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A Unique Crusader-Period Lead Seal from the Old City of Jerusalem

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A unique lead seal of the Byzantine Patriarch of Jerusalem, Leontios II (1176–1184/85), was discovered in a salvage excavation in Jerusalem's Old City. This is the first seal of this patriarch to have been found, confirming the sojourn of Leontios II to the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1177–1178. It also sheds new light on the attempts of the Byzantine emperor, Manuel I Komnenos, to maintain his influence over the reigning Jerusalem dynasty.

Keywords: Crusader period, patriarchy, lead seal, Anastasis, Late Byzantine period, Crusader Jerusalem, Leontios II, Manuel I Komnenos, Baldwin IV, Greek-Orthodox church

Introduction

Although 80 years have passed since the landmark publication of *Sigillographie de l'Orient latin*, it remains the first and only attempt to provide a substantial catalogue of Crusader-period seals. Assembled from unpublished notes and descriptions of items in museum and private collections, it encompasses mostly seals whose provenance is unknown and as such, detached from their original medieval contexts and charters which have long since been lost. None of the Crusader seals mentioned in the *Sigillographie* originated from excavations, which is not surprising as Crusader-period archaeology developed in earnest only in the second half of the twentieth century (Shotten-Hallel and Weetch 2021:1–22).

Today, Crusader-period seals remain among the rarer objects known to us, and finds from well-documented excavations are still rarer. The importance of the find described below cannot be overstated, as it is almost unheard of even in a city like Jerusalem that has been excavated continuously and intensively.[2] Therefore, we take this opportunity to examine the seal's context and discuss its wider historical significance.

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[2] For such rare finds from excavations in Jerusalem, see Bijovsky and Kool (1995); Kool (2014). An unpublished, badly preserved baronial(?) seal was found at the Mughrabi Gate near the Temple Mount in 2007, excavated by Hervé Barbé of the Israel Antiquities Authority (Permit No. A-5013)—our thanks to him for permission to mention this find here. An unprovenanced seal of Baldwin I, claimed to have been found in the coastal city of Batroun, Lebanon, and purchased on the market by Arnold Spaer (1982), turned out to be a modern imitation through isotope and thermal neutron radiography (Kool, Gitler and Hershko 2018).

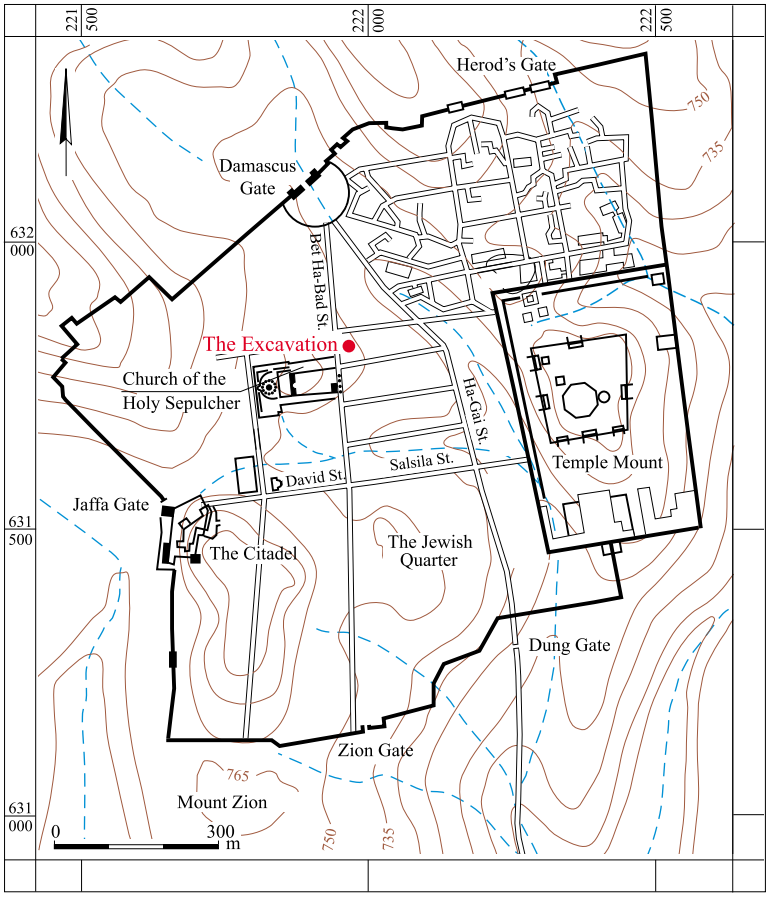

Fig. 1. Location map of the excavation and findspot of the seal.

