

PRESS RELEASE  
20. January 2011

## 'Insculpta imago' - Seals in the Mediterranean area

**An International Conference at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence is devoted to one of the earliest media for cross-cultural image reproduction**

The seal as sign of authentication, as reproductive medium in its smallest form, is extraordinarily rich in the multiplicity of images and signs it can transmit. With a history stretching over 9000 years it is one of the earliest and most enduring forms of image reproduction and is found in numerous cultures. Seal matrices can produce a great variety of impressions in clay, lead or wax. So, in comparison with other artefacts, seals are prolific and widespread in their dissemination in diplomatic correspondence and in commercial relations, and as objects of representation and collection as well.

The Conference will examine both the seal matrix and the seal impression as 'insculptae imagines', as sculptural images; both are three-dimensional: for what is sculpted or engraved in the seal die in depth appears raised and relief-like in its impression.

In particular the Conference will examine the interaction of image, text and sign in the sculptural seal images, and particular focuses of interest will be the encounter, or transmission, between seal images of various Mediterranean cultures, the innovation or persistence of image forms and formulae, their mutual reception, the role of the materiality of seal dies and impressions, and the interaction of seals with other three-dimensional artefacts.

The Conference at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence is specifically devoted to the study of seals in the Mediterranean area, as a region of many-sided contacts and co-existence between various cultures, in the period stretching from late antiquity to early modern times. To this end it brings together for the first time scholars from disciplines that hitherto studied seals mainly within the confines of their own particular fields of study: Egyptology, archaeology, Judaic, Byzantine and Islamic studies, medieval historiography and history of art.

Sponsored by the Fritz Thyssen Foundation, the Conference is linked with the research project on "Siegel-Bilder" being conducted by Dr. Ruth Wolff at the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence under the direction of Prof. Dr. Gerhard Wolf und Prof. Dr. Michael Stolleis in cooperation with the Max-Planck-Institut für Europäische Rechtsgeschichte in Frankfurt am Main.

**INFO** The online exhibition *Sigilli* of the Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florence shows seal dies and seal impressions from two of the most important collections of seals in Italy: the *Museo Nazionale del Bargello* and the *Archivio di Stato di Firenze*. It can be accessed and viewed on the website <http://expo.khi.fi.it/galerie/sigilli>.

### Further info:

Astrid Müller  
PR and Communications  
Kunsthistorisches Institut in Florenz – Max-Planck-Institut  
Via Giuseppe Giusti 44, 50121 Firenze  
Tel.: +39 055 24911-1, Fax: +39 055 244394  
[khi-presse@khi.fi.it](mailto:khi-presse@khi.fi.it)  
[www.khi.fi.it/](http://www.khi.fi.it/)