous contributions of Nicolae Edroiu or Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu. Among its most obvious errors are the excessive borrowing of notions from heraldry, or the drafting of incorrect classifications, which in some situations end up overlapping each other. All these lead to a contribution with serious deviations from the norm and profoundly obsolete by current standards to the subjects it deals with.

Therefore, the theoretical approach of sigillography did not excel in Romanian academia, being tributary even in the most recent contributions to the auxiliary sciences textbooks published during the 1970s and 1980s. The inaccuracy of discussing sigillography as an independent scholarly discipline was however partially overcome by the publication of the first synthesis works.

In the 1950s, the launch of the national editorial project of medieval documents *Documente privind Istoria României* (Documents Regarding the History of Romania) required the writing of specialised studies on several topics of auxiliary sciences – palaeography, diplomatic, sigillography or chronology –, in order to accompany the published charters, mostly only in their Romanian translation, and less to formulate an exclusively theoretical framework of the disciplines.⁴⁸ Remaining so far the most complex syntheses on sigillography, although written over 60 years ago, the contributions of Emil Vîrtosu⁴⁹ and Zsigmond (Sigismud) Jakó⁵⁰ address the use of seals in the Middle Ages, in Wallachia and Moldova, on the one hand, and in

⁴⁷ Marcel-Dumitru Ciucă, *Științele auxiliare ale istoriei* [Auxiliary Sciences of History] (Bucharest: Editura Universității din București, 2008), 79-88; Idem, *Științele auxiliare ale istoriei* [Auxiliary Sciences of History] (Bucharest: Saeculum I.O., 2012), 124-140.

⁴⁸ Lidia Gross, "Din începuturile unei colecții. *Documente privind istoria României. Seria C. Transilvania*" [From the Beginnings of a Collection. Documents Regarding the History of Romania. C Series. Transylvania], *Anuarul Institutului de Istorie „George Barițiu”. Seria Historica*, XLVI (2007): 33-39; Violeta Barbu, "Istoria unei colecții. *Documenta Romaniae Historica*" (The History of a Collection. *Documenta Romaniae Historica*), *Studii și Materiale de Istorie Medie*, XVII (1999): 39-43.

⁴⁹ Emil Vîrtosu, "Din sigilografia Moldovei și a Țării Românești" [From the Sigillography of Moldavia and Wallachia], in *Documente privind istoria României. Introducere. Volumul II* [Documents Regarding the History of Romania. Introduction. Volume II] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RPR, 1956), 333-558.

⁵⁰ Sigismund Jakó, "Sigilografia cu referire la Transilvania (până la sfârșitul secolului al XV-lea)" [The Sigillography with Reference to Transylvania (Until the End of the 15th Century)], in *Documente privind istoria României. Introducere. Volumul II* [Documents Regarding the History of Romania. Introduction. Volume II] (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RPR, 1956), 561-633.

Transylvania, on the other hand, by reference to their rightful owners: voivodes, vice-voivodes, towns, cities, places of authentication, church institutions, craft guilds and so on. If the first author tried to reconstruct as detailed as possible the sealing practices in the two Romanian principalities, benefiting from a rich and prolonged chronological context, until the dawn of the 19th century, the second scholar clarified in the first part of his study a series of theoretical aspects with reference to seal matrices, seal categories and ways of affixing them, permanently exemplified and illustrated with Transylvanian sources, while the second part addresses the issue of corroboration with the holders of these instruments, all these being limited by the end of the 15th century.

The first consistent handbook of sigillography in Romanian historiography was published in 1976 by Maria Dogaru.⁵¹ Benefiting from decent graphic conditions, her work brings together about 300 description of seals, accompanied by their illustration, grouped into 12 categories, several of them further divided. Dogaru's contribution was made in a context quite favourable for the auxiliary sciences among Romanian historical publications, during the same period being published the most comprehensive works on archival science⁵² and heraldry.⁵³ Overall, Dogaru's tome is a quite reasonable one, especially due to the gathered corpus of seals, but far from being complete. Although the author admits that the analysed seals represent only a small part of this kind of sources kept in Romanian archives, probably the most important shortcoming of her approach was the increased attention paid to seals belonging to Wallachian and Moldavian princes in relation to other types of seal owners. This option also determined a narrower interest in seals of Transylvanian origin, both in the contents of the sigillographic corpus and in the introductory study. Curiously, the work ends with an entitled heraldic glossary and not one of sigillographic terms.

