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ON TWO MEDIEVAL SEAL MATRICES  
AND THE GUILD SEALS FROM  
TALLINN

The number of surviving medieval seal matrices of corporate bodies in Europe is much smaller than that of individuals. There were far fewer institutions and corporations using a seal, and even fewer such ecclesiastical or secular institutions which continued to exist from medieval times until the nineteenth century. However, the institutional seals were more likely to be preserved through the centuries. The use of the seal of an individual was limited to his lifetime and, after his death, the object was destroyed (e.g. broken in half) or deformed (e.g. by removing the owner's name or the entire legend).<sup>1</sup> (There were some exceptions, for example when a son of the same name continued to use his father's seal.<sup>2</sup>) The seals of towns, institutions and corporations, in contrast, stayed in use for a longer time, sometimes even for centuries. Naturally, a corporate body could acquire a new seal over the course of time,<sup>3</sup> but there was not always a need or money to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> In the case of high-ranking persons, it was a public ceremony and often a part of the funeral ritual. See John Cherry, "The Breaking of Seals", *Middelalderlige seglstamper i Norden*, ed. by Michael Andersen, Göran Tegnér (Roskilde: Roskilde Museums Forlag, 2002), 81–87.

<sup>2</sup> Toni Diederich, "Mittelalterliche Siegelstempel des Rheinlandes. Beobachtungen und Schlußfolgerungen", *Middelalderlige seglstamper i Norden*, 109.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the Mayors of London decided to order a new seal in 1381 because the old one was 'small, crude and ancient, ugly and unworthy of the honour of the said city' (Cherry, "The Breaking of Seals", 92). In short, they wanted a larger and more fashionable seal.

In this article, the medieval seal matrices of institutions and corporations from the city of Tallinn (in medieval times known by the German name Reval) will be discussed. Only two of these matrices have survived: that of the parish church of St Olaf and that of the goldsmiths' corporation (Middle Low German *amt*).<sup>4</sup> In addition, the medieval seal impressions of other guilds and corporations of Tallinn will be surveyed. The time frame of this article ranges from the fourteenth century (i.e. from the earliest time that guild seals in medieval Livonia are known) to about 1525 (i.e. the approximate end of Gothic-style seals in the region).

A study of seals and how they were used can offer fascinating material for several fields of research, such as sigillography, heraldry, art history (including iconography) and diplomacy. It can also offer interesting information on the history of the attitudes and institutions of specific locations (such as, in our case, Tallinn). Seals, as with any artefacts, can also be approached from the perspective of cultural biography, consisting of the phases of their commission, production, use ('career') and, finally, discarding.<sup>5</sup> In the following, the focus is on the dating, style and iconography of the above-mentioned seals, and a brief overview of what is known about their usage will be provided.

#### THE MEDIEVAL SEAL MATRICES OF ST OLAF'S CHURCH AND THE GOLDSMITHS IN TALLINN

Both seal matrices have thus far received minimal scholarly attention. The best reference book for seals in medieval Livonia is the fourth volume (1887) in the *Brieflade* series, which contains drawings of more than 700 seal impressions.<sup>6</sup> However, this volume does not

<sup>4</sup> In the English language, unlike in German, there is no differentiation between the terms guild and craft corporation (in German *Zunft*). The medieval equivalent for *Zunft* in Livonia was *amt*. In this article, the goldsmiths' *amt* will be translated as 'guild' or 'corporation'.

<sup>5</sup> On the concept, see Igor Kopytoff, "The cultural biography of things: commodization as process", *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. by Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 64–68.

<sup>6</sup> *Est- und Livländische Brieflade 4: Siegel und Münzen*, hrsg. von Robert von Toll, Johannes Sachssendahl (Reval: Kluge und Ströhm, 1887) (hereafter *Brieflade 4*).

include all the seals known in the region.<sup>7</sup> Among others, the seals of parish churches and guilds have been left out. Nonetheless, neither of the seals discussed is unknown to scholars. The seal matrix of the Tallinn goldsmiths belongs to the Tallinn City Museum (inventory number TLM 4288), which also possesses an impression of the seal. Impressions of this seal can also be found in the Estonian History Museum. Although a photo of the seal has been published in several books on the history of goldsmiths' works or on the craftsmen in Tallinn,<sup>8</sup> the seal's function there has remained purely illustrative, meaning that one does not find there either a description or an analysis of the object. The seal matrix of St Olaf's Church is even less known: it has been in private collections since World War II and was unavailable to scholars until 2007.<sup>9</sup> One can find the image of the seal impression in an early twentieth-century publication about old church seals,<sup>10</sup> but the author did not describe it in detail or provide dates. A photo of the seal impression was published in 1995 by Küllike Kaplinski; however, she misread the legend and therefore attributed the seal to St Olaf's Guild in Tallinn.<sup>11</sup>

The rare nature of these two objects must also be stressed. In Finland, there are only ten or eleven medieval seal matrices.<sup>12</sup> In other Nordic countries, the number of extant seal matrices is consider-

<sup>7</sup> A selection of medieval seals of wealthy citizens (mainly merchants, but also some goldsmiths) can be found in Eugen von Nottbeck, *Siegel aus dem Revaler Rathssarchiv nebst Sammlung von Wappen der Revaler Rathsfamilien* (Lübeck: s.n., 1880). Some seals of vassal courts (*Manngerichte*) and judges (*Mannrichter*) can be found in Viivi Glass, "Meeskohtute pitserid Eesti Ajaloomuuseumis", *Eesti Kolleksionäär*, 1 (2) (1991), 33–37.

