# The Temple of Justice and the Key of David: Anachronism and Authority in the Chichester Seal Matrix

Author(s):

Lloyd de Beer

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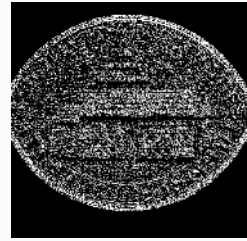
# The Temple of Justice and the Key of David: Anachronism and Authority in the Chichester Seal Matrix

Article by **Lloyd de Beer**

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## Abstract

In the early thirteenth century a new seal matrix was made for Chichester Cathedral. At its centre is an anachronistic architectural depiction, engraved underneath with the words "temple of justice". The matrix's combination of image and format is unique in English ecclesiastical seals. It is a pointed oval rather than a circle as preferred by other institutions which employed architectural images. This article is an investigation into why these distinctive choices were made. For the first time the seal matrix (in the British Museum) is brought together with its counterseal drawn from extant casts and wax seals attached to charters. Doing so reveals that the Chichester seals were artistically based on a seal and counterseal made for Christ Church, Canterbury, between 1155 and 1158. I argue that the architectural image on the Canterbury seal was understood as the first "temple of justice" and that this was related to the teachings and writings of Master Vacarius and John of Salisbury, both of whom worked at Canterbury prior to the production of the seals. The context for the reinterpretation of the Canterbury seals at Chichester coincides with the appointment of Ralph Neville as bishop. Neville's own episcopal counterseal displays a similar type of image to the cathedral's counterseal. I suggest that Neville was responsible for commissioning the seals and that through them he promoted a relationship between himself and an Old Testament palace administrator named Eliakim, who was given the Key of David by God. This interpretation relates to Neville's combined roles as bishop of Chichester and chancellor to the young Henry III, at whose court theocracy was a potent tract amongst the circle of archbishop Stephen Langton. A further and more general point of this article is that Neville and the artist responsible for the seals were able to borrow from the Canterbury seals because of the authority invested in architectural archetypes.

## Introduction

The medieval seal matrix made for the use of Chichester Cathedral, now in the collection of the British Museum, is an enigmatic object (fig. 1). It has consistently been dated to the early thirteenth century, although this is complicated by its central image.[1] While the size of the matrix and its epigraphy are consistent with this period, the building depicted is anachronistic. This is confirmed by its nearest stylistic comparison, the late eleventh-century seal made for Chertsey

Abbey (fig. 2). Sandy Heslop remarked upon the anachronistic image choice when cataloguing the object for the exhibition *Age of Chivalry*: "It remains a mystery why such an archaic structure should have been chosen as the motif for the Cathedral's seal."[2] If this were not strange enough we find a further oddity in the line of text underneath the building identifying it as the "temple of justice".



Figure 1

Unknown maker, *Chichester seal matrix*, obverse, circa 1222–24, silver, 8.5 x 6.4 cm. Collection of the British Museum (1923,1015.1). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 2

Unknown maker, Chertsey Abbey seal, cast, late 11th-century. Collection of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries of London.

When the matrix was made in the thirteenth century it succeeded one which was probably in use from the late eleventh century. Chichester was established as the seat of the bishop of Sussex in 1075 replacing the earlier cathedral at Selsey.[3] Most of the earliest known ecclesiastical seals from England display a building at their centre, and it has been suggested that the matrix made for Chichester is based on an earlier original made for the new cathedral church.[4] However, as there are no surviving impressions of a first seal potentially made for Chichester in the late 1070s, this remains conjecture. Yet rather than leaving this object in its eccentric isolation, this article brings the Chichester matrix into conversation with other seals of the period and discusses a particularly dynamic moment, politically and artistically, in their development and manufacture. Through close comparison with other seals, this article uncovers the rich iconographical, material, and conceptual network of connections in which the Chichester seal is embedded. Further, this article unites the matrix with its counterseal which have so far never been brought together. Doing so clarifies their antecedents and their meaning.

## The Matrix

The function of the matrix was to produce wax impressions which were attached to documents by way of a coloured cord or a parchment tag. This article privileges the Chichester matrix as a work of art in its own right, but it is important to recognize that impressions made from it would

ultimately interact spatially with the parchment, cord, and text of the document, as well as with any other seal impressions attached alongside. The iconography of the seal must be seen within this documentary context, in which its unique combination of image and format would have immediately been apparent.

Formed of a thin piece of silver, the matrix takes the shape of a pointed oval measuring 85 by 64 millimetres (fig. 1). It is about as large as a thirteenth-century ecclesiastical seal could be—maximum size being determined in relation to the dimensions of other seals made for more important individuals and institutions. Thus Henry III's first Great Seal, made in 1218, measures 100 millimetres in diameter, and the third seal for Christ Church, Canterbury, of 1232/33, 93 millimetres in diameter. The maker of the Chichester matrix has positioned the longer axis sideways to present the central image horizontally. Most other major ecclesiastical seals of the period are circular, especially those on which a building is the main image. The horizontal orientation here—the width of the matrix exceeding its height—suggests an innovative and creative mind behind its conception.