The lead seal under discussion was discovered in May 2020, while preparing a salvage excavation in a modern shop along Bet Ha-Bad Street (Khan el-Zeit) in the Old City of Jerusalem (Fig. 1).[3] This street crosses the Old City from north to south, preserving the course of the ancient route of the western cardo of the Roman and Byzantine periods (Tsafrir 1999).

Building remains dating from the late Byzantine period (sixth century CE), and a flourmill with a grinding installation built in the Mamluk period (fourteenth–fifteenth centuries CE), were unearthed in the excavation. The seal was discovered in a soil fill that covered the remains, together with Crusader-period pottery and glass vessels, all indicating activity in this period at or near the excavation site (Landes-Nagar, in press).

[3] The excavation (Permit No. A-8715; map ref. 221952/631799), undertaken on 107 Bet Ha-Bad Street on behalf of the IAA and financed by the Custodia Terra Santa, was directed by Annette Landes-Nagar (forthcoming). The pre-excavation inspection was conducted by Zubair ʻAdawi; the location map was prepared by Or Zakaim; and the photographs were taken by Daphna Gazit.

The Bet Ha-Bad Street was known as St. Stephen's Street during the Frankish occupation of Jerusalem (1099–1187) and functioned as the city's main north–south thoroughfare, as in preceding periods. Although the seal was not discovered *in situ*, its location is of great significance. This part of the Crusader city belonged to the Northeastern Quarter, the former Jewish Quarter (Juiverie) that was resettled by Eastern Christians during the Crusader period (Boas 2001:83–85). St. Stephen's Street was the dividing line between the Northeastern Quarter and the Patriarch's Quarter, settled by the Latin clergy and Hospitaller Order, and where the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was located. The seal's findspot was in fact only 75 m southeast of the church.

The Seal: Description, Design and Date

Upon its discovery, the seal was covered with light, whitish brown encrustation and showed signs of deep corrosion. After treatment and preservation, the seal's surface showed a dark grayish tint on both sides.[4] Spots of white corrosion were visible on the central part of the seal on both sides.

The seal (Fig. 2) is circular in shape (diam. 32 mm), weighing 21.8 g. The obverse and reverse have an identical 12 o'clock axis. The seal has a string channel along its vertical axis; the upper channel entrance indented and broken, and the lower channel entrance largely intact. Both sides have wide margins, delineated by a circular border of dots.

The seal's obverse shows a figure climbing out to the right, its head turning backward to the left, holding a double cross in his left hand and pulling a kneeling figure by the wrist with his right hand. This figure is gazed at by two(?) other figures on the right side of the seal. Also depicted on this side is an abbreviated rendering of the Anastasis, an image of Christ's 'raising up', the Resurrection (Kartsonis 1986:4–6).[5] Here, Christ is seen marching to the right, holding a double cross in his left hand and, with his right hand, pulling the, kneeling Adam by the wrist from his tomb, while two other unidentified figures rise from their tombs. There is good reason to suspect, based on the presence of the Anastasis scene on the seal, that the person or institution to which it belonged were connected to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. This church was known since Emperor Constantine's

[4] The seal underwent treatment in the IAA Metals Laboratory by Ilia Reznitsky, Metals Conservator. As lead is notoriously corrosive, it was necessary to quickly apply conservation to prevent surface degeneration. The measures included the removal of the active, upper corrosive layer. First, the surfaces of the seal were mechanically cleaned with a scalpel and a glass-fiber brush, using a microscope. Then, the seal was chemically treated in a controlled manner with an EDTA 8% solution, followed by mechanical cleaning with a soft brush. This procedure was repeated several times. The seal was rinsed with cold tap water and then dried in an oven at a temperature of 50°C. Finally, a Paraloid B-72 coating with 3% Acetone was applied using a soft brush.