<sup>8</sup> Publications from the last decades: Küllike Kaplinski, *Tallinn – meistrite linn* (Tallinn: Koolibri, 1995), 179 (impression); Annelore Leistikow, *Baltisches Silber* (Lüneburg: Institut Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1996), 14 (impression); Kaalu Kirme, *Eesti hõbe. 800 aastat hõbe- ja kullassepakunsti Eestis* (Tallinn: Kunst, 2000), 18 (seal matrix); Anu Mänd, "Hans Holtappel, kullassepp", *Kümme keskaegset tallinlast* (Tallinn: Varrak, 2006), 99 (impression); Anu Mänd, *Kirikute hõbevara. Altaririistad keskaegsel Liivimaal. Eesti kirikute sisustus I* (Tallinn: Muinsuskaitseamet, 2008), 56–57 (seal matrix and impression).

<sup>9</sup> The seal was bought about 15 years ago by the antiquary Jaanus Idla, who in 2007 deposited it in the Art Museum of Estonia. The object is exhibited in the Silver Chamber of the Niguliste Museum.

<sup>10</sup> Ernst Campenhausen-Loddiger, *Die alten Siegel der evangelisch-lutherischen Kirchen in Rußland* (Riga: Scheffer, 1902), 31.

<sup>11</sup> Kaplinski, *Tallinn – meistrite linn*, 54. Kaplinski deciphered the legend incorrectly as follows: *Sligillum] blealti olavi coln]fraternitatis] rle]ualia*.

<sup>12</sup> Visa Immonen, *Golden Moments: Artefacts of Precious Metals as Products of Luxury Consumption in Finland c. 1200–1600*. *Archaeologia Medii Aevi Finlandiae*, 16 (Turku: Suomen keskiajan arkeologian seura, 2009), Vol. 1, Text, 300–304, Vol. 2, Catalogue, 160–163, no. 1–11.



Fig. 1. Silver seal matrix of St Olaf's Church in Tallinn, 2nd half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Diameter 44 mm. Private collection. Photo by Stanislav Stepashko.

ably higher (e.g. in Sweden about 550, and in Danish museums about 450),<sup>13</sup> but it still forms only a small part of the number of known seal impressions. Among the surviving seal matrices, those engraved in silver are the rarest. The most common materials for seal matrices were copper alloys, particularly bronze. For instance, out of the 450 seal matrices in Denmark, 85% are of bronze, 13% of pewter, 1% of silver and 1% of other materials (bone, semi-precious stone etc.).<sup>14</sup> Silver was expensive, and only wealthy individuals or corporate bodies could afford to have silver seals, expressing their status. Silver is also easily workable, and seals cut in silver are generally more elegant and detailed than those cut in other materials.

The two seal matrices from Tallinn are quite similar to each other in style. Both of them are circular in form, with a standing figure of the patron saint in the middle, surrounded by a legend in

<sup>13</sup> Henrik Klackenbergh, Göran Tegnér, "Sigillstamper i svenska samlingar", *Middelalderlige seglstamper i Norden*, 25; Michael Andersen, "Seglstamper fra middelalderen i danske samlinger", *Ibidem*, 61.

<sup>14</sup> Andersen, "Seglstamper fra middelalderen", 66–67.



Fig. 2. Silver seal matrix of St Olaf's Church in Tallinn. Photo by Stanislav Stepashko.



Fig. 3. Seal impression of St Olaf's Church. Estonian History Museum, P 3734. Photo from the 1930s.



Fig. 4. Silver seal matrix of the Tallinn goldsmiths, c. 1500. Diameter 30 mm. Tallinn City Museum, TLM 4288. Photo by Stanislav Stepashko.

Gothic minuscule lettering. The seal of St Olaf's Church (Fig. 1, 2, 3) depicts King Olaf Haraldsson of Norway standing in semi-profile and wearing a crown. In his right hand, he is holding his attribute, a battleaxe, and in his left hand, an orb. The saint's head is surrounded by a halo. The legend is written on a scroll running around the seal. It reads: *S[igillum] s[an]c[t]i olavi ecc[lesi]e r[e]ual[ensis]*, i.e. the 'seal of St Olaf's Church of Reval'. Between the words, one can see stars and flowers. The curved bands on both sides of the saint are likewise decorated with flower motifs. The diameter of the seal is 44 mm. The turned wooden handle was added in the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

The seal matrix of the goldsmiths (Fig. 4, 5, 6) is smaller than that of St Olaf's Church: its diameter is only 30 mm. The seal depicts St Eligius (Eloy), the patron saint of goldsmiths, in front view.<sup>15</sup> He is represented as a bishop with a mitre and a crosier. In his right hand,

<sup>15</sup> St Eligius (c. 588–660), the bishop of Noyon and Tournai, also worked as a goldsmith and master of the mint in Marseille. He is not only the patron of goldsmiths but also of blacksmiths and other metalworkers.



Fig. 5. Silver seal matrix of the Tallinn goldsmiths, c. 1500. Photo by Stanislav Stepashko.



