

## Painted medieval waxseals in West- and North-West Europe

Based on *Gelakte middeleeuwse. waszegels in West- en Noordwest Europa*

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### Initial notes

1. With painted I refer to a waxseal covered by an opaque layer of paint.
2. In the Netherlands the composers of the Charters of Holland and Zeeland used the term painted. In English sources the term varnished is also used. In German and French published sources the number of painted waxseals is very small.
3. I restrict myself to the year of sealing, as the day and the month does not provide an extra value to my paper
4. In the text the word seal never refers to the seal matrix.
5. Further I use the terms: sigillographic right and sigillographic left, as proposed by me. See note 9.
6. Paint should no be confused with patina. Patina is an oxydized layer.

### Introduction

In the literature information is found on painting of especially white/whitish seals. The idea behind it is that white wax is sensitive to micro-organisms and that the pigments in green and red wax kill the micro-organisms. However, in addition to white/whitish seals also especially brown and green seals have been painted. This points to another reason for painting seals.

Presumably, since the 11th century a start was made with to paint waxseals. The layer always had another colour. I suppose that painting was done to give the seal another colour than the wax of the seal itself. In a few waxseal inventories the painting is mentioned, but mostly this is not done. This means that the colour presented could have been the colour of the paint. However, in many inventories the seal colour is not given. The name of the painting can be different. In de *Corpus Sigillorum Neerlandicorum*-CSN, Brugmans en Heeringa (1) used three names in Dutch: gekleurd = coloured, geverfd = painted and governist = varnished. As the information for the CSN was provided by various Dutch, Belgian, German and French archival staffs the CSN-authors probably used the term as received by them. The authors do not explain these three terms. In the the Charters of Holland and Zeeland-OHZ (2) the paint layer was always "geverfd". In United Kingdom at the end of the 19th century W. De Gray Birch, describing seals in the British Museum were always varnished. (3)

Preference for a certain seal colour plays a role too. Henc Dijkhof concluded that the seals of the counts of Holland and Zeeland were mostly pale brown. (4) From 1323 onwards the seals of the bishops of Utrecht always were red (Zeven, unpublished).



Caption:

Seal of count Willem II van Holland. One can see that during painting of the seal the tails were also painted. [www.rijnland.net/Ontstaan van het Hoogheemraadschap](http://www.rijnland.net/Ontstaan%20van%20het%20Hoogheemraadschap) (visited 30 July 2019).

The geographic distribution of painted seals is limited. In The Netherlands they are mentioned in the CSN and the Charters OHZ, whereas in the Charters of Gelre/Gelderland and (North)Brabant they are rare. For the United Kingdom W. de Gray Birch mentioned painted seals, formerly in the British Museum, in Inventories 1 (1887) and 2 (1892). In the other four Inventories they are rarely mentioned. In France, a few are identified in the Archives of Champagne (Arnaud Baudin, cited by Philippe Jacquet (5). Adrian Ailes mentioned “*We have found some painted seals in our collection but at the moment they seem confined to Lancashire. However, it is an area of research we wish to pursue so I am glad to know of your own finds*”. (6) Toni Diederich life-long archivist of Cologne archives reported that he had not seen painted seals. (7)

Does this mean that painting of seals started in the 11th century to reach a maximum in the 13th and 14th centuries after which painting gradually disappeared. Maybe sealwax was in all colours locally available to satisfy the demand of each sealer.

In this paper we hope that readers become acquainted with painting of seals in Medieval Times and that they will pay attention to this point during their research.