[5] The Anastasis refers to both the rising of Christ from the dead and his raising of the dead. Depictions of the Anastasis show Christ's sojourn in the underworld and the resurrection of Adam. The Anastasis was the sole image of Christ's resurrection in Eastern Christianity and was not part of the iconography used by the Western Church.

Fig. 2. The seal (Reg. No. 6002, 607): obverse, before (a) and after (b) cleaning; and reverse, before (c) and after (d) cleaning.

time as the church of the Anastasis, or Resurrection, particularly among Eastern Christians (Pringle 1993:7). The iconography of the Anastasis, a quintessentially orthodox image, was closely associated with the visual program of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. It adorned the apse of the Byzantine-period church's rotunda, restored in the 1040s under Fatimid rule (Pringle 1993:14; Folda 1995:230), and a large mosaic in the rebuilt twelfth-century Crusader church, which has not survived (Borg 1981:7–12; Zeitler 1994:690–691). It is thus presumed that the seal's owner was a member of the clergy associated with the church, perhaps its patriarch, the church's highest-ranking official.

This possibility raises an intriguing question regarding the identity of the seal's owner. Seals of Byzantine-appointed Greek-Orthodox patriarchs of Jerusalem, portraying a scene of the Anastasis, are known to have existed at least from the tenth century CE (Laurent 1965:393). The earliest such Latin Anastasis-type seal dates to a much later period, at the time of the patriarchate Foucher d'Angoulème, 1146–1157 (Chandon de Briailles 1939:139–140, 143–146). Prior to the mid-twelfth century, all seals of the first Latin patriarchs depicted a sarcophagus, decorated either with medallions or a band with ovals (Schlumberger, Chalandon and Blanchet 1943:73–75). From the mid-twelfth to the mid-thirteenth centuries, both the Greek and Latin patriarchs of Jerusalem issued similar-looking, large lead seals with an almost identical Anastasis scene (Schlumberger, Chalandon and Blanchet 1943:7–88; Laurent 1965:392–398; Kool 2007). The Anastasis scene introduced by the Latin patriarch Foucher d'Angoulème on his seal was closely affiliated with the foundational Eastern Orthodox belief

code:[6] it showed Christ with a nimbate head standing in center, holding a double cross in his right hand, pulling a kneeling bearded figure by the wrist with his left hand, with two kneeling figures at right. From that period onward, a large Latin inscription mentioning the name of the reigning patriarch and the title 'Patriarch(ate) of the Holy Church of the Resurrection' appears on the reverse of the Latin patriarch's seal. The iconography of the Latin seals differs from that of the Greek seals in two small additions: behind the kneeling bearded figure on the left stands another figure in prayer, while a Greek inscription H/ANAC/TA/CIC, 'the Anastasis', appears to the left of Christ's head.

The present seal bears a partly preserved, five-line Greek inscription on its reverse side. The overall size and arrangement of the inscription, and the small size of the letters, indicate that this seal belonged to a Byzantine-appointed church official. The inscription, although difficult to decipher, leaves no doubt as to the identity of the seal's owner.

Obv.: Figure to the right, head turned backward to left, holding a double cross in his left hand; with his right hand, he pulls a kneeling figure by the wrist. Two(?) figures on right side of seal gaze at him.

Rev.: Cross, below a five-line inscription:

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ΛΕΟΝΤΙΟC
ΕΛΕΩΘV
ΠΡΙΑΡΧΗC
.ΕΡΟCΟΛV
ΜΩΝ

Λεόντιος ἐλέῳ Θεοῦ πατριάρχης Ἱεροσολύμων
Axis ↑, 21.80 g, 32 mm.

The inscription reads: "Leontios, by the Grace of God, Patriarch of Jerusalem."

