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Expressing New Rule: Seals from Early Islamic Egypt and Syria, 600–800 CE

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Seals—Making and Marking Connections across the Medieval World

Edited by
BRIGITTE MIRIAM BEDOS-REZAK

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This volume owes its existence to many. Carol Symes assumed the risk of opening her journal, *The Medieval Globe*, to seals, a subject matter that until recently still belonged to the domain of specialized connoisseurship and technical *Historische Hilfswissenschaften*. By enabling the work of scholars from different times and places to appear in a single volume informed by the conceptual framework of global history, she has provided both a forum and a challenge, which each contributor has taken up with exceptional scholarship and flair. Mike Richardson and Linda Paulus shepherded the volume to publication. To all I extend my thankful appreciation.

Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak

EXPRESSING NEW RULE: SEALS FROM EARLY ISLAMIC EGYPT AND SYRIA, 600–800 CE

PETRA M. SIJPESTEIJN

THE GREAT ARAB conquests of the seventh century CE brought the former Romano-Byzantine provinces of Syria and Egypt, along with the whole Sasanian Empire, under Muslim control.[1] Contacts between Arabia and these regions had already been intensive in the pre-Islamic period, resulting in the continuous exchange of knowledge, customs, and administrative practices. Influence and imitation did not simply flow in one direction; they were generative processes, in which forms and ideas were actively adapted to new political, religious, and cultural contexts. The practices and ideas that the Arabs brought to these conquered areas were similarly transformed through interaction with local models and customs, and in close relation to socio-political developments at the provincial and empire-wide level. These processes of exchange and adaptation reflect the political and social transitions set in motion by the Muslim conquests, which found expression in administrative systems, material culture, and religious-intellectual life—processes manifested in the seals used in official and private contexts. Seals continued to exhibit Byzantine, Sassanid, and Arabian habits, but their use and form also reflect the influence of developments under Islam. By comparing early Islamic examples with pre-Islamic ones, and by tracing the developments that occurred over time, I will explore the continuities and changes in usage, imagery, and linguistic expression in order

This work was supported by the European Research Council under Grant number 683194. I would like to thank Nitzan Amitai-Preiss, Stefan Heidemann, and Tawfiq Ibrahim for their help with matters concerning the lead seal imprints. I would also like to thank Robert Carter, Ahmad al-Jallad, Derk Kennet, Michael C. A. Macdonald, and Peter Stein for sharing their knowledge on ancient Arabian materials. Mistakes, of course, remain my own.

1 In the period under study in this article, the Muslim world formed one political unit that was ruled by a caliph, based in Medina (632–661), then in Damascus (661–750), and finally in Baghdad (from 750). It is clear that Islam did not exist at this time in the form that it became known later, based on the outcome of later debates. The terms "Muslim" and "Arab" were also understood differently, especially in the earliest period (e.g., Webb, *Imagining the Arabs*; Donner, *Muhammad and the Believers*; Hoyland, "Identity of the Arabian Conquerors"). "Islamic" and "pre-Islamic" are used in this article as chronological terms indicating the time before the prophet Muhammad's preaching and after it, while "Muslim" is used to refer to the political regime in place. As it is clear that the new rulers put in place administrative, fiscal, political, economic, and military structures that differed from local traditions as soon as they arrived, I feel it is justified to speak of a Muslim *empire* even if an imperial organization and ideology were still being developed. The term "Byzantine" refers both to the precursor of the Muslim empire in the eastern Mediterranean and to the Byzantine Empire, which continued to exist in Anatolia.

to show how these can be linked to the underlying ideologies and ambitions of Muslim authorities. In particular, I will examine how and why different practices unfolded in Egypt and the Levant, and I will compare these to the dissemination of shared forms throughout the Muslim empire, particularly the rich material from Khurasan in the east and al-Andalus in the west.

Near Eastern Seals and Sealing Practices before and after Islam

The function and meaning of seals in the Near East, widespread from their first introduction in the ancient empires of Mesopotamia, did not fundamentally change in the thousands of years they were in use. By the late antique period impression and stamp seal matrices, mounted in rings or in conical form suspended from strings, had become ubiquitous.[2] By pressing the seal into wet clay, wax, or another mouldable material, an imprint was pressed directly into or fastened onto the object to be sealed. Seals were individualized through the display of names, titles, and functions; or by personalized symbolic illustrations or mottos. They could also be anonymous, mentioning instead institutions or pious formulae or bearing unidentifiable devices. They were widely used by people in all social categories.[3]

Seals served two main purposes: (1) identification and authorization, similar to modern-day signatures; and (2) protection, by preventing or restricting access.[4] A sealing representing an official institution or its functionary, when attached to a document, assured its validity. Since most actual writing was carried out by professional secretaries,[5] the seal's imprint certified the sender's identity and his licensed supervision of the transactions recorded and added credence to the message, because of its association with the official "behind" the seal, his office, and his status. The seal's imprint was thus a real and lasting reference to the presence and authority of the seal's owner.[6] This can be observed both in the sealings at the bottom of papyrus documents and from descriptions in papyrus letters. For

2 Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 2. For seals and sealings from ancient Arabia, see the examples in the online database of the Corpus of South-Arabian Inscriptions (dasi.humnet.unipi.it) dating from the second millennium BCE to the sixth century CE. I would like to thank Ahmad al-Jallad for bringing these objects to my attention.

3 Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 100.

4 The use of seals in magic will not be dealt with here. For a discussion of the use of magical seals in the Islamic period, see Dorpmüller, "Seals in Islamic Literature"; and Soucek, "Early Islamic Seals," 250–52.

5 Platt, "Making an Impression," 241.

6 Verity Platt speaks of "an ongoing presence (and protective force) in the face of bodily absence": ibid., 241–42.

example, an early eighth-century Coptic letter from an Arab official introduces an Egyptian tax collector to the taxpayers, recording that the tax collector is licensed and ending his letter with the phrase "I have written this letter and attached [an imprint of] my seal." One can imagine the tax collector carrying the sealed letter of his superior on his visits to Egyptian taxpayers, showing it as a sign of legitimacy when needed. In an early eighth-century Greek letter, 'Abd al-Malik b. Yazīd, pagarch (local administrator) of the district of Ihnās (Heracleopolite), writes to an Egyptian village community: "Make sure you get a receipt from the tax collector from your village with [an imprint of] his seal and make sure you do not pay anything more unless you receive a letter of mine with [an imprint of] my seal."[7] Similarly, witnesses to legal documents, merchants or other individuals, added their sealings to substantiate their written words and facilitate identification. Such sealings were fastened to the sides or bottoms of letters and legal documents and remained visible when the documents were being read (Figure 5.1a).[8] When attached to objects, sealings identified the addressee or sender, verifying their value but also impacting the handling and delivery of the goods, which were accorded greater priority and importance.[9]

Closure sealings, by contrast, secured access to the contents of a letter or container. They were attached in such a way as to close off (part of) a document, bag, or box, either by being attached directly to the container or to strings tying the articles up, or on textiles wrapping the objects.[10] Opening and displaying the contents inevitably broke the sealing, which was clearly and immediately visible. So the sealing restricted access to the contents, keeping them hidden or protected against tampering, until they were opened by a suitably authorized person. In many

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7 Both documents are discussed in Sijpesteijn, "Seals and Papyri," 167.

8 Weber, *Berliner Pahlavi-Dokumente*, 239–41, tab. III, doc. 3 – X, no. 10; XIV, no. 14; XV, no. 15; XXVIII, no. 28; Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 139, no. 24. Seals were suspended from strings at the bottom of Soghdian documents (Huff, "Technological Observations," 383). For the application of a seal next to Ptolemaic testaments summarizing the contents, see Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri," 235.

9 Some Sasanian clay sealings show traces of fabric imprints on the back: Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 59. See also the lead sealing that seems to have been fastened to chain mail based on the traces left on the back of it: Ibrahim, "Notas sobre precintos." The nail-shaped rivet on the back of a lead sealing bearing the name of caliph Hishām (r. 691–743) suggests it was connected to a container, possibly of wood: Amitai-Preiss and Farhi, "A Small Assemblage," 233. See below, note 37.

10 For a good overview of the kind of containers that could be closed off with a sealing, as discussed in Arabic literary sources, see Robinson, "Neck-Sealing," 403n6. See also the account of cloth bales being sealed: Frye, "Sasanian Seals," 160. For similar usages in ancient Near Eastern and ancient Egyptian contexts, see Regulski, Duistermaat, and Verkinderen, *Seals and Sealing Practices in the Near East*.

(a)

Figure 5.1a. Arabic tax quittance dated Ṣafar 150 (March–April 767), from Khurasan. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. DOC 15 (AR 23). © Nour Foundation. Courtesy of the Khalili Family Trust. (Cf. Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 104–5, no. 7.)

(b)

Figure 5.1b. A clay seal imprint is attached to the bottom of the document with a leather string tied through a slit in the document. It has the inscription: Shihāb, for God (*shihāb li-llāh*). Shihāb b. ʿAmr is the financial administrator of the governor issuing the document.

cases, the closure sealing functioned simultaneously to restrict access, secure the contents, and to identify the goods, the owner/sender, or addressee, thereby functioning to authenticate and protect at the same time. In Bactrian and Pahlavi letters found in Central Asia and Iran, the sealings that closed the documents were typically attached to a piece of leather partially cut from the bottom of the document or affixed to a separate piece of fabric. Once the document was unrolled, the sealing remained attached, hanging from the piece of leather or textile.[11] The sealings referred to in the second letter discussed above similarly served a dual function. The seal's imprint on the closed letter assured the addressee that the contents had not been interfered with, while at the same time identifying the sender and conveying a sense of urgency, as well as corroborating the authenticity of the text. The sealing of the village tax collector would have identified the receipt as an official document, while simultaneously closing off the bottom part of the document containing a summary of the contents, which would remain secured

11 For Bactrian letters, see, for example, Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, vol. 3, pls. 150, 151a, 151b; for Pahlavi documents, see Weber, *Pahlavi-Dokumente*, tab. XLI, images 3a, 3b.

(a)

Figure 5.2a. Poll tax receipt for the baker Aba Kire written in Arabic on papyrus, dated Ramaḍān 196 (May–June 812). The bottom part of the document was sealed. Under the seal impression, the amount, year and kind of taxes are repeated. Austrian National Library. P. Vindob. A. P. 644. Photo © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. (Cf. Grohmann, "Probleme," no. 18.)

(b)

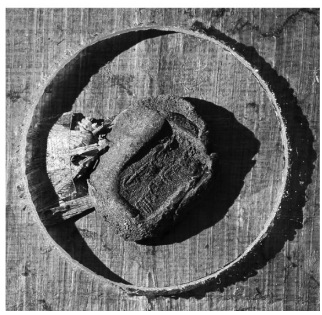

Figure 5.2b. The clay sealing contains the name of the tax collector Yūnus b. ʿAbd al-Raḥmān.

until the proper authorities needed to open it (Figures 5.4a, 5.8a)[12] (for a full discussion of this practice, see below). Interestingly, the text of such documents self-refer to their sealed nature, mentioning that they are sealed or that witnesses had added their sealing to the documents.[13] Likewise, in an early eighth-century Arabic

12 See Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, vol. 3, pl. 72.

13 For example, Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, vol. 1, 104 (doc. T).

(a)

Figure 5.3a. Legal document in duplicate, written in Bactrian with one version visible and the other sealed off at the bottom (for an illustration of the document with its bottom half sealed and closed, see Sims-Williams, *Bactrian*, III pl. 72). The deed records a gift of an estate and of a female slave and is dated in the month Second New-year 478/June-July 700. A clause in the document states that "this contract has been sealed by my indulgence" and that two witnesses were present at the statement. The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. DOC 10. Photo © Nour Foundation. Courtesy of the Khalili Family Trust. (Cf. Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, I, 98–105, no. T.)

letter, the head of an administrative district ordered his subordinate, who was responsible for the tax collection in a subdistrict, to consolidate the dinars from the different villages into one shipment and "then seal what you received with the seal which has been transferred to you."[14] The seal transmitted to the local official

14 Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 314–16, no. 8, ll. 19–20.

(b)

Figure 5.3b. Clay bulla with the image of a male buste.