## Other painters?

Above we concluded that seal painting was done in medieval times, but several authors suppose that painting was done by archival staff in the eighteenth to twentieth century. They considered that by applying paint to especially whitish seal the seal became more beautiful, because of the shine. Jacquet supposed that a certain seal (AD 76 16 Hp 75) is a proof of this supposed, but not described, practice. It is also supposed that the archives staff chose the colour they admired. (7)

## Painted waxseals, drawn by Buchelius before his death in 1641

Arnout van Buchel/Arnoldus Buchelius (1565-1641), living in Utrecht-City, described and drew many seals, including the following three seals. This might mean that all the other seals were not painted. (8)

## Jan van Diest, bishop of Utrecht, 1323

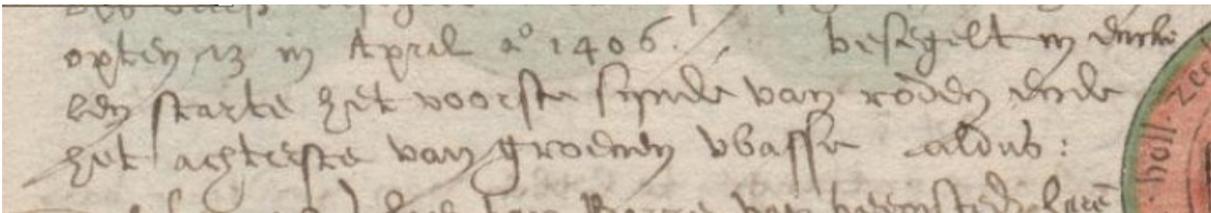


### Caption

Seal of Jan van Diest, bishop of Utrecht, 1323, drawn by Arnoldus Buchelius. Shown is the Merciful Samaritan, with in the seal foot the bishop kneeling, with the arms sigillographic right: bishopric Utrecht (in red a silver cross), and sigillographic left, his family arms (in gold two black bars). Legend: S . IOHIS . DEI . GRACIA . LECTI . T—AIECT—. HUA-Utrecht, Buchelius, book 3, drawing on page 63.

See (9) for sigillographic left and right.

As Jan (III) van Diest, bishop of Utrecht (1322-1340) has several seal matrices, the present imprint is derived of one of these matrices. Buchelius added *Epi[scopi] sigillv[m] in caera rubr. Paul maius. Dit was gedaen tvtrecht dynd. voor St. Margrieten dach Int iair o.h. 1323*



(carried out at Utrecht on Tuesday before St Margaretha Day (= 20 July) in the years our Lord 1323). Buchelius noted that of the original 27 seals 20 are left, 19 being green, and one of Jan van Diest as shown here. The thinly applied paint could be added later, but it is more possible that the bishop ordered the sealer to have it painted red. The reason is that from 1323 onwards the bishop used red wax only (Zeven, unpublished). However not-drawn seal nr 18 was described as: *het Stats segel vt solet in rode wasche*, i.e. the seal of the city (Utrecht) en solet (?) in red wax. Maybe this seal was applied at a later date, or the city messenger had brought a ready-made copy. I assume that the bishop had ordered his seal to be painted re. (10)

## Margaretha (1375-1411), countess of Cleve, duchess of Bavaria, countess of Hainut, Holland and Zeeland, 1408



### Caption

Seal of Margaretha. Two arms, separated by a dead uprooted tree. Arms sigillographic right: Bavaria/Holland, sigillographic left Cleve. Her husband, Albrecht van Bavaria died in 1404. The dead tree may point to her widowhood.

Legend: S.MARGARETE A CLIUIS DUCISSE BAUARIE COMITISSE HAN.HOL.ZEELAND. Buchelius: Book 6 page 47. Date: April a° 1408.

CLIUIS to be read as CLIVIS, and BAUARIA as BAVARIA.

Buchelius writes that de letter is – on the front of red wax and on the back of green wax. This is shown by his drawing.

This text must have been written by Buchelius before his death in 1641. This means that the red paint was applied in 1641 or earlier, probably in 1408. Margaretha will probably have ordered that the seal had to be painted.

### Melis van Amstel, knight, 1453

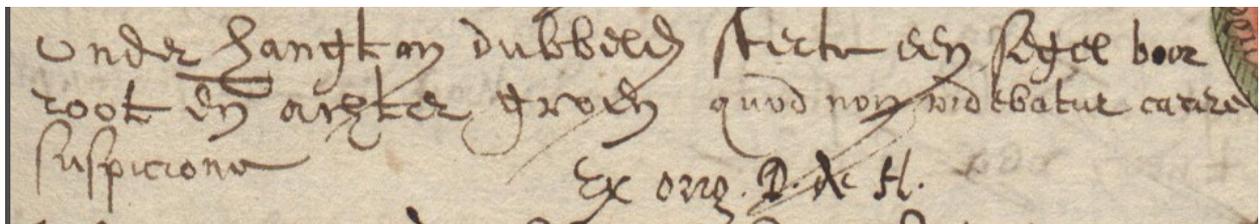


Caption.

