

Byzantina Symmeikta

Vol 28 (2018)

BYZANTINA SYMMEIKTA 28



Book Review: M. CAMPAGNOLO-POTHITOU and J.-Cl. CHEYNET, Sceaux de la collection George Zacos au Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, Geneva: Musée d'art et d'histoire, 2016.

Olga KARAGIORGOU

doi: [10.12681/byzsym.18976](https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.18976)

Copyright © 2018, Olga KARAGIORGOU



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/).

To cite this article:

KARAGIORGOU, O. (2018). Book Review: M. CAMPAGNOLO-POTHITOU and J.-Cl. CHEYNET, Sceaux de la collection George Zacos au Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève, Geneva: Musée d'art et d'histoire, 2016. *Byzantina Symmeikta*, 28, 463–470. <https://doi.org/10.12681/byzsym.18976>

Maria CAMPAGNOLO-POTHITOU – Jean-Claude CHEYNET, *Sceaux de la collection George Zacos au Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève*, Geneva: Musée d'art et d'histoire, 2016, pp. 521. ISBN 978-88-7439-707-5

The spontaneous thought that sprang to our mind after having read the *Sceaux de la collection George Zacos au Musée d'art et d'histoire de Genève*, co-edited by Maria Campagnolo-Pothitou and Jean-Claude Cheynet, was that a title such as *Les sceaux byzantins comme objets d'art* (after *Die byzantinische Bleisiegel als Kunstwerk*, the title of the superb catalogue of an exhibition on seals, co-edited by L. Zarnitz and W. Seibt in 1997) would have been a more fitting headpiece to the volume under review: next to the authoritative commentary on the seals presented in both works, obviously the expected result of the fruitful co-operation between the co-editors, the seals in the Geneva volume, many of them in an excellent state of preservation¹, offer a greater typological diversity, a longer chronological coverage and they have been illustrated in photos of superb quality (the work of B. Jacot-Descombes and Fl. Bevilacqua), deliberately made in colour (see p. 10), which (with very few exceptions, see, for example, no. 21) have been rendered in 1,5/1 scale, allowing thus the reader an immediate appreciation of the contribution of seals in the field (among others) of Byzantine art.

The volume begins with a preface by Jean-Yves Marin (Director of the museum), a short introduction to sigillography by Jean-Claude Cheynet and a note for the reader by Maria Campagnolo-Pothitou and ends with the table of contents, six useful indices on names, titles and functions, geographical terms, iconographic motives, unusual expressions and metrical legends, a glossary explaining 113 technical terms mentioned in the text and a very rich list of references. The main body of the volume presents a total of 464 objects, including one iron *boulloterion*,

1. See, for example, nos. 350B, 360, 372, 386B, 406.

one gold seal-ring (no. 131), two gold seals (nos. 6 and 8), 433 Byzantine lead seals, 14 Byzantine lead tokens, and 13 lead seals with Latin legends. The catalogue opens with the presentation of the iron *boulloterion* (the only one in Swiss collections) and the rest of the material is organised in the following eleven sections:

I. *L'empereur* (pp. 15-38; 24 specimens representing 21 individuals)

II. *L'administration centrale* (pp. 39-123) divided in two subgroups: the civil officials (61 specimens representing 60 individuals) and the military officials (24 specimens representing 21 individuals)

III. *L'administration provinciale* (pp. 124-184; 60 specimens representing 58 individuals: specimens nos. 107, 112 and 113 present different career stages of one and the same official, Romanos Skleros)

IV. *Les dignitaires de la cour* (pp. 185-266; 84 specimens representing 72 individuals: apart from the officials presented under nos. 179, 182, 197, 201, 205, 218 and 234, who are attested by more than one specimens, no. 166 presents another career stage of Romanos Skleros already introduced to the reader by three specimens – nos. 107, 112 and 113 – in the previous section)

V. *L'église de Constantinople and les églises provinciales* (pp. 267-348; 84 specimens presenting, apart from the seals of the ekklesiokdikoi, 63 ecclesiastical officials including 23 patriarchs of Constantinople)