(a) (b)

Figure 5.4a–b. Sealed Arabic order of payment, dated 9 Ramaḍān 196 (May 24, 812): front and back. A seal closes off the bottom part of the document, which presumably contains a summary of the most important information in the document. Austrian National Library. P. Vindob. A. P. 1053. Photo © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

was presumably that of the district's head, or in some other way recognizable as belonging to the Muslim administration. The sealing functioned, on the one hand, to protect the shipment of gold coins, making sure that no one would be able to interfere with it en route, and, on the other, identified it as a government delivery.

Although the function of Near Eastern seals did not change much through time and the purpose of Muslim-Arab seals and sealings compares well to other

(c)

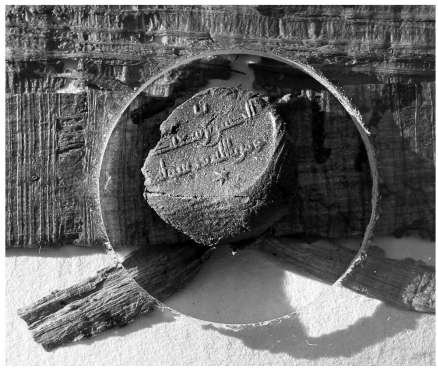

Figure 5.4c. Clay sealing containing pious formulae and the name of the finance director al-Ḥasan b. Sa'īd in whose name the receipt was issued.

(a) (b)

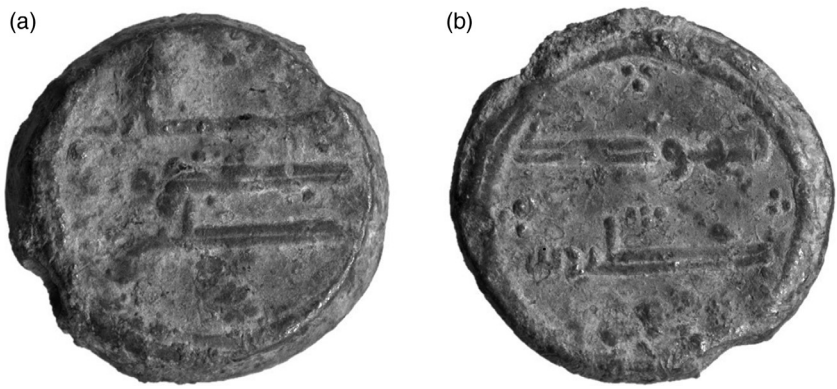

Figure 5.5a–b. Umayyad two-sided lead seal imprint recording the poll tax payment made by the Jewish inhabitants of Tiberias. a: *khātim kūra ṭabariyya*; b: *yahūd ṭabariyya*. No. 89.8.13190. Collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Photo © the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. (Cf. Amitai-Preiss, "A Poll Tax Seal," 104–5.)

geographical and historical settings, the specific documentary contexts as well as the forms, materials, and imprints of the seals and sealings did vary. Two main processes were at play. First, in the Muslim world Arab, Byzantine and Sasanian material-cultural traditions travelled freely, blending into new composite forms, which also affected seals.[15] Second, political consolidation, on the one hand, and religious-political self-awareness, on the other, motivated administrative reforms, such as the Arabicization of the chancery, fiscal restructurings, and increased

15 The same observation has been made for Islamic material culture in general (Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*) and, more specifically, for early Muslim weights (Khamis, "A Bronze Weight"). See also Knappett, "Imprints."

(a)

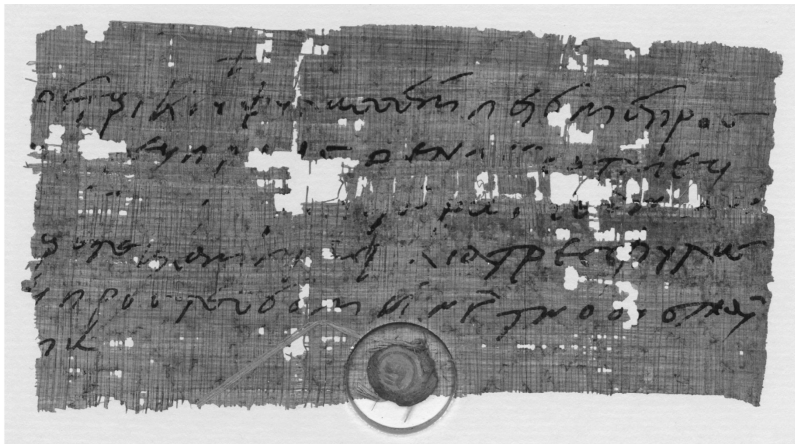

Figure 5.6a. Coptic official document from the seventh to eighth centuries. Austrian National Library. P. Vindob. K. 2579. Photo © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek.

(b)

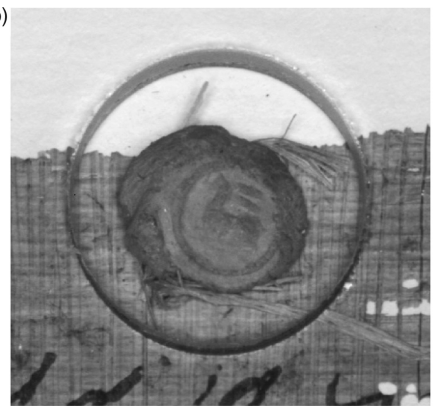

Figure 5.6b. Clay seal imprint depicting a sitting hare (Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 16–17, no. 3).

supervision of the movement of people and property—all of which are reflected in seals. While some of these measures are better documented at the provincial level, other developments can be connected to empire-wide transformations. Public administrative practices obviously interacted with those common in private commercial contexts, as both official and personal seals witnessed similar changes albeit at a different pace. Before examining these developments in detail, I will briefly discuss the material on which these observations are based.

Profiling the Sources

Political and climatological conditions, in combination with scholarly, especially archaeological, preferences, have resulted in an uneven distribution of attested

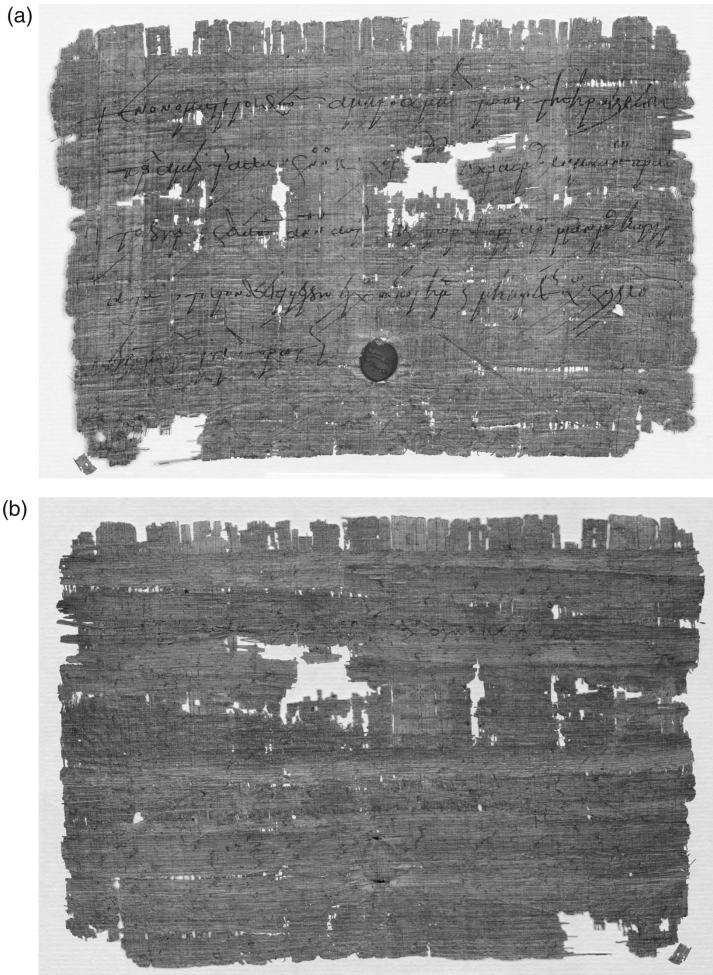

Figure 5.7-a–b. Delivery order written in Greek on papyrus from the governor ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 664) to the administrator of Heracleopolis/Ihnās for maintenance of an Arab army unit: front and back. Austrian National Library. P. Vindob. G. 39724. Photo © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. (Cf. Grohmann, *From the World*, 115–16.)

seals and sealings from the pre-Islamic and Islamic Near East. It is difficult to establish the extent to which practices and forms observed in a specific geographical context can be applied more generally. First, it cannot be assumed that the presence of seals in a given archaeological site indicates that the act of sealing objects and documents was practised at that site.[16] Seals served ornamental

16 Ritter, Die *altorientalischen Traditionen*, 58.

(c)

Figure 5.7c. Clay seal imprint belonging to the governor ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 664) depicting a charging bull.

(a) (b)

Figure 5.8a–b. Arabic tax receipt issued to a baker named Mūsā and a builder called George, dated 291 (904): front and back. The bottom part containing a summary of the document is rolled up and sealed with a seal attached to a string tied through the papyrus. Austrian National Library. P. Vindob. A.P. 3378. Photo © Österreichische Nationalbibliothek. (Cf. Grohmann, "Einige bemerkenswerte Urkunden," no. 12.)

(c)

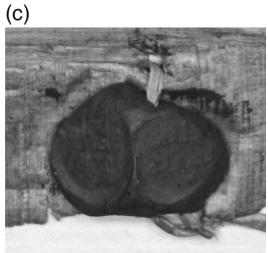

Figure 5.8c. The seal of the tax-collector Jalawayh is imprinted twice at the bottom of the document, with the two clay impressions at a 90°-angle from each other. Their inscriptions read: seal of Yalahwayh (*ṭābiʿ yalahwayh*).

(a)

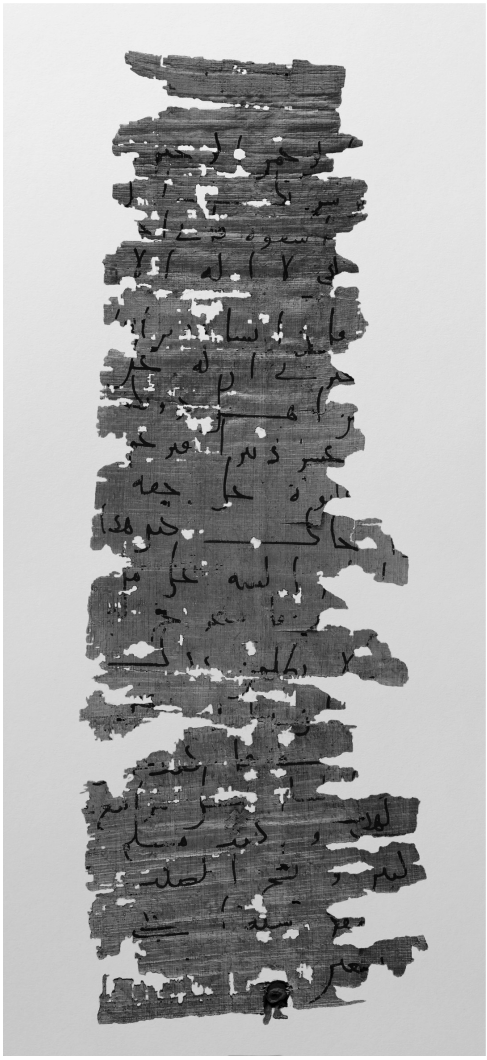

Figure 5.9a. Sealed letter from the governor Qurra b. Sharīk to Basileios, the pagarch (administrator) of Ishqūh/Aphroditō, dated Ṣafar 91 (December 709–January 710). Oriental Institute Chicago, D. 13296 (E. 13756). Courtesy of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago. (Cf. Abbott, *Kurrah Papyri*, 47–9, no. 3.)

purposes too, and mounted seals were worn as jewellery.[17] In Arabia, for example, seal matrices have been found, but sealings remain unattested. The cultural integration of Arabia into Near Eastern writing traditions, however, suggests that

17 See also the much later signet ring seals, in which the writing appears not in mirror image, so as to produce a 'correct' text when stamped, but in regular script indicating these no longer functioned as proper seals.