A drawing of the seal imprint of Melis van Amstel, knight, 1453 by Buchelius. Book 6, page 174.

The arms of Melis of Amstel/Aemstel is barry of eight pieces, gold and black, and surmounted by a counter-compony red and silver saltire. Crest: two arms, hands in prayer. Legend: S.MELIS [AE]MSTEL H.OF [?CRONENBURCH EN- MIJN]DEN.

Buchelius added: -- a seal in front red and the back green. The date is 15 of March 1453.



**Conclusion:** those three drawn seals, of which two actually have been described as on the front red and on back green wax indicates that painting of these seals was done in 1641 or earlier.

### Described as patina, but possibly painted

#### King Abel of Denmark, 1251

Kees Schilder described this seal as made of white wax with a dark patina. Further the wax is mixed with red particles. I suppose that these particles could be minium.



Caption.

Seal of king Abel of Denmark, duke of Jutland. Regest 1, date 24 of September 1251. Abel, Danorum Slavorumque rex. Dux Jutie. A very damaged throne seal.

A coloured picture of this seal on internet (website Stadsarchief Kampen-SaK) shows, according to me, a seal, made of whitish/yellowish wax, covered with a red paint. Schilder also wrote that the back of the seal also is covered with a dark patina. The seal wax maybe painted on both sides. But maybe I am wrong. The seal cannot easily be investigated as it is packed in a sealed bag. (11)

## Early examples

### Magnus, king of Sweden and Norway, 1335

In addition to the above-mentioned seal of king Abel, the Archives of the city Kampen-SaK possesses a seal imprint of king Magnus, king of Sweden and Norway, dated 7 November 1335, which wax was photographed by Kees Schilder and described as white wax, covered by a green paint.



Caption.

Left: coloured photograph of the Archives of Kampen-SaK (probably photographed through the plastic cover), right the black and white photograph by Kees Schilder.

The photograph of the Archives of Kampen-SaK shows the yellowish colour of the sealwax, and the brown-blackish paint. The photograph by Schilder shows the seal clearly.

ACZ: Between the moments of taking both photographs a small piece sigillographic right top disappeared.

## Early examples of France

### Hugues d'Amiens 1137/1138

As earlier mentioned medieval painted seals do occur in France. One example is the seals of Hugues d'Amiens AN-CHAIN 1389-7, described by Philippe Jacquet : the main body of the seal is "virginal" wax, painted "marron caramel" (12)

### Hugues d'Amiens, 1137/8



Caption

Seal of Hugues d'Amiens, archbishop of Rouen **1129-1164**. 1161 (AN CHAN1339-7). Borrowed from Jacquet.

## Hugues d'Amiens, 1161



Caption  
Seal of Hugues d'Amiens,  
archbishop of Rouen 1129-1164.  
AD 76 26  
Left: strokes of the paintbrush.(13)

A second “marron caramel” painted seal of Hugues d'Amiens is also pictured by Jacquet. It dates 1161. (14)

Jacquet supposes that the unrecorded painting occurred in the last 200 years. But in that case I question why the archivist did not paint the fractures and and by mistake occasionally the tail pieces. Further research, especially of the age of the paint, is needed.

### OTHER EXAMPLES

#### Seal of the Monastery Sankt Aegidii at Münster



Caption  
Seal of the Monastery Sankt Aegidii at Münster, Germany,  
dating 1423.

This seals has been described as being green-painted. The photograph shows that the yellow seal body is covered by a green layer. (15)

### Corpus Sigillorum Neerlandicorum-CSN

The CSN contains “all” the “Dutch”seals, before 1301. However, it should be remembered that Venner (16) concluded that the CSN-survey covered only 50% of all seals that should be included.