What of the building depicted? It is a curious architectural structure comprising a central vessel with eastern and western additions and a triple-tiered tower, receding in three stages. The extremities of the roofs are topped by crosses, and two large eight-pointed stars are positioned either side of the tower. Close attention to detail characterizes the architecture. Preparatory guiding lines are visible, lightly drawn on the metal surface of the matrix to aid the engraver.[5] That the lines were not followed exactly during engraving indicates freedom of movement, relaying a sense of confidence on the part of the goldsmith in his capacity to change tack.[6] Small shallow repeated cuts into the roofs of the different structures give the impression of tiles, whilst the engraved stonework surrounding the doorway emphasizes its singularity through the inclusion of voussoir lines. There are no other apertures present on the structure, and the visual statement of a continuous coursed building privileges the single entrance as a point of importance on the object. The reverse of the matrix is plain except for an engraved cross to help positioning in the act of sealing and an elaborately cast, engraved, and soldered foliate handle (fig. 3). The rarity of English goldsmiths' work from the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries prevents detailed comparisons that would point to the status of the seal maker, but the impressive quality of the foliate handle suggests this is the work of a goldsmith capable of making an object such as the silver ciborium at the abbey of Saint-Maurice d'Agaune.[7] The maker of the Chichester matrix was likely not solely a professional seal cutter but also a skilled goldsmith probably working across a variety of object types.

Figure 3

Unknown maker, *Chichester seal matrix*, reverse, circa 1222–24, silver, 8.5 x 6.4 cm. Collection of the British Museum (1923,1015.1). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.



Figure 4

Unknown maker, *Chichester seal matrix*, modern impression, circa 1222–24, silver, 8.5 x 6.4 cm. Collection of the British Museum (1923,1015.1). Digital image courtesy of Trustees of the British Museum.

Next to attend to are the inscriptions on the Chichester matrix. In the precise centre of the building a tiny arched doorway is visible, inside of which is engraved a half-open set of doors (fig. 4). The structure and its half-open doorway are underscored by a line of text which give us cause to interpret what exactly the building might be. It reads: "TE'PLV'. IVSTICIE" ("temple of justice"). Here lies the first conundrum: how can the architectural image represent both Chichester Cathedral and the "temple of justice"; are they one and the same? Further, there is a noticeable tension in the Chichester matrix between what has been included and what has been left out. The matrix lacks two key elements common to all other ecclesiastical seals of this type. Its legend reads simply: "+ SIGILLVM: SANCTE: CICESTRENSIS: ECCLESIE" ("The seal of the Holy Church of Chichester" or "The Cross is the Seal of the Holy Church of Chichester").[8] Chichester was a secular cathedral dedicated to the Holy Trinity and administered by a Dean and Chapter.[9] Other secular cathedrals such as London, York, and Lincoln had on their late eleventh-century seals recognized their holy patrons and acknowledged their capitular status in their seal legends. For example, the London seal states: "+ SIGILLVM C[AP]ITVLI SANCTI PAVLI LV[NDO]NIE" ("The seal of the chapter of St Paul's London").[10] By contrast, the Chichester seal lacks any mention of capitular status or its dedication to the Holy Trinity. This is strange as a seal's legend was a prime opportunity for an institution to promote its constitution and a relationship with its holy patron. Without either, it is not apparent exactly from where and by whom the cathedral church of Chichester derived its authority.

The absence of any reference to Chichester being administered by a Dean and Chapter also calls into question who exactly was responsible for commissioning the object and what their agenda was (a point to be discussed further in the final section of this essay). If it were the Dean—as would be expected—then why forgo the chance to promote his position and the authority of the Chapter on the seal? When it came to producing the ad causas seal for Chichester the capitular status was included in the legend.[11] What was different when the major seal was made? If, as I will argue, the choices about artistic representation on the seal were well thought through and

intentional, then omitting mention of the Holy Trinity and neglecting to reference the cathedral's capitular status must have been pertinent to the object's overall agenda.

The use of an anachronistic architectural motif is inventive enough to warrant investigation in its own right. When combined with the descriptive text "TE'PLV'. IVSTICIE", the effect is transformative. The use of text on a matrix's face inside the legend rim was rare and sporadic before the middle of the thirteenth century. Its origins can probably be traced to papal lead bullae, with the names of Peter and Paul; a contemporary English example is the first seal of Westminster Abbey, again with St Peter. In Chichester's case—and for the first time on a seal—the text identifies an architectural structure. Is the *reader* of the seal being invited to interpret the architecture in the way they would usually identify a holy person?

## The Counterseal

The counterseal for Chichester Cathedral has never been discussed alongside its larger partner (fig. 5).[12] Its matrix does not survive and it is known only from impressions attached to documents or casts from those impressions. The earliest charter with a wax impression of both the Chichester seal and counterseal is dated 1253 and is held in the muniment room of Magdalen College, Oxford.[13] This places the counterseal firmly within the thirteenth century. Further, the way in which the imagery and text of the major seal and counterseal interact suggests that they were made together as a piece by the same goldsmith or workshop, presumably at the same time.



Figure 5

Unknown maker, *Chichester Cathedral counterseal*, cast, circa 1222–24. Collection of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries of London.

At the centre of the counterseal is an enthroned figure of Christ in Judgement under a trefoil gothic-style canopy. He is nimbed and shown with his right arm held up in blessing and his left outstretched clasping an open book. The flourish of the flying portion of drapery from the left-hand side of Christ's cloak provides a momentary sense of the fluttering of cloth caught by the

wind or disturbed by the lifting of an arm. In a dynamic reinterpretation of biblical narrative, the throne on which Christ sits is placed on an arch—rather than a rainbow—on either side of which is a micro-architectural spire topped with a cross. The apocalyptic image is certainly drawn from Revelation 4:1:

> *and there before me was a throne in heaven with someone sitting on it. And the one who sat there had the appearance of jasper and ruby. A rainbow shone like an emerald encircled the throne.[14]*

In this instance however, the vision of the throne is inventively combined with Ezekiel's vision of the temple:

> *While the man was standing beside me I heard someone speaking to me out of the temple. He said to me: Mortal, this is the place of my throne and the place for the soles of my feet, where I will reside among the people of Israel for ever. (Ezekiel 43:6)*