(b)

Figure 5.9b. The clay seal imprint at the bottom of the letter shows a quadrupled animal with a star above its back.

sealing documents and objects was nevertheless practised in the peninsula. References to sealing do occur, moreover, in written texts.[18]

Byzantine, Sasanian, and Arab seals were all made of durable materials, such as precious stones, rock crystal, and metal, and were used both in metal signet rings and as block stamp seals.[19] Several of these seals have been the objects of study.[20] These seal matrices alone do not tell us much about their use, however. For this, seal imprints in lead, clay, or wax—the materials in use in this period and region—are needed, preferably attached to the objects that they authenticated. Indeed, there is uncertainty and even outright disagreement among scholars about how seals were used, by whom, in what context, and for what purpose, both in the Islamic and pre-Islamic Near East.[21]

18 See below, note 75.

19 Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 4. For signet rings, see ibid., 41–43. See also Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals*.

20 See, for example, Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*; Platt, "Making an Impression"; and Amitai-Preiss, "Faunal Iconography."

21 The application and usage of Sasanian clay seals, whether for objects or documents, and the explanation for the finding of multiple clay imprints together are fiercely debated.

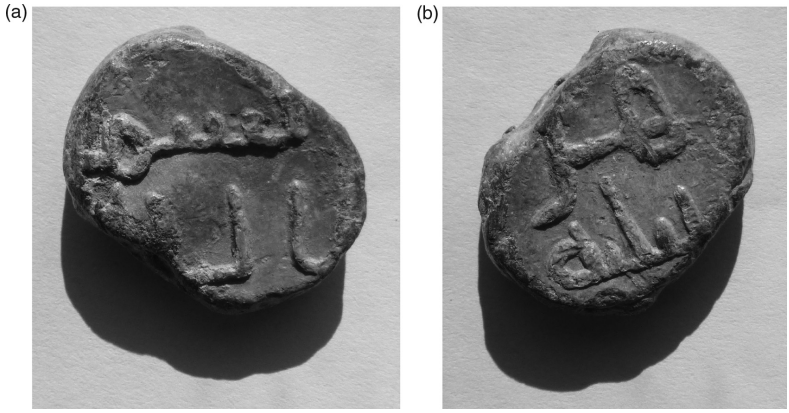

Figure 5.10a–b. Two-sided lead seal imprint recording the tribute or poll tax paid by the inhabitants of Seville, early eighth century: (a) *bi-sm allāh*; (b) *ahl ashbīla*. Private collection Tawfiq Ibrahim. www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html. © Tawfiq Ibrahim.

While many imprints of seals have been found dating to the early Muslim empire — including in al-Andalus, Egypt, Syria-Palestine, Central Asia, Sicily, Sardinia, southern France, and Iran — and pre-Islamic Sasanian and Byzantine seal impressions have been unearthed in large numbers as well, many more undoubtedly remain to be found. The reasons for this are manifold. Covered in layers of deposits, lead seal imprints are difficult to detect even in an organized archaeological excavation. To the untrained and naked eye they do not look very impressive, and so often remain unnoticed.[22] Metal detectors can, to a certain extent, be used to

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See, for example, Frye, "Sasanian Seals"; Lerner and Skjaervø, "Some Uses of Clay Bullae"; Huff, "Technological Observations"; and Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen.* The interpretation of the use of Arabic lead seals stating place names, districts, provinces, or named officials continues to be debated as well. An example is the discussion about the relation of some of these seals to the Muslim poll tax and whether they were worn by individual taxpayers as proof of their payments or accompanied transports of goods and coins. See, for example, Schindel, "Nochmals"; Robinson, "Neck-Sealing"; Balog, "Dated Aghlabid"; and Amitai-Preiss, "A Poll Tax Seal." See also Ibrahim, "Additions," 115. Further, the choice of illustrations on seals has been called "random" (Amitai-Preiss, "Faunal Iconography," 212) and "intentional" (Gyselen, *Sasanian Seals and Sealings*, 8; Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 109–10; Platt, "Making an Impression"). The interpretation of the function of individual seals continues to be discussed as well. See the contested interpretation of 'Abd al-Malik's sealing (Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*, ill. 21), some arguing that it is, instead, a weight (Amitai-Preiss, "An Umayyad Lead Seal," 233n2; Khamis, "A Bronze Weight," 151).

22 Note the lead and copper sealings first deemed to be too unimpressive to take to an antiquities dealer by the Sicilian farmer who found them (Balog, "Dated Aghlabid," 129). Only

remedy this and have led to discoveries of lead seals in places where their presence was not initially suspected.[23] Yet this has meant that most seals are acquired not via controlled excavations, but via private purchases or on the antiquities market with little knowledge of their provenance.[24] Furthermore, countless lead seals will never be retrieved because their material lent itself to reuse, either by restriking outdated imprints or by melting and reusing the lead for new seals.[25]

Even less likely to be found are clay imprints of seals. Sand-coloured and often damaged because of their brittle nature, they can be found and salvaged only through very intensive recovery methods (e.g., sieving). In addition, unbaked clay imprints quickly dissolve when brought into contact with water. Many seals were broken, either intentionally, when the objects to which they were fastened were opened, or accidentally, when the objects were moved from one place to another. Most clay impressions have been recovered when still attached to documents, usually on folded parts of double documents, which are more easily detected, or when they existed in large enough quantities (and of large enough size) to be noticed.[26] Even so, the number of known clay imprints is only a fraction of the number of lead seal imprints.[27] At the same time, the number of known lead sealings from the Islamic period is very small compared to the number of Byzantine lead imprints. This is to a large extent caused by the status of the field, since less archaeological work has been conducted on the Islamic period than on other periods in Near Eastern history—a situation that is, nevertheless, slowly improving. Rarest of all are wax sealings, which were less common in the Byzantine Empire than lead

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when metal detectors were used to examine the waste deposits removed by archaeologists from sites in al-Andalus could lead sealings be discovered (Ibrahim, "Additions," 115n2).

23 See previous note.

24 Most lead sealings from the Arab Middle East originate in Israel, where the antiquities trade is well developed: Schindel, "Nochmals"; Amitai-Preiss, "An Umayyad Lead Seal." None of the lead sealings from al-Andalus originate from controlled, scholarly excavations: Ibrahim, "Additions," 115n2. From North Africa, on the other hand, none have come to light, though the presence of lead sealings in al-Andalus, France, and Sicily strongly suggests that lead sealings were also in use there: Balog, "Dated Aghlabid"; Ibrahim, "Additions." The more northerly provinces, such as the Jazira, have also so far not yielded any sealings.

25 Ibrahim, "Additions"; Cheynet, "L'usage," 24; Huff, "Technological Observations," 373–75; Ritter, "On the Development," 104.

26 For sealings connected to documents, see, for example, Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*; Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri"; Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*; and Khan, *Arabic Documents*. For hoards of clay bullae, see Huff, "Technological Observations," 375–76; and Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri," 231.

27 Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 4; Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri," 231.

ones.[28] Although some wax sealings have been recovered on documents from the later Byzantine Empire, only two have so far been retrieved from Islamic Egypt.[29]

The dearth of actual seals and sealings, especially attached to documents, is partially compensated for by texts. Many documents contain information on the use of seals, discussing the sealing of documents or shipments, and referring to signet rings and other seals.[30] In the Greek papyri from the Islamic period, the word *bulla* is used for the sealing that appears on a document. Arabic papyri employ the terms *ṭābi'*, which seems to have been especially used in Egypt, and *khātim*, which was the more general term; both could also be used as verbs. These terms also appear on the seals themselves.[31]

The Shape and Application of Seals

Arab-Muslim seals took different forms depending on their function and the context in which they were used. Sealings still attached to documents from Egypt, Iran, and Central Asia are all imprinted on one side only and are, with the exception of two wax imprints attached to papyrus, all made of clay.[32] The clay was shaped by hand, as the occasional fingerprints indicate. A small piece of clay was attached to the folded or rolled-up document, after which a string was tied through or around it over the clay and pressed into it. A ball of clay was added on top and a seal was pressed into it. In this way the string located in the middle of the clay seal was secure, and the seal was attached in the strongest way possible.[33] As discussed above, seals could also be attached to a partially cut-off part of the writing surface in such a way that they remained attached and visible after the document had been

28 Wax sealings had replaced lead ones entirely by the twelfth century in the Byzantine empire: Cheynet, "L'usage," 23.

29 Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 8, 37, no. 27.

30 Sijpesteijn, "Seals and Papyri"; Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri," 231.

31 See below at note 95. *Khātim* occurs on seal imprints from al-Andalus and Syria-Palestine (Figures 5.5, 5.16) and in documents from Khurasan referring to the sealing at the bottom of the document (Figures 5.3a, 5.14a). *Ṭābi'* is attested on Egyptian glass stamps and on a seal imprint: see Figure 5.8c and Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, no. 29. It also appears on one lead sealing from Ilyā dated 101 (719/20): Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Vocabulary," 282. See also Soucek, "Early Islamic Seals," 237.

32 Huff, "Technological Observations." The wax sealings are attached to papyri with Arabic protocol texts on the other side, indicating an eighth-century date: Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 8. For examples from Iran, see Weber, *Pahlavi-Dokumente*, tabs. XLI–XLIII; for Central Asia, see Khan, *Arabic Documents*. See also Grohmann, *Einführung*, 128–30.

33 Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri"; Huff, "Technological Observations," 381; Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 74–75.

opened up (Figure 5.3a–b). Seals attached to the bottom of documents or to a part of the document that was folded over were attached in the same way, the only difference being that the string was tied via one or two holes in the papyrus or other material (Figure 5.4a–c).[34] This practice of sealing folded or rolled-up documents with clay sealings continued pre-Islamic Sasanian and Byzantine practices, and persisted in unchanged form until the middle of the tenth century, when the last such sealings are attested.[35]

While some of the larger clay bullae may have been used to secure bags and containers, it seems unlikely that the very vulnerable clay sealings were attached to objects on a large scale.[36] The imprints of strings, wires, or textile weaving on the unwritten back of clay sealings that have been used to argue for the use of clay sealings on objects more probably derive from their having been fastened to strings tying documents or to (textile) writing material directly.[37] The concave form of some larger clay sealings can also be explained by their having been attached directly to rolled-up documents.[38]

Lead, copper, and other metals were also used for sealings in the Muslim period, albeit not attached to documents. Lead sealings are attested with one-sided and two-sided imprints (Figures 5.11a–b, 5.12). The impressions on both sides were made with tongs, sometimes showing the same inscription, but in most cases inscribed differently on each side (Figures 5.5, 5.11a–b).[39] In some cases a wire seems to have

34 See, for example, from Sasanian Iraq, Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 60; Frye, "Sasanian Seals"; from Iran, Weber, *Pahlavi-Dokumente*, tab. XXVIII; from Roman and Byzantine Egypt, Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri"; from Islamic Egypt, Grohmann, *Einführung*, 128–29; and from Islamic Central Asia, Khan, *Arabic Documents*; and Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*.

35 The latest dated Arabic clay seal from Egypt was attached to a paper document with a tax receipt dated 342 (954/55): Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 39, no. 31. A paper document dated 960 was sent from Iraq by Neḥemiah Gaon to Egypt, where it ended up in the Genizah of the Ben Ezra synagogue of Fusṭāṭ. The seal imprint attached to the bottom of the document was made of two colours of clay and contains goat hair. The name of the Gaon appears on the sealing, as well as a wish for his long life. A twisted piece of paper was fastened through the sealing, while an additional piece of paper was fastened to the back of the sealing to fortify the writing support: Olszowy-Schlangen, "Early Babylonian 'Documentary' Script."

36 Scholarly opinions remain divided on this point: see Freye, "Sasanian Seals"; Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*; and Lerner and Skjaervø, "Some Uses of Clay Bullae."

37 Huff, "Technological Observations," 379. For documents written on textile, see Weber, *Pahlavi-Dokumente*. See figure 5.17 in this essay.

38 Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri." Rather than sticks or bundles, as suggested by Richard Frye, "Sasanian Seals," 157.

39 This continued Byzantine practice: Cheynet, "L'usage," 24. A two-sided lead sealing mentioning the caliph Sulaymān (r. 715–17) was found in Palestine: Schindel, "Nochmals," 118. For examples from Arab Syria-Palestine, see Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Lead Sealings."