I used the CSN to collect the description of 49 seals with two colours (see tabel below). These 49 seals form 3.5% of some 1400 seal descriptions. Most seals are green of brownish, but seal colours as red, pale red, yellow, white, pale green, black, grey also occur. (17) Furthermore some archives in The Netherlands and abroad could have been better investigated than other archives.

## **SURVEY OF THE CSN FOR WAX SEALS WITH A DIFFERENT COLOURED PAINT LAYER**

As this paper deals with painting I ordered the seals according to the colour of the paint.

### **Green layer**

#### **White wax 20 seals**

Religious persons and institutions

016 Wilbrand, bishop of Utrecht 1230

144 Reimar, provost of St Pieter 1228

145 idem 1230

146 idem, counterseal 1240.

ACZ: Reimar used in the years 1228, 1230 and 1240 green painted white wax. In 1247 he used brown wax (nr 147).

152 Hugo, dean of St. Pieter 1228

153 Willem, dean of St. Pieter 1230

200 Andreas, dean of S. Marie at Utrecht 1230

201 idem 1237

226 Otto, provost of Deventer 1230

261 Chapter of Zutphen 1242.

265 Pelgrim, canon of S. Marie at Utrecht and St. Walburg at Zutphen 1242

412 Hendrik, abbot of Berne at Herpt 1240

Stedelijke instition

583 Doetinchem city 1236

ACZ: Doetinchem is the only city with a green painted white wax seal. Below I will refer to cities, which impressed yellow coloured seals.

Knights and noblemen

711 Berg, Hendrik van, knight 1244

1043 Latum, Hendrik van, page 1299

1069 Luceus, Gerlach, knight 1069

1165 Ringenberg (of Dingede) Zweder van 1233

ACZ: Sweder van Ringenberg (van Dingede) 1190-after 1239). According to [www.oudheidkundigekring.nl/](http://www.oudheidkundigekring.nl/) he was knight and “vrijgraaf”

1189 Sabbinge, Gilles van, 1259

ACZ: Nobleman. The compiler of the internet-paper ([//zea.wikipedia.org/wiki/%27t\\_ouweland](http://zea.wikipedia.org/wiki/%27t_ouweland)) writes “Sabbinge near Goes. Gilles van Sabbinge is mentioned in letters of 1208 – 1213 among the noblemen”

1394 Wisch, Dirk van, knight 1244

### **Red layer**

#### **Colour of the sealwax not mentioned 3 seals**

081 Hendrik, dean of Utrecht 1232

729 Biggo Ymmenzoon 1260

ACZ: Johan Ymmenzoon (see below) is possibly his brother. He sealed with red painted white wax. This may mean that Biggo also used red painted white wax.

1202 Schoudee, Johan van, 1259

ACZ: Below mentioned as brown painted green wax.

### **Brown wax 1 zegel**

064 Dirk of Randered, dean of Utrecht 1227: brown wax, counter seal red painted wax

ACZ: why was the observe left untouched, while the revers was red painted?

### **White wax 5 seals**

259 Reinier, provost and archdean of Tiel 1232

334 Willem, dean of Voorn 1250?

828 Duvenee, Hendrik, son of Nicolaas 1260

829 Duvenee, Nicolaas, son of Nicolaas 1260

ACZ: the charter will show that they were brothers.

973 Johan Ymmenzoon 1260

ACZ: zie boven bij zegel 729

## **Brown layer**

### **White wax 16 seals**

233 Chapter of St Pieter at Hilvarenbeek 1157

258 G., a person at Alphen year?

285 Religious persons in Drenthe 1294

519 Willem II count of Holland 1242

ACZ: see Chapterbook.