The degree to which difference is articulated on this counterseal is worth mentioning: the cross to the left of Christ is square formed and the other trefoiled. The cross-topped spires recall the type of architectural towers situated on the exterior of a physical church, while the square-formed cross visually links with the crosses situated on the "temple of justice" as represented on the accompanying major seal. The image of Christ enthroned between two towers imaginatively positions him both as seated upon the structure of a church in a literal way, and at the same time as enthroned upon the Church symbolically. Does Christ's judgement sit between two different buildings: the Temple and the Church? Several Early Christian churches in Rome have extensive mosaic decoration at the triumphal arch between the nave and apse. Some of these triumphal arches, at Santa Maria Maggiore for instance, contain a visionary image of the throne at their centre, situated between micro-architectural depictions of Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The image of Christ enthroned micro-architecturally is an invention of this seal, and can be paralleled in only one other place: as the image on the counterseal of the bishop of Chichester, Ralph Neville (1224–44), who, I will argue, commissioned the cathedral's seals.

Immediately beneath the arch is a space left almost empty except for the faintest trace of a triangle of three dots. Their significance is unclear; perhaps they represent a schematic rendering of the Trinity in abstract form. Since the cathedral was dedicated to the Trinity, this would make sense. The legend on the seals prompts a further connection between God the Father and Christ: "EGO SVM VIA VERITAS ET VITA" ("I am the way the truth and the life"; John 14:6–7). This text is related to the narrative of Thomas who asks Christ "how can we know the way?", to which Christ replies "I am the way the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, you will know my father also." The implications of this are building on Christ's earlier words in the Gospel of John when he says "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30).

Thus the seal and counterseal are unified by the biblical texts referenced and inscribed upon them. The connection between the open door on the "temple of justice" and the image of Christ in judgement is made clearer by the text immediately preceding the vision of the throne in heaven:

> *After this I looked, and there before me was a door standing open in heaven. And the voice I had first heard speaking to me like a trumpet said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after this." At once I was in the Spirit. (Revelation 4:1)*

## The Visionary Image

Architecture could function both as "pictures" and as physical structures. These pictures were understood and used as mnemonic devices for recalling other buildings such as Ezekiel's temple, the tabernacle, and the Heavenly City.[15] This line of thinking was applied to art-making from early on in Christianity.[16] Early Christian ivories such as the Three Maries at the Sepulchre from the Castello Sforzesco, Milan, conflate the vision at Christ's tomb with Ezekiel's vision, and the ninth-century "Plan of St Gaul" contains an architectural floor plan of a monastic site whose entrance is labelled as a *templum*.[17] A similar conflation takes place in the Chichester seals— wherein an image of what is presumably a church is referred to as a temple. Expounding upon visions and the transcendental experience of visualizing images was a major function of exegetical literature. Exegesis on Ezekiel's temple was particularly popular in the twelfth century; two well-known texts of Richard of St-Victor's commentary on Ezekiel carry detailed illustrations of the temple.[18] The relevance of art-making as a process by which these biblical or exegetical descriptions could be visualized is referenced by Gilbert Crispin in his late eleventh-century *Disputation between a Christian and a Jew*:

> what Isaiah saw, said and wrote, what Ezekiel saw, said and wrote, could after them be written, spoken and picturae aliqua nota signari for just as letters are in some sense the figures and notae of words, so too pictures can appear as the likenesses and notae of the reality of the scriptures.[19]

The artistic interpretation of biblical or exegetical writing into architectural image is present in another seal made prior to the examples from Chichester. The late twelfth-century seal made for Burscough priory (fig. 6) shows an archetypal image of a building with a pathway leading up to its doorway. The image is drawn from Bede's treatise on the temple, *de Templo*, wherein he offers an interpretation of the meaning of the doorway and portico:

> The door of the portico is prophetic speech which led as if <u>by a straight path</u> those going in at the door of the temple by the grace of the Lord the saviour whereby he proclaimed that he was to redeem the world. The whole structure of the portico, therefore signifies the faithful of that time, but the door in the portico stands for the teachers who shone the light of life for the others and held the door open for them to enter the presence of the Lord.[20]

Figure 6

Unknown maker, *Burscough priory seal*, cast, late 12th
century. Collection of the Society of Antiquaries of
London. Digital image courtesy of Society of
Antiquaries of London.

Working together, the Chichester seal and counterseal similarly contain and release visionary
images, impressed into wax from silver matrices. They assert the divine source of their
institution's authority as accessed via Christ, whose body was raised as a temple after the
Resurrection:

> *The Jews then said to him, "What sign can you show us for doing this?" Jesus answered
> them, "Destroy the temple and in three days I will raise it up." The Jews then said, "This
> temple has been under construction for forty-six years, and will you raise it up in three
> days?" But he was speaking of the temple of his body. (John 2:18–22)*

The connection between the pathway and the door on the Burscough seal suggests that at least
some early seals reproduce an architectural image as a biblical or exegetical sign of the "temple".
However, unlike Chichester, Burscough has no specific claim to be a "temple of justice". How
then did Chichester come to label their architectural image as such? For the images on the
Chichester seals, the maker engaged in visual cross-referencing with the intention of conveying
specific ideas from the origins of English ecclesiastical sigillographic tradition. It did this
through the reuse of an archetypal architectural image. As will be argued below, the format
selected was a two-seal design in imitation of the second seal and counterseal made for Christ
Church, Canterbury, in the middle of the twelfth century. The Canterbury seals display a building
on the major seal countered by an image of Christ in Judgement, and apart from Chichester are
the earliest and only other ones to do so. It is the political, scholarly, and patronal context in
which Canterbury remade its seals that establishes its architectural image as the first "temple of
justice" and a prototype for Chichester. Surveying the reasons for their production will help us
understand why Chichester sought to imitate them.