Fig. 6. Seal impression of the goldsmiths. Estonian History Museum, P 3788. Photo by Ivar Leimus.

he is holding a small hammer. At the base of the seal, there is a shield, decorated with a double drinking cup and tiny stars. The legend is again designed as a scroll. It reads: *S[igillum] der golt smede i[n] reuel*, i.e. the 'seal of the goldsmiths in Reval'.<sup>16</sup> The wooden handle originates from the seventeenth or eighteenth century.

It is difficult to date the common seals of institutions with great precision, unless there is information on when exactly the object was obtained. Sometimes, the earliest surviving document bearing a seal can be of assistance, but in most cases the dating is based on stylistic analysis. If the design of the seals of St Olaf's Church and of the goldsmiths are compared with other seals from medieval Livonia, it can be suggested that they date from the second half of the fifteenth century or from the first decades of the sixteenth century.<sup>17</sup> This is indicated by the style of the figures and the motifs used (flowers and stars), and by the legend on the scroll. The seal of the goldsmiths has some additional features that allow us to specify the dating. Shields with a round end were characteristic of the fifteenth century and also of the first decades of the sixteenth century, becoming widespread beginning in the 1470s.<sup>18</sup> In the second quarter of the sixteenth century, this form was gradually replaced by Renaissance shields, elaborately decorated with dents and bends. About the same time, in the 1520s and 1530s, the Gothic scripts on the seal legends were replaced with Renaissance humanistic scripts.<sup>19</sup> Another characteristic feature on the Tallinn goldsmiths' seal is the double cup, a vessel in which both the cup and the cover were used for drinking. In the Gothic period, the vessel frequently had a handle, an element which disappeared later on. Such double cups became popular in the second half of the fourteenth century; however, those with a melon-shaped form, as depicted on the goldsmiths' seal, became widespread beginning in the early

<sup>16</sup> An inscription containing both Latin and German words was not unusual. For example, the legend on the mid-fifteenth century seal of the Wrocław (Breslau) goldsmiths reads: *Sigillom d[er] czeghe d[er] goltsmide zu breslaw*. Johann Michael Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst der Gotik in Mitteleuropa* (München: Beck, 1982), fig. 4.

<sup>17</sup> *Brieflade 4*, plate (pl.) 7, no. 9–11, pl. 20, no. 26, pl. 27, no. 40, pl. 31, no. 11, pl. 37, no. 14, 16, 18, pl. 41, no. 14, pl. A, no. C.

<sup>18</sup> *Brieflade 4*, e.g. pl. 31, no. 4–9, 11, pl. 37, no. 14–18, pl. 41, no. 11–14.

<sup>19</sup> *Brieflade 4*, e.g. pl. 32, 38, 42, 43.

sixteenth century.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the foot of the depicted cup is in Gothic style. If all the named elements are considered, it can be suggested that both seal matrices were made within the years 1470–1520. It is likely that the seal of St Olaf's Church is the earlier of the two, originating in the second half of the fifteenth century, whereas the seal of the goldsmiths can be dated to around 1500.

It is difficult to say why the church and the goldsmiths' corporation decided to obtain a seal exactly at that point. The history of both institutions is much older: St Olaf's Church is first mentioned in documents in 1267, and the statutes (Middle Low German *schra*) of the Tallinn goldsmiths were confirmed in 1393.<sup>21</sup> Seals as a means of authenticating documents were already widespread in the thirteenth century. Naturally, one cannot be entirely certain that the preserved seals are the oldest ones that St Olaf's Church and the goldsmiths possessed, although this seems likely. It may well be the case that they did not need a seal prior to the fifteenth century, when the amount of written documentation remarkably grew in comparison with previous centuries. It can be surmised that the purchase of the seals around 1500 was caused by the trends of the time and the increase in wealth, rather than by a specific legislative act which needed to be validated in a modern manner.

#### ON THE SEALS OF TALLINN GUILDS

In this section, the other guild seals from medieval Tallinn will be discussed. The seals of St Canute's Guild and St Olaf's Guild, two guilds that united craftsmen, are undoubtedly the oldest ones (Fig. 7, 8). On both of them, the patron saint of the guild is seated on a throne. St Canute (Knud) is holding royal insignia: a sceptre with a lily on top

<sup>20</sup> See Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst der Gotik*, fig. 364–366, 536, 643, 864–865; *Silver*, ed. by Philippa Glanville (London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1999), 18; Renate Scholz, *Goldschmiedearbeiten. Renaissance und Barock* (Hamburg: Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, 1974), 9.

<sup>21</sup> *Liv-, Esth- und Curländisches Urkundenbuch nebst Regesten*, Bd. 1, hrsg. von Friedrich Georg von Bunge (Reval: Kluge und Ströhm, 1853), no. 404; Bd. 3, hrsg. von Friedrich Georg von Bunge (Reval: Kluge und Ströhm, 1855), no. 1343.



