



Questioned Documents - 2017

J8 Revealing Hidden Information From the Reverse Side of a Questioned Document

Nadeem-Ul-Hassan Khan, MPhil, Punjab Forensic Science Agency, Thokar Niaz Baig, Lahore, Providence of Punjab 53700, PAKISTAN; Khurram W. Mahmood, MPhil*, Punjab Forensic Science Agency, Thokar Niaz Baig, Lahore, Punjab, PAKISTAN; Muhammad Irfan Ashiq, PhD*, Punjab Forensic Science Agency, Old Multan Road, Thokar Niaz Baig, Lahore, Punjab 54500, PAKISTAN; and Mohammad A. Tahir, PhD*, Punjab Forensic Science Agency, Thokar Niaz Baig, Multan Road, Lahore, Punjab, PAKISTAN*

The goals of this presentation are to: (1) serve as an all-round practice session for practicing document examiners; (2) provide valuable learning experience for newcomers in the profession; (3) highlight the importance of detailed examination of a questioned document that can reveal different kinds of information; and, (4) discuss the circumstances in which the reverse side of the questioned document can provide additional clues to the contents written/printed on the front side of the questioned document.

This presentation will impact the forensic science community by educating attendees how extended repertoire, non-destructive examinations can still be used to clarify specimens that are obscured and complicated. When non-destructive ink differentiation fails on the document's front side, examination options on the reverse side of the same document can lead to the successful detection of multiple writing instruments used in the area of the alleged tampering.

Background: The job of the forensic document examiner is to analyze, compare, and evaluate the questioned document in order to determine genuineness or non-genuineness, to expose forgery, or to decipher alteration using a variety of techniques. When examining a piece of writing for alleged tampering, one of the things the examiner looks for is any difference in the writing instrument/ink used. This will consequently result in one of two findings: (1) that the writing instrument(s) used in the area of the questioned writing is similar/same; or, (2) that more than one (different) writing instruments have been used. In the latter scenario, the interpretation is usually easier; whereas in the former, there may be no tampering or tampering using the same or similar enough writing instrument. The examination may become complicated when the suspected tampered area of writing involves writing instruments having similar enough ink composition to evade differentiation by commonly used non-destructive methods. Such disputed documents prove to be more demanding for the document examiner, and the use of non-conventional techniques accompanied by problem solving approaches become essential.

Method: A few cases are notable in that the question is solved in an unusual and unexpected manner. The case to be discussed required determination of alleged tampering in a questioned cheque. The inks/writing instruments were so similar that the conventional use of light sources and fluorescence filters available in the video spectral comparator (VSC-6000) were unable to differentiate the writings. The examiner was sure that "something" was suspicious about the questioned document, and continued to investigate. At last, by using an unusual and different approach by examining the reverse side of the questioned document, and this approach resulted in the discovery of remarkable evidence that was sufficient to prove alleged tampering in the disputed document. The rear of the document revealed a new dimension for examination of the writing present on the front side. This technique focused not on ink differentiation but towards physical differences in interaction of ink and paper indicating clues about time of writing as well as difference in writing pressure. This approach resulted not only in a number of findings sufficient to prove tampering in the questioned document but also provided probative evidence to the investigation.



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Conclusion: Using an extended repertoire, non-destructive examination can still be used to clarify specimens that are obscured and complicated. Where non-destructive ink differentiation fails on the documents front side, examination options on the reverse side of the same documents can lead to successful detection of multiple writing instruments used in the area of alleged tampering.

Forensic Document Examination, Non-Destructive Examination, Tampering