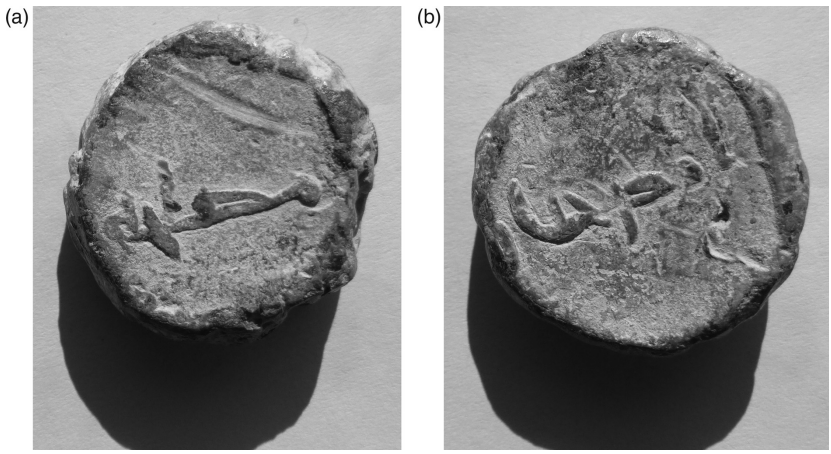

Figure 5.11a–b. Two-sided lead imprint recording the tribute paid by the inhabitants of the town of Jaen and its hinterland in compliance with the peace treaty concluded with the Arabs in the early eighth century: (a) *muṣālaḥa*; (b) *arḍ jayyān*. Private collection Tawfiq Ibrahim. www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html. © Tawfiq Ibrahim.

Figure 5.12.One-sided lead seal imprint recording an order of ʿAnbasa b. Suhaym, governor of al-Andalus (in office 721–725). The inscription reads: *bi-sm allāh hādhā mā amara bihi al-amīr ʿanbasa ibn suhaym*. Private collection Tawfiq Ibrahim. www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html. © Tawfiq Ibrahim.

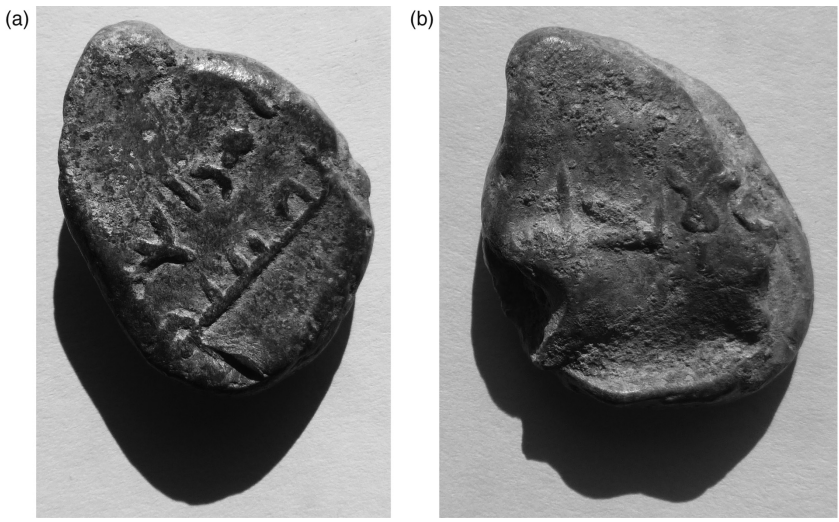

Figure 5.13a–b. Two-sided lead seal imprint recording the order by al-Ḥurr, governor of Andalusia (in office 715–718) for the division of the tribute made by the province of al-Andalus: (a) *amara al-ḥurr qasm*; (b) *al-andalus*. Private collection Tawfiq Ibrahim, www.andalustonegawa.50g.com/Seals.html. © Tawfiq Ibrahim.

been pressed into the material at the time of striking, but other samples show that a channel was added at the time of striking or that a hole was subsequently drilled through the seal imprint to enable it to be fastened with a metal wire or string. Other sealings have a loop from which they are suspended like a pendant. One-sided lead sealings sometimes have an attached nail on the back to fasten them.[40] Such leaden sealings were not actually broken to open the containers, as only the wires or strings used to attach the sealing had to be cut in order to do so. Since a cut string with sealing could have been easily replaced by a new one without damaging the imprint itself, the secretive and protective function was also less pertinent than that of the clay sealings attached directly to the writing material after folding it. The more durable, but not very expensive, lead sealings seem, on the other hand, to have been frequently used to seal bags, containers, and boxes. Lead sealings could also be fastened to textile bags or sacks directly.[41] Some of the lead sealings seem to

40 For a hole drilled through the sealing, see the references in Robinson, "Neck-Sealing," 423n102; for wires inserted before the imprints were made, see Balog, "Dated Aghlabid" and Ibrahim "Notas sobre precintos"; for channels intended for wires made into the sealings, see Cheynet, "L'usage," 24. Sealings with nails on the back were found in al-Andalus and Syria-Palestine: Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Lead Sealings"; Ibrahim "Notas sobre precintos."

41 Amitai-Preiss, "Early Islamic Lead Seals," 111–14.

(a)

Figure 5.14a. Arabic legal document from Khurasan recording the emancipation of a slave, dated Sha'bān 146 (October–November 763). The document ends with the statement that the manumitted slave, the owner and the witnesses have added their seal (*khatama qiyā wa-būya ibn muḥammad wa-l-shuhūd*). The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. DOC 35 (AR 12). © Nour Foundation. Courtesy of the Khalili Family Trust. (Cf. Khan, *Arabic Documents* 158–9, no. 31.)

(b)

Figure 5.14b. The clay seal imprint bears multiple imprints amongst which are astral images, including a small six-pointed star drawn above and below some names (Yaḥyā ibn 'Ubayd, Jahm ibn Qays, Mūsā for God, *mūsā li-llāh*) and pious formulae.

have been fastened to armour or clothing, as traces of metal rings or textile fabrics on the uninscribed back sides indicate.[42] There is no indication that lead sealings were used to seal documents in the early Islamic period, though they were used on contemporary, earlier, and later Byzantine documents.

42 As the imprints on the back, which seem to have been made by metal rings as part of a ring mail indicate: Ibrahim "Notas sobre precintos."

(a)

Figure 5.15a. Tax quittance from Khurasan, dated Rabīʿ II 147 (June–July 764) . The Nasser D. Khalili Collection of Islamic Art. DOC 29 (AR 9). © Nour Foundation. Courtesy of the Khalili Family Trust. (Cf. Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 92–3, no. 1.)

(b)

Figure 5.15b. Clay seal imprint depicting a five-pointed star surrounded by four small crescents attached to the bottom of the document.

It should be noted that all the functions that were fulfilled by seals made of different materials could also be achieved by pen and ink. Indeed, examples of this are attested. Lines and drawings on the outside of folded letters were positioned across folding and overlapping parts of the papyrus, thus forming an uninterrupted pattern as long as the papyrus or paper remained tightly folded.[43] Opening the document disrupted the pattern, which was easily discernible. The contents of a bag, container, or document, and the name of the addressee or sender, could also be indicated by writing on the container or document directly, or on a piece of textile covering the object (Figure 5.17). It is clear that the social and, in particular, the political position of the individuals involved determined the use of seals versus simple ink, though availability and personal choice cannot be ruled out either, especially in private contexts. Nevertheless, the use of seals was widespread in public and private domains.

Lead sealings may have been used to manage poll tax collection (see below). In exchange for the poll tax, Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians received protection and the guarantee, at least officially, of peaceful coexistence under Muslim rule. Literary sources describe how, in late seventh-/early eighth-century Egypt and northern

43 Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri," 243.

Figure 5.16a–b. Two-sided lead seal imprint from the district of ʿAmwās in Palestine, eighth century: (a) *khātim kūrat ʿamwās*; (b) *iqlīm bālū bayt būsim*. The inscriptions can be translated as: seal of the district ʿAmwās, the sub district of Bālū, [the town of] Bayt Būsīm (?). No. 2006.33.26184. Collection of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Photo © the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. (Cf. Amitai-Preiss, "Islamic Lead Coins.")

Iraq, non-Muslim taxpayers had to carry an identifying sign in the form of a lead seal imprint around their necks showing they had paid their poll tax. A group of ninth- and tenth-century lead sealings attests to this practice in a later period.[44] The amounts of 12 and 24 dirhams listed on the sealings compare exactly with the numbers listed in Arabic legal texts corresponding to two of the three categories of the poll tax for non-Muslims. Poll tax payments were adjusted to the economic position of taxpayers, with low, middle, and rich classes paying different amounts.

The Arab Conquest and Early Muslim Rule

The seventh-century Arab conquests led to greater reliance on documentation and the increased employment of seals, as is visible on documents and preserved items from Egypt and Syria-Palestine. The new rulers did not completely overhaul the local administrative structures. Although government officials in the highest

44 Robinson, "Neck-Sealing," 427n125. Chase Robinson suggests that sealings containing references to the inhabitants of a province might have served the same purpose in earlier periods as the individual seals from the ninth and tenth centuries. He acknowledges that the reference to larger areas or regions makes sense only outside those areas and regions ("Neck-Sealing," 424–25). Porter also only finds evidence for individual poll tax seals in the ninth century (*Arabic and Persian Seals*, 3–4). Nikolaus Schindel does not accept the interpretation of such earlier sealings according to which names of provinces or areas refer to payments made by individual taxpayers; rather, he considers these payments to have been made by or for non-Muslim communities as a whole ("Nochmals").

Figure 5.17. Textile covering or container with the name of the addressee, ninth century or later. 12.855, no. 88. © Leiden University Libraries.

layers of the administration were replaced by Arab governors, security officers, and financial administrators, appointees on lower positions remained in their functions. This first generation was replenished from the same reservoirs: the highest positions by Arabs; the lower positions, both those in the countryside and those in the central administration, by indigenous non-Muslims belonging to the same local economic and social elite from which such administrators had been recruited in the pre-Islamic period.[45] The same individuals were in charge

45 In Egypt, the Arabs appointed Egyptian pagarchs (local district managers) belonging to the same landholding class that the Byzantines had used: Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*. For Syria, see, for example, John of Damascus, whose family had served the local

of the same taxes according to the same structures as before, but change was also part of the picture. As the Arab rulers relied for a large extend on local expertise, experience and personnel, the prevailing sense was one of continuity in the daily life of most subjects. Nevertheless, some of the new measures did have an impact on individuals subjected to Muslim rule, starting soon after the conquest.[46]

Muslim rule led to an increase in administrative record-keeping. The difference is striking, with many more administrative documents being attested starting in the immediate post-conquest period, as well as more seals having been preserved from the Muslim period than from the previous period.[47] The Muslims were keen and active administrators, demanding extensive written documentation from their government officials and producing at least as much themselves.[48] Such emphasis on writing and written records also spilled over into the private sphere, where the use of seals on letters and legal documents also proliferated.

This increased documentary trail ran across multiple languages. The use of Arabic was introduced directly following the conquests to communicate with the subject population.[49] Greek, Coptic, and other local languages continued to be used besides Arabic, but Arabic functioned right from the start as an administrative language for official writings. The use of Coptic had increased in Byzantine Egypt, entering domains in which it had not been used beforehand, such as legal documents. This expansion continued under the Muslims, when Coptic began to be used also for administrative documents (Figure 5.6a).

The earliest documents preserved on papyrus from Egypt, as well as those on leather from Central Asia and Iran, also show that the Muslims introduced their own documentary practices and administrative habits. These practices differed from local traditions, but showed at the same time commonalities across the Muslim empire. In other words, practices observed in documents from al-Andalus, Egypt, Persia, and Central Asia show the same features, which set them apart from locally produced documents, and which were presumably introduced by

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administration in Damascus in the pre-Islamic period and continued to do so under the Arab rulers: Hoyland, *Seeing*, 480–89.

46 For these developments in Egypt, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, chap. 2. Several additional observations appear in this article. For changes taking place in Syria-Palestine following the Arab-Muslim conquest, see Haldon, "Introduction: Greater Syria."

47 Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 11.

48 See also the observation, based on the information from lead seals as well as chronicles, that the Arabs executed in al-Andalus a "very diligent and efficient excise system of collection": Ibrahim, "Additions," 119.

