Major Messages on Minor Surfaces?
The Visual Language of the Early Medieval Royal Seal

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1. Basics

1.1. Functional Development

Seals have existed all along. We can provide evidence of sealing practice for the past 7000 years. Even though seals were applied in various functional and cultural contexts, ever since then they were in use almost everywhere across the globe. The usage of royal seals was reinforced in the 8th pre-Christian century, when the cylinder seal was replaced by the seal stamp and the seal ring, respectively. It must be assumed that from then on each and every high official possessed a seal. Accordingly, the royal seal was by no means an invention of the Early Middle Ages. With the benefit of hindsight, however, one can easily argue that sealing practice was very much defined at the time of the early post-Roman rulers of the West. From then on seals could not only be found in nearly every royal charter, they were also announced in a charter's *corroboratio*, in which the text refers to the ruler's authority and to the permanent validity of the document.[1]

Although the first sealed charters were issued by late antique rulers, the seal was not relevant in law then.[2] Also, at that time, it was affixed to *seal* a document in the true sense of the word – that is to say for its closure. It was used to preserve a charter against eventual falsification but not to prove the genuineness of the document.[3] The seal only became the central means of authenticating in the Merovingian period. This functional change had a long-lasting effect on the medieval world. Indeed, the tradition of sealed royal charters originated in the early 7th century. In other words: during the Early Middle Ages the seal, as a renowned royal symbol, was aggrandized with regard to its political significance. The post-Roman rulers used it like it had never been used before, which turns the royal seal into a specifically medieval medium.

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[1] Cf. for instance D Kar. 1. 2: *Et ut certius credatis, manu propria subter firmavimus et de anulo nostro sigillavimus.*

[2] Cf. STIELDORF, Andrea (2001/2002): *Gestalt und Funktion der Siegel auf den merowingischen Königsurkunden*, in: Archiv für Diplomatik, Schriftgeschichte, Siegel- und Wappenkunde 47/48, p. 134.

[3] Cf. POSSE, Otto [ed.] (1913): *Die Siegel der deutschen Kaiser und Könige von 751-1806* (Vol. 5), Dresden, p. 137.

But what made it that specific? On a functional level, one might argue that the term *anulo nostro* (see above) reinforced the connection between the seal and the ruler. However, this connection was already taken into account by classical authors. Here, in many examples, the sealing device (the seal ring for the main part) is presented as a political symbol, closely related to the sphere of authority – especially with regard to its recognition, transfer and indemnity: during their reunion, Orestes proofs his identity to his sister Electra by showing her the seal ring of their father.[4] Before Philip II had to leave Macedon to lead a campaign against Byzantium, he presented his son Alexander (the Great) with the royal seal.[5] During the battle against Caesar's assassins at Philippi, Octavian was wearing his "father's" seal ring to underline the legitimacy of his succession.[6] While all examples emphasize the seal's function as a sign of authority, we learn nothing about its form. Only Suetonius provides some details about the seals of Augustus: for his first seal he used the image of a sphinx, later an image of Alexander the Great, and finally his own. And all of his successors, so he continues, would use their own images for their seals.[7] Suetonius' claim corresponds with the corpus of extant antique gems: images that may represent a ruler (i.e. through a certain iconographic pattern) cannot be found very frequently before the Roman imperial period.[8] At least with regard to the aspect of representation via seals, one can say that the image of the ruler only gradually took on greater importance over the centuries.

1.2. Formal Development

Overlooking Western seals of the Early Middle Ages[9], it is striking that the image of the ruler can already be found on the extant royal seals of the Merovingian period. The famous seal ring of Childerich I is the earliest example. **(fig. 1)** However, this

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[4] Soph. El. 1220: τήνδε προσβλέψασά μου σφραγῖδα πατρὸς ἔκμαθ᾿ εἰ σαφῆ λέγω.

[5] Plut. Alex. 9,1: Φιλίππου δὲ στρατεύοντος ἐπὶ Βυζαντίους, ἦν μὲν ἑκκαιδεκέτης Ἀλέξανδρος, ἀπολειφθεὶς δὲ κύριος ἐν Μακεδονίᾳ τῶν πραγμάτων καὶ τῆς σφραγῖδος . . .