## The Canterbury Seals

Between 1155 and 1158 a new seal and counterseal were produced for Christ Church, Canterbury (figs 7 and 8).[21] These seals replaced the pre-Conquest seal with a round seal almost double the size: 80 millimetres in diameter as opposed to the original 49 millimetres, and a counterseal measuring 57 by 35 millimetres. Canterbury was the first institution to introduce a large seal with a counterseal; for some time this type had been exclusively used by individuals.[22] The artistic debt of the seal to the Utrecht psalter and its "copies"—the Harley and Eadwine psalters—is undeniable. The latter was in the process of being illuminated at Christ Church at exactly the time of the making of the new matrices and the seals' makers may have seen the psalter in production.[23]



Figure 7

Unknown maker, *Canterbury Cathedral second seal*, cast, circa 1155–58. Collection of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries of London.



Figure 8

*Canterbury Cathedral counterseal*, impression from document, circa 1155–58. Collection of Canterbury Cathedral Archives (CCA DCc/ChAnt/C/163). Digital image courtesy of the Dean and Chapter of Canterbury Cathedral.

At the centre of the round seal is an image of a two-storied architectural structure. The legend on the seal reads: "+ SIGILLVM ECCLE XPI CANTVARIE : PRIME SEDIS BRITANNIE" ("The Seal of Christ Church, Canterbury. First Seat of Britain"). In almost all respects this seal appears to be an enlargement of the first seal made for the institution insofar as it contains an image of a building. It is at the central doorway where this seal deviates. Inside the porch there is a miniature representation of the resurrected Christ, nimbed and carrying a cross. He is framed by a spiral column at either side, supporting the pediment of the porch in which he stands. Spiral columns were used in some churches to define the holiest of spaces.[24] They were particularly popular in England from the late eleventh century, appearing in Anselm's crypt at Canterbury, begun around 1096, and were ultimately derived iconographically from the fourth-century spiral columns used at the high altar of St Peter's in Rome. The columns in Rome had various legends

attached, one being that they were reused from the doorway of Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem.[25] Their use on the Canterbury seal conjures up this association but explicitly combines it with Christ's resurrection, implying that the building is both a church and Solomon's porch in which his throne of judgement was placed (1 Kings 7:6).[26]

In another first, the counterseal features a contemporary engraved image and not a reused Roman intaglio. It shows an image of Christ in Judgement seated on a rainbow with a book in his left hand and his right held up in blessing. The legend for the seal reads: "+ EGO SUM VIA VERITAS ET VITA". Apart from important deviations in design, the basic and essential premise of the Chichester and Canterbury seals is the same. Both display a large architectural structure on their major seal and a counterseal containing Christ in Judgement. In both cases the seal and counterseal work together to emphasize the central doorway on the major seal— on Canterbury's it is the resurrected Christ; at Chichester it is the half-open door. These need not be seen as any different from Christ as person, door, and temple as described biblically and discussed exegetically.[27] Other institutions soon followed Canterbury in developing a counterseal; however, Chichester is the only one which employed this specific combined format and iconography. Alongside a desire on the part of Canterbury to appear artistically relevant, there are further reasons for why they might have remade their seal and why we can consider it to be the first "temple of justice".

## The Temple of Justice

The use of the term the "temple of justice" can be found with confidence just twice in medieval England. The origin of the first instance is at Canterbury around the middle of the twelfth century and a decade before their new seals were made. In the 1140s, Archbishop Theobald brought Master Vacarius and John of Salisbury to Canterbury from Bologna and Paris respectively. Both were experts in Roman Law and they were introduced into his curia to assist with legal issues surrounding the status of the papal legate in England. Vacarius's work on behalf of Theobald gave rise to issues which were commented upon by John of Salisbury in his *Policraticus*:

> In the time of King Stephen the Roman laws were ordered out of the kingdom, whereof the knowledge had been received into Britain through the household of the venerable father Theobald, the primate of Britain. By a royal edict it was forbidden even to keep the books, and silence was enjoined upon our Vacarius; but by the power of God the virtue of the law was strengthened the more by the efforts of impiety to weaken it.[28]

It is in the dissemination of Roman law and Salisbury's *Policraticus* that we first find reference to a "temple of justice". During his time in England Vacarius taught law and produced the *Liber Pauperum*—a compendium of texts from the *Corpus Iuris Civilis*—for English students.[29] The *Corpus* describes the law as being consecrated as a "*Sanctissimum Templum Iustitiae*": "the most holy temple of Justice".[30] John of Salisbury drew on the teachings of Vacarius and Justinianic Roman law for his *Policraticus*, borrowing the idea of a "temple of justice" for his discussion of specifically virtuous and effective juridical leaders:

> What manner of men Justinian and Leo were is clear from the fact that by disclosing and proclaiming the most sacred laws, they sought to consecrate the whole world as a temple of justice.[31]

Vacarius and John of Salisbury were responsible for teaching students at Canterbury, including Prior Wibert, who would go on to initiate the substantial rebuilding of parts of the cathedral church and significant parts of the priory. Wibert was prior at the time of the making of the seals, and without any reason to doubt it we must see him as involved, if not in charge of, the decision

to make new ones. The revival of Roman law in England and its implementation at Canterbury was primarily related to its status as a liberty, and Peter Fergusson has argued that the most ambitious part of Wibert's rebuilding—the development of the Green Court and the Aula Nova—served as the prior's courthouse.[32] He has shown that the iconography of the new architecture, particularly that of the entrance porch and staircase for the Aula Nova, should be viewed through the biblical lens of the entrance to the judgement hall of Solomon's temple.[33] The iconography and function of the seals are irrevocably tied up with this developing legal identity, being the method by which the priory's missives were validated. Travelling across Europe as part of the dissemination of Canterbury's authority, these seals were also the primary visual means by which the see was perceived outside the confines of the cathedral walls. The seals therefore carried the compound rhetorical message of the legal-minded, mid-twelfth-century architectural rebuilding at Canterbury.

