

- Find in the museum display the lead seal of Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus



Side A (front side)



Side B (back side)

Did you know?

Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus was particularly interested in sciences, such as Maths, Astronomy, Architecture, as well as Arts. Remember Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus when you reach the corresponding chapter of your history book.

- Which figures are depicted in the lead seal?

Side A:

Side B:

Did you know?

Imperial seals are similar to contemporary coins and bear the same symbols. The imperial signs that are depicted on seals are the crown (the basic symbol assigned to the emperor) with a cross on the top and prepedoulia, ornaments hanging from each side of the face, the sphere (symbolizing the universe), the scepter and the labarum (silver cross).

- With which of the above signs is the emperor depicted on the lead seal?



MUSEUM
OF BYZANTINE
CULTURE

2 Stratou Avenue, 54640 Thessaloniki, Greece

Tel.: (+30) 2313 306422

<http://www.mbp.gr>

Learning about byzantine seals

from boullae to IPs

WORKSHEET 1



MUSEUM
OF BYZANTINE
CULTURE



Sectoral Operational Programme
"Human Resources Development,
Education and Lifelong Learning"



Gallery 4

“From Iconoclasm to the splendor of the Macedonian and Komnenian dynasties”

What are lead seals?

Lead seals (or lead bullae in Greek) were personal seals used for sealing documents in the Byzantine Empire. Byzantines in this way ensured a) the confidentiality and security of correspondence b) the authenticity of the signature of the sender c) a document's validity. From lead seals information regarding the owners can be obtained (e.g. name and title).

► Nowadays, in which ways do we ensure the confidentiality and validity of documents?

(mark all the correct answers)

- stamp
- seal
- signature
- digital signature
- envelope
- sealing wax

► Find the lead seal of Tiberius III in the museum display



Side A (front side)



Side B (back side)

Did you know?

In Byzantine times, lead seals had a religious subject on one of their sides. They usually had depictions of the Virgin holding Christ or a saint that the owner of the seal regarded as a protector. In the case of imperial lead seals, the other side had the name of the owner, an inscription or the emperor's portrait.

Did you know?

Emperor Tiberius III (698-705) tried to reorganize the naval and army forces of the empire in order to confront the Arabs, and for the same reason reconstructed the sea walls of Constantinople. Remember Tiberius III when you reach the corresponding chapter of your history book.

► Who are the people depicted on each side of the lead seal?

Side A:

Side B:

Did you know?

The imperial vestments are the chlamys (long purple cloak) and loros (long and narrow part of cloth decorated with precious stones). Alternatively, the emperor was dressed in military attire (helmet with a cross, breastplate and shield).

► Look closely at the emperor's portrait and mark what he wears and holds

- crown
- shield
- spear
- scepter
- helmet with a crest on the top
- sphere
- breastplate



Folded document with a lead seal ensuring its authenticity. Vlatades Monastery Collection.

Did you know?

Bulls were manufactured with other materials apart from lead, such as gold, silver and wax. Gold seals were used exclusively by emperors and only for exceptionally high-level official documents that were called chrysoboulla in Greek. Their private correspondence was sealed with lead seals, identical to the gold ones.

► Can you think of the reasons why not many wax seals have been preserved?

Did you know?

The weight of the gold seals varied, being harmonized to that of the contemporary gold coins, while it also depended upon the importance of the recipient. Gold seals to foreign rulers and to the Pope were weighted to two gold coins. For the kings of Armenia, the Patriarchs of Antioch, Alexandria and Jerusalem the gold seals weighed as much as three gold coins. For the Arab Caliph of Baghdad the gold seals weighed as much as four gold coins.

► Having read the text above, what can you say about the importance of the people to whom the letters were addressed?

The Byzantine emperor regarded as more important

Less important was regarded