[6] Cass. Dio 47,41,2: Ἀνὴρ Θεσσαλὸς ἔδοξέν οἱ τὸν Καίσαρα τὸν πρότερον κεκελευκέναι εἰπεῖν τῷ Καίσαρι ὅτι τε ἐς ἕνης ἡ μάχη γενήσοιτο, καὶ ἵνα ἀναλάβῃ τι ὧν δικτατορεύων αὐτὸς ἐφόρει· καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὸν δακτύλιον αὐτοῦ τότε τε εὐθὺς περιέθετο καὶ ἔπειτα πολλάκις ἔφερεν.

[7] Suet. Aug. 50: in diplomatibus libellisque et epistulis signandis initio sphinge usus est, mox imagine Magni Alexandri, nouissime sua, Dioscuridis manu scalpta, qua signare insecuti quoque principes perseuerarunt. See also INSTINSKY, Hans Ulrich (1962): *Die Siegel des Kaisers Augustus. Ein Kapitel zur Geschichte und Symbolik des antiken Herrschersiegels.* Baden-Baden.

[8] Cf. RICHTER, Gisela Marie Augusta [ed.] (1971): *Engraved Gems of the Romans. A Supplement to the History of Roman Art*, London.

[9] Cf. DALAS, Martine [ed.] (1991): *Corpus des sceaux français du Moyen Âge* (Tome II). *Les sceaux des rois et de régence*, Paris; SCHRAMM, Percy Ernst [ed.] (1983): *Die deutschen Kaiser und Könige in Bildern ihrer Zeit. 751-1190*, München; POSSE [ed.] (1913): *Die Siegel.*

seal is not known from diplomatic coherences. Royal seals of later Merovingian kings survived *in situ*, and as in Childerich's case these kings were also stylized *en face*. The king's hair is always depicted equally: three thick lines left and right of the parting. Royal attributes (crowns, garments etc.) cannot be found at all while military attributes only feature occasionally. The cross, which is displayed on the same surface as the seal image, is the only religious symbol. The seal legends always correspond to the same sample: name of the ruler (in the nominative) followed by *rex Francorum*. **(fig. 2)** There is every indication that the Mayors of the Palace of Austrasia and Neustria had their own idea of sealing. The gem seals of Pepin the Younger, the last Mayor of the Palace of Neustria and first Carolingian king, contrast strongly with the typical Merovingian royal seal. While the circumscription was abandoned, the seal image also departed from Merovingian standards: One of them even shows the head of the god Bacchus in a three-quarter profile. **(fig. 3)**

In hindsight, the seal of Pepin's son Charles (Charlemagne) can be declared a landmark with regard to the sealing history of the Early Middle Ages. **(fig. 4)** That is because many different lineages were unified in his seal matrice. The seal legend (+ *XPE PROTEGE CAROLVM REGE(m) FRANC(o)R(um)*) combines Merovingian and Byzantine elements. The profile bust in the seal's centre was impressed with an antique gem, a connection to the seal tradition of the recent past, namely to that of the *maiores domus*. This type became a successful model that was frequently repeated during the course of the Carolingian era.

Yet, starting in the second quarter of the 9th century, some Carolingian rulers went their own way in terms of this aspect of royal representation. The first royal seal of Louis II (the German) is an illustrative example. **(fig. 5)** Compared to the type going back to Charlemagne, his seal breaks out of the column. It displays miniature weapons as well as a simplified circumscription with only little religious reference. Weapons true to their scale eventually appeared on a seal belonging to Louis IV (the Child), one of the last East Frankish royal seals. **(fig. 10)** This design marks the beginning of another seal-evolution, whose end was instigated with the seal of emperor Otto I **(fig. 11)** and finally reached with the so called majesty- and throne seals of the last Ottonian rulers. **(fig. 12-13)**

Early medieval royal seals are exceptional in that they not only protrude through their function but also through their form. The connection between the seal and authority

was completed by the combination of image and circumscription. In a way, the form of the royal seal followed its new function: The owner of the seal is mentioned in the *corroboratio* as well as in the seal legend. In order to track the royal seal's semantic change one also has to consider its formal dimension (seal images, seal legends). Thus it might be possible to analyse some royal seals as a medium of political discourse of the Early Middle Ages.

2. The Original Research Project

2.1. General Framework

My interest for early medieval seals began with the observation of an epistemological phenomenon. When studying older but also younger publications on early medieval royal representation or seals in particular, one can observe a strong national bias between French and German historians, who part their ways when reaching the year 877, the year of Charles the Bald's death. For the subsequent years, German research predominantly deals with East Frankish royal seals, while the focus of French research is on West Frankish ones.[10] I was convinced that a comprehensive analysis of all seals (East as well as West Frankish) would produce a modified narrative.