Only two office-holders by the name Leontios occur among the 97 Greek-Orthodox patriarchs of Jerusalem, known since the establishment of the patriarchate at the Council of Chalcedon in 451: Leontios I (911–928) and Leontios II (1176–1184/85; Fedalto 1988:1002–1003). On first impression, the seal may be assigned to Leontios I. Patriarchal seals like the one of Leontios I, from the tenth–eleventh centuries, form the largest group of finds of this type in the East (Laurent 1965:392–398), as few of the earlier patriarchal seals survived the

[6] Borg (1981:9–10) saw a direct connection between Foucher's introduction of a new Anastasis-type seal and the rebuilding and consecration of the Crusader church in the late 1140s. In his opinion, this new patriarchal seal, imitating the mosaic in the apse above the main altar, was introduced to celebrate this event.

iconoclasts of the eighth and ninth centuries (Laurent 1963:xix). Leontios I is also known to have resided in Jerusalem for an extended period of seventeen years, and presumably issued quite a few sealed documents, increasing the chances of finding his seal at an excavation in Jerusalem. Yet, there are strong typological considerations to question the possibility that the Bet Ha-Bad seal belonged to Leontios I. Patriarchal seals from Jerusalem, dating before the twelfth century, are normally considerably smaller than the present example. Large seals of this type were preferred by Greek Orthodox patriarchs, who held the office during the first fifty years of the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem; this choice may have been influenced by the large lead seals issued by the Latin patriarchate, established in Jerusalem by the Frankish conquerors after 1099 (Laurent 1965:392–398; Schlumberger, Chalandon and Blanchet 1943:73–87).[7] Confusing things further is the improbability of unearthing a seal belonging to a Byzantine-appointed patriarch in twelfth-century Jerusalem, as following the Crusader conquest, the entire Greek Orthodox higher clergy, including the patriarch, was either demoted or exiled by the new Latin rulers and replaced with Catholic Latin clergymen from the West. For more than a century, from 1099 to 1206/7, no Greek Orthodox patriarch visited or resided in Jerusalem (Galadza 2017:421–437). That is, with one exception, the Greek Orthodox patriarch Leontios II, our second candidate for the seal ownership. We believe that this seal belongs to Leontios II. Unearthed in an excavation in close vicinity to the Holy Sepulcher, the seal corroborates the extraordinary historical events surrounding Leontios II's short sojourn in the Kingdom of Jerusalem in 1177–1178.

DISCUSSION: THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SEAL

Leontios II's seal serves vital evidence of the strained relationship between Medieval-period Byzantium and the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem. We are informed about Leontios II's stay in Jerusalem in a biography written by one of his disciples, Theodosios Goudeles of Patmos, just 20 years after his death, in 1203–1206.[8] Leontios II's stay in the city seems to have been connected to attempts by the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180) to consolidate his political influence in the Kingdom of Jerusalem under the young, leper-king Baldwin IV (1174–1185), strengthen the Greek Orthodox church and possibly restore a Greek Orthodox patriarchate in the kingdom (Rose 1987:371–390).

The possibility that Leontios II used his patriarchal seal in Jerusalem suggests, however, that his visit was of far greater consequence than that rendered in the biography (for the

[7] The patriarchal seals of John VII (964–966), Sophronios II (1050s–1083) and Symeon (1083–1099) are all between 21–26 mm large. In contrast, the seal of John VIII, elected Greek Orthodox patriarch in exile (1106/7–1156), who held office during the first 50 years of the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem is much larger, 45–50 mm (Schlumberger, Chalandon and Blanchet 1943:73–87; Laurent 1965:392–398).

[8] A critical edition of Goudeles' account was published by Tsougarakis in 1993. For earlier editions, see Rose (1987:373, esp. nn. 1–3). Parts of the work related to Leontios' visit to the Holy Land were translated to Russian by Popov (1903:238–241).

importance of the biography in explicating Crusader-period politics, see Rose 1987). Though Leontios II is not mentioned in any of the medieval written sources other than his biography,[9] the existence of the seal strongly suggests that he acted in an official capacity as Greek Orthodox patriarch in Jerusalem. The document to which the seal was attached did not survive, although we may speculate that it had to do with religious matters of interest to the Greek Orthodox community of Jerusalem, perhaps an attempt to improve the standing of Greek Orthodox Christians in the Holy Sepulcher, or possibly to restore the Orthodox patriarchate under an imperial Byzantine protectorate (Hamilton 2000:113, 127–128).