VI. *Les patronymes* (pp. 349-430; 80 specimens representing 72 individuals)

VII. *Les prénoms* (pp. 431-442; 13 specimens representing 10 individuals)

VIII. *Les sceaux anonymes* (pp. 443-448; 5 specimens)

IX. *Les tessères de charité* (pp. 449-463; 14 specimens)

X. *L'Orient Latin* (pp. 464-470; 6 specimens representing 5 individuals)

XI. *Les bulles papales et ducales* (pp. 471-477; 7 specimens representing 6 individuals)

Since the gold seal-ring (discussed in the section *L'administration provinciale*, no. 131), as well as the iron *boulloterion*, are used for striking seals (in wax and lead, respectively), we would prefer to see them grouped together at the beginning of the catalogue under a section entitled “Sealing devices” with a commentary accompanied by drawings of the seals (in fact sealings) that each one of these devices produced, making thus crystal clear to the reader the distinction between sealing tools and sealings, that is between the *ἀληθῆς σφραγίς* (the *boulloterion*) and the *ἐκμαγεῖον* (imprint), as duly described in the legend of the seal of Georgios(?)

Manikaites (no. 352). Also, since the first section includes five seals belonging to empresses, we would prefer to mark it with the more generic label *Sceaux impériaux* (instead of *L'empereur*).

Being the last one in a series of publications instigated ten years ago on the occasion of the exposition “Byzance en Suisse” (p. 7), this volume had to follow – to the great joy of its readers– preconceived specifications on paper quality and layout, which are largely responsible for the aesthetically pleasing outcome; besides, nothing less than that would have been worthy of the valuable material presented therein. The importance and high quality of the objects included in the volume comes to no surprise, if one bears in mind that these were part (the last one) of the sigillographic collection of George Zacos (1911-1983), a Greek antiques dealer in Istanbul and renowned connoisseur in matters of sigillography, which was donated to the Musée d’art et d’histoire de Genève by his late widow, Janet Zacos, in 2003². Indicative examples of the valuable and often unique seals included in this volume are those described under no. 2 (with a remarkable type of Theotokos, similar but not identical to the Hodegetria, unknown in other works of art, which is successfully connected to an icon of the Virgin in St. Sophia as described by Photios in 867 – the same type of Theotokos is also seen on the obverse of the specimens under nos. 3 and 4), 3 (the only known seal from the second reign of Justinian II, 705-711), 4 (the only known seal of Anastasios II, 713-715), 6 (one of only two *δισολδίαι* preserved to our days), 8 (the only known *πεντασόλδια* preserved to our days), 34 (a seal of the historian Ioannes Skylitzes), 74 and 386 (with portraits of their owners on the obverse, an extremely rare iconographic feature), 180 (introducing Theodoros, an unknown, so far, member of the Spanopoulos family), 191 (with the *harpax* mention of a *διάδοχος*), 199a-b (the only sigillographic evidence on the known family of Boilas), 203 (the first mention in sigillography of the title of *προθυπέρατος*), 236 and 253 (with the unique expressions *δοῦλος τῶν δούλων* and *χάριτι Θεοῦ*, on the seals of the patriarchs Methodios I and Nikephoros II, respectively), 276 (with a unique Deesis featuring the Theotokos flanked by St. Nikolaos and St. Ioannes Chrysostomos), 321 (the first sigillographic evidence on the family name Skaimonas), 323 (where Theotokos is designated as *μυστική λαβίς*, an *harpax* in sigillography), 353 (a very rare type of the so-called “collective” seals, where each of the two sigillants, here Leon and Georgios, occupies his own face of

2. Only three specimens in the catalogue entered the Geneva Museum before (nos. 10b and 103) and after (no. 350) the donation by Janet Zacos.

the molybdoboullon), 380 (with the very rare portrait of St. Orentios), 399 (a token preserving a circular cavity in its centre, interestingly interpreted by the editors as a sign that it had been redeemed) and 408 (a unique token for the “redeem of sins”!).