Maria Dogaru is also the author of the only catalogue dedicated to seal matrices preserved in special compiled collections of the National Archives of Romania⁵⁴. Providing information about the extreme years of these collections, the numbers of matrices kept in each county branch and its central office, or detailing the most valuable pieces of this kind, the author wrote an extensive introductory study, where she analysed aspects related to the legislation for the approval, use

⁵¹ Maria Dogaru, *Sigiliile. Mărturii ale trecutului istoric. Album sigilografic* [Seals. Testimonies of the Historical Past. Sigillographic Album] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1976).

⁵² Aurelian Sacerdoțeanu, *Arhivistica* [Archival Science] (Bucharest: Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1970).

⁵³ Marcel Sturdza-Săucești, *Heraldica. Tratat tehnic* [Heraldry. Technical Treatise] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1974); Dan Cernovodeanu, *Știință și artă heraldică în România* [Heraldic Science and Art in Romania] (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1977).

⁵⁴ Maria Dogaru, *Colecțiile de matrice sigilare ale Arhivelor Statului* [Seal Matrices Collections of the State Archives] (Bucharest: Direcția Generală a Arhivelor Statului din RSR, 1984).

and preservation of seals, the technique of engraving matrices, legends, slogans or heraldic insignia present on such instruments. Although the seal matrices originating in Transylvania are oldest and most numerous, as shown by the description of each collection, the introductory study draws mainly its arguments and examples from sealing practices specific to institutions in Wallachia and Moldavia.

Part of the same category is the more recent work published by Laurențiu-Ștefan Szemkovics and, posthumously, Maria Dogaru. Probably the first two volumes of a truly innovative approach among this type of publications, sumptuously entitled *Tezaur Sigilografic Românesc* (Romanian Sigillographic Treasure), but unfortunately at present stagnant, this contribution proposes a review of the seals known to have belonged to the princes of Wallachia⁵⁵ and Moldavia.⁵⁶ Focusing on several sigillographic aspects particular to the Wallachian context, but also briefly questioning issues related to the legends, shapes and sizes of the seals used over the centuries by the two chanceries, the authors bring together 301 seals from 83 Wallachian princes, respectively 263 from 79 Moldavian princes, covering a time span between 1390/1387-1856. Each of these sigillographic sources is described and individually illustrated, but the graphic conditions are far from being adequate for an independent attempt to read these materials. Both volumes end up with an unequal glossary, whose terms go beyond the specialised sigillographic domain, but which is not either fully explored. Unfortunately, the work lacks a consistent introductory study, chronologically developed and compared between the two chanceries, with a critical debate on older and newer historiographical opinions of a very generous subject such as Romanian princely seals, or to propose new research and analysis perspectives. Assumed at the same time both as a scientific and a popularisation work, the two volumes signed by Szemkovics and Dogaru does not overcome the characteristics of a plain catalogue, with its inherent limits and inaccuracies.

Strictly regarding various problems of terminology, they were much better addressed in probably the most extensive Romanian approach dedicated so far to historical auxiliary sciences.⁵⁷ Of the more than 1500 terms and concepts identified and defined by the dictionary, about 80 of them refer exclusively to sigillography, to which are added another 40, also used in heraldry. Moreover, 10 terms referring to sealed documents can be included in the same category, these being present in very recent work dealing with terminological problems specific to medieval manuscript

⁵⁵ Laurențiu-Ștefan Szemkovics, Maria Dogaru, *Tezaur sfragistic românesc I. Sigiliile emise de cancelaria domnească a Țării Românești (1390-1856)* [Romanian Sigillographic Treasure I. The Seals Issued by the Princely Chancery of Wallachia (1390-1856)] (Bucharest: Ars Docendi, 2006).

⁵⁶ Ibidem, *Tezaur sfragistic românesc II. Sigiliile emise de cancelaria domnească a Moldovei (1387-1856)* [Romanian Sigillographic Treasure II. The Seals Issued by the Princely Chancery of Moldavia (1387-1856)] (Bucharest: Ars Docendi, 2006).

⁵⁷ *Dicționar al științelor speciale ale istoriei* [Dictionary of Special Sciences of History], ed. Ionel Gal (Bucharest: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1982).

books.⁵⁸ Additionally, it would be worth mentioning another specialised dictionary, in which the seal is defined as a validation instrument with a constant presence in the Romanian society of the Middle Ages.⁵⁹

As for the more recent attempts to bring together various contributions in Romanian sigillography, previously undertaken by Maria Dogaru and Adina Berciu-Drăghicescu,⁶⁰ Laurențiu-Ștefan Szemkovics and Augustin Mureșan compiled a new and self-standing publication.⁶¹ This continued and enhanced bibliography has the merit of indicating the titles of more than 1100 contributions within the Romanian sigillographic discipline, published by 2014, being also organised in the same nine thematic groups established by the previous endeavours of this kind. A significant plus of this volume is its bilingual character, since the French translation of the titles and of the very short introductory note could generate a modest but important stimulus to bring closer the national sigillographic research to the international requirements and practices in this field of study.