Fig. 7. Seal impression of St Canute's Guild in Tallinn, 1st half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Diameter 65 mm. Estonian History Museum, P 3770. Photo by Merilis Sähka.

and an orb.<sup>22</sup> The sides of the throne are decorated with lion's heads. The legend is in Gothic majuscules: *SIGILLVM CONFRATERNITATIS SANTI KANVTI DE REVALIA*. On the seal of St Olaf's Guild, the saint is holding a battleaxe and a host pyx, the cover of which ends with a cross. Under the feet of the king lies another attribute of St Olaf – a

<sup>22</sup> Most likely, the figure on the seal represents St Canute (Knud) IV of Denmark (reigned 1080–1086) and not Canute Lavard, Duke of Schleswig (d. 1131), who was the original patron saint of many Canute guilds in Scandinavia. However, it deserves to be noted that since Duke Canute was also King of the Obodrits, he was occasionally depicted in the same manner and with the same attributes as King Canute (e.g. on the newer seal from c. 1325 of St Canute's Guild in Schleswig). See Camillus Nyrop, "St. Knudsgildernes segl", *Tidsskrift for Kunstindustri*, 5 (1899), 4. For the Tallinn guild, see Anu Mänd, "Tallinna Kanuti gild ja selle oldermannid keskjal", *Modus vivendi II. Vana Tallinn*, XVI (XX) (2005), 129–157.



Fig. 8. Seal impression of St Olaf's Guild in Tallinn, 1st half of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Diameter 61 mm. From: Arnold Soom, *Die Zunfthandwerker in Reval im siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Stockholm: KVHAA, 1971), 83.

warrior with a helmet, representing the Antichrist.<sup>23</sup> The background on both sides of the throne is decorated with six-pointed stars. The legend in Gothic majuscules reads: *SIGILLVM SANCTI OLAVI*.

These two seals have been dated very differently. Scholars conducting research on St Canute's guilds and their seals in Sweden and Denmark have dated the seal of St Canute's Guild in Tallinn to

<sup>23</sup> The figure, a symbol of the Antichrist trampled beneath the feet of St Olaf, was depicted in art as a human (sometimes a warrior or a jester), as a dragon with a human head (incl. a king's head), or as a dragon. Anne Lidén, *Olav den helige i medeltida bildkonsten. Legendmotiv och attribut* (Stockholm: KVHAA, 1999), 220–240.

about 1325.<sup>24</sup> The seal bears similarities to several seals of St Canute guilds from 1300 to 1400,<sup>25</sup> but stylistically the closest is the seal, from about 1325, of the German merchants from St Canute's Guild in Visby.<sup>26</sup> Küllike Kaplinski, in turn, regarded the seals of St Canute's Guild and St Olaf's Guild as typical of the Renaissance, dating the first to the fifteenth or the sixteenth century and the latter to 1659.<sup>27</sup> (It is possible that her opinion was based on a document from 1659 on which both seals can be found.<sup>28</sup>) However, the design of the seals leaves no doubt about their origin in the fourteenth century. It can be added that the seals of St Canute's guilds in Sweden and Denmark (as well as those of the St Canute's Guild and St Olaf's Guild in Tallinn) follow the design of the seals of Scandinavian monarchs, which, in turn, borrowed several elements from the seals of the Holy Roman emperors.<sup>29</sup>

The first surviving references to St Canute's Guild and St Olaf's Guild are from 1326 and 1341, respectively.<sup>30</sup> According to these records, both guilds owned buildings in the first half of the fourteenth century. Real property could be used to guarantee legal agreements, and therefore it is not surprising that the guilds needed a common seal to verify such documents. Unfortunately, no medieval docu-

<sup>24</sup> Nyrop, "St. Knudsgildernes segl", 14; Poul Bredo Grandjean, *Danske gilders segl fra middelalderen* (København: Schultz Forlag, 1948), 28; Curt Wallin, *Knutsgillena i det medeltida Sverige: Kring kulturen av de nordiska helgonkungarna* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1975), 121; Hans-Friedrich Schütt, "Die dänischen St. Knudsgilden – mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Gilden in Schleswig und Flensburg", *Gilden und Zünfte. Kaufmännische und gewerbliche Genossenschaften im frühen und hohen Mittelalter*, hrsg. von Berent Schweineköper (Sigmaringen: Thorbecke, 1985), 256.

<sup>25</sup> For seal matrices, see *Margrete I. Regent of the North. The Kalmar Union 600 Years*, ed. by Poul Grønder-Hansen (Copenhagen: National Museum, 1997), 318–319, no. 93–98. For seal impressions, see, e.g. Nyrop, "St. Knudsgildernes segl", 1–16; Grandjean, *Danske gilders segl*, plates 3–8; Lauritz Weibull, *Sankt Knuts gille: Historisk framställning* (Malmö: Allhems Förlag, 1956), 20–21.

<sup>26</sup> Nyrop, "St. Knudsgildernes segl", 13–14; Grandjean, *Danske gilders segl*, 30, plate 7b.

<sup>27</sup> Kaplinski, *Tallinn – meistrite linn*, 53, 56.

<sup>28</sup> See Arnold Soom, *Die Zunfthandwerker in Reval im siebzehnten Jahrhundert* (Stockholm: KVHAA, 1971), 83. The seals of St Canute's and St Olaf's Guilds, embossed in paper on 17th-century documents, can be found in the Tallinn City Archives [Tallinna Linnaarhiiv, TLA], collection (coll.) 190, inventory (inv.) 1, no. 15, fol. 319, 323, 325.

<sup>29</sup> For details, see Nils G. Bartholdy, "Thronsigel dänischer Könige im Mittelalter mit besonderer Rücksicht auf ausländische Vorbilder und Parallelen", *Middelalderlige seglstanper i Norden*, 129–140.