The editors follow a strictly organised scheme in the presentation of each specimen concerning its physique [measurements, detailed description of the obverse and reverse with transcriptions of the legends in Athena/Athena Ruby (for some special characters), in miniscule, and a translation in French], and an extensive commentary on all possible pieces of information that the specimen in question contributes to Byzantine prosopography, the administrative and social history, the historical geography, the literature and the art of Byzantium. Thereafter, follow references to previous editions, known parallel specimens and the relevant bibliography. The editors are to be congratulated on the wealth of information that they bring into their discussion concerning not just the owner of the seal (proposed identification, ethnic origin, *cursus honorum*, devotional preferences – see, for example, the commentary on nos. 341, 343, 350), but also on the history (alliances, fate) of his family within the Byzantine State throughout the centuries. All this information derives from non-sigillographic, as well as sigillographic sources, including very often still unpublished specimens in state or private collections (see, for example, nos. 165, 174, 181, 233, 316b, etc.) or specimens that have appeared in auction catalogues (not always easy to track).

Our main disagreement in the afore-mentioned treatment of the seals concerns the decision of the editors to transcribe the legends without taking into account the grammatical errors (p. 10). The editors rightly remark that “Les incorrections grammaticales ne sont pas rares en sigillographie. Elles sont mêmes parfois révélatrices de l’évolution de la langue parlée et de son influence sur l’écrit” (see no. 66). We believe, however, that – whenever deemed crucial for their projecting image – the Byzantines did put a lot of effort in the correct orthography and syntax of the legends on their seals. An impeccable legend is therefore a clear indication of an owner who either has a considerable cultural level or is greatly concerned about his image and how this is perceived by his entourage (in such cases the owner of a seal would even go as far as to check the work of the engraver to whom he entrusted the manufacturing of his *boulloterion*)³. Thus, a transcription of the legends in

3. How else should one explain the impeccable legends on the seals of Eustathios Kymineianos, himself a poet (see no. 230), or the sudden and complete disappearance of errors in grammar and syntax on the seals struck by Nikephoros Botaneiates during the period just

minuscule, free of errors, would have offered the reader –especially the one who is very little (or not at all) acquainted with the Greek language– the possibility to understand straight away the grammatical deviations met in the legends of the seals and thus, draw further conclusions on the social status and cultural level of the sigillant. Instead, the editors offer a critical transcription in miniscule where they transcribe the erroneous last omicron in majuscule of a word in the dative with ρ (i.e. ΤΟ ΔΟΥΛΟ is transcribed as τρ δούλο, instead of τῷ δούλω), or the erroneous omicron in majuscule of a word in plural genitive with ὄ (i.e. ΤΟΝ is transcribed as τὼν, instead of τῶν), creating thus fictitious characters (the ρ and the ὄ) that do not exist, and never existed, in the Greek language⁴. A correct transcription of the legend in minuscule would also show immediately to the reader that the noun ἀσηκρῆτις is invariable (no. 25), despite its other forms attested in sigillography (as rightly commented upon by the editors) and it would also explain why the French transliteration (for example) for ΓΥΡΑΡΔ, (no. 211) or for ΤΖΥΜΙΚΗ (no. 227) is Girardos (not Gyrardos) and Tzimiskes (not Tzymiskes), respectively. Similarly, the correct syntax of the verb βοηθῶ with dative would bring forward those cases where it is associated with an accusative (nos. 137 and 345), obviously a sign (as noted by the editors) of the influence of spoken Greek. Unfortunately, these transcriptions in miniscule “reflecting the mistakes of the engravers/owners of the seals” made their way in the index of the metrical legends (pp. 506-508), offering not just erroneous grammatical types (e.g. on p. 506, no. 323: γράφο, instead of γράφω), but also erroneous readings of family names (e.g. on p. 507, no. 354, where the owner’s name is given as Μεγαδομιάτου, despite the fact that in the relevant entry it is given in its correct form, i.e. Μεγαλομιάτου).

Next to 86 specimens, which have never been edited before and have no parallels, the volume under review contains many seals (we counted a total of 138 specimens) which have already appeared (albeit with no extensive commentary) in the volume G. ZACOS, *Byzantine Lead Seals II*, compiled and edited by J.W. NESBITT (Bern 1984); thus, the treatment of these seals in the Geneva volume offers a much

before his ascension to the throne, when obviously he (or his advisors) were particularly worried about the future emperor’s public image? [on this point, see O. ΚΑΡΑΓΙΩΡΓΟΥ, Περί αλφαριθμητισμού, αιρέσεων και πολιτικών φιλοδοξιών στα μολυβδόβουλλα του Νικηφόρου Βοτανειάτη (περίπου 1001/2-1081), *ΒυζΣύμμ* 18 (2008), 77-122, esp. 83-90 on the orthography of the legends on his seals].