The overall aim of the original research project was to determine the royal seal's political and social significance within the early medieval world. Due to the above-mentioned idiosyncrasies in terms of sealing practices, the post-Roman realms of the West seemed to be suitable as a territorial focus. Although the rethinking of seal-usage was only established in the course of the 8th century, the origins of that development go back to the Merovingian period. Therefore the middle of the 5th century, when the first Merovingian kings began to reign, marked the outset of the evaluation period. The Carolingian era is crucial, as the main body of source material (70% of the extant seals) dates back to the 8th and 9th century. The year 1024, the year the last Ottonian emperor Henry II died, marked the end of the period investigated.

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[10] Cf. DALAS [ed.] (1991): *Corpus des sceaux*; SCHRAMM [ed.] (1983): *Die Deutschen Kaiser und Könige*; POSSE [ed.] (1913): *Die Siegel*. Also newer studies end with the year 877: GARIPZANOV, Ildar H. (2008): *The Symbolic Language of Authority in the Carolingian World (c. 751-877)*, Leiden [et al.]; By contrast: KOZIOL, Geoffrey (2012): *The Politics of Memory and Identity in Carolingian Royal Diplomas. The West Frankish Kingdom (840-987)*, Turnhout.

In relation to the sources, I asked the following leading question: in how far was the early medieval royal seal a medium of political and cultural concepts? As far as the period under investigation was concerned, I wanted to learn how the rulers and their subjects construed style and form of the *symbolic language of authority*.[11] With regard to the methodological approach, I expected promising results by comparing the royal seals with the development of early medieval kingship. The same applied to a comparison of the relationship between medium, image, and communication, while considering issues of mediality and its significance. Thereby, I was hoping to demonstrate correlations between the artefacts, their application, and their social interpretation. The plan was to study the material mainly with regard to three analytical categories: *communication*, *representation* and *intermediality*:

2.2. Analytical Categories

Communication: I included this category because more often than not we tend to take for granted that iconographic sources carried meaning, which was understood by the contemporary observers. This of course has to be assumed to be able to interpret the material with regard to its iconology. However, factual evidence is rarely presented. In order to classify the royal seal as a medium of communication, we have to find out whether we can comment on its reception at all. This is a difficult task since we talk about material that emerged in a period, in which it was unusual for the subjects to present their image of the ruler on the basis of the perception of the images presented to them (e.g. by building a statue). In case of our analysis, we have to turn our attention to the social circles that were privileged enough to receive royal charters (clergy and nobility) in order to find any reactions.

Since it was one of my aims not to dismiss the recipients, the following question basically suggested itself: did the messages that were to be conveyed by the seals reach the recipients? Here, one has to rethink the common approach inasmuch as the written sources are largely insufficient. As a result, I constructed the following hypothesis: recipients of royal charters did perceive typical components of the attached seals and possibly adapted them in their own seal matrices. Of course, this would not automatically be synonymous with a statement of political intent. However, this type of evidence would emphasize that royal seals were perceived as specific and changing icons.

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[11] This term was coined by GARIPZANOV (2008): *The Symbolic Language of Authority*.

Regarding this approach, the body of source material is a double-edged sword. On the one hand we are able to work with excellent editions of royal charters that allow us to determine major parts of clerical recipients and at least some secular recipients. In many cases it is even possible to figure out which seal was impressed on the respective charters. On the other hand the transmission history of non-royal seals not even begins to compare with the one of the royal charters.

Representation: In terms of representation, again it was my intention to consider both sides of the communication model. Thus, I was not only interested in what the authorities wanted to represent but also what the audience made out of these messages. I decided that the royal seal's point of origin, i.e. the context of the act of privileging, should provide the basis for further questions since the space surrounding the emergence of a charter was of high significance for both – what was represented and what was discerned subsequently.

Within the text of each royal charter the ruler addressed the public. Formulations that are typical for the *publicatio* (*notum esse volumus omnibus, notum sit omnibus* or *noverit omnium industria*) indicate to what extent this public was imagined.[12] But for all that, only a small part of this public would ever take part in a privileging ceremony. So we must always consider that the act of privileging for the most part was a very special event for the individual recipient of a charter. In the course of this event, the recipient would most likely face his ruler, who – while appearing in his official capacity – bestowed him a favour. Displaying a stylized image of the ruler and mentioning his name and title in the legend, the seal functions as a memorial picture of this special encounter.[13] Here we should not attach too much importance to the question whether this picture was portrait-like or not. More importantly, the seal image reminded the recipient of the meeting with his ruler.