653 Altena, Dirk, sir of 1222

732 Blokhoven, Willem van, knight 1298

748 Borselen, Pieter van, knight 1266

750 (Borselen), Hendrik Wisse (van), knight 1266

897 Haarlem, Wouter van 1237

1049 Lek, Dirk van de 1248

1106 Nobel, Pieter and his brothers, children of Klaas 1286

1203 Schoudee, Johan van 1263

1205 Schoudee, Johan van, knight 1265

1301 Vinninghe, Johan of 1266

1334 Waars, Johan van, knight 1259

Civic institution

578 Delft seal of aldermen 1260

### **Green wax 1 zegel**

1203 Linschoten, Johan van 1298

## **Yellow layer**

### **White wax 5 and 4 seals**

Civic institution

582 Doesburg city 1290

589 Groenlo city 1290

595 Harderwijk city 1290  
612 Nieuwstad city 1290  
632 Venlo city 1290

This information is extracted of G 1290 fébr. St. Gent. Vl. S.G. nr followed by ciphers (not seen by me). These ciphers probably point to the seals attached. Conspicuously five cities of Gelre sealing with white wax, are painted yellow, whereas the sixth seal, that of Roermond was made of yellow wax.

(xx)ACZ: I wonder whether the choice of the yellow colour is based on the golden/yellow shield of the arms of the old Gelre-arms or on the golden/yellow lion in de arms of Gelre/Gelderland, Groenlo, Harderwijk, Nieuwstad and Venlo.

#### Persons

746 Borselen, Nicolaas van, knight and sir, 1256  
768 Breda, Ludgardis, dame of, mother of Godfried of Breda 1216  
1120 Persijn, Johan van, knight 1256  
1254 Teylingen, Dirk van, sir of, knight, 1256

ACZ: in 1274 red wax.

The four persons with a yellow painted white waxseal are all of socially high level. The yellow paint can be by chance been applied, because in 1256 Dirk van Teylingen sealed with red wax.

#### White layer

##### Reddish wax 1 seal

555 Landschap Reiderland 1276

Reiderland is situated in north-east Groningen province. It is possible that the available reddish wax is a mixture of red and white wax. As apparently the seal had to be white it was white-painted.

#### TWO EXAMPLES FROM THE GELDERS ARCHIVES (PERIOD UP TO 1450)

An investigation into the seals of the counts of Gelre in the Gelders Archives resulted in the finding of painted seals. The seals of the counts of Gelre were made of whitish wax covered by a layer of another colour. I give two examples.



Dark brown layer



Pale brown layer

Willem van Gelre en Gulik, 1434-12-31 <i>Willem onsen here broeder</i> Restored Code 0012-2091-2 Gelders Archives zegels “Gelre – 1450” page 48 Gelders Archives zegels “Gelre – 1450” page 37.	Otto (II) van Gelre, 1260-05-13 <i>Otte, comes, Gelren</i> Restored Code 0243 17/2
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Several seal inventories have become available. I recall the 14th century seal collection *De zegelcollectie Hora Siccama*, described by Redmer Alma. He did not find painted seals. The same holds for the medieval *Charterbooks of Gelre and (North)Brabant*. As already mentioned painted seals are described for the *Charterbook of Holland and Zeeland*.

## Social status

The colour of a seal – painted or not – may indicate the social position of the sealer. There are many examples of a sealer using various seal colours in the course of years, although his social position had not changed. The cause could be the absence of sealwax of the desired colour. At a later date the seal could get its desired colour being painted. So sealed Floris van Borselen as a page in 1297 (CSN nr 759) and as a knight in 1300 (CSN nr 760) with brown wax. One would expect brown wax for the page, and red for the knight. But maybe, Floris copied the seal colour of the counts of Holland, being pale brown. (see note 4)

759 Borselen, Floris of Borselen, page 1297 red wax  
760 idem, knight 1300 brown wax

## Conclusions

1. Since the eleventh century several seals could be covered by a layer of sealwax, mostly of different colours. This would occur when during the sealing procedure the desired wax colour was not available.
2. A colour could be desired to have it adapted to the social level of the sealer.
3. A second reason of a desired colour could be the colour of the family. An example is the pale brown coloured seals of the Counts of Holland and Zeeland. Maybe there are more families with one colour for the seals.
4. Gradually painting disappeared. The cause could be that a sealer brought his own sealwax, or that locally sufficiently seal wax with different colours was available. I am not aware of dealers of sealwax.