<sup>30</sup> *Das älteste Wittschopbuch der Stadt Reval (1312–1360)*, hrsg. von Leonid Arbusow (Reval: Kluge, 1888), 43, no. 322; 78, no. 526.

ments with these seals have been preserved. The existence of the guild seal is mentioned in the statutes of St Canute's Guild, surviving in a transcript from 1486–1490, but it is not indicated there when the seal was obtained.<sup>31</sup>

Both seals are considerably larger than the previously discussed seals of St Olaf's Church and the goldsmiths: the diameter of the seal of St Canute's Guild is about 65 mm, and that of St Olaf's Guild about 61 mm.<sup>32</sup> Several seals of Swedish and Danish St Canute guilds are even larger, with a diameter of over 70 mm. Since the seal matrices of these Tallinn guilds have not been preserved, it is not known which materials they were made of. The surviving seal matrices of the Swedish and Danish St Canute guilds are predominantly made of bronze.<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting that the seals of St Canute guilds in the Baltic Sea region are among the oldest guild seals in Europe: in general, the guilds began to acquire seals beginning at the end of the fourteenth century.<sup>34</sup>

The usage of both seals ended in the seventeenth century. St Olaf's Guild was dissolved at the end of the century, and it is likely that its seal was destroyed in connection with that process. St Canute's Guild had a new seal made in the last quarter of the seventeenth century.<sup>35</sup> The seal (with a diameter of 35 mm) depicts King Canute dressed in a fashionable Renaissance costume, holding royal insignia and a coat of arms with three lions. This seal, too, is known to us only from impressions.<sup>36</sup> Why the guild decided to replace its medieval seal with

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<sup>31</sup> Aleksander Margus, *Katalog des Stadtarchivs Tallinn IV: Archiv der St. Kanutigilde* (Tallinn: Tallinna Linnaarhiiv, 1938), LXXVIII, § 59, 61. It has been suggested that the oldest part of the statutes date from after 1300 (Heinz von zur Mühlen, "Zur Frühgeschichte der Revaler Gilden", *Reval: Handel und Wandel vom 13. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert*, hrsg. von Norbert Angermann, Wilhelm Lenz (Lüneburg: Institut Nordostdeutsches Kulturwerk, 1997), 31). The two clauses on the use of seals do not belong to the oldest part; they are recorded some time prior to 1468.

<sup>32</sup> The diameter of impressions varies a little, caused by the use of different materials (wax, sealing-wax and leather) and their preservation conditions.

<sup>33</sup> *Margrete I. Regent of the North*, 318–319, no. 93–98.

<sup>34</sup> John Cherry, "Some seals of English guilds and fraternities, 1400–1540: iconography and patronage", *Late Gothic England: Art and Display*, ed. by Richard Marks (Donington: Shaun Tyas, 2007), 16.

<sup>35</sup> The earliest known surviving impression dates from 1679. TLA, coll. 190, inv. 1, no. 15, fol. 329. See also Soom, *Die Zunfthandwerker in Reval*, 83; Margus, *Archiv der St. Kanutigilde*, 141 and fig. 3.

<sup>36</sup> One of them belongs to the Estonian History Museum (inv. no. P 6051).



Fig. 9. Seal impression of the Virgin Mary's Guild on Toompea (Domberg), Tallinn, c. 1500. Diameter 36 mm. Tallinn City Museum, TLM 5163. Photo by Stanislav Stepashko.

a new one is not known. It is possible that this decision was influenced by the 1675 regulation regarding the uniting of St Olaf's Guild with that of St Canute's.<sup>37</sup> However, a new seal could also have been acquired due to changes in drawing up documents (a smaller seal took less space).

In addition to the above-mentioned seals, only one other medieval guild seal from Tallinn has survived, that of the Virgin Mary's

<sup>37</sup> Soom, *Die Zunfthandwerker in Reval*, 82–83. The final regulation was issued in 1698.

Guild on Toompea (Ger. *Domberg*) (Fig. 9). The circular seal has a depiction of the seated Virgin, holding the Christ-child in her lap. The legend is in Gothic minuscules: *Sigillu[m] fraternitatis b[e]a[te] v[ir]ginis in reualia*. Based on its style, the seal dates from the second half of the fifteenth or the first decades of the sixteenth century. The first attempt to found the guild of the Virgin Mary in 1407 was probably unsuccessful, and the guild was re-founded towards the end of the fifteenth century, at the latest in 1494.<sup>38</sup> It is likely that the seal was obtained either in connection with the last mentioned event or when the guild became a building owner some time after 1508.<sup>39</sup>

Among the seals of different craft corporations (Middle Low German *amte*), those of the goldsmiths in Riga and Tallinn are the only ones dating from the Gothic period. In Riga, only the seal impression has been preserved; the seal matrix has been lost since 1936, when the guild was dissolved.<sup>40</sup> The matrix was, as with the Tallinn seal, made of silver.<sup>41</sup> On the seal, there is a depiction of a seated St Eligius, with a hammer and an anvil, chasing a chalice (Fig. 10, 11). The background is filled with an elegantly curved scroll bearing a legend in Gothic minuscules: *sig/illu[m]/ officii/ aur/ifa/br/or/um/ ci/uit/at/is ri/ge*. Based on style, the Riga seal can be dated to the first quarter of the sixteenth century.<sup>42</sup> The seal matrices or impressions next in age have been preserved from the mid-sixteenth century, but most

<sup>38</sup> The first additions to the statute date from 1494; the fact of the re-foundation is mentioned in a document from 1496. Friedrich Stillmark, "Der älteste Schragen der Dom- oder Mariengilde zu Reval", *Beiträge zur Kunde Estlands*, 18 (Reval: Kluge, 1932), 25–26, 42; *Liv-, Est- und Kurländisches Urkundenbuch*, Abteilung 2, Bd. 1, hrsg. von Leonid Arbusow (Riga, Moskau: J. Deubner, 1900), no. 335.