49 One Arabic and one Greek-Arabic document from Egypt date to the period of the conquest of the province. They constitute the earliest dated Arabic writings known, dating to 22 (643): Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 65.

the Arab conquerors.[50] In certain cases, such practices can in fact be connected to Muslim legal and administrative prescriptions and customs, known from the extensive Arabic literary documentary record, including legal treatises, theological tractates, chronicles, and administrative handbooks produced from the ninth century onwards. The question remains, however, whether this early Arab practice influenced the debates and prescriptions later recorded in these literary accounts, or whether both can be traced to practices introduced and inspired by a theoretical framework based on Islamic rules.[51]

Bilingual administrative documents from Egypt and Palestine show how the Greek and Arabic parts of the papyri were not directly translated from each other but, rather, that each linguistic part followed its own documentary and administrative conventions.[52] The Arabic documents exhibit a new technical vocabulary, different expressions that disclose a full-fledged documentary and managerial tradition, some of which overlaps with the local practices in the newly conquered lands.[53] This Arab-Muslim practice did not replace but existed side by side with local traditions. This combination of adaptation and continuity can also be observed in the use of administrative terminology and titles. " 'Abd Allāh," slave or servant of God, which preceded the caliph's name on coins, seals, and papyrus protocols and in monumental inscriptions, can be directly connected to similar terms used to refer to Byzantine emperors.[54] On the other hand, the use of this part of the caliph's title in Greek transcription, rather than Greek translation, in the Greek and bilingual Arabic/Greek protocol texts on papyrus suggests that the borrowing took place before the conquests.[55] The term *amīr*, used in Arabic literary texts for

50 As observed already by Geoffrey Khan, "The Pre-Islamic Background."

51 See, for example, the conditions discussed in an early eighth-century Arabic letter concerning the *ḥajj*, the Muslim pilgrimage. The vocabulary and contents of this letter resonate with later legal texts discussing the conditions in which someone is obliged to undertake the pilgrimage and the rules that apply to the religious journey. Without additional context, it remains difficult to decide whether the discussions in the letter describe customs and common expectations or religious legal prescriptions: Sijpesteijn, "An Early Umayyad." See also Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 68–69.

52 Khan, "The Historical Development." For the differences between the Arabic and Greek texts of bilingual papyri, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 67–69.

53 Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 69–71.

54 *Servus Christi* (Latin) and *doulos tou Christou* (Greek), as observed by Nitzan Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Vocabulary." While 'Abd Allah as a personal name is surely widely attested in Arabia, no occurrence of it being used as title for a ruler can be identified with certainty (I would like to thank Ahmad al-Jallad for this information). For protocols, see Grohmann, *Protokolle*.

55 Greek administrative titles do appear in transcription in Arabic texts (such as *māzūt* for *meizoteros* and *sammāk* for *symmachos*), while Arabic titles were sometimes translated into Greek (such as *symboulos* for "governor" and *prōtosymboulos* for "caliph").

"army commander" and "governor," is used in papyri, on glass weights, and on seals to refer to the governor.[56] Greek and Coptic papyrus texts, on the other hand, apply this term to local military-administrative officials, at the level of districts and larger administrative units, but not for the governor. The appearance of *amiras*, the Greek and Coptic transcription of the Arabic *amīr*, shows that no Greek or Coptic equivalent existed in the eyes of the scribes.[57]

As with other administrative practices, the Arabs introduced new sealing practices, while in other respects the use of seals continued pre-Islamic tradition. The first generation of clay sealings produced by the Arab conquerors in Egypt show pictures rather than texts. This exclusive use of images constitutes a break with Byzantine and Sasanian tradition, in which texts prevailed on official seals, including those used by civil servants in their official capacity.[58] In general, anepigraphic seals were more commonly used in the private sphere in the Sasanian Empire. Impressions in clay with single gem-like imprints as produced in Muslim Egypt continued Sasanian practice, albeit in smaller and more modest formats. No lead imprints used on documents can be dated securely to the immediate post-conquest period, even though these were common in the Byzantine Empire before and after the Arab conquest.[59] While the absence of text on administrative seals, as well as the size of the sealings, thus constituted a break, the images on Muslim clay sealings from Egypt of dogs, bulls, hares, birds, and figures of warriors or saints can already be found on pre-Islamic Byzantine and Sasanian sealings (Figures 5.6b, 5.7c, 5.9b).[60] Similar patterns can be observed outside Egypt, where the documentary evidence is more scarce, however. Literary texts report that early Muslim officials in Iraq also used seals decorated with animals and figures rather than texts.[61] Late seventh-century clay sealings excavated in Qasr-I Abu Nasr near Shiraz in Iran similarly depict animals, and their size is smaller than those from the Sasanian period, but the background of the seals' owners is not clear.[62]

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56 For papyri and weights from Egypt, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, chap. 2; for seals from Palestine, see Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Vocabulary" and "Four Umayyad Lead Sealings"; and, for al-Andalus, see Ibrahim, "Additions," 119.

57 Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 117–24.

58 Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 62; Cheynet, "L'usage," 25; Soucek, "Early Islamic Seals," 238.

59 Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 4.

60 For Sasanian images, see Potts, *The Arabian Gulf*, 215; Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*; and Friedenberg, "The Evolution," 2, figs. 9–11. For Byzantine images, see Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*.

61 Soucek, "Early Islamic Seals," 246n57.

62 Ibid., 245.

As expressions of material culture, seals reflected the development of Islamic art more generally. In the Muslim empire iconographic motifs and material applications circulated freely between the Byzantine and Sasanian cultural realms, resulting in new combinations of patterns, forms, and applications in new geographical and administrative contexts.[63] Some iconographic motifs attested on sealings in Muslim Egypt and Syria-Palestine can be related to Sasanian designs, especially the use of celestial bodies, stars, the moon, and the sun. The introduction of the Sasanian motif of a beaded border surrounding an image can already be observed in the "decorative frame of knots" around the picture of a charging bull on the seal of the Arab conqueror and first governor of Egypt, ʿAmr b. al-ʿĀṣ (d. 664) (Figure 5.7c).[64] While it might be difficult to classify this as identifiably and specifically Arab-Muslim, the Muslims' application of existing motifs, forms, and usages differed from local practice starting immediately following the conquest.

Not only the form and images on the seals changed. The Muslims also introduced innovations in the application of sealings in the conquered provinces that also point to Sasanian influence. One innovation was to use clay sealings to close off securely the bottom part of a document that contained a summary of the contents of the text written out in full in the main part of the document.[65] This practice is attested in documents from Muslim Egypt and Palestine. It was mainly applied to tax-demand notes and tax receipts, when the amount of taxes paid (or to be paid), the date, and sometimes the kind of taxes were repeated in the sealed-off part (Figures 5.2a, 5.4a–b, 5.8a–b). It was used in Arabic as well as Greek or bilingual Arabic/Greek documents, starting with a Greek papyrus dated 642 CE. The purpose is clear: in case of disagreement about the reliability of the visible text, the closed-off part could be opened to reveal the untouched, authentic contents.

The use of sealings to close off part of a document was introduced by the Muslims, but the practice had a precedent in the Near East. Egyptian Ptolemaic so-called double documents, for example, display a similar practice. These legal documents contained twice the full text of a legal transaction. After the document had been signed and concluded, one part remained visible, while the second text was sealed off.[66] Aramaic double documents were produced in Palestine

63 Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*. Note also the circulation of Byzantine bronze weights and the production of Egyptian-style glass weights throughout the Muslim empire: Khamis, "A Bronze Weight," 149–54.

64 Priscilla Soucek describes the "decorative frame of knots" without identifying it as Sasanian: "Early Islamic Seals," 248. This Sasanian motif was introduced via the Muslim empire on Byzantine seals in the late ninth century: Walker, "Islamicizing Motifs," 389.

65 This innovation is extensively discussed in Sijpesteijn, "Seals and Papyri."

66 Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri."

around the same period, but the practice is already described for the seventh-century BCE.[67] In Ancient Mesopotamia such double legal documents existed as well.[68] In Khurasan full double legal documents were produced in Bactrian into the Muslim period (Figure 5.3a).[69] The Muslim custom of protecting only a summary of the text is different and compares best with some procedures in Roman Egypt. This habit had disappeared from Egypt by the late Roman period, however, and there is also no evidence that it was practised elsewhere in the Middle East. Whether the Muslims had maintained an ancient custom in adjusted form, were exposed to it during the conquests, or revived this practice to fit their needs remains to be determined.[70]

The increased use of single-sided sealings for identification and authentication in Muslim Egypt and Syria-Palestine may also be connected to Sasanian administrative practice, which spread in the Muslim empire to other areas. The common mention in documents to the sealings that appear on them and to the sealings' function as a marker of authority and identification was a novelty in Muslim Egypt. Although seals were used to identify and verify Sasanian, Bactrian, and Soghdian documents, the practice was almost entirely unknown in pre-Islamic Egypt.[71] As the letters quoted above show, the use of clay sealings was common in the Muslim chancery immediately following the conquest of Egypt and closely follows the application of clay sealings in the Sasanian chancery. Single-sided lead seal imprints used for identification and authentication outnumber double-sided lead sealings used for closing and securing in Muslim Syria-Palestine. This is opposite to the situation in the province under the Byzantines, and relates also to Sasanian practice, whereby single-sided seals were the only ones in use.

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67 Sijpesteijn, "Seals and Papyri." The prophet Jeremiah (627–586 BCE) took "the sealed deed of purchase containing the terms and conditions and the open copy" (Jer. 32:11). See also Jer. 32:14.

68 With the copy of the tablet text written on the outside envelope. In case of disagreement, the envelope was broken to reveal the tablet inside: Lerner and Skjaervø, "Some Uses of Clay Bullae," 74n44.

69 A depiction of this document with the bottom part closed off appears in Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, vol. 3, pl. 72.

70 The practice of using stamp seals instead of signet rings was reinvented in the Sasanian Empire after several centuries of having been in disuse: Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*.

71 In Roman Egypt the only example comes from tax receipts to be presented at checkpoints on the desert roads out to the oases, which contained authentication seals of the fiscal officials: Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri," 250–53. For Soghdian and Sasanian practice, see Huff, "Technological Observations," 382–83. For Bactrian, see Sims-Williams, *Bactrian Documents*, vols. 1 and 2.

Arab Seals and Sealing

Although no examples of sealings applied to documents are attested in pre-Islamic Arabia, written references and archaeological finds suggest that seals were regularly used for authentication and to regulate access. By the time ink-written documents were in common use, from the fourth century CE at the latest, sealings were most probably applied in similar ways in Arabia as in the Byzantine and Sasanian contexts. These practices continued in the early Muslim community in Arabia and influenced practices in the provinces conquered in the seventh century.

Even before documents were in use in Arabia, practices can be observed that paved the way for the use of sealings for authentication and the control of access to written texts. The practice of sealing to close off and lock items was widely known in pre-Islamic Arabia, where seals made out of precious stone and metal have been found. Sasanian (but not Byzantine) seals have been found on the eastern Arabian Gulf coast.[72] Himyarite (110 BCE–ca. 520 CE) seals have been unearthed in south Arabia carrying depictions of figurines and animals often accompanied by writing.[73] The seals vary from gem-like precious stones for use in rings or worn on necklaces to metal stamp seals with a loop on the back to facilitate stamping.[74] Identification practices were applied already in writings incised in stone. The use of personalized ways of signing (*ʿalāma*) can be recognized in pre-Islamic rock inscriptions present all over the peninsula, in which authors identified their writings through specific ways of inscribing their name or adding symbols to their texts. The most explicit reference to the use of seals in ancient Arabia comes from a third-century Sabaic letter written on palm wood found in Yemen. The writer orders the addressee to "seal it [a document] with seal and wax."[75] How the seals would have been attached to the wooden documents remains an open question. The editor of this text, Peter Stein, suggests that the holes that appear on the left

72 In Tarut (Potts, *The Arabian Gulf*, 215), in the United Arab Emirates (Kennet, "Transformations," 154), and in Bahrain (Lerner and Skjaervø, "Some Uses of Clay Bullae," 71).

73 A black stone seal shows a three-faced head of a man and a Himyarite inscription with a name: Beeston, "Old South Arabian Antiquities," 22–23, pl. III. A sardonyx seal has a depiction of an eagle with open wings standing on a bucranium with a star next to it and a late Sabaic inscription: Beeston, Pirenne and Robin, *Corpus des inscriptions*, 601–2.

74 See the 156 seals described in the Corpus of South-Arabian Inscriptions (dasi.humnet.unipi.it) dating from the second millennium BCE to the sixth century CE.

75 Stein, *Die altsüdarabischen Minuskulinschriften*, 32. Other documents written on palm leaves equally mention the use of wax sealings (e.g., ibid., 324, 541). I would like to thank Michael C. A. Macdonald, Ahmad al-Jallad, and Peter Stein for their help locating references to sealing practices in the ancient Arabian material.

extremity of several of the legal documents might have been to suspend a string and seal.