The architectural vision was not abandoned by Canterbury when they decided to remake their seals once again in the thirteenth century (figs 9 and 10). Markus Späth has argued that while the building on the obverse of the new seal does not faithfully represent the physical church at Canterbury, the arrangement of imagery does suggest a topographical liturgical/devotional arrangement within the church.[34] Yet, an often overlooked piece of text situated around the central doorway and wall suggests that we may be looking at something different. On the lintel below the pediment of the doorway is a line of text which begins a rhyming couplet: "EST DOMUS H' X'I", and underneath: "MURI METROPO' ISTI" ("est domus hoc Christi/ Muri Metropolitani isti"). A walled city containing the house of Christ is suggestive of another apocalyptic event, that of John's vision of the Holy City from Revelation 21:

> Then I saw "a new heaven and a new earth," for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God."

Figure 9

Unknown maker, *Canterbury Cathedral third seal*, obverse, cast, circa 1232/33. Collection of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries of London.

Figure 10

Unknown maker, *Canterbury cathedral third seal*, reverse, cast, circa 1232/33. Collection of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries of London.

It is not surprising that Canterbury replaced the "temple" with the Holy City as the major sign on their seal around 1232/33. Henry III was exploiting the vacant see at Canterbury, and incorporating a visionary image in their seal which edged the apocalyptic narrative ever closer to the final judgement might have been part of Canterbury's methods for announcing its displeasure. It is the power of the architectural sign as vision and fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy which is specifically being addressed; the vision in Revelation answering a question posed in 1 Kings 8:27:

> *But will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you. How much less this temple I have built! . . . May your eyes be open toward this temple night and day, this place of which you said, "My Name shall be there," so that you will hear the prayer your servant prays toward this place.*

The images on these seals clearly acted as signs and not solely as architectural representations or indexes of the corporate identity of the monastic community. These signs could communicate in a variety of ways, one being to address contemporary concerns to kings, popes, and others who would meddle in the affairs of the institution. The choice of Becket's martyrdom for the reverse is theocratically potent when viewed in this way. Each time Canterbury came to remake their seals they reflected on their own sigillographic history, innovating and altering the architectural image with acute awareness of meaning; always employing the potential of the visionary architectural image.

The concept of the "temple of justice" comes to Chichester from Canterbury through the images on its seals. It then travels to us via the inscription on the Chichester matrix, which suggests that the allegorical significance was transferred through referencing this visual model. Unlike the Chichester seal there is no line of text to help identify the Canterbury structure as such. Its very

existence on the Chichester seal suggests that whoever was responsible for its production wanted to make sure the image was identified as such. The "temple of justice" is referenced here, for the only other known time, 2 millimetres high and cut into silver under the image of a building.

## Bishop Ralph Neville as Patron of the Chichester Seals

The twelfth-century remaking of the Canterbury seals occurred within the context of the implementation of Roman law in England. This was not the situation when Chichester's new seals were made; it was not a liberty and there is no evidence that jurisprudence was practised there. The relationship in Salisbury's *Policraticus* between the proper model of kingship (based on the actions of either historical or Old Testament exempla) and the law as administered by the current monarch had a profound effect on thinking and art-making in England.[35] Salisbury's framework was favoured by high ranking clergy when denouncing the actions of the monarch.[36] In the thirteenth century bishops came to see themselves as "peacemakers" who sought to reform the monarchy.[37] This is the context in which the Chichester seals were produced.

The appropriation of the format of the Canterbury seals at Chichester helps to refine their date of production. Chichester's major seal and counterseal must surely have been made before 1233, at which time Canterbury's third seals can be documented and the earlier pair were put out of use. Although it is impossible to identify a maker there is sufficient evidence for the patron. Ralph Neville became bishop-elect of Chichester in 1222 and was consecrated in 1224.[38] In 1218 he had been granted custody of Henry III's first Great Seal and was effectively in control of the chancery.[39] This was not the first time he had held proxy within the political centre, as he had been keeper of the Great Seal at least once previously during the monarchy of King John. The historical moment at which Neville first appears is characterized by profound political and religious upheaval culminating in the Interdict, the Barons' War, and the creation of Magna Carta.[40] There is little evidence to suggest that Neville was present at Runnymede in 1215, however his name does appear as Ralph of Chichester on the 1225 version of Magna Carta. David D'Avray has shown the importance of understanding Stephen Langton's biblical exegesis in relation to his involvement with Magna Carta, especially for the reissues of 1223 and 1225.[41] Theocracy as opposed to monarchy was a potent principle amongst the bishops in the circle of Stephen Langton, who in his scholarship presented himself as an Old Testament prophet.[42]

Figure 11

Unknown maker, *Counterseal of bishop Ralph Neville*, cast, circa 1222–24. Collection of the Society of Antiquaries of London. Digital image courtesy of Society of Antiquaries of London.