4. See nos. 23, 52, 63, 66, 84, 101, 130, 136, 156, 160, 170, 171, 188, 191, 286, 287, 291, 324, 397 (o with iota subscript) and nos. 47, 48, 128, 160, 204 (o with tilde).

desired update in terms of chronology and commentary, in view of the more recent developments in sigillographic studies. Indicative in this sense are the proposed corrections in the reading of some known legends (nos. 134, 181, 229, 305, 321, 336, 338, 370, 397), as well as the addition of seven new metrical legends (nos. 196, 278, 309, 333, 339, 353rev and 366) not included in the reference work by A.-K. WASSILIOU-SEIBT on the *Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden, Teil 1: Einleitung, Siegellegenden von Alpha bis inklusive My* (Vienna 2011)⁵.

Some further remarks on specific entries may be noted here:

No. 19: “l’empereur ... vêtu d’un *divitision* et d’une chlamyde bordée de grosses perles”. We would opt for “...vêtu d’un *divitision*, *loros* et d’un manteau ...”, since a) the rectangular panel covering the pelvis of the emperor, which is so characteristic of the *loros*, is quite prominent, and b) the use of the term *chlamys* presupposes the existence of *tablia*, whose presence cannot be confirmed in this instance; thus, it is safer to use the more generic term “manteau” (mantle).

No. 68: The date in the title of this entry (seconde moitié du Xe siècle) is obviously a slip of the pen for the 11th century, since at the beginning of their commentary the editors clearly note that “L’epigraphie de la bulle plaide pour une datation au XIe siècle ...”.

No. 75: why is this specimen (with no channel for the μύθινθος) a seal and not a token, later perforated in order to be worn as a pendant? This probably explains why the two holes were opened symmetrically on either side of the head of the Virgin.

No. 76: the legend of this seal does not contain the name of the owner; thus, the title of this entry should have been “Anonymous, protonotaire” (not Bardas, le protonotaire).

No. 83: the word θεοφυλάκτου (gardé de Dieu) has not been included in the title of this entry.

No. 89: for the “peculiar” decorative motif on the shield of the saint, see nos. 96, 106 and (especially) 110.

No. 98: the editors have accidentally designated this specimen as “Inédit”, since in their BIBLIOGRAPHIE they include the contribution by W. SEIBT in the volume

5. The volume under review includes 98 metrical inscriptions whose initial letter is N to Ω; it is certain, therefore, that a large part of this material should be also treated in the *Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden, Teil 2: Siegellegenden von Ny bis inklusive Sphragis* (Vienna 2016) by A.-K. WASSILIOU-SEIBT, published almost simultaneously with the volume under review.

Byzanz in Europa. Europas östliches Erbe (Turnhout 2011), where the specimen in question was published.

No. 106: on the trustworthiness of Attaleiates' testimony portraying Nikephoros Botaneiates as an avid reader, see ΚΑΡΑΓΙΟΡΓΟΥ, *Περί αλφαβητισμού...* [as in n.3], 88-89.

No. 109: Michael Bourtzes, *magistros*, *vestes*, *vestarches* and *strategos* of the *Anatolikoï*. It is worth noting that *vestes* precedes the title of *vestarches*, although the latter is theoretically higher. The same is observed on one of the seals of Leo Skleros (see J. NESBITT and N. ΟΙΚΟΝΟΜΙΔΗΣ, *Catalogue of Byzantine seals at Dumbarton Oaks and the Fogg Museum of Art, vol. 2: South of the Balkans, the Islands, South of Asia Minor*, Washington, D.C.1994, no. 40.15) and of Nikephoros Botaneiates, see ΚΑΡΑΓΙΟΡΓΟΥ, *Περί αλφαβητισμού...* [as in n. 3], 79.