## Noten

(1) H. Brugmans & K. Heeringa. *Corpus Sigillorum Neerlandicorum; de Nederlandsche zegels tot 1300. 1937-1940*. 3 parts: 1. Descriptions of seals, andn 2 and 3. Photo's. 's-Gravenhage. E-books. Abridged to CSN; G. Venner. (2005. *Zegels in het archief of de abdij van Thorn. Opera Omnia II: 11-49*) showed that many seals of “before 1301” and present in archives concerning the present-day The Netherlands have not been included in the CSN. Venner did not describe the colour of the seals.

(2) A.C.F. Koch, J.G. Kruisheer & E.C. Dijkhof; indices door J.W.J. Burgers, P.J.J. Moors & J. Sparreboom. *Oorkondenboek of Holland en Zeeland tot 1299*. 1970-2006. Abridged to OHZ.

(3) Gray Birch, W. De. *Catalogue of seals in the Department of manuscripts in the British Museum*. 6 delen, 1887, 1892, 1894, 1895, 1898, 1900.

(4) Dijkhof, E.C. *Het oorkondenwezen of enige kloosters en steden in Holland*. Doctor's Thesis, Universiteit of Amsterdam. 1997. G. Fleetwood. The conservation of medieval seals in the Swedish Riksarchiv. *The American Archivist*; 1946: 166-174 (translated out Swedish). *Why do uncoloured medieval seals appear less stable than those seals that are coloured?* [www.sigillvm.net/](http://www.sigillvm.net/) posted 2 May 2016. Also E.C.M. Leemans-Prins. *Seals en wapens of steden in Zuid-Holland*. 1982. She wrote that in olden times a waxseal was painted brown or pale green to improve its tenability. I suppose that this subject needs more research, because green seals are also painted brown or red.

(5) Philippe Jacquet. *Les sceaux des archévêques de Rouen, 1129-1229*. Université de Caen Basse Normandie, Master thesis. 113p. [sfhs-rfhs.fr/wp-content/PDF/jacquet\\_memoire.dpf](http://sfhs-rfhs.fr/wp-content/PDF/jacquet_memoire.dpf)

(6) The archivist Adrian Ailes, National Archives, e-mail 8 Oct. 2015.

(7) The archivist Toni Diederich did not find painted seals in the archives of Cologne. Ailes, e-mail 8 Oct. 2015, A. Diederich e-mail 2015.

(8) See note 5.

(9) See for sigillographic left and right: Anton C. Zeven. 2012. Sigillografisch rechts en links versus heraldisch rechts en links in non-wapenzegels. *De Nederlandsche Leeuw* 129: 32-38.

(10) HUA-Utrecht, Toegangscode 355. Verzameling of Buchel-Booth 1295-1695. The drawings are in the University Library of Utrecht. On internet I consulted 20 books with drawings and written information, covering maybe some 3000-4000 drawings. Therefore I restricted myself to drawings of red seals. I found it difficult to date the books, but as Buchelius died in 1641 the three painted seals date earlier than 1642.

(11) The collection Kampener seals (photo's by K. Schilder) shows imprints of three types of seals of Jan van Diest. SaK-Kampen. K. Schilder. 2012. Seals aan charters in het oud-archieff of Kampen. *Kamper genealogische en historische bronnen*, deel 34; en [www.antonzeven.nl](http://www.antonzeven.nl)

(12) Philippe Jacquet. *Les sceaux des archévêques de Rouen, 1129-1229*. Université de Caen Basse Normandie, Master thesis. 113p. [sfhs-rfhs.fr/wp-content/PDF/jacquet\\_memoire.pdf](http://sfhs-rfhs.fr/wp-content/PDF/jacquet_memoire.pdf) Jacquet also mentioned two sceaux vernies, i.e. varnished seals.

(13) see note 12.

(14) see note 12.

(15) Anonymous. Das Siegel des Klosters St. Aegidii in Münster von 1423. *Archiv der Kategorie Siegelumschrift*. This Siegelblog tells that the seal is now in the Collection Rassweiler at. Londen

(16) The number of seals is smaller, as I did not subtract the number of reverse seals and the number of seals without indication about the colour of the wax. See note 1.

(17) I will return to the subject “relation social status and seal colour” in another paper.