The influence of Near Eastern writing and sealing practices was facilitated by the introduction of the Arabic script on the Arabian Peninsula in the fourth century CE. Developed out of the Nabatean alphabet, Arabic is not an epigraphic system moulded in clay or carved in stone but, rather, a "pen-and-ink" writing system applied to parchment, leather, and animal bones, and probably also papyrus.[76] The ancient Arabs' interaction with the world around them was regular and intense, with writing habits being one of the many practices exchanged. Already, in the pre-Islamic period, Arab merchants, pilgrims, and travellers moved around the known classical world, while goods and objects—gifts, merchandise, utensils—from outside the peninsula circulated in Arabia. Documents, as well as the paraphernalia used to produce them, would surely have accompanied some of these movements.

One likely venue of cultural exchange was the Arab Christian tribes who worked in the service of Byzantines and Sasanians to defend the desert borders. The Arab Christian Ghassanids and Lakhmids were thoroughly integrated into the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires respectively. The close affinity and interaction between Ghassanids and Arabians explains to a great extent the direction and sequence of the seventh-century Arab conquests. It also elucidates the continued use of Byzantine administrative practice and instruments in Muslim Syria-Palestine and Egypt, as well as their spread throughout the Muslim empire.[77] The Ghassanid and Lakhmid use of seals thus most probably influenced pre-Islamic Arabian usage, and explains the spread of Sasanian and Byzantine practice in the Muslim empire later on. The Ghassanids and Lakhmids were important cultural brokers whose experience with Byzantine and Sasanian administration and rule served the early Muslim empire well. A lead imprint of the last Ghassanid king, which depicts Christian symbols in combination with the Greek language,[78] shows what form this influence might have taken.

It is clear that the earliest Arab-Muslim community in Arabia was indeed familiar with seals. When the prophet Muḥammad (d. 632) was allegedly told that foreign rulers would not accept his letters inviting them to join Islam without his personal seal attached, he decided to adopt one for himself. Reports differ as to what image was depicted, some stating it was a lion or human figure, others that

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76 Macdonald, "Ancient Arabia." See similar observations concerning the switch from cuneiform to Aramaic in Mesopotamia: Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 108. For the presence of papyrus as a writing material in Arabia, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 1.

77 See, for example, the introduction of Aramaic-Greek terms by the Arabs in Egypt: ibid., 70n52.

78 The seal of the last Ghassanid king, Gabala patrikios (d. 640/41), contained crosses and a Greek legend: Shahid, *Byzantium*, 159.

it was a legend with the words "Muḥammad is God's messenger."[79] The Qur'an mentions the use of legal documents to ensure the correct recording of a transaction, adding that witnesses should be used when it is impractical to write the transaction down (Q 2:212). The use of seals to close off or lock is also attested in the Qur'an. Unbelievers who refuse to respond to God's message are described as having their hearts and ears sealed by God (*khatama* Q 2:7; 6:46; 36:65; 42:24; 83:25). Muḥammad's identification as the seal (*khātim*) of the prophets (Q 33:40), is generally interpreted as meaning that he was the last prophet sent by God: his prophecy completed and closed the row of Old and New Testament prophets, as a sealing finalizes and secures a container or document.

Adaptations and reshapings surely followed the introduction of governmental practices and instruments in Arabia in response to local norms, implementation and usage, with a particular Arabian praxis developing as a result. As no documents dating from the earliest history of Islam have been preserved from Arabia, the only way to deduce such practice is from the changes implemented by the Muslims in the areas they conquered.

Arabicization and Islamicization

As discussed above, documentary practices, including the application and form of seals used on documents and goods, show that certain changes followed soon upon the Arab conquest in Egypt and Syria-Palestine. Information from other areas of the Muslim empire suggests that such changes occurred elsewhere too. In many ways, however, administrative routine was unaltered, and change is partially explained by the introduction of known practices into new geographical contexts and for different administrative purposes.

It took another couple of decades following the conquests before the Muslim rulers implemented a concerted programme of revision in administrative instruments, organization, and institutions. Initiated under the Umayyad dynasty (661–750) from its capital, Damascus in Syria, administrative reforms continued to be regionally expressed as they interacted with local needs, usages, and conventions. Under Caliph Muʿāwiya (r. 661–680), significant changes can be observed in administrative organization and practice in the papyri from Egypt and

79 Alan and Sourdel, "Khaṭām." The appearance of the latter text stamped with ink on the letters written on leather ascribed to the prophet Muḥammad must date from the time (tenth century CE onwards) when such practice of stamping seals with ink had replaced the custom of using clay seals. The use of an Arabic text rather than an image would set Muḥammad's seal apart from contemporary use by other Muslims. See above at notes 60 and 61 for examples of figural seals from early Islamic Egypt and Iraq.

Syria-Palestine.[80] Mu'āwiya is the first caliph whose name might have appeared on a bilingual Arabic/Greek papyrus protocol—preceding an Arabic/Greek note (54/674) from Nessana in Palestine requesting the delivery of oil and wheat to an Arab army unit.[81] His name is reportedly also the first to appear on monumental inscriptions. Mu'āwiya is, moreover, credited with installing a bureau of seals and putting a special official in charge of it, but, as we noted, the Muslim administration also used seals before that period.[82]

Further changes were implemented at the end of the seventh century and the beginning of the eighth under the Umayyad Marwanid dynasty (684–750). Modifications in the administration aimed at increased monitoring, centralized control, standardization, and professionalization were enacted throughout the Muslim empire. The goal was surely to increase the fiscal income from the areas under caliphal control, which had become especially urgent when proceeds in the form of booty had substantially diminished with the slowing down of the conquests. An amplified self-awareness and self-confidence among the rulers, whose regime had survived fifty years of counter-attacks, civil war, and apparent imminent collapse but now seemed certain to stay, was also expressed in a desire for further Islamicization and Arabicization.

The narrative sources indeed assign 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685–705), and his sons who succeeded him, an ambitious programme of reforms. The Marwanid caliphs are more present in the documentary record in and outside Syria, their immediate area of governance. 'Abd al-Malik is the first caliph whose name appeared on lead and glass weights from Egypt and Syria-Palestine.[83] His name also appears on an administrative papyrus from Nessana, while numerous papyrus protocols are issued on behalf of his sons.

Arabicization of the administration was realized in different ways. The language of the chancery was decreed to be exclusively Arabic at the expense of local languages. The numismatic evidence, which is probably the most widely known and studied, shows a slow process of reform, with images being gradually superseded by the exclusive use of Arabic writing. Lead and bronze weights show a similarly gradual evolution from pre-Islamic via mixed to exclusively Arabic-Islamic forms.[84] It is from this time too that lead sealings bearing Arabic-only

80 Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*.

81 Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana*, no. 60. See, however, the objections to the *editio princeps*, including the identification of this papyrus as a protocol, in Sijpesteijn, "Arabic Script and Language in the Earliest Papyri."

82 Abbott, *The Ḳurrah Papyri*, 28.

83 Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*, ill. 21; Khamis "A Bronze Weight," 151.

84 Khamis, "A Bronze Weight."

legends are attested, recording contributions by towns, administrative districts (*ajnād*), or whole provinces (*miṣr*; *filasṭīn*; *al-andalus*) (Figures 5.5, 5.10, 5.11, 5.12, 5.13, 5.16, plate 5.1).[85] These seals show a standardized formulation and use of technical terms.[86] Egyptian papyrus protocols too start to appear in bilingual Arabic/Greek (as opposed to exclusively Greek ones) around this time, with the earliest caliph mentioned being al-Walīd (r. 705–715) and the first entirely Arabic protocol dating to Caliph Hishām (r. 724–743).[87] It appears therefore that the introduction of Arabic on public objects transcending local usage was generally applied throughout Syria-Palestine and Egypt in more or less immediate response to the court-initiated programme.[88]

Local languages continued to be used and learned in the Muslim chancery for a time, appearing on administrative instruments such as seals, coins, weights, and documents. In Egypt Greek continued to be actively used into the ninth century, while Coptic was used for local administration even longer. In Syria-Palestine Syriac and Aramaic disappeared more quickly in the face of Arabic. In Egypt Greek lingered on seals, even on those used by Muslim officials, into the eighth century. Images too continued to figure on the clay seals of officials in Egypt (Figures 5.6b, 5.9b). Similarly, in Khurasan depictions of animals and other images persisted on official seals into the middle of the eighth century (Figures 5.3b, 5.14b, 5.15b).[89] Eighth-century bronze and lead weights from Egypt, Syria-Palestine, and Iraq show both the continued use of Greek alongside Arabic and the application of pre-Islamic imagery.[90]

In spite of this transition period, a firm trend towards a specifically Arab(ic)-Islamic sealing usage and practice is visible in the clay and metal sealings from the eighth century onwards and from all over the Muslim empire. Some striking features were introduced on the sealings, which cannot be traced back to Byzantine or Sasanian practice. Others show how Sasanian practice, sometimes combined with local "Byzantine" traits, was introduced in Egypt and Syria-Palestine. A first difference concerns the identification of officials on the seals. Arab(ic)-Islamic seal inscriptions are specifically characterized by the general absence of titles. While Byzantine and Sasanian seals mention the (name and)

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85 Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Lead Sealings," 19–20; Schindel, "Nochmals" and "Eine Umayyadische Bleibulle," 118–21.

86 Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Vocabulary."

87 Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 110–11.

88 In general on 'Abd al-Malik's reforms, see Robinson, *'Abd al-Malik*, chap. 4.

89 Sijpesteijn, "Seals and Papyri"; Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*; Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 83. The district manager of the Fayyum (in office ca. 720–750), Nājid b. Muslim, used a seal with his name written out in Arabic and Greek.

90 Khamis, "A Bronze Weight."

title or office of officials, Arab(ic)-Islamic seals contain only personal names, either written out or symbolized by an image, sometimes in combination with a pious formula (Figures 5.1b, 5.9b).[91] This conforms to the practice in use within the papyri in which bilingual Greek-Arabic texts show the common application of titles in the Greek part while the Arabic section lacks such attributions, emphasizing instead lineage and membership via patronymics and other community identity markers.[92] Only the governor and caliph are regularly referred to as *amīr* and *amīr al-mu'minīn* respectively, possibly an indication of their elevated status (Figure 5.12).[93]

Two other innovations on Arab(ic)-Islamic seals, which break with Byzantine and Sasanian usage, are related to technical terms and expressions attested on the sealings themselves. The first concerns the addition of years to lead sealings imprinted on bags or containers (Plate 5.1a–b).[94] This practice is first attested on a series of lead and brass seals recording tax payments "by the inhabitants of Egypt," which carry dates between 93 and 95 AH (712–714 CE). Such use of dates occurs only on "impersonal" seals—that is to say, on seals referring to institutions, offices, the Muslim chancery, or administration in a general sense, without mentioning personal names. The use of words referring to the seal on the sealing itself is another practice that is not found on pre-Islamic seals but appears for the first time on eighth-century Arabic seals. The words "seal" (*khātim*) and "stamp" (*ṭābi'*) are attested on the sealings and discussed in the documents on which the sealings appear (Figures 5.3a, 5.5a, 5.8c, 5.14a, 5.16a).[95]

Another group of eighth-century lead seal imprints listing administrative territorial divisions, but with no names of officials in charge, is the product of measures to professionalize the Muslim bureaucracy. Mostly from Filastin but also from al-Andalus and Egypt, these sealings combine names of towns, subdistricts (*iqlīm*), districts (*kūra*), or entire provinces (Figures 5.5a–b, 5.10a–b, 5.16a–b; Plate 5.1a–b).[96] They record annual tax payments and refer to the Muslim tax-collecting authorities as an institution rather than a person, thereby reflecting the

91 For Byzantine seal inscriptions, see Cheynet, "L'usage," and Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Vocabulary"; for Sasanian examples, see Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 61–62.

92 Grohmann, *From the World*, 121; Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 67–68.

93 See also Amitai-Preiss and Farhi, "A Small Assemblage," no. 1.

94 No dates were used on Byzantine seals: Balog, "Dated Aghlabid," 127.

95 See above at note 31. Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Vocabulary," 281–82; Alan and Sourdel, "Khaṭām." For the use of *ṭābi'* in the papyri, see Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 317–18.