<sup>39</sup> In October 1508, a plot of land for building the guildhall was donated by Wolter von Plettenberg, the Master of the Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order. Stillmark, "Der älteste Schragen", 35; *Liv-, Est- und Kurländisches Urkundenbuch*, Abteilung 2, Bd. 3, hrsg. von Leonid Arbusow (Riga, Moskau: J. Deubner, 1914), no. 465.

<sup>40</sup> I am grateful to Inita Dzelme, the head of the Numismatics and Precious Metal Department of the Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, for this information.

<sup>41</sup> Johann Christoph Brotze, *Estonica*, koost. Ants Hein, Ivar Leimus, Raimo Pullat, Ants Viires (Tallinn: Estopol, 2006), 61.

<sup>42</sup> A scroll with numerous curves was more frequent in Renaissance seals, becoming widespread beginning in the 1520s (see e.g. *Brieflade 4*, pl. 8, no. 15, pl. 17, no. 4). However, the legend on the Riga seal is still in Gothic script.



Fig. 10. Seal impression of the goldsmiths in Riga, 1st quarter of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Diameter 44 mm. Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation, VRVMp 9667. Photo by Ilgvars Gradovskis.

of the craft guilds acquired seals no earlier than the seventeenth or eighteenth century.<sup>43</sup>

The goldsmiths were the first among the craftsmen to use a common seal. For instance, the goldsmiths in Vienna already had a seal around 1367, and those in Braunschweig in the second half of the fourteenth century.<sup>44</sup> This is hardly surprising, for the goldsmith profession was the most lucrative of the crafts, and their social posi-

<sup>43</sup> See Kaplinski, *Tallinn – meistrite linn, passim*; Küllike Kaplinski, "Tsunftipitseritest", *Kunstist Eestis läbi aegade: uurimusi ja artikleid*, koost. Irina Solomõkova (Tallinn: Kunst, 1990), 169–194.

<sup>44</sup> Fritz, *Goldschmiedekunst der Gotik*, fig. 2–3.



Fig. 11. Drawing of the seal impression of the goldsmiths of Riga. From: Wilhelm Stieda, Constantin Mettig, *Schragen der Gilden und Aemter der Stadt Riga bis 1621* (Riga: Häcker, 1896), title page.

tion was practically equal to that of merchants. In northern Europe, including Livonia, where there were no special seal-makers, it was the goldsmiths who produced the seals,<sup>45</sup> and who certainly had the means and ambition to acquire this status-marking object for their own corporation as well.

The European context shows that not every guild possessed a seal in the Middle Ages. A common seal was obtained by well-endowed

<sup>45</sup> The statutes of the Riga goldsmiths from 1542 prescribed four masterpieces which a master candidate had to produce, including a seal in which a shield and a helmet had to be engraved (*ein segel, darinne geschmeden schiltt unnd helm*). Stieda, Mettig, *Schragen der Gilden und Aemter der Stadt Riga*, 304, § 19.

guilds which had enough property (including real estate) to make legal agreements. Minor guilds and confraternities with little or no property did not need a seal.<sup>46</sup> The Tallinn goldsmiths' guild did not own a building: their assemblies took place in the building of the alderman or that of St Canute's Guild. Nevertheless, the guild was wealthy enough to found and maintain as many as three altars: in St Catherine's Church of the Dominicans (1471), in the parish church of St Olaf (c. 1486), and in the hospital church of St John the Baptist (1505).<sup>47</sup>

According to the regulations, it was the guild alderman who was responsible for the common seal. In the statutes of St Canute's Guild it is indicated that 'no one is allowed to issue documents with the guild seal without the knowledge and will of the alderman'. If a guild brother wished to have a document ('letter') sealed with the guild seal, he had to pay the alderman one *oere* for the seal and two *oere* to the scribe.<sup>48</sup> In the account book of St Canute's Guild there are several records (the earliest one from 1489) indicating that the old alderman when resigning from his office handed the guild seal (Middle Low German *gilde segel*) over to the new alderman.<sup>49</sup>

#### ON THE SEALS, AND THEIR USAGE, OF THE PARISH CHURCHES OF TALLINN

There were two parish churches in medieval Tallinn, St Nicholas' and St Olaf's, and only the seal of the latter has been preserved. The seal of a parish church was kept by the church wardens, because it was they who took care of the finances of the church and concluded legal agreements. Examples of this can be found in the medieval account book (1465–1520) of St Nicholas' Church. The book contains some transcripts of contracts concluded between the church wardens and private individuals or associations, and these contracts concern

<sup>46</sup> Cherry, "Some seals of English guilds", 17.

