

*Ivar Leimus*

## THE LARGEST LIVONIAN COIN WAS MINTED IN TARTU

Numismatics as a hobby emerged out of the interest in ancient heritage that was awakened during the Renaissance, and at that time it focused particularly on the numerous ancient Greek and Roman coins that had been unearthed then. Subsequent centuries did not offer hordes of beautiful coins in the same way, but numismatics still developed. Over time the passion of art lovers for collecting transformed into a branch of academic historical research, and it started to deal more and more with questions of economic, demographic and political history among various other issues.<sup>1</sup>

As the diameter of coins increased dramatically in the late Middle Ages and early modern era, coins started to appear that could allow increasingly artistic and symbolic designs and texts to be minted on their surface, and these coins were thalers. Coins consequently were no longer simply a token of value, but were an important vehicle for propaganda and information through both the writing and the designs that they bore.<sup>2</sup> The visual aspect must consequently be

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.12697/BJAH.2024.27.05>

1 Research for this article was supported by grant PRG1276 'Digital Livonia', financed by the Estonian Research Council.

2 See Ivar Leimus, 'Münt kui võimu teabekandja. Kesk- ja varauusaegse Liivimaa vaatenurk', *Pildikeel kirjakultuuris*, Eesti Rahvusraamatukogu toimetised = Acta Bibliothecae Nationalis Estoniae 18; *Raamat ja aeg = Libri et memoria*, 7 (2024), ed. by Piret Lotman, 47–73.

borne in mind today when these coins are studied, as this was how the issuer of the coin communicated with those who used it and tried to influence them.

Large coins were rarely minted in late mediaeval Livonia, and they mostly appeared for special occasions. An example is the coins minted as gifts in honour of Wolter van Plettenberg in Riga in 1525, in silver with the weight of a thaler and in gold with a weight of 12 ducats, which may have commemorated his liberation from the subordination of the Grand Master, and the establishment of a sole government over the city.<sup>3</sup> Coins dedicated to von Plettenberg with the value of a thaler or a half thaler were also minted in Tallinn in 1528, but the reason they were minted remains unknown. The mint master of Tallinn Mattis Gerdes struck thalers in 1536 to commemorate the visit of Livonian Master Hermann von Brüggenei to Tallinn. This appears to have been an effort by Gerdes to gain the support of the Master, as the relations between the mint master and the citizens and magistrate of Tallinn had become very strained.<sup>4</sup> Ordinary thalers were issued in Riga in 1557 by Master of the Order Heinrich von Galen and his successor Wilhelm Fürstenberg.<sup>5</sup>

The most outstanding Livonian coin of the Middle Ages though is one that was initiated by the Bishop of Tartu Jodokus von der Recke (1543–1551/53). The Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation has a large silver coin of the type intended for giving as a gift, which has a diameter of 50 mm and weighs 56.96 g<sup>6</sup> (Fig. 1). This weight is twice that of a thaler, making it a double thaler. The obverse shows a stereotypical humanist figure of the Renaissance era with a scroll in his hand, and nothing indicates his status except for the legend *IODOCVS·A·RECK·EPISCOPVS·AC·D[OMI]N[V]S·TERBATEN[SIS]* (Jodokus von Recke, Lord and Bishop of Tartu). The position and

3 Ivar Leimus, 'Medieval Livonian Gold Coins – Additional Data', *Numizmatikos rinkiniai: istorinės Lietuvos ir su ja susijusių šalių paveldas. Mokslo straipsnių rinkinys*, comp. by Eduardas Remecas, Lietuvos nacionalinio muziejaus biblioteka, 24 (Vilnius: Lietuvos nacionalinis muziejus, 2015), 197–199.

4 Ivar Leimus, 'Tallinna mündimeistrid 16 sajandil', *Vana Tallinn*, III (VII) (Tallinn: Estopol, 1993), 7–31.

5 Ivar Leimus, Mauri Kiudsoo, Gunnar Haljak, *Sestertsist sendini: 2000 aastat raha Eestis* (Tallinn: Äripäev, 2018), 66–67.

6 Inv. no. VRVM 7992. Germ. *Schaumünze*. There is no proper term in English for these coin-like items, which were mainly intended to be given as gifts though they have the weight and appearance of coins, and so they appear under various names.



FIG. 1. JODOKUS VON DER RECKE, DOUBLE THALER. MUSEUM OF THE HISTORY OF RIGA AND NAVIGATION.

status of the bishop is only shown on the reverse, where the quartered coat of arms representing himself and his diocese are crowned with a bishop's mitre with an infula, while behind the shield are a sceptre and a sword, which refer to the spiritual and secular power of the bishop, who was also lord of the land. The legend on the reverse states: *BENEDICTIONE·RECTOR[IS]: FORTVNATVR·CIVITAS* (the blessing of the ruler makes the city happy). This may be a paraphrase of King Solomon's proverb: *Benedictione iustorum exaltabitur civitas* ('By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted').<sup>8</sup>

This coin is mentioned for the first time in the second volume of the manuscript on Livonian antiquities by the well-known scholar and literate of Riga, Johann Christoph Brotze (1742–1823).<sup>9</sup> Brotze also identifies the possible paraphrasing, though inaccurately. It would not of course be possible to prove the identity of the Riga-coin from that drawn by Brotze, but fortunately he drew the coins using impressions of them pressed into the paper (Fig. 2). The indentations that have been preserved on the back of the page confirm that the coin is exactly the same as is the one now still in Riga.