96 Amitai-Preiss, "Kūra and Iqlīm."

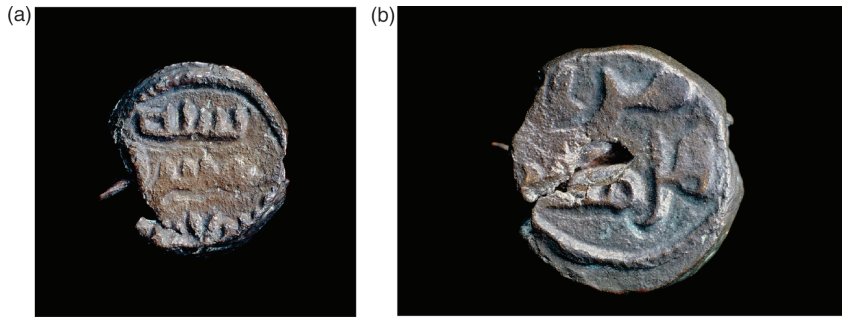

Plate 5.1a–b. Copper seal recording a tribute or poll tax payments made by the inhabitants of Egypt in the year 95 (713/14): (a) *min ahl miṣr*, (b) *sanat khams wa-tisaʿīn*. Walker, *Catalogue*, 295; Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals*, p. 28, no. 9; British Museum, 00803873001. © Trustees of the British Museum.

administrative reorganization of the early eighth century, when Muslim administrative bureaucrats replaced local Christian and Jewish landholding office holders.

Again, the Egyptian papyri offer further information, in this case about the territorial division in place and about the process of administrative transformations as referenced on the sealings as well. At the lowest level in the administration stood the villages, rural estates, monastic communities, and urban neighbourhoods. Village headmen and other local representatives were responsible for the collection of taxes from individual taxpaying residents in the communities. Initially operating as an intermediary between the Muslim authorities and the indigenous taxpayers, these local representatives had also been responsible for the division of the taxes imposed in one lump sum on the communities. From the early eighth century onwards tax collectors, still drawn from the indigenous population, lost this autonomy and operated in the service of the Muslim fisc, which assigned taxes on individual taxpayers directly. The local collectors brought the taxes gathered from individual taxpayers to a subdistrict, called an *iqlīm* in Syria-Palestine and *ḥayyiz* in Egypt (Figures 5.2a, 5.16a–b). From there the taxes of the different communities were forwarded in one lump sum to the district capital (*madīnat al-kūra*). From the district the payments were dispatched to the next level in the administrative geography of the province. In Egypt the districts were in direct contact with the provincial capital until a subdivision in Upper and Lower Egypt was introduced in the ninth century. In Syria-Palestine the *ajnād* functioned as supraregional administrative units that also played a military role. Then the taxes advanced to the capital of the province. At the provincial capital the tax taken was used to pay stipends to Muslim inhabitants according to their place on the *dīwān* (register), to contribute to the maintenance of the land, the upkeep of the road system and other public services, and the sustenance of the governor and his entourage, and, finally, to send as dues to the caliph's

court.[97] In spite of the continuous complaints that payments from the provinces were missing, insufficient, or late, the sealings referring to payments made by the (inhabitants of) provinces make it clear that these payments were indeed destined for the caliphal capital (Figure 5.13a–b; Plate 5.1a–b).[98]

Some of the "impersonal" sealings that reflect the new administrative order put in place in the early eighth century seemingly record the payment of poll tax contributions by non-Muslim subjects. Such sealings are known from Egypt and Palestine from the time of Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik onwards (Figure 5.5a–b; Plate 5.1a–b).[99] Papyri report that poll tax payments were in fact already in place, newly introduced by the Arab rulers, directly following the conquest in Egypt, as they were presumably elsewhere.[100] In al-Andalus similar seals were used immediately following the Arab conquest in the early eighth century to record payments made by communities on the Iberian Peninsula (Figures 5.10a–b, 5.11a–b, 5.13a–b).[101] Such poll tax or tribute payments contain a place name, sometimes accompanied by a reference to the stamp having been issued in the place (e.g., *bi-ludd*, "issued in Ludd"), or that this is the seal of the town (e.g., *khātim ludd*, "Ludd's seal")[102] or district (*khātim kūrat ʿasqalan*; *kūrat ʿamwās*).[103] Payments for a whole province are also referred to on such seals (*qasm al-andalus*, "allotment of al-Andalus" [Figure 5.13a–b]).[104] In some cases a reference to the (non-Muslim) population appears as well (e.g., *min ahl miṣr*, "from the people of Egypt" [Plate 5.1a–b];[105] *bi-sm llāh ahl ashbīla*, "in the name of God, the people of Seville" [Figure 5.10a–b];[106] *khātim kūra ṭabariyya*, "seal of Tiberias"; *yahūd ṭabariyya*, "Jews of Tiberias" [Figure 5.5a–b]),[107] or to the peace treaty that gave rise to the payments (e.g., *muṣālaḥat libīra*,

97 Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 85–91; Amitai-Preiss, "Islamic Lead Coins," 15.

98 Robinson, "Neck-Sealing." See also the list of payments made by the province of Egypt in the years 221–278 AH (836–892 CE) recorded on a papyrus found in Samarra in which Egypt figures prominently: Reinfandt, "Administrative Papyri."

99 Amitai-Preiss, "A Poll Tax Seal"; Robinson, "Neck-Sealing," 404.

100 Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 72–74.

101 Amitai-Preiss, "A Poll Tax Seal"; Ibrahim, "Additions."

102 Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Lead Sealings." See also the examples mentioned by Amitai-Preiss, "A Poll Tax Seal," of seals mentioning, on one side, *khātim* ("seal") of a district's name and, on the other side, *iqlīm* ("district"), followed by another geographical name.

103 Amitai-Preiss, "Islamic Lead Coins," 15–16, nrs. 10–11.

104 Ibrahim, "Nuevos documentos."

105 Four such copper seals are known, dated to 93 and 95 AH (712–715 CE): Schindel, "Nochmals."

106 Ibrahim, "Nuevos documentos."

107 Amitai-Preiss, "A Poll Tax Seal."

"the peace agreement of Elibirri";[108] *muṣālaḥat arḍ jayyān*, "the peace agreement of the land of Jaen" [Figure 5.11a–b]).[109] Sealings discovered in southern France record booty captured from coastal towns raided by the Arabs,[110] and contain Arabic terms known from legal and administrative manuals. These lead sealings from al-Andalus, Egypt, Syria/Palestine, and southern France protected payments intended for the central Muslim administration. Such examples from across the empire all share an avoidance of images and decorations and reveal a common script and technical vocabulary.[111]

Another administrative change related to the execution of the collection of the poll tax is visible in early eighth-century sealings. As part of the administrative reforms under the Marwanids, centralizing measures were introduced to increase control over the local administrations and their executives, as well as individual taxpayers and their possessions, in order to secure a higher tax uptake. Closer supervision of taxpayers, their possessions, and their movements resulted in a higher tax burden, while the stronger state presence caused disaffection among the subjects. Protest took different forms, from tax evasion by running away from one's place of residence to outright revolt. The Muslim authorities struck back with a measure that was as effective as it was humiliating: lead sealings fastened around the necks or wrists of non-Muslim taxpayers identified them as liable to the non-Muslim poll tax, while at the same time disgracing them by associating them with slaves and captives. Although no lead sealings that can be connected to the bodily sealing of individual taxpayers dating to the eighth century have been identified, such objects do exist, but from a later period.[112] Contemporary literary sources from Egypt and northern Iraq give detailed descriptions of the practice. The custom of putting lead sealings around the necks and hands of captives and slaves was, moreover, practised in the Sasanian Empire for the purpose of humiliation, punishment, and identification. The Muslims were the first in the Near East, however, to apply this debasing practice in a fiscal context. The measure was not applied continuously and generally but, rather, represented extraordinary punitive or overzealous measures, which, for logistical and moral reasons, could not be maintained in the long term.[113]

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108 Ibrahim, "Additions," 116, no. 1.

109 Ibrahim, "Nuevos documentos," 153–55, no. 10, with corrections in the addenda.

110 See also *maghnūm ṭayyib qusima bi-arbūna*, "licit booty distributed in Narbonne": Marichal and Sénac, "Sceaux arabes."

111 Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Vocabulary."

112 Robinson, "Neck-Sealing," 427.

113 Robinson emphasizes that neck sealing, which initially served only a humiliating and stigmatizing function, from the early eighth century to the tenth served an additional, fiscal

Archaeological material from the most western part of the Muslim empire, al-Andalus, shows how the new Muslim administrative standards introduced under the Marwanids spread throughout the empire. The Arab conquerors who crossed over into the Iberian Peninsula in 711 were closely related to the Umayyads of Egypt and Syria-Palestine. They introduced the same kinds of lead sealings, recording (in Arabic) and protecting the payments made by towns and communities to the new rulers. While the specific terminology referring to payments made as part of the peace agreements (*ṣulḥ*, *muṣālaḥa*) and the status of the conquered land (*fay*) is not attested elsewhere, the invading armies had obviously already incorporated the linguistic and administrative changes initiated further east (Figures 5.10a–b, 5.11a–b, 5.13a–b).[114] Some of the vocabulary and expressions in use on these early eighth-century Arab(ic)-Islamic seals compare well with those in use elsewhere in the empire and point to a common administrative culture (Figures 5.5a–b, 5.16a–b; Plate 5.1a–b).[115] No clearly identifiable images appear on the Andalusian lead seals at all.[116]

Global and Local Trends

The creation of one Muslim empire uniting the former Byzantine eastern Mediterranean provinces and the Sasanian Empire facilitated the sharing of practices and forms across a large area. Falling under one political system and sharing many linguistic, economic, legal, and social features meant that, transcending local specificities, local material repertoires, and administrative practices, they were distributed more widely and more rapidly than before. In this way, Sasanian and

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purpose, even though it was always secondary to the humiliation ("Neck-Sealing," 417ff.). The measure might also be connected to administrative changes aimed at strict centralized control, which were introduced early in the eighth century and led to censuses and land surveys, but which were not maintained because of logistic difficulties: Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*, 94–102. Extraordinary circumstances in eighth-century Middle Egypt motivated increased record-keeping of the movement of people: Delattre, "Checkpoints"; Boud'hors, "L'apport." See also the Arabic safe conducts and tax receipts that had to be shown to officials upon request: Frantz-Murphy, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, 105–10.

114 Ibrahim, "Additions," 116, no. 1; 118, no. 3; Ibrahim "Nuevos documentos," no. 14. Other terminology so far only attested in the Andalusian material is *qasm*: Ibrahim, "Additions," 121, 125–26, nos. 6–8; Figure 5.13a in this essay.

115 See the use of *arḍ*, "land," with a provincial or place name, which appears on lead seals from al-Andalus and Syria-Palestine (Ibrahim, "Nuevos documentos"; Amitai-Preiss, "Arḍ and Jund," 134–41) and which is also a frequently attested term in papyri from administrative and fiscal contexts: Sijpesteijn, *Shaping a Muslim State*. The reference on seals from al-Andalus and Egypt to payments made by the inhabitants (*ahl*) of the province mirrors the use of that term in the papyri to refer to the taxpaying subjects (*ahl al-arḍ*), and might be compared to the identification "Jews" (*yahūd*) on a sealing from Tiberias.

116 Ibrahim, "Nuevos documentos."

Byzantine shapes, structures, and procedures extended more easily beyond their respective imperial borders. The newly introduced forms and practices also underwent adjustments as they were put to local use and fitted to local needs. Seals bear witness to this active process of adjustment, reshaping, and expansion, which resulted in a shared but locally defined administrative material culture.[117]

In their form and application, Arab(ic)-Islamic seals show an influx of Near Eastern influences that were given new meaning and functions in the Muslim empire and implemented locally. The introduction of the common practice in the Sasanian Empire of adding a lead seal to the neck or hands of captives and slaves, also occasionally performed in the Byzantine Empire, was given a new function and application in the Muslim empire. Significantly, the Muslims were the first to use identifying lead neck-seals in a fiscal context; in doing so, they adjusted a Sasanian practice and implemented it throughout the Muslim empire.[118] Decorative elements such as stars and crescents, frequently encountered on Sasanian seals, found their way onto the seals of the Egyptian governor Qurra b. Sharīk (in office 709–715), where they appear together with the animal figures commonly used on Byzantine seals (Figure 5.9b).[119] Stars are also used on early eighth-century seals and coins in al-Andalus and Palestine.[120] In eighth-century Khurasani documents star-covered clay sealings finalize the transaction (Figures 5.14a–b, 5.15a–b). An increased presence of one-sided sealings, in clay and lead, might also point to the influence of Sasanian sealing practice (which exclusively used one-sided seals, as opposed to the double-sided ones commonly used in the Byzantine Empire) upon the whole Muslim empire (Figure 5.12).[121] The Byzantine use of lead seal imprints arrived in al-Andalus with the Arab conquerors, who spread this practice westwards.[122]

Other administrative practices and measures newly introduced by the Muslims found their ways onto the seals in different parts of the empire. *Arḍ*, "land," is used in papyri from Egypt, as well as on sealings from al-Andalus and Palestine, with the technical meaning of land under the control of Muslims and subject to taxation. Another technical term related to taxes is *ahl*, "people," attested on papyri and

117 For a similar pattern of sharing of Byzantine and Sasanian forms to the development of an Islamic form with local expressions in the domain of material culture, see Grabar, *Formation of Islamic Art*. See also Knappett "Imprints."