<sup>47</sup> Mänd, *Kirikute hõbevara*, 50. For the treasures belonging to these altars, see *ibidem*, 208–210.

<sup>48</sup> Margus, *Archiv der St. Kanutigilde*, LXXVIII, § 59, 61.

<sup>49</sup> TLA, coll. 190, inv. 1, no. 60, fol. 54r. See also fol. 93v, and in part 2, fol. 2r, 14r, 18r, 22r.

an altar, a chantry, a mass or real estate.<sup>50</sup> The original contracts have not been preserved. At the end of the transcripts, it is written that the contracts were authenticated with the church's seal.<sup>51</sup> The oldest transcripts which mention the seal date from 1489.<sup>52</sup> It is not known when St Nicholas' Church acquired a seal or what it looked like. Very likely, it depicted St Nicholas. The patron saint of the church can also be seen on the later seal of the church, which probably dates from the seventeenth century.<sup>53</sup>

With regard to St Olaf's Church, it is interesting to mention that, in addition to the surviving church seal, the chapel of the Virgin Mary, attached to the south side of the chancel and re-built in 1512–1521 (1523),<sup>54</sup> also had its own seal. The earliest surviving reference to this seal dates from 1523, when the church warden Johan Selhorst handed it over to his successor, the town councillor Evert Hessels. According to the record, the seal was made of silver and the image of the Virgin Mary was engraved on it.<sup>55</sup> Usually, references to seals do not mention the material or describe the object. Therefore, one may assume that the seal of the chapel was a new acquisition, perhaps made in the same year (i.e. 1523), in connection with the completion of the chapel. That the church and one of its chapels had separate seals indicates that the wardens had a right to make legal agreements concerning the chapel of the Virgin Mary. Although the chapel was physically attached to the church, it was apparently regarded as a separate object

<sup>50</sup> For the contract from 1517 with the wardens of the Corpus Christi Mass, see Tiina Kala, "Tallinna linnaelu kajastumine raehärra Hans Rotgersi märkmetes", *Ajalookirjutaja aeg / Actas Historiarum*, Raamat ja aeg / Libri et memoria 1, Acta Bibliothecae Nationalis Estoniae 11, toim. Piret Lotman (Tallinn: Eesti Rahvusraamatukogu, 2008), 27–28.

<sup>51</sup> The seal is referred to in the account book (TLA, coll. 31, inv. 1, no. 216) as 'our seal' (*unse ingesegel*, fol. 19r), 'the seal of our church' (*unser kerken segel*, fol. 22r), or 'the seal of the church of St Nicholas' (*dat ingesegel der kerken sancti nicolai*, fol. 21r).

<sup>52</sup> TLA, coll. 31, inv. 1, no. 216, fol. 19r (contract with the painter and glazier Diderick van Katwich), fol. 20r (contract with the butchers).

<sup>53</sup> Estonian History Museum, inv. no. P 282 and P 5904.

<sup>54</sup> The tower and the weather-vane were finished in 1521, which indicates that the chapel was ready. However, in 1523, there followed a payment for gilded roses, most probably referring to the keystones. TLA, coll. 230, inv. 1, no. Aa 245, fol. 40v, 41v; Sten Karling, "Die Marienkapelle an der Olaikirche in Tallinn und ihr Bildwerk", *Sitzungsberichte der Gelehrten Estnischen Gesellschaft 1935* (Tartu: Õpetatud Eesti Selts, 1937), 108.

<sup>55</sup> TLA, coll. 230, inv. 1, no. Aa 245, fol. 41v: *It. deß hebbe ik her Euert Hessels geleuert en sul(u)-eren segel, dat tor kappellen hort, dar en Marygen bylde in gegraven is.* The seal is also mentioned in 1530. *Ibidem*, fol. 55v.

with its own rights. The same conclusion can be drawn, for instance, on the basis of the testaments of the inhabitants of Tallinn in which separate bequests were made to St Olaf's Church and to the chapel of the Virgin Mary.<sup>56</sup>

## IN CONCLUSION

There is no documentary evidence of who made the two extant seal matrices (or the other aforementioned seals). As might be expected, there are no hallmarks on these early objects.<sup>57</sup> However, it is very likely that the seals were made by local goldsmiths and not imported. The last third of the fifteenth and first quarter of the sixteenth century was a period when gold-smithing flourished in medieval Livonian towns. In Tallinn, there were about ten masters working at the same time and there were enough wealthy customers for all of them.<sup>58</sup>

It is remarkable that any seal matrices at all have been preserved to the present day, considering the changing socio-economic context and the developments in the drawing up and authenticating of documents. The Tallinn goldsmiths did not acquire a new seal in the modern period but continued to use the medieval one. It may well be the case that the guild regarded it as an object of representation which had a great symbolic, aesthetic and material value. The seal was part of the identity of the guild and provided evidence for its long history. St Olaf's Church, on the contrary, acquired a new seal in the nineteenth century.<sup>59</sup> Luckily, the medieval one was not destroyed or thrown away. It was part of the property of the church and particularly valuable because of its material – silver. It is possible that the decision to preserve it was also influenced by the interest in antiquities characteristic of the period.