Details of Leontios II's early life in Goudeles' biography reveal his special connection to the Holy Land (Goudeles, *The Life of Leonios*:39–75). He was born in north Macedonia between 1110–1115. Soon after his arrival at Constantinople, he donned a monk's habit like numerous other holy men on the margins of society. He underwent a spiritual transformation upon meeting the Greek Orthodox bishop of Tiberias, who resided in the capital in exile. The bishop seems to have exerted an extraordinary impression on the young Leontios, becoming his spiritual mentor. In the early 1130s, Leontios joined the bishop on his journey back to Tiberias,[10] but once they arrived in Cyprus, Leontios decided to discontinue the journey. On returning to Constantinople, Leontios entered the monastery of Saint John the Theologian at Patmos—a heavily fortified monastery established by Manuel I's grandfather, Emperor Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118)—which was known for the unusual asceticism of its members. There, rising through the ranks, Leontios II was elected abbot in 1157 (Goudeles, *The Life of Leonios*:75). An obedient and efficient administrator, he was offered the archbishoprics of Kiev and Cyprus by Emperor Manuel I; after remarkably declining this offer, Leontios was offered the office of patriarch of Jerusalem, which he accepted. In April 1176, he was elevated to the patriarchate and almost immediately dispatched by the emperor to the Kingdom of Jerusalem (Goudeles, *The Life of Leonios*:105–111).

According to Goudeles (*The Life of Leonios*:127), Leontios II set out to the Holy Land to complete his earlier unfinished pilgrimage and see to the church's properties in Cyprus and the Kingdom of Jerusalem. After spending the winter of 1176–1177 in Cyprus, he sailed to Acre, where he was warmly received by the Greek community in August 1177. After spending some time in Acre, Leontios II travelled to Jerusalem via Nazareth in the fall. Upon hearing of his arrival, Frankish laymen and church officials refused to recognize Leontios'

[9] In his chronicle, William of Tyre mentions the names of four emissaries negotiating on behalf of the Byzantine Empire with assembled barons and the king in Jerusalem: Andronicus Doukas Angelos (1133–1185), cousin of Emperor Manuel I, the megaheteriarch John, George Sinaites, and the Norman count Alexander of Conversana, all prominent court officials (William of Tyre 21.15:981–982).

[10] The name of this bishop remains unknown. No name of a Greek Orthodox bishop in Tiberias is listed after the eleventh century in Georgio Fedalto's (1988), Hierarchia Ecclesiastica Orientalis. Presumably, with the city's conquest by Tancred in 1099, this bishop was exiled with the rest of the Greek Orthodox church elite and replaced by a Latin bishop. There is mention of a Jacobite bishop of Tiberias, Severus, residing there after 1129 in the chronicle of Michael the Syrian (Chabot 1899:497). Our thanks to Leah Di Segni for these references.

status as a visiting patriarch. Latin officials, led by the patriarch Amaury of Nestle who sought to expand the Latin church's influence in the Crusader kingdom (Kool 2007:182–183), vehemently opposed Leontios' intention of celebrating mass under an official capacity in the Holy Sepulcher. Subsequently, an attempt was made on his life, and Leontios was forced to leave Jerusalem in the summer of 1178, returning to Constantinople via Acre (Goudeles, *The Life of Leonios*:135–141).