118 Robinson, "Neck-Sealing," 405.

119 Sijpesteijn, "Seals and Papyri," 173. The introduction of stars on seals does not have to be related to eastern practice, as evidenced in eighth-century Khurasani documents: Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 87–88.

120 Ibrahim, "Nuevos documentos"; Amitai-Preiss, "Four Umayyad Seals," no. 2.

121 Amitai-Preiss and Farhi, "A Small Assemblage," no. 1.

122 See above, note 63, for the distribution of glass, lead, and bronze weights throughout the different provinces of the Islamic empire.

sealings from al-Andalus, Syria-Palestine, and Egypt to designate the taxpaying subjects in lands conquered by the Arabs. Other examples include the term *ṣulḥ*, "amicable treaty," which appears on sealings from al-Andalus and southern France recording tribute payments and booty. Local practices thrived as well, with many of the forms, expressions, and technical terms found on seals being specific to a particular province or district. Uniformity was imposed from the Marwanid court at the beginning of the eighth century, with Arabic-only seals becoming dominant, albeit not exclusive everywhere. Administrative hierarchies became settled and were represented uniformly and consistently even if this was initially most visible at the level of single provinces.[123] Regional differences continued to exist, with local political powers and customs maintaining an influence.

In the ninth century population movements from the eastern part of the Muslim empire to the west introduced new administrative terminologies and practices from the eastern provinces westwards. Armies and government officials were sent from Baghdad to subdue Egypt, bringing it (temporarily) back under the wings of the Abbasid caliphate. The diminishing economic situation in Baghdad, moreover, drew civil servants westwards to the more prosperous Egyptian capital. These administrators introduced practices from the eastern part of the empire to Egypt and Syria-Palestine, which generally fell under Egyptian influence, or even outright political control, at this time.[124]

The application of multiple imprints of the same seal on one piece of clay was introduced into Egypt at this time. For example, the *jahbadh* (paymaster) Yalahwayh imprinted his seal twice at the bottom of a document dated 291 (904) as proof that he had received the taxes mentioned in the papyrus (Figure 5.8c).[125] This practice can be connected to similar practices common in legal documents from the eastern part of the Muslim empire. The custom of applying multiple seals to one lump of clay had been practised by Sasanian legal officials.[126] Their placement and size indicated the hierarchy of the parties involved. Sometimes multiple imprints were impressed by the same seal belonging to the main official present.[127] A similar development can be observed in Ptolemaic Egypt, where the use of multiple seals on one piece of clay had been replaced by the practice of printing the seal of one official on clay and the signatures of additional witnesses surrounding it.[128] Arabic legal documents from mid-eighth-century Khurasan have large seals with multiple

123 Amitai-Preiss, "Umayyad Vocabulary" and "Kūra and Iqlīm."

124 Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 83, and "The Pre-Islamic Background."

125 Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 38, no. 29.

126 Macuch, "The Use of Seals."

127 Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 63.

128 Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri," 234.

imprints from seals and thumbnail marks belonging to the witnesses to the transaction (Figure 5.14b).[129] In its move westwards, the practice of applying multiple seals to one lump of clay thus shifted to the documentary domain, appearing in Egypt on administrative rather than legal documents. Although no clay sealings appear on legal deeds, the eastern practice of witnesses adding their personal seal to their name might have impacted the practice of witnesses using a personalized written sign (*'alāma*) behind their name, which becomes commonly practised in Arabic papyri from the ninth century onwards.[130]

The introduction of paper as a writing material profoundly changed the writing culture in the Middle East.[131] Introduced from China via Central Asia, the production of paper was much cheaper than that of parchment, leather, or papyrus. Fabricated from used textiles, paper could be produced everywhere and anywhere. The introduction of this writing support was accompanied by other practices. One such related innovation was the use of ink-stamped seals, which led to innovations in seals and signet rings as well. The first paper mills appeared in Baghdad in the eighth century, and paper reached Egypt by the ninth century, becoming dominant by the tenth. Clay seal imprints can be found on paper documents from the tenth century, but by the eleventh century ink stamps had replaced clay sealings.[132]

Conclusion

The use and format of sealings in Syria-Palestine and Egypt show an interesting and revealing blend of continuities and changes under the Muslims. With seals and seal imprints dating from directly after the conquest of these areas, the employment and appearance of seals can be connected to practices introduced by the new rulers as well as subsequent changes taking place under a developing and changing Muslim state.

The meaning and function of seals as a means for identification and authority, on the one hand, and closure and protection, on the other, persisted throughout this period. How these functions were expressed, what materials were used, how the seals were applied to objects, and what they looked like differed depending on local conditions and governmental measures, at both the regional and central levels. Practical considerations, such as the degree of interaction between scribal and administrative cultures before and after the conquests and the level of interaction between subjects and rulers as a result of settlement patterns, played a role. Symbolic

129 Khan, *Arabic Documents*, 83. The use of fingerprints in clay seals is known from Ptolemaic Egypt (Vandorpe, "Seals in and on the Papyri," 236) and from the ancient Near East: Ritter, *Die altorientalischen Traditionen*, 105.

130 Sijpesteijn, "Seals and Papyri."

131 Bloom, *Paper before Print*.

132 Grohmann, *Einführung*, 129.

considerations, such as the contacts (hostile, diplomatic, and economic) with the Byzantine Empire and the relation between Muslim and non-Muslim populations, as well as processes of Arabicization and Islamicization, were also important.[133] Finally, political relations between the provinces and the centre of the caliphate, as well as the dynamics of multicentrism, imperial ambition, and the formation of an Islamic empire, also impacted the way the Muslims expressed their rule and ideology in administrative measures, building projects, and material artefacts such as seals.

The exclusive use of the Arabic language by the administration was one example of this. Even taking into account accidents of preservation, a pattern of change disseminating from the political centre to the periphery with faster implementation in the public domain, in which central control was greater, is visible in the material record. The oldest protocol papyrus that includes Arabic is dated to the caliphate of Muʿāwiya (r. 661–680), and it was used in Nessana, Palestine.[134] In Egypt, located further from the centre, the earliest bilingual Arabic/Greek protocols date to the caliphate of al-Walīd (r. 705–715).[135] Arabic, though present from the beginning of Muslim rule, did not monopolize the chancery (*dīwān*), with local languages being actively promoted for at least a century following ʿAbd al-Malik's decree ordering the exclusive use of Arabic. The oldest known Arabic lead weight was struck in Palestine with ʿAbd al-Malik's name and additional Arabic legends on it, and a contemporary bronze weight belonging to ʿAbd al-Malik's governor in Iraq, al-Ḥajjāj (d. 714), has Arabic struck over an original Greek legend.[136] Arabic sealings mentioning the name and title of Caliph ʿAbd al-Malik (r. 685–705), his sons and Caliphs al-Walīd (r. 705–715), Sulaymān (r. 715–717), and Hishām (r. 724–743), as well as Caliph Marwān II (r. 744–750), are found in Syria-Palestine.[137] Sealings with Arabic start to be used for institutions and administrative domains particular to Muslim rule, such as the poll tax or tribute payments by communities of non-Muslims and the division of booty gained in raiding from the 710s onwards. The use of local languages and the continued use of figures—rather than writing—on seals, even on those belonging to government officials, continues into the eighth century in Egypt, Iran, and Khurasan. In Armenia no Arabic seals have been found before the ninth century.[138] On the other hand, no administrative seals with depictions are known from al-Andalus or Syria-Palestine. Syria-Palestine, being at the centre of the Umayyad Empire, was where

133 See also the exoticizing motive at play in the application of Islamic motifs on ninth- and tenth-century Byzantine seals: Walker, "Islamicizing Motifs."

134 Kraemer, *Excavations at Nessana*, no. 60, but see above at note 81.

135 Grohmann, *Protokolle*.

136 Khamis, "A Bronze Weight."

137 Amitai-Preiss, "Four Umayyad Lead Sealings," 176.

138 Ninth-century layers in Dvin yielded Arabic seals: Huff, "Technological Observations," 376.

policy changes, including the change to Arabic, were first implemented. While distance thus played a role, the production of seals used by provincial officials was not subject to central control and scrutiny the way that seals for public use were.[139] Individual governors or governments especially closely connected to the caliphal court, such as Qurra in Egypt, al-Ḥajjāj in Iraq, or even the Umayyad conquerors of al-Andalus, implemented administrative customs more readily.

Separate traditions continued to exist on both sides of cultural-political borders. In Anatolia and Syria—the areas that the Byzantines recaptured from the Muslims in the eleventh and twelfth centuries—Arabic-speaking Christians were drawn into the Byzantine administration. Their seals in Arabic, often in combination with Syriac and Greek, and bearing prominent Christian symbols such as crosses and figures of saints, are preserved in the dozens. No such imagery is attested on administrative seals of the area under earlier Muslim rule.[140] Christian-Arab officials did of course work in substantial numbers in the Muslim administration, and their seals mentioning their names in Arabic have been preserved in Egypt (Figures 5.2b, 5.8c).[141] Conversely, only a very small number of bilingual Arabic/Greek Byzantine seals are attested from the earlier period belonging to Arabs working in the Byzantine administration, while Islamicizing motifs found their way onto some Byzantine seals of the ninth and tenth centuries.[142] Byzantine lead sealings for documents continued to be imprinted on both sides and identified the officials mentioned on them by their titles, contrary to the practices in Arab(ic)-Islamic seals as described above.

As opposed to public inscriptions, protocol texts, or coins, which serve a long-term function transcending temporal and confined spaces, seals serve immediate and localized needs while still operating in the public sphere and participating in the large-scale administrative and political processes of the time. These Arabic/Greek Christian Byzantine seals show how malleable and flexible the medium was, and how scribal and administrative habits, cultural and religious preferences, languages and applications were mixed, rejected, or revived in the service of new masters in new historical realities.

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139 Compare the much slower introduction of Arabic-only legends on Umayyad copper coins, which were locally produced beyond central supervision, as opposed to silver and gold coins, the minting of which was centrally controlled. I would like to thank Kees Uitenbroek for pointing this out to me.

140 A small number of Byzantine seals containing Arabic, and in some cases images of animals or Christian symbols, date to the seventh/eighth centuries: Heidemann and Sode, "Metallsiegel," 48, and "Christlich-orientalische Bleisiegel," nos. 1, 2, 3. An Arabic seal bearing a saint's depiction on one side and an Arabic legend on the other belonged to a Byzantine family in the service of the Seljuks in Asia Minor: Heidemann and Sode, "Metallsiegel," 48.

141 See, for example, Antūna ibn Karīl, whose seal appears on a document dated 862: Wassiliou, *Siegel und Papyri*, 38, no. 30.

142 Walker, "Islamicizing Motifs."

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Abstract This article explores the usage, imagery, and linguistic expressions found on seals produced in the early Muslim empire and reveals how these developed from the seventh century to the ninth. Comparing Islamic and pre-Islamic samples exposes continuities and changes in sealing practices among Byzantine, Sasanian, and Arabian cultures and shows how these developments can be linked to the underlying ideologies and ambitions of Muslim authorities. In particular, it explains how and why different practices unfolded in Egypt and the Levant, and compares this phenomenon to the dissemination of shared forms throughout the Muslim empire, with particular reference to the rich material from Khurasan in the east and al-Andalus in the west.

Keywords Islam, Arabic, administration, taxes, Islamicization, Levant, Egypt, Iberia, Khurasan, al-Andalus