<sup>56</sup> Hans Bouwer in his testament from 1519 bequeathed 70 marks to St Olaf's Church and 50 marks to St Mary's Chapel. TLA, coll. 230, inv. 1-IIIb, no. 75. See also Roland Seeberg-Elverfeldt, *Revaler Regesten*, Bd. 3, Testamente Revaler Bürger und Einwohner aus den Jahren 1369 bis 1851 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), no. 110, 113, 115, 117, 120, 122, 124.

<sup>57</sup> The marking of the precious metal works in Tallinn was required from 1537. Mänd, "Hans Holtappel, kullassepp", 98, 114.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibidem*, 108, 113–114.

<sup>59</sup> Seal impressions in the Estonian History Museum, P 298, P 3737, P 5906.

The material world and the symbolic world have always been interconnected. This was particularly true in the Middle Ages, but is also true of later centuries. Although the survival of precious metal objects in general was greatly influenced by chance, the institutional seals had additional value which ensured their preservation. It was not only their material value and use value as means of authentication, but also what they were a symbol of that made them important. Both these seal matrices were signs of institutional continuity and, as such, were appreciated and preserved through the centuries.<sup>60</sup>

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### KOKKUVÕTE: **Kahest keskaegsest pitsatist ja Tallinna gildide pitseritest**

Kogu Euroopast on keskaegsete institutsioonide pitsateid säilinud tunduvalt vähem kui üksikisikute omi. Tallinnast on neid alles vaid kaks: Oleviste kiriku ja kullasseppade tsunfti oma. Artiklis analüüsitakse nende pitsatite stiili ja ikonograafiat ning pakutakse välja võimalik valmistamisaeg. Lisaks käsitletakse Tallinna gildide keskaegseid pitsereid, mida on säilinud kolm: Kanuti, Olavi ja Maarja gildi oma. Vaadeldakse, mida on kirjalike allikate põhjal teada nende kasutamisest ning arutletakse, miks keskaegseid pitsateid hoiti alles ka hilisematel sajanditel.

Oleviste kiriku ja kullasseppade pitsat on kujunduselt küllalt sarnased: keskel kaitsepühaku kujutis (vastavalt Püha Olav ja Püha Eligius) ning ääres gooti minusklites legend. Pitsatid on valmistatud hõbedast, mis teeb nad eriti haruldaseks: kalleid hõbepitsateid said endale lubada vaid jõukad üksikisikud või institutsioonid. Võrdlevale

<sup>60</sup> This article was written under the auspices of the ESF EuroCORECODE grant FP-004 „Symbols that Bind and Break Communities“, supported by the Estonian Science Foundation.

stiilianalüüsile tuginedes võib väita, et esemed on valmistatud vahemikus 1470–1520: Oleviste kiriku oma pärineb tõenäoliselt 15. sajandi teisest poolest, kullasseppade oma umbes 1500. aastast. On raske öelda, miks kirik ja tsunft otsustasid just sel ajal pitsati omandada. Võimalik, et neil polnud enne 15. sajandit, mil kirjalik asjaajamine varasemaga võrreldes suurenes, pitsati järele vajadust. Võib oletada, et pitsati muretsemist ajendas ka ajastu mood ja institutsiooni jõukuse kasv.

Kolmest säilinud gildipitserist on kõige arhailisema kujundusega Kanuti ja Olavi gildi omad. Mõlemal näeme gildi kaitsepühakut troonil istumas. Rootsi ja Taani Kanuti gildide uurijad on Tallinna Kanuti gildi pitseri paigutanud 14. sajandi esimesse poolde. Samasse aega võib dateerida ka Olavi gildi pitseri. Mõlema pitsati kasutusaeg lõppes 17. sajandiga. Kolmas säilinud pitser kuulus Toompea Maarja gildile. Arvatavasti graveeriti pitsat seoses gildi taasasutamisega, mis toimus hiljemalt 1494.

Euroopa kontekst tõendab, et sugugi igal gildil polnud keskajal pitsatit. Seda omasid need, kellel oli küllaldaselt vara (sh kinnisvara), et sellega või selle tagatisel juriidilisi tehinguid teha. Gildi või tsunfti pitsat oli oldermanni valduses. Kanuti gildi skraast loeme, et kui mõnel gildivennal oli vaja pitseeritud dokumenti, pidi ta kirjutajale maksma kaks ööri ning oldermannile pitseri löömise eest ühe ööri. Kogudusekiriku pitsat oli eestseisjate valduses, kes hoolitsesid kiriku finantskülje eest ja sõlmisid lepinguid. Selle kohta on andmeid näiteks Niguliste kiriku keskaegses arveraamatus. Oleviste kirikuga seoses tasub mainida, et lisaks kiriku pitsatile oli eraldi pitsat olemas ka Maarja kabelil.

Tallinna kullassepad ei ole teadaolevalt endale uusajal lõiganud uut ja moodsamat pitsatit, vaid kasutasid keskaegset edasi. Võib oletada, et tsunft nägi pitsatis sümboolset eset, mis andis tunnistust nende pikast ajaloost ja vääris säilitamist kui esindusobjekt. Oleviste kirik muretses küll 19. sajandil uue pitsati, ent õnneks jättis alles ka vana. Võimalik, et seda otsust mõjutas sajandile omane huvi muinasesemete ja vanavara suhtes, aga kindlasti mängis oma osa ka eseme sümboolne väärtus.