In search of messages beyond the scope of the act of privileging, my focus was on the iconographic program of the royal seals (also including the seal legends). In connection with the area of the representation of power, one can analyse the iconographic material regarding a wide range of issues: which iconographic elements

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[12] Cf. KELLER, Hagen (2004): *Mediale Aspekte der Öffentlichkeit im Mittelalter. Mündlichkeit – Schriftlichkeit – symbolische Interaktion*, in: <u>Frühmittelalterliche Studien</u> 38, p. 278.

[13] Cf. KELLER, Hagen (2004): *Die Herrscherurkunden. Botschaften des Privilegierungsaktes – Botschaften des Privelegienaktes*, in: Fondazione Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo [ed.]: Comunicare e Significare nell' Alto Medioevo, Spoleto, p. 276.

were used to generate this aspect of the symbolic language of authority? How do we have to interpret the inclusion or disappearance of religious symbols? Do changes in the iconographic program of the seals reflect political and cultural changes? And to what degree did certain iconographic patterns reflect the political self-conception of the respective early medieval rulers? In addition to that, one can ask if the iconographic program of a seal might have offered several versions, depending on the observer's educational level etc.

Intermediality: This final analytical category was considered to put the object of study into perspective. Of course, the seal was only one of many objects of royal/imperial representation. Without a sideglance to coins, miniatures etc. the focus of the intended research project would be too narrow. Although I intended to work predominantly on seals, the plan to at least compare their messages and functions to that of other visual media of the same time existed from the very beginning.

This claim to completeness was originally also designed to face a methodological problem that relates especially to the transmission history of West Frankish seals: Here, many seals are retained only because of one impression. In order to make more reliable statements regarding their symbolic language of authority, we have to include other media for the purpose of filling the gaps.

3. State of Affairs

3.1. Analytical Categories

Communication: As distinguished from other artefacts of royal representation, e.g. coins, seals reached a stable group of recipients. Of course, mainly charters that were issued for clerics did survive. "The great unknown are those charters that were issued for secular recipients, of which we can only reach the *diplomas* that ended up in a clerical archive."[14] In this connection, recipients who possessed their own seals are of particular interest. The idea was to compare non-royal seal matrices with their royal counterparts in order to find out whether typical elements of the royal seals were adopted by the recipients. In so doing, I was hoping to provide some evidence for reactions within the group of recipients. However, regular adoptions of that

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[14] KEHR, Paul Friedolin [ed.] (1934): *Die Urkunden Ludwigs des Deutschen, Karlmanns und Ludwigs des Jüngeren (MGH Diplomata regum Germaniae ex stirpe Karolinorum I)*, Hannover, p. XVI. (Translated by Daniel Doumerc)

manner can only be demonstrated for the later stages of the Early Middle Ages. We can explain that because the king/emperor and his high clerics gradually closed ranks during that time. Although the aristocratic elite apparently had seal rings at their disposal ever since the beginning of the Early Middle Ages, the regular sealing of private charters was only established in the middle of the 11th century.

Consequently, older extant private seals have to be declared a cast of fortune not least because seal rings were normally destroyed after their owner had passed away. The seal of Radpod, archbishop of Trier from 883 and head of the chancery of Lorraine from 895, can be referred to as such a fluke of transmission history. It has even survived as seal stamp. **(fig. 8)** We have factual evidence that Radpod came into contact with sealed royal charters of East Frankish Carolingian kings on numerous occasions, also before his time as chancellor.[15] The seals on these charters all feature the typical elements of East Frankish royal seals: All of the seal legends claim name and title of the owner (e.g. ARNOLFVS REX). Seal legend and seal image are located on the same surface – there is no dividing line between them. In the seal's center we can find profile busts that are turned to the left in the heraldic sense. The slightly upturned heads are covered with a laurel wreath or a crown. The trunk of the busts is swathed in a *paludamentum*, which is usually closed on the shoulder. **(fig. 9)** When Radpods seal was designed, this type was maintained in its chief features. Only the seal legend starts with a Greek cross, a variant that was not popular in the East Frankish realm. The legend proceeds analogous to the royal seals, claiming name and title of the owner: *RADPODVS AR(c)HIE(pisco)P(u)S*. Again, there is no divide between seal image and circumscription. The bust is turned to the left; its head slightly upturned. The status of the owner is not underlined by some headgear but through the clerical tonsure. The trunk of the bust again is swathed in an antique garment.