Three partial examples exist of the episcopal seals of Ralph Neville as bishop of Chichester.[43] His major seal shows an image of a standing bishop, with his right hand held in blessing and a crozier in his left. The legend on the seal reads: "RADVLFUS DEI GRATIA . . . TRENSIS EPISCOPVS". There is nothing surprising about the format or design of this seal. However, impressions of Neville's counterseal survive, and it was as inventive as the seals produced for Chichester Cathedral (fig. 11). The counterseal shows an enthroned Christ in Judgement situated on an arch and contained within a trefoil canopy. The image is almost a counterfeit of the cathedral's counterseal, reproducing—or perhaps even inventing—its iconography of the seated Christ positioned between two micro-architectural towers. The major differences between the two are the inclusion of Neville as supplicant inside of the arch below Christ and the legend, which is an elegant and bold rhyming couplet: "TE VOLO REGE REGI/XPE VIGIL ESTO GREGI" ("I wish you as king to the king, Christ be watchman to the flock").[44]

There is no reason to doubt that Neville's seal and counterseal were made between 1222 when he was bishop-elect and 1224 at the time of his consecration, when he would have needed a set of seals reflecting his new status. As appointed keeper of the Royal Great Seal for Henry III, he combined his titles in his *Acta*, "dei gratia Cyc' episcopus domini regis cancellarius", confirming the ways in which his religious and secular offices were perceived and promoted simultaneously. There are two possible reasons why the image from the institutional counterseal ended up on Neville's counterseal—or vice versa. The first is that the cathedral's seal and counterseal already existed by 1222/24 when Neville took up office, and for whatever reason he imitated that which already existed. The second is that Neville was at least partly responsible for conceiving of the entire sigillographic programme implemented and used at Chichester. I am inclined towards the latter, and will offer my reasons in due course—but first we must establish doubts regarding the former.

The fact that Neville's counterseal was a version of the counterseal of the cathedral for which he was spiritually responsible was anomalous and unprecedented at any earlier date. His counterseal was the basis for the seals of successive bishops, Richard de la Wych and John Climpling.[45] Elsewhere, beginning with Hubert Walter in the late twelfth century, archbishops of Canterbury ceased using classical gems in their counterseals and started using an image of the martyrdom of Thomas Becket. Those succeeding Walter in the arch-episcopate followed him in this respect.[46] This provides evidence for the reuse of image types on episcopal counterseals by a succession of bishops at an institution, the difference being that in this instance they went from archbishop to archbishop, rather than from institutional counterseal to episcopal counterseal. Richard Poore held the bishopric of Chichester before Ralph Neville, and is thus a potential

candidate for the iconographical ingenuity of the seals. No seals connected to his short episcopacy survive, however they do from his time at both Salisbury and Durham.[47] On neither occasion were the institutional seals altered, and his episcopal seals bear no relation to those of the cathedrals.

## The Key of David

I have so far argued that the maker of the Chichester seals based his work on an unknown eleventh-century seal made for the cathedral, in combination with the second set of seals made for Canterbury in the middle of the twelfth century. There are, however, important deviations from the earliest archetypes and the Canterbury seals that need to be addressed, ones which I believe emphasize the role of the half-open door and its allegorical potential. If a representation of the "temple of justice" was desired, the second Canterbury seals make the point sufficiently well. The imagery on the cathedral's and Neville's counterseals explicitly emphasizes Ezekiel's vision of the new temple and the return of Glory to the Temple, including a vision of the throne. The description preceding this vision is characterized by an explicit use of anti-monarchical language: "The house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name, neither they nor their kings by their whoring, and by the corpses of their kings at their death" (Ezekiel 43:7). This interpretation steers close to contemporary ecclesiastical theocracy which sought the reforming of secular monarchical judgement within a framework of biblical exegesis. The legend on Neville's counterseal is theocratic, wishing Christ to be "King to the King" and citing his watching of the flock. This reference is to Ezekiel 34:11–31, where God's judgement is played out metaphorically ("As for you, my flock . . . I shall judge between sheep and sheep, between rams and goats"), further serves to make the point.

Ralph Neville must have looked to biblical, exegetical, and polemical writings for the creation of his authority. The passage in Salisbury's *Policraticus*, from which the "temple of justice" is derived explicitly, states that "princes" should look to the law—like Justinian, "that most Christian prince"—and imitate priests:

> And not only are men enjoined to take priests as models for imitation, but the prince is expressly sent to the tribe of Levi to borrow of them. For lawful priests are to be hearkened to in such fashion that the just man shall close his ear utterly to reprobates and all who speak evil against them.[48]

The architectural archetype was well suited to Neville's needs, as it allowed him to make complex and multifaceted associations between Old and New Testaments. Herein lies the reason for why a half-open door was included in the centre of the building. This allegorical representation addresses Neville's dual administrative roles as bishop and royal chancellor, by promoting his association with an Old Testament palace administrator named Eliakim. He served the good king Hezekiah who was himself a model for good kingship as referenced by Salisbury alongside David and Josiah.[49] Eliakim's authority was not derived from the king but was granted by God, much as Neville's authority was God-given—and derived from a council of the realm—rather than monarchical. In the Old Testament the symbol of Eliakim's authority is a key given to him by God. Described as the Key of David, it has the power to open and shut any door:

> On that day I will call my servant Eliakim son of Hilkiah, and will clothe him with your robe and bind your sash on him. I will commit your authority to his hand, and he shall be father to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and to the house of Judah. I will place on his shoulder the key of the house of David; he shall open, and no one shall shut, he shall shut and no one shall open. (Isaiah 22:20)

This key reappears in Revelation alongside the vision of the open door and God's ultimate judgement of mankind:

> And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of the holy one, the true one, who has the Key of David, who opens and no one will shut, who shuts and no one opens: "I know your works. Look, I have set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut . . . If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it." (Revelation 3:7–13)

## Conclusion

A proper analysis of the Chichester seal matrix must extend beyond the purely visual. Through an intertwined discussion of text and image, the matrix and its anachronistic architectural image have provided a lens through which to view and think about the role of allusion and exegesis in mediating historical interpretation. It is not surprising that an archetypal image was selected as the central image for the Chichester seal, any more than its choice of the two-seal format borrowed from Canterbury. It is the way in which the artist and patron worked together to transform the general meanings implicit in the archetype that make the Chichester seals outstanding examples of their genre.

