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Automation in Cataloguing Seals

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Cataloguing seals, seal matrices and casts by computer¹: A nation-wide electronic catalogue of seals, seals matrices and casts used in archives of the Czech Republic

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Seals, seal matrices and casts represent a specific kind of archival material which also demands a specific methodological approach. The first attempts at a survey of seals in the Czech lands were made by three specialists in heraldry and sigillography: August Sedláček, Antonín Masák and František Beneš. For his personal requirements, August Sedláček made many descriptions of seals, including drawings of them, during the 1880s. Although he never intended to publish them, 3 volumes of Sedláček's handwritten excerpts have just been published in a magnificent edition.² By contrast, Antonín Masák published his book, *Seals of the Bohemian, Moravian and Silesian Nobility*, in 1911.³ František Beneš worked for many years on his own private project on seals. He wanted to create a wide-ranging survey of seals. He focused his interest on the seals of kings, archbishops, bishops, nobles and cities. Unfortunately, his exceptional effort did not reach a successful conclusion. His death in 1971 prevented him from finishing his extraordinary work. Only a large number of photographs survived in his personal papers.⁴ Moreover, the situation after the Second World War was not very favourable: as archivists concentrated their attention on the diplomatic analysis of archival documents, seals remained somewhat in the background. Inventories of archive holdings contain no detailed information about the seals. They only mention the number of seals and their condition. Catalogues of archive holdings which provide detailed information are not prevalent in Czech archives, and for this reason these archival finding aids do not provide a comprehensive review of how many seals, seal matrices and casts can be found in the deposits of the archives of the Czech Republic and what condition they are in. At the beginning of the 1990s the situation changed and the idea of a nation-wide catalogue of seals and seal matrices once again emerged. The need for such a catalogue was mentioned at the Seventh Congress of Historians in the Czech Republic in 1993. Participants in the Congress requested the Archive Administration Office of the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic to take the initiative in this.⁵

In 1995 the Czech Archive Administration Office started to organize a nation-wide catalogue of seals, seal matrices and casts.⁶ The catalogue was declared to be an urgent task for Czech archives. It was clear that advantages of computers should be harnessed in carrying out the project. Having no example from abroad, the Archive Administration Office had to solve the problem itself. After several meetings with those working in the various archives and with sigillographers, the necessary database programme was developed by people working in the Archive Administration Office in 1996. Josef Hora, a specialist in software, created a special structured database programme, following the recommendations of Vladimír Růžek, a specialist in sigillography. Vladimír Růžek was also entrusted with supervising the implementation of this task. On 1 January 1997 the programme was introduced to all state archives of the Czech Republic, namely to the Central State Archives in Prague, 7 regional state archives, 73 district state archives and also to 5 city archives and 3 special archives (i.e. the National Museum Archives, the Archives of Prague Castle, and the Charles University Archives). It was decided that all pendent seals, seal matrices and casts would be catalogued; applied seals would be included only up to 1526.⁷

The programme that had been developed had to be adapted to the technical equipment available in the archives at that time. Josef Hora chose the database environment FoxPro, version 2.5 for the operating system DOS, because of its low demands for hardware.⁸ From the very beginning it was decided that digital images of the seals, seal matrices and casts should be added to their descriptions. This step of adding images is not obligatory and depends on the equipment available in the archives.

Three predefined specific forms have been created for cataloguing this kind of archival material (i.e., for cataloguing seals, seal matrices and casts).⁹ Each form is divided into three pages. The first page

¹Based on the presentation held at the parallel session „Automation in Cataloguing Seals“, on August 25, 2004, XVth International Congress on Archives, Vienna.

²Sedláček, August, *Atlasy erbů a pečeti české a moravské středověké šlechty*, (ed. Vladimír Růžek, Vol. 1-5, Praha: Academia 2001-2003).

³Masák, Antonín, *Pečeti šlechty české, moravské a slezské*, Praha: Alois Wiesner 1911.

⁴Beneš's personal papers are divided into two parts, first can be found in the Central State Archives in Prague (Státní ústřední archiv v Praze) and the second one in the Museum of Gold Mining and Exploitation in Jílové (Muzeum těžby a zpracování zlata v Jílovém).

⁵Růžek, Vladimír, *Soupis pečeti, pečetidel a sbírkových odlišků v archivech České republiky*, Archivní časopis, 47/1997, s. 143-144.

⁶For more details about the project, see Růžek, Vladimír, *Soupis pečeti, pečetidel a sbírkových odlišků v archivech České republiky*, Archivní časopis, 47/1997, s. 143-158, 213-231 and Růžek, Vladimír, *Zhodnocení průběhu celostátní akce soupisu (katalogizace) pečeti, pečetidel a pečetních sbírkových odlišků v archivech ČR*, Sborník archivních prací, L/2, 2000, s. 515-524.