The reasons for Leontios' journey to Jerusalem were likely motivated by the Byzantine state's wish to become a major influence in the Kingdom of Jerusalem at a time of tremendous local and regional political turmoil. This turbulent period saw the deaths of King Amaury of Jerusalem (1177) and the Zandjid ruler of Syria, Nur-a-Din (1174). Nur-a-Din's protégé, Saladin, after having repelled a joint Frankish-Byzantine invasion of Egypt (1169), had become paramount ruler of that country (1171) and was now consolidating his position in Syria. To do so, he concluded an armistice with the Kingdom's new child ruler, Baldwin IV in July 1175, which barely held a year and dissolved after a joint raid by the Kingdom's forces and those of the County of Tripoli deep into Syrian territory in 1176 (Lyons and Jackson 1997:99–110). The king's two predecessors, his uncle Baldwin III and his father Amaury, had had a longstanding and intimate relationship with Byzantium and its imperial rulers, Baldwin III having been married to Manuel's niece, Theodora, and Amaury, to Manuel's grandniece, Maria Komnene. During Baldwin's and Amaury's rule, the influence of the Byzantine court in the Kingdom of Jerusalem had grown substantially through a number of important political and military alliances between the two states (Lilie 1993:175–202; Magdalino 1993:66–76; Hamilton 2000:64–66). Now, Amaury's son, Baldwin IV, and his advisors were planning a second attack on Egypt with the active support of the Byzantine emperor's fleet and the powerful count of Flanders, Philip of Alsace (1168–1191), who planned to attack Northern Syria. To preclude such a move, Saladin took the offensive in the fall of 1177, but was defeated at Mons Gisart/Gezer by Baldwin IV's host (Ibn al-Athīr, *Chronicle* 442:253). Leontios' arrival in Acre at the same time as the Byzantine fleet was anchored there, with the emperor's representatives aboard in August 1177, seems to have hardly been coincidental. The patriarch's arrival in Jerusalem was certainly well-timed, in a period of crucial negotiations between the imperial envoys and the representatives of the Kingdom of Jerusalem, such as Philip of Alsace and the king's regent count, Raymond III of Tripoli (Willelmus Tyrensis Archiepiscopus, *Chronicon* 21.15–18:981–984).

The Byzantine Empire's policy of rapprochement toward the kingdom under Amaury and its aspirations to remain a dominant regional force, was further threatened by a dynastic crisis that had been brewing with the ascent of Baldwin IV in 1174. Barely 13 years old when crowned king, Baldwin IV suffered from a severe form of leprosy which impaired his capability to become an effective ruler in the eyes of many of his contemporaries and, more importantly, to produce an heir (Willelmus Tyrensis Archiepiscopus, *Chronicon* 21.1, 2:961–962; Ibn al-Athīr, *Chronicle* 415:234). Competing court factions on issues of regency and succession of the sickly and childless Baldwin meant looming local political instability. Other destabilizing events at this time included the assassination of the kingdom's seneschal

and unofficial regent, Miles of Plancy, in 1174, and the death of William of Montferrat, husband of Sybilla, Baldwin's older sister, in April 1177, merely a year after their marriage, leaving his wife pregnant with the future heir of the Kingdom, Baldwin V (Willelmus Tyrensis Archiepiscopus, *Chronicon* 21.3, 4, 12:963–965, 977–978; Tyerman 2006:259–262).

Conclusions

It is very likely that Leontios II journeyed to the Kingdom of Jerusalem on a diplomatic mission initiated by Manuel I to guarantee that the dynastic, political and military alliances with the reigning Crusader dynasty were kept in place. Well before the bishop's visit in 1177–1178, Manuel I sought to broaden his influence over the Kingdom's affairs by restoring the standing of the Greek Orthodox clergy, mainly in two of Christendom's most important shrines in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The Greek clergy were readmitted to the Holy Sepulcher, even serving there as canons after the mid-twelfth century (Hamilton 2000:170–171; Jotischky 2001:85–86). The redecoration of the Nativity Church in Bethlehem was initiated under joint patronage of Manuel I and Amaury in the late 1160s, at the time of the betrothal of the king to the emperor's niece, Maria (Folda 1995:347–371; Bacci 2017:135–202). This event is attested by a bilingual dedicative inscription on the church's southern wall: a Latin part mentioning Manuel I as the main donor, and a Greek part referring to the emperor as the great imperial ruler in whose reign the new decoration project was undertaken (Bacci 2017:137). The Leontios II seal from the Old City of Jerusalem provides new evidence regarding the Byzantine empire's attempts to preserve its influence in the Kingdom of Jerusalem in the second half of the twelfth century.

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