At the end of the twelfth century a revolution in ecclesiastical seal making took place in the south and south-east of England and parts of Scotland. Beginning in 1198–99 at St Augustine's, Canterbury, a new vogue took off for double-sided seals—borrowed from the format of the Royal Great Seal. This was followed quickly by other institutions, such as Westminster Abbey.[50] These two-sided seals would eventually replace the highly inventive large round seal plus the smaller counterseal type first used at Christ Church, Canterbury, which was ultimately the format adopted by Chichester (fig. 4). The seals from around 1200 are inventive in numerous aspects: in their employment of ever more complex literary constructs in the legends, as feats of miniature technical sculptural achievement, and as iconographically rich indexes of the image-conscious corporate bodies which they represent. In terms of format, the patron and maker of the Chichester seals rejected these technical and artistic developments in seal making in favour of Canterbury's older, established, and specific model. The central image of the Chichester matrix was not selected for its antiquity alone however, but for the authority vested in it as an archetype.

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## About the author

Lloyd de Beer is Curator: Medieval Britain and Europe in the department of Britain, Europe and Prehistory at the British Museum, where he has worked since 2012. He recently curated the blockbuster exhibition *Thomas Becket: Murder and the Making of a Saint*. In January 2022 Lloyd began a three-year fellowship, jointly funded by the British Academy and the Wolfson Foundation, working on a project called *The Age of Copper, Ivory and Gold: England and West Africa in the Middle Ages*.

## Footnotes

1. The matrix has been dated to the early thirteenth century by several authors. T. A. Heslop is the most specific and situates it to around 1220. See Walter de Gray Birch, *Catalogue of Seals in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Museum*, Vol. 1 (London: British Museum, 1887), 210; Birch, *Seals* (London: Methuen, 1907), 79; T. A. Heslop, "Seal Matrix of Chichester Cathedral", in *Age of Chivalry: Art in Plantagenet England 1200-1400,* ed. J. J. G. Alexander and P. Binski, exh. cat (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1987), 398, cat. no. 455; James Robinson, "Appendix", in *Good Impressions: Image and Authority in Medieval Seals*, ed. N. Adams, J. Cherry, and J. Robinson (London: British Museum, 2008), 109; and A. B. Tonnochy, *Catalogue of British Seal-Dies in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1952), 162–63.
2. Heslop, *Age of Chivalry*, 398.
3. Philippa M. Hoskin, ed., *English Episcopal Acta 22: Chichester, 1215–1253* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), xxxv.
4. P. D. A. Harvey and Andrew McGuinness, eds., *A Guide to British Medieval Seals* (Dorchester: Dorset Press, 1996), 98.
5. Heslop, *Age of Chivalry*, 398.
6. T. A. Heslop, "Seals as Evidence for Metalworking in the Later Twelfth Century", in *Art and Patronage in the English Romanesque*, ed. S. Macready and F. H. Thompson, Society of Antiquaries Occasional Papers n.s. 8 (London: Society of Antiquaries, 1986), 52; Heslop, "Seal Matrix", 398.
7. G. Zarnecki, ed., *English Romanesque Art, 1066–1200*, exh. cat. (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1984), cat. no. 309, 288; Heslop, "Seals as Evidence", 57–58.
8. There are two ways in which this text might be translated, firstly: "the cross [+] is the seal of the holy church of Chichester", and secondly: "the seal of the holy church of Chichester". See P. D. A. Harvey, "This is a Seal", in *Seals and their Context in the Middle Ages*, ed. Phillipp Schofield (Oxford: Oxbow, 2015), 1–6.
9. Kathleen Edwards, *The English Secular Cathedrals in the Middle Ages* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1967), 137–48; Everett U. Crosby, *Bishop and Chapter in Twelfth-Century England: A Study of the Mensa Episcopalis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 257–69.
10. Birch, *Catalogue of Seals*, 299: for Lincoln see 271 and York see 382.
11. The legend on the ad causas seal reads: "S' DECANI. ET CAPITVLI. CICESTRENS' [AS CAV]SAS". See Birch, *Catalogue of Seals*, 210–11. Birch dates the matrix for this seal to the thirteenth century.
12. The only place where they have been brought together is in Birch, *Catalogue of Seals*, 210. This is simply the catalogue record for BL.1469 which dates from 1523.
13. This charter is Sele Ch.27 and is dated 1253. For further details, see William Macray's unpublished catalogue of Magdalen College Deeds held at Magdalen College, 103. There is an earlier charter held at East Sussex Record Office dated to 1249. This charter is SAS-G47-16s, and although the obverse of the wax is in good condition the reverse is fragmentary. Two later charters also exist bearing both seal and counter seal: the first is HEH BA Vol 42/1527, dated 1262, which is held at the Huntingdon Library in California. The second is BL.1462, dated to 1523 and held at the British Library. My gratitude to Jessica Berenbeim, John McEwan, and Christopher Whittick for bringing these documents to my attention.

14. Bible translations here and elsewhere are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan House, 1984).

15. Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought: Meditation, Rhetoric, and the Making of Images, 400–1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 269–71.

16. Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 241.

17. Carruthers, *Craft of Thought*, 228–30. The Milan ivory is Inv. Avori 9 in the collection of the Museo Delle Arti Decorative.

18. Walter Kahn, "Architecture and Exegesis: Richard of St.-Victor's Ezekiel Commentary and its Illustrations", *The Art Bulletin* 76, no. 1 (March 1994): 53–68.

19. T.A. Heslop, "The Implication of the Utrecht Psalter in English Romanesque Art", in *Romanesque Art and Thought in the Twelfth Century*, ed. C. Hourihane (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 284.