So can we comment on the reception of early medieval royal seals after all? The example of Radpod and the East Frankish kings has illustrated a large amount of iconographic parallels. It would be plausible to think that the bishop's seal design was directly influenced by the royal paragons. On the other hand, we cannot tell whether there was an active decision to copy these main features. As suggested elsewhere, it

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[15]   He personally received privileges from Charles III (the Fat): D Karl 102. Also from Arnulf of Carinthia (DD Arn 39, 53, 113, 124), Zwentibold (DD Zw 18, 20), and Louis IV (the Child) (D LK 17).

would be easily conceivable that the parallels are a result of the same place of manufacture.[16] The episcopate – as the domain of the social and political elite – probably had access to the same manufactures as the kings.

As the written sources also provide no help in that matter, such examples are largely insufficient to prove that royal seals were perceived as specific and changing icons. In consequence, the above-mentioned hypothesis cannot be corroborated. I have to conclude that the idea of the *receptive* recipient cannot be used as starting point for the way forward. Anyway, due to some pieces of fortune (like Radpod's seal) preliminary statements on the royal seal's reception will still be possible.

Representation: Right at the start, I asked the following question: Which exact forms were used for the representation via seals? Consequently, I started to conduct a study of the formal elements of the royal seal (images and legends). For the purpose of a purely inductive approach, I initially analysed the material without its context. Since the circumscription names the seal's owner and thereby might have proposed deductive presuppositions, I decided to look at images and legends separately. I predominantly tested this approach with Carolingian royal seals since they provided the main body of source material.

I collected all relevant details such as format, type of stamp, perspective and of course the single iconographic elements. I then arranged and compared certain parts of the corpus. In the beginning, I only worked with the determined details while blanking out the respective figures. That way I wanted to work out hard cases, aberrations, and details that might remain concealed when looking at the artefacts in their entirety.

Some general observations: Most of the seal images feature a male profile bust. With only few exceptions, these busts are turned to the left. The typical profile bust is swathed in an antique garment, has short, straight hair and wears a crown or a laurel wreath with flying ribbons. Approximately half of the seal legends start with a Greek cross. In many cases this cross is followed by a formula of intercession (e.g. *XPE PROTEGE CAROLVM REGE(m) FRANC(o)R(um)*). If we imagine the seal's surface as a clock-face, the circumscription either starts at 9 or at 12. Starting at 9, it is

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[16]   Cf. KAHSNITZ, Rainer (2001): *Bergkristallsiegel Erzbischofs Radpods von Trier*, in: PUHLE, Matthias [ed.]: Otto der Große. Magdeburg und Europa, p. 284-85.

engraved on the same surface as the seal image; starting at 12 the legend has its own area separated by a dividing line. (compare **fig. 9** to **fig. 6**)

The formal analysis resulted in several interesting insights: I discovered that some seals shared the exact same iconographic elements. Above that, a peculiar set of seals displays female profile busts. When assessing the seal legends, we can find common ground, too: The legends of some seals are identical whereas some only deviate from each other because of different titles of the ruler. Not as peculiar as the female profile busts but still worth mentioning are the rare circumscriptions including the words *dei gratia* and *misericordia dei*.

In a next step, these results get contextualised: to which rulers did the respective seals belong to? Where and when did these rulers reign? When and for how long was a certain seal was in use? Let us now move on to an example case, in which we will contextualise a protruding pair of seals: The royal seals of Lothar I and his son Lothar II.

Example Case: Like Father, Like Son

If we arrange the two seals next to each other, their close resemblance attracts our attention straightaway. It is quite evident that the seal of the younger Lothar **(fig. 7)** was influenced by his father's seal. **(fig. 6)** From my point of view, the comparison of the seal legends is most striking: + *XPE ADIVVA HLOTHARIVM AVG(ustum)* vs. + *XPE ADIVVA HLOTHARIVM REG(em).* If we compare the legends of Lothar I and Lothar II, it seems like the latter tried to copy the position of the single letters and words as meticulously as possible. This applies, for instance, to the two dots next to the Greek cross and is especially prominent to the redundant gap between the cross and the first word of the legend. Together with the Greek cross one can count 23 characters on each seal, despite the fact that the circumscriptions are not equally worded. In fact, it was not possible to use the exact same legend. Although the two rulers shared the same name and the style of the formula of intercession (*XPE ADIVVA…*) could simply be adopted, father and son differed from each other by an important detail: While Lothar I was made co-emperor at a young age, Lothar II would remain king all his life. The circumscription of the emperor's seal marks the imperial honor by the usual abbreviation *AVG*. With regard to the king's seal, creativity was in demand because in order to maintain the intercession's syntax, the noun *rex* had to be declined. Apparently the number of characters was of such high importance that

