



J18 Crossing Borders: Issues From Inter-Jurisdictional Casework

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Learning Overview: After attending this presentation, attendees will be aware of the inter-jurisdictional nature of questioned document examination casework.

Impact on the Forensic Science Community: This presentation will impact the forensic science community by educating attendees about the challenges and limitations that are associated with inter-jurisdictional work in forensic document examination.

Forensic science has been inter-jurisdictional in nature from earliest times in the various disciplines. As one of the original forensic disciplines, Questioned Documents has myriad examples of this. Some of the earliest reported cases of forgery are accounts of counterfeit travel documents from the far reaches of the world. In approximately 450 BC is the first mention of a written letter from a Persian official requesting safe passage from “the governors beyond the river” as he crossed their lands.¹ Consequently, throughout history, documents such as laissez-passer, passports, currency, and other official documents from foreign jurisdictions have had to be forensically examined to determine authenticity and veracity.

In more modern times, there has been a broadening of the inter-jurisdictional nature of forensic work to include training and other collaboration. Forensic document examination has matured as a discipline over the past century in North America, Europe, and select other areas of the world. Recently, there has been a concerted effort to promote international standards in the examination of documents, including providing training to forensic scientists from all corners of the globe. Further, venues such as the American Academy of Forensic Sciences and other forensic conferences provide opportunity to share knowledge across borders. This learning is multi-path as traditional examiners learn equally from examiners of foreign scripts, for example. It has become commonplace to receive requests for forensic document examination services from foreign entities, about foreign entities, and concerning documents of foreign origin, source, manufacture, etc. This may bring certain elements of challenge and limitation to the examination.

Another issue in working on inter-jurisdictional casework involves the basic logistics of physically receiving the case (continuity of evidence included), or establishing where items will be examined. This may perhaps involve remote field examinations that pose other specific challenges from technical (such as power supply and ventilation) to space requirements and security.

There are examples of inter-jurisdictional cases that involve the prosecution of suspected war criminals and those charged with crimes against humanity in which security concerns add a real element of danger that may be foreign to the traditional forensic document examiner.

A daunting challenge to inter-jurisdictional work is the assurance that the forensic opinions issued in a report are received and understood with the same weight as they were written and intended. Clarity of message is crucial in all forensic reporting; this challenge is increased considerably if there are differences in language, legal system, customs, and culture.

Each of these challenges will be touched upon in this presentation by those who have worked in some regard on the international scene. With the increase in inter-jurisdictional casework, it is important to share experiences within the forensic document examination community so that our work is clearly understood by clients and stakeholders, regardless in which and for which jurisdiction the work is conducted.

Reference(s):

¹. Holy Bible, New International Version, *Nehemiah 2: 7-9*.

Forensic Document Examiner, Inter-Jurisdiction Forensic Science, International Forensic Science