20. Bede, *On the Temple*, trans. Sean Connolly (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1995), 24.

21. T. A. Heslop, '"The Conventual Seals of Canterbury Cathedral, 1066—1232' 1232", in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Canterbury before 1220*, ed. N. Coldstream and P. Draper, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 5 (Leeds: Maney,1982), 94.

22. Heslop, "Conventual Seals", 97.

23. Margaret Gibson, T. A. Heslop, and Richard W. Pfaff, eds., *The Eadwine Psalter: Text, Image, and Monastic Culture in Twelfth-Century Canterbury* (London and University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1992), 60.

24. Eric Fernie, "The Romanesque Piers of Norwich Cathedral", *Norfolk Archaeology* 36, no. 4 (1977) 383–86; Fernie, "The Spiral Piers of Durham Cathedral", in *Medieval Art and Architecture at Durham Cathedral*, ed. N. Coldstream and P. Draper, British Archaeological Association Conference Transactions 3 (London: Routledge, 1980), 49–58.

25. Fernie, "Romanesque Piers", 385.

26. See Helen Lunnon's contribution to this issue for a fuller discussion of Solomon's porch. My Thanks to Helen for sharing her paper with me before publication.

27. See Bede, *On the Temple*, 24.

28. John of Salisbury, *Policratici sive De nugis curialium et vestigiis philosophorum libri VIII*, ed. C. C. I. Webb, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), 2: 399: "Tempore regis Stephani a regno iussae sunt leges Romanae quas in Britanniam domus unerabilis patris Theobaldi Britanniarum primatis asciuerat. Ne quis etiam libros retineret edicto region prohibitum est et Vacario nostro indictum silentium; sed Deo faciente, eo magis uirtus legis inualuit quo eam amplius nitebatur impietas infirmare." Translation taken from John of Salisbury, *The Statesman's Book: Policraticus*, trans. John Dickinson (New York: Knopf, 1927), 396–97.

29. Jason Taliadoros, *Law and Theology in Twelfth-Century England: The Works of Master Vacarius (c. 1115/1120–c. 1200)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 9.

30. *Patrologia Latina* 72: 1090D: "Cumque haec materia summa nostri numinis liberalitate collecta fuerit, oportet eam pulcherrimo opere exstruere, et quasi proprium et sanctissimum templum justitiae consecrare."

31. John of Salisbury, *Policratici*, 1: 253: "Justinianus et Leo qui fuerint ex eo claret, quod totum orbem sacratissimis legibus encleatis, quasi quodam templum justitiae sacrare studuerunt." Translation from Salisbury, *Statesman's Book*, 25.

32. Peter Fergusson, *Canterbury Cathedral Priory in the Age of Becket* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale University Press, 2011), 81–144.

33. Fergusson, *Canterbury Cathedral*, 94.

34. Markus Späth*,* "Architectural Representation and Monastic Identity: The Medieval Seal Images of Christchurch Canterbury", in *Image, Memory and Devotion: Liber Amicorum Paul Crossley*, ed. Z. Opacic and A. Timmermann (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 255–63.

35. Paul Binksi, "The Painted Chamber at Westminster, the Fall of Tyrants and the English Literary Model of Governance", *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 74 (2011): 121–54.

36. See Binski, "Painted Chamber", 135.

37. Sophie Ambler, *Bishops in the Political Community of England, 1213–1272* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 9.

38. For a brief outline of Ralph Neville's life, see Hoskin, ed., *English Episcopal Acta 22*, xxxi–xxxv.

39. David Carpenter, "Chancellor Ralph de Neville and Plans of Political Reform, 1215–1258", in *Thirteenth Century England II: Proceedings of the Newcastle upon Tyne Conference 1987*, ed. P. R. Coss and S. D. Lloyd (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 1988), 70. Hoskin, *English Episcopal Acta 22*, xxxi.

40. Nicholas Vincent, "Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury", in *Étienne Langton: Prédicateur, Bibliste, Théologien*, ed. Louis-Jacques Bataillon, Nicole Bériou, Gilbert Dahan, and Riccardo Quinto (Turnhout: Brepols, 2010), 64.

41. David D'Avray, "Magna Carta: Its Background in Stephen Langton's Academic Biblical Exegesis and its Episcopal Reception:, *Studi Medievali*, 3rd ser., 38, Fasc. I (1997): 423–38.

42. Vincent, "Stephen Langton", 86.

43. Hoskin, *English Episcopal Acta 22*, lxxii.

44. The legend is misread in Hoskin, *English Episcopal Acta*, lxxii, which records it as: "TE VOLO REGERE SI VIS VIGIL ESTO GREGI". I read the legend as a Leonine verse which places it in line with other bishops' counterseals of the period. I would like to thank John Jenkins, John Cherry, Amy Jeffs, and Sandy Heslop for their assistance with the translation of this legend.

45. Hoskin, *English Episcopal Acta*, lxvi–lxvii.

46. It was only much later that Becket's martyrdom appeared on the conventual seals of Canterbury Cathedral. See Heslop, "Conventual Seals", 94–100.

47. Birch, *Catalogue of Seals*, 341 (Salisbury), 397 (Durham).

48. John of Salisbury, *Policratici*, 1: 251: "Et non modo sacerdotes exemplaria peti praecipit sed ad Leuiticam tribum, mutuandi gratia, principem mittit. Sic enim legitimi sacerdotes audiendi sunt, ut reprobis et ascendentibus ex aduerso omnem uir iustus claudat auditum." Translation from John of Salisbury, *Statesman's Book*, 25.

49. John of Salisbury, *Policratici*, 1: 252.

50. Harvey and McGuinness, eds., *British Medieval Seals*, 103–4.

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