the accusative *regem* was abbreviated *REG*, which was unprecedented.[17] When comparing the seal images, it appears that the images were not only similar but the same. According to all accounts, the core of Lothar II's seal was made out of the same antique gem that had already been used by his father.[18]

So what can we learn from the obvious connection between the seals of father and son? By copying his father's seal, Lothar II got in line with the symbolic language of authority common to his branch of the Carolingian family. Above that, references of that manner were effective to underline one's claims to power.[19] However, it might be possible to take the interpretation a step further by analyzing this result against the backdrop of the development of Carolingian kingship in the 9th century.

The previous history of the first half of the 9th century (the *Ordinatio imperii* of 813, the inter-dynastic struggles from 830-42, and the Treaty of Verdun of 843) has to be considered in order to understand why Lothar II projected such an imperial aura onto his king seal. That he himself was trying to make imperial demands seems unlikely. To a greater degree, he preserved the standards of his family. Although the imperial honour at that time had geographically been reduced to the Italian realm, it remained an important instrument of royal representation among the descendants of Lothar I. In other words: As compared to total-Frankish standards, the imperial title was of unique characteristic for the Middle Frankish realm.

3.2. General Framework

The formal comparison of East and West Frankish seals resulted in a disappointing outcome. Here, only the seal's format and the circumscriptions distinguish the difference whereas the iconographic elements of the seal images basically remain the same over a long period of time. So in the end, the comprehensive analysis of all seals (East as well as West Frankish) did not result in a modified narrative.

All media of royal representation certainly conveyed meaning. The question whether these messages were understood by the contemporary observers is important. However, it cannot easily be answered – at least not with the sources accessible to

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[17] This is a sole exception in the period investigated. Usually *regem* is spelled in full.

[18] The reutilisation of an older seal can be at least proven for one more time: The second king seal of Louis II (the German) was reused by his son Louis III (the Younger) as well as by his great-grandson Louis IV (the Child). There might also be a West Frankish example: The second king seal of Charles II (the Bald) and the second king seal of his son Louis II (the Stutterer) are conform in style. However, residual doubts regarding their similarity remain since the latter seal today is extremely corroded.

[19] Cf. KORNBLUTH, Genevra (1990): *The Seal of Lothar II. Model and Copy*, in: Francia 17, p. 60.

us at this point in time. In general, the future focus should be on the question *what* was represented in *which* manner. It remains to be seen whether we will be able to comment on the recipient-aspect at all. This reasonable doubt led to the temporary exclusion of *communication* as analytical category.

Representation will remain an analytical category although it will have to be modified. A purely formal and partially computer-aided study of iconographic material provides a good basis for a research project within the scope of visual semantics. This methodology highlights hard cases, sorts out aberrations, and might turn our attention to details that might remain concealed when only analysing the material as a whole. Going forward, this approach certainly should not be limited to just one type of source.

So far, most of the developed hypotheses developed could only be made plausible. There is a lack of arguments that are fully convincing on an empirical basis. An intermedia comparison could finally refute some hypotheses while also corroborating others. Since *intermediality* was considered an analytical category from the very beginning, I now tend to expand this approach in order to create a versatile research approach.