⁷Růžek, *Soupis*, 148-150 and Růžek, Vladimír, *Zhodnocení průběhu celostátní akce soupisu (katalogizace) pečeti, pečetidel a pečetních sbírkových odlišků v archivech ČR*, Sborník archivních prací, L/2, 2000, s. 516.

⁸Růžek, *Soupis*, 213.

⁹The following paragraph is based on information from Růžek, *Soupis*, 213-224 and Růžek, *Zhodnocení*, 516-518.

contains columns concerning the owner of the seal, seal matrix or cast (if the owner is a natural person, it is necessary to fill in his/her name, family name, title of nobility, data about his/her position in the society, country of his/her origin; if the owner is a legal body, the columns are concentrated on its specification), and also details about the charter and seal from the diplomatic point of view (date and place of issue of the charter, authenticity, number of the seals, position of the seal on the charter, announcement of the seal in the charter). The second page makes it possible to describe the seal, seal matrix or cast (their shape, material, colour, size, kind of attachment, legend - including language and writing, iconographic description of image, their form and type). The last page is devoted to their physical state and contains details about their storage. The most detailed form is the one for cataloguing seals; it consists of 54 columns. The creators of the programme sought to make filling the database as quick and convenient as possible, which is why only 29 columns must be filled in (in the sense that some text must be typed in them); the other columns are completed as a result of a prior choice being made through the user choosing options on a rolling menu.

At the beginning the idea was that the data in the database would be accessible only on a computer on which the programme would be installed. That is why the database programme also contains detailed searching aids and also offers the possibility of printing selected entries. During the several years of entering information into the database, it became clear that this way of using data was not adequate. Another solution had to be found. It was decided to separate the project into two independent parts. The first part is the original database programme making it possible to collect data and use them by means of a sophisticated system of searching aids and a printing function. The second part of the project consists of the data transformed into a CD. A specialized company, AiP Beroun, was asked to assist in this. The result is a CD which can be used on any computer without the necessity of installing the original database programme. Now we have a second edition of the CD at our disposal. It includes 37,355 entries and 487 images. The structure of entries on the CD is based on the form of the original database. It is possible to combine many criteria in searching the data, and also to print the information obtained through such searches.

Apart from this kind of data usage, some archives have decided to publish the results of their work in a classic paper form. Several books on surviving seals and seal matrices for limited areas, usually districts, will appear very soon. Some examples are the following books: Ružicková, Renata: *Nejvzácnější sfragistické památky Státního okresního archivu v Chrudimi* (The Most Precious Monuments of Sigillography in the District State Archives in Chrudim), Chrudim 1997; Bisíngrová, Marie: *Sfragistické památky Státního okresního archivu Kutná Hora* (Monuments of Sigillography in the District State Archives in Kutná Hora), Kutná Hora 1999; Kütner, Dušan: *Soupis pečeti ve Státním okresním archivu v Přerově* (List of Seals in the District State Archives in Přerov), Přerov 2003. A catalogue of the seals and seal matrices of Eastern Bohemia will be published in the near future. Vladimír Růžek and the archivists of the Regional State Archives in Zámrsrk are currently working on the final corrections to this catalogue.

At the moment the database contains almost 41,000 entries. All state archives are successfully continuing to catalogue their sealing-related materials. Only five archives have not yet adopted the project (the Prague City Archives, the National Museum Archives, the Charles University Archives, the Archives of Prague Castle and the Ústí nad Labem City Archives).¹⁰ It must be stated that the project has not yet passed its halfway point, which is why the database is still a work-in-progress. To create a final version will require making many corrections over the coming years.

The ease of access to the collected data as a result of their transfer onto CDs confirms the appropriateness of the solution that was adopted. The third edition of the CD is currently being prepared. The possibility of placing the catalogue on the Internet is also being discussed. The database can be found on the web site of the AiP Beroun firm and represents one of their products (<http://database.aipberoun.cz/pecete/>).

Since 1997, when the programme was launched, the situation has changed a great deal, especially with regard to computer equipment and software. The database programme which works on the operating system DOS is slowly losing its compatibility with modern computers. It does work on computers with the Windows 2000 operating system but is not able to cope with the XP system. The priority now is to modify the programme so it can run on modern Windows systems.

The achieved results confirm that the taken way is proper. The catalogue helps to develop not only the sigillography as a discipline but also helps to protect this brittle material from the archival point of view.

¹⁰Růžek, *Zhodnocení*, 518-524.