

The Legal Document (Copenhagen, 15–16 May 25)

University of Copenhagen, Saxo-Institute, May 15–16, 2025

Deadline: Dec 31, 2024

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The Legal Document in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Period: Visuality, Materiality, and Performance.

The aim of this 2-day interdisciplinary conference is to highlight and explore the visuality, material properties, and performative aspects of legal documents and their role in legal communication across regional and cultural borders (including the pre- and early modern worlds of Africa, Asia, and the Ancient Americas) and within a broadly conceived time frame from antiquity to ca. 1500. Building on Peter Rück's (+) pioneering work on the aesthetics of early medieval German charters and Brigitte M. Bedos-Rezak's inspiring studies on the complexities of French medieval seals, recent focus on legal documents as objects shaped by aesthetic, material, and performative concerns, has opened up new ways of investigating this fascinating body of material, in particular within a European context. What is the role of eye-catching seal attachments, complex graphic signs, artfully written calligraphy, and ritual acts of conveyance for the authenticity of legal charters? Can we recognize common factors in the conceptual thinking about legal documents and their corroboration across different cultural, religious, and temporal divides? How is the carefully designed visuality and materiality of a charter transferred into an officially approved copy? Another emphasis is set to investigate the performative aspects of medieval charters in rituals, their multi-sensorial reception in these contexts, and their materialities.

Through these and related questions and thematic focus, this conference aims to bring together scholars of history, art history, diplomatics, archaeology, auxiliary sciences, and related fields, interested in legal documents and communication. With such a more broadly conceived platform of discussion, we are curious to bridge the gap between disciplines, geographical and temporal borders and eager to engage in a debate within a more globally envisioned Middle Ages and Early Modern Period.

Papers should be 25-30 minutes long. Confirmed keynote speaker is Brigitte Miriam Bedos-Rezak (New York University). The conference will take place on May 15th and 16th, 2025 in the Saxo-Institute at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. For speakers, travel, accommodation and meals related to the conference will be covered by the Novo Nordisk Foundation. Conference papers are expected to be published in a peer-reviewed anthology. Paper proposals (1 page), accompanied by a brief CV (2 pages), should be sent to Nino Zchomelidse (Nino@hum.ku.dk) and/or Carsten Jahnke (Jahnke@hum.ku.dk) before December 31st, 2024.

Reference:

CFP: The Legal Document (Copenhagen, 15-16 May 25). In: Arthist.net, Dec 5, 2024 (accessed Jul 30, 2025), <<https://arthist.net/archive/43473>>.