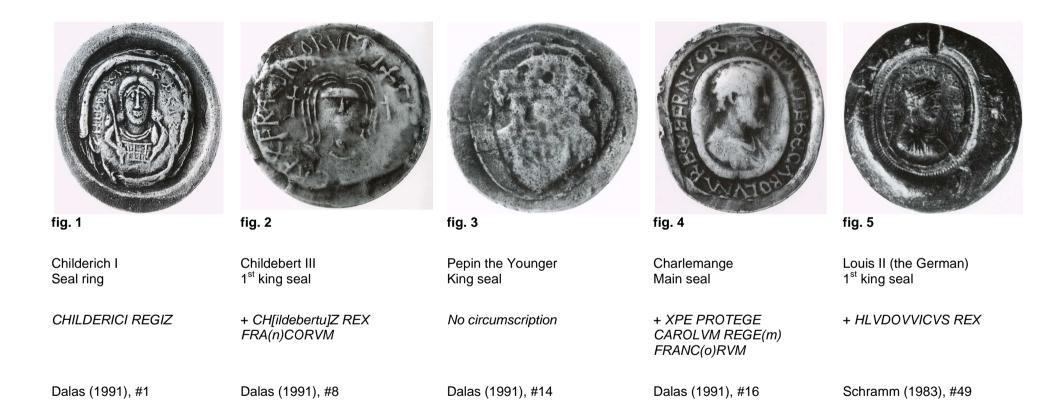## 4. The Way Forward: Intermedial Representation

Even though the original approach was too one-dimensional, my work on seals will still be worthwhile. Indeed, it will provide a good basis for a broader perspective on early medieval royal representation. I am convinced that the corpus of the extant royal seals will turn out to be of high relevance for the whole analysis – it simply did not *speak* enough on its own.

Nevertheless, for the way forward, the only suitable option is to shift the emphasis towards intermediality. Various iconographic sources might be taken into consideration: artefacts similar to seals like bulls and coins as well as dissimilar visual material as miniatures etc. This raises the question where the sphere of representation ended? One can argue that architecture, e.g. the Palace of Ingelheim, has represented Carolingian rulers in a certain manner. Of course, it will not be possible to include *all* iconographic sources of the Early Middle Ages. It remains to be seen which sources are suited for an intermedia comparison. The parameters of such a comparison have to be chosen carefully. It is certainly difficult to compare full-size

paintings with coins. Yet still, one can assume that there are certain media that operate with similar visual strategies and are therefore especially eligible to be compared with each other. Also, the period under investigation most like needs to be modified. In this regard, I still respond to the challenge of especially studying periods of time that so far did not attract as much attraction as others, e.g. the iconographic legacies of the East Frankish realm after 888 but also that of their West Frankish neighbours after 877.

Taken together, these new sources open a further dimension for an analysis that is based upon visual semantics. One of the key assumptions of semantic analysis in general is that the cultural code represented by semantics can only be understood through the serial evaluation of extensive corpora. This focus on seriality facilitates the interpretation of the single result: The series provides us with an idea of the visual semantics inherent in the corpus. It presents the limits of what can be told and understood through imagery. Instead of viewing the single result as a case in point, its relation to what can be called the common imagery allows further insight into the possible modifications and traditions within the visual program of a respective item.

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5. Table of Figures

fig. 1	fig. 2	fig. 3	fig. 4	fig. 5
Childerich I Seal ring	Childebert III 1st king seal	Pepin the Younger King seal	Charlemange Main seal	Louis II (the German) 1st king seal
CHILDERICI REGIZ	*+ CH[ildebertu]Z REX FRA(n)CORVM*	*No circumscription*	*+ XPE PROTEGE CAROLVM REGE(m) FRANC(o)RVM*	*+ HLVDOVVICVS REX*
Dalas (1991), #1	Dalas (1991), #8	Dalas (1991), #14	Dalas (1991), #16	Schramm (1983), #49

fig. 6

Lothar I
Emperor seal

+ *XPE ADIVVA HLOTHARIVM AVG(ustum)*

Dalas (1991), #22

fig. 7

Lothar II
King seal

+ *XPE ADIVVA HLOTHARIVM REG(em)*

Schramm (1983), #29

fig. 8

Radpod
Bishop seal

+ *RADPODVS AR(c)HIE(piso)P(u)S*

Puhle (2001), #67

fig. 9

Arnulf (of Carinthia)
2nd king seal

ARNOLFVS REX

Schramm (1983), #58

fig. 10

Louis IV (the Child)
2nd king seal

HLVDOVVICVS REX

Schramm (1983), #63

fig. 11

Otto I (the Great)
5th emperor seal

+ *OTTO IMP(erator)*
AVG(ustus)

Schramm (1983), #83

fig. 12

Otto III
1st emperor seal

+ *OTTO D(e)I GR(ATI)A*
ROMANORVM IMP(erator)
AVG(ustus)

Schramm (1983), #98

fig. 13

Henry II
Emperor seal

HEINRICHVS D(e)I GR(ati)A
ROMANORV(m) IMP(erator)
AVG(ustus)

Schramm (1983), #116