Therefore, this brief evaluation of Romanian approaches in sigillography, within the university milieu and not only, shows that the interest for establishing a solid theoretical framework of this discipline was limited to offer only some points of reference, rather common in the wider set of auxiliary sciences of history, in order to simulate specific researches, especially in the Romanian sigillography of the former principalities of Wallachia and Moldavia. The most appropriate concepts and notions can however be extracted from the complex syntheses and reference works published starting with the 1950s. These contributions, although not very numerous and critical within their selves, have the merit of putting together seals of various cultural and historical origins, which is why their investigation without the slightest conceptual introduction would have been difficult to approach. At the same time, theoretical issues have been rarely addressed or debated, the only worth mentioning contributions belonging to Emil Vîrtosu⁶² and Maria Dogaru,⁶³ both authors finding their arguments exclusively in sigillographic sources originating in Moldavia and Wallachia. On the other hand, the Romanian historiography dealing

⁵⁸ *Vocabularul cărții manuscrise* [Vocabulary of the Manuscript Book], ed. Adrian Papahagi (Bucharest: Editura Academiei Române, 2013), 63-65.

⁵⁹ *Instituții feudale din Țările Române. Dicționar* [Feudal Institutions in the Romanian Principalities. Dictionary], eds. Ovid Sachelarie, Nicolae Stoicescu (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1988), 226, 355, 441.

⁶⁰ See above note 41.

⁶¹ Laurențiu-Ștefan Szemkovics, Augustin Mureșan, *Bibliografia sigilografiei românești. Bibliographie de la sigillographie roumaine* (Arad: Gutenberg Univers, 2019).

⁶² Emil Vîrtosu, "Despre dreptul de sigiliu" [About the Seal Right], *Studii și cercetări de numismatică*, III (1960): 333-344.

⁶³ Maria Dogaru, "Sigiliul – izvor istoric și factor cultural" [The Seal – Historical Source and Cultural Factor], *Analele Universității din Bucharest. Seria Istorie*, XXIX (1980): 123-133.

with seals of Transylvanian origin is still in period of accumulation and acquaintance with these sources, no matter what historical period they would come from.⁶⁴ However, several Transylvanian sources have allowed studies that have probed the versatility of seals, beyond their immediate purpose as instruments for authenticating charters issued by their rightful owners, investigations dealing especially with seals that belonged to several medieval goldsmiths' guilds.⁶⁵ All these aspects addressed so far, together with the variety of historical sources and seals preserved in various Romanian archives, could have led to the drafting of at least one consistent handbook on sigillography, in addition to the very few theoretical contributions, so necessary for the national historiography. However, no scholar has so far assumed such an endeavour.

If the Western research on medieval seals focuses nowadays on their semiotic structuring, in order to better understand the information that they further passed on, the Romanian historiography did not achieve similar research performance. The contributions in this field of study remained in most cases exclusively descriptive, largely due to the university perspectives less oriented towards analysis, decryption and interpretation of this specific category of historical sources in relation to their holders and the charters they authenticated. Therefore, the medieval seals which can be recovered from Romanian archives, regardless their historical profile, whether they come from Transylvania or from the other two Romanian principalities, can be valuable research topics with a double expectation. On the one hand, their interrogation according to principles developed in the recent decades can provide new information on their holders and their sigillographic and diplomatic horizon, and, on the other hand, new researches can undoubtedly contribute to the renewal and connection of the Romanian sigillography to the most recent standards promoted by Western academia. It remains, therefore, for further contributions to deepen with even greater consideration the versatility of medieval seals as genuine historical sources in relation to their rightful owners.

⁶⁴ Alexandru Ștefan, "Prolegomena to a Historiography of the Sigillographic Research concerning Transylvania", *Revista Arhivelor. Archives Review*, XCIII/1-2(2016): 76-83.

⁶⁵ Viorica Guy Marica, "Figura aurarului în sigilografie," in *Sub semnul lui Clio. Omagiu Acad. Prof. Ștefan Pascu* (Cluj: s.n., 1974), 451-458; Alexandru Ștefan, "Sigiliile hagiografice ale breslelor de aurari din orașele Transilvaniei Evului Mediu târziu" [The Hagiographic Seals of the Goldsmiths' Guilds from Towns of Transylvania in the Late Middle Ages], *Ars Transilvaniae*, XXVII-XVIII (2017-2018): 21-30.