No. 127: the family name of the owner is Tzanzes (not Tzantzes), as it can be clearly read on the reverse of this specimen.

No. 146, fn. 1: Gregorios Radenos with no mention to his title and/or office appears also on a seal from the Hermitage (M-5520), while the reference to Jordanov, *Corpus III*, no. 2710 discusses an Anonymous Radenos, *strategos*.

No. 261: the (non-recorded) inventory number of the parallel in Dumbarton Oaks is BZS.1955.1.4995, see <https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1955.1.4995>.

No. 262: the Dumbarton Oaks collection holds yet another parallel with the inventory number BZS.1947.2.291, see <https://www.doaks.org/resources/seals/byzantine-seals/BZS.1947.2.291>.

No. 295: the translation of the legend has not taken into account the article Σῆς at the very beginning; thus, the end of the translated legend should read ...le pasteur de ta (ville) Euchaneia.

No. 292: this specimen has been edited in Zacos II, no. 797 *bis*.

No. 296: the fourth letter in the third line on the reverse is a M (not an N).

No. 299: on the “composite” St. Achillios, the patron saint of Larissa, see O. ΚΑΡΑΓΙΟΡΓΟΥ, *Ο άγιος Αχιλλίος και η Λάρισα της Ύστερης Αρχαιότητας: αγιολογικές και αρχαιολογικές μαρτυρίες (πρόταση για μια διαφορετική ανάγνωση)* [in Greek with English summary: St. Achillios and the city of Larissa in Late Antiquity: hagiographical and archaeological evidence (an alternative interpretation)], *Papers in honour of Prof. P. L. Vocotopoulos*, ed. V. ΚΑΤΣΑΡΟΣ, Athens, 2015, 233-246.

No. 318: *Je porte l’empreinte (du boulloterion) [instead of (du sceau)] de Michel Autoreianos ...*

No. 351, fn. 4: *Μακροεμβολίτα* (not *Μακροεμβολίτην*) *Μιχαήλ, γραφάς* (not *ευχάς*) *δέχου | ἐκ σῆς ὀμεννέτιδος Εἰρήνης φίλης*. On this legend, see also KARAGIORGOU, Review-article of Alexandra-Kyriaki WASSILIOU-SEIBT, *Corpus der byzantinischen Siegel mit metrischen Legenden, Teil 1: Einleitung, Siegellegenden von Alpha bis inklusive My*, Wien 2011, *ΒυζΣυμμ* 23 (2013), 276 (no. 1345).

No. 352: In the transcription of the legend in Athena of the specimen 352A, there should have been two dots at the beginning of the 4th line, indicating the place of the two missing letters Γ and Π.

No. 353: since the metrical legend on the reverse requires a dodecasyllable, the reconstruction of the family name as Mauromates seems almost secure. In such a case, the present specimen introduces yet another (fourth) member of this family “sans éclat”. On the other known members of Mauromates, see J.-Cl. CHEYNET – T. GÖKYILDIRIM – V. BULGURLU, *Les sceaux byzantins du Musée archéologique d’Istanbul* (Istanbul 2012), no. 7.84.

No. 359: for the translation we would prefer *En voyant, sache que cette empreinte appartient à Pantechnès*.

No. 380: the editors clearly state that they “préfèrent considérer le nom Rhizaios comme un qualificatif d’origine” rather than a family name. In that case the title of this entry should have been “N., Zosimas, originating from Rhizaion”.

No. 406: the editors comment that Sophia chooses to mention the more prestigious title of her father (Michael, magistros) rather than the one of her husband (Konstantinos Radenos, protospatharios). Is it not possible that she may have organised this charity before her marriage?

No. 410: The name of the patriarch of Antioch (i.e. Aimery of Limoges) is missing in the title of this entry.

The excellent work that the two editors and everyone else involved in the publication of this volume have achieved justifies Janet Zacos’ decision to entrust this part of her husband’s collection to the Museum d’art et d’histoire de Genève. For the experts, this is a book of reference; for the non-experts it is an irresistible lure to the fascinating world of sigillography.

OLGA KARAGIORGOU
Academy of Athens
Research Centre for Byzantine
and PostByzantine Art