7 Translated by Tiina Kala.

8 Proverbs 11:11.

9 Johann Christoph Brotze, *Sammlung verschiedner Liefländischer Monumente, Prospecte, Münzen, Wapen etc.*, Zweiter Theil [Riga: s.n., s.a.]. Manuscript, University of Latvia Academic Library.



FIG. 2. JODOKUS VON DER RECKE, DOUBLE THALER. BACK SIDE OF THE DRAWING BY J. C. BROTZE, FLIPPED HORIZONTALLY. UNIVERSITY OF LATVIA ACADEMIC LIBRARY.

The Estonian History Museum also has a galvanic copy<sup>10</sup> that was made from some other coin minted using the same dies (Fig. 3). A silver example of exactly the same coin was sold at auction in 2009, but there was uncertainty about its authenticity (Fig. 4).<sup>11</sup>

Coins weighing twice as much as a thaler were rare throughout Europe in this period, the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They were minted most commonly in Saxony and Tirol, though also elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> They were sometimes struck as *Schaumünze* medallions on larger-diameter planchets with dies that was cut especially for the occasion, and sometimes with standard thaler dies but on much thicker blanks, giving the double thaler or Doppeltaler.

The identity of the mint master who made the coin from Tartu is shown by his mark on it of a bunch of grapes with a leaf. The same

10 Estonian History Museum, inv. no. AM 13752:737.

11 Dr. Busso Peus Nachfolger, Auktion 398, available at: [https://www.acsearch.info/search.html?term=Recke+1545&category=1-2&lot=&date\\_from=&date\\_to=&thesaurus=1&image\\_s=1&en=1&de=1&fr=1&it=1&es=1&ot=1&currency=usd&order=0](https://www.acsearch.info/search.html?term=Recke+1545&category=1-2&lot=&date_from=&date_to=&thesaurus=1&image_s=1&en=1&de=1&fr=1&it=1&es=1&ot=1&currency=usd&order=0) [accessed 31 July 2024]. Photographs show that the front and back of the coin are located at an angle of zero degrees to one another, exactly like on the copy in the Estonian History Museum. This positioning is standard in machine minting, but it occurs very rarely in coins struck by hand. It is the irregular position of the obverse and the reverse, together with its weight, that confirms the authenticity of the example in Riga. The weight of the coin that was auctioned is a little low for a double thaler at 55.28 g, although some variation in weight is always possible with such handmade coins.

12 Cf. Wolfgang Schulden, *Deutsche Münzen aus der Zeit Karls V. Typenkatalog der Gepräge zwischen dem Beginn der Talerprägung (1484) und der dritten Reichsmünzordnung (1559)* (Frankfurt/Main: Numismatischer Verlag P.N. Schulden 1974), nos. 43, 216, 331, 1227, 1252, 1745, 1903, 2724, 3104, 3105, 3187, 3208, 3821, 3822, 4118, 4285, 4377, 4379, 4442, 4452, 4454, 4552.

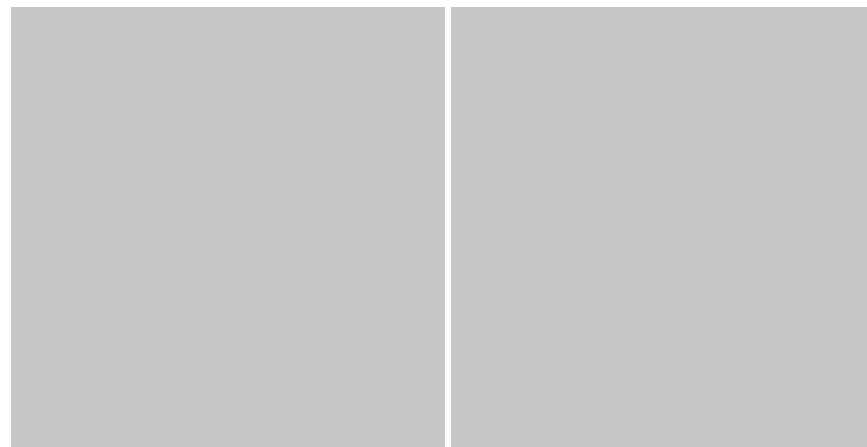


FIG. 3. JODOKUS VON DER RECKE, DOUBLE THALER. COPY, ESTONIAN HISTORY MUSEUM, INV. NO. AM 13752:737.



FIG. 4. JODOKUS VON DER RECKE, DOUBLE THALER. DR. BUSO PEUS NACHFOLGER, AUKTION 398.

mark of the bunch of grapes also appears on some Tartu shillings from 1545. It then disappears and reappears again only on the Haapsalu and Kuressaare coins of Duke Magnus (1562–1569). It is thought that these were made by Erich Beck, who was master of the Tartu mint from 1554, and who fled from there in 1558 when the city fell to the

Russians<sup>13</sup> and entered the service of Magnus. The minter's mark indicates that Erich Beck must also have been master of the Tartu mint for a short time in 1545, before he was replaced for some reason by Erhard Beck, who may have been a relative.<sup>14</sup> Erhard's mark was the cedar cone.<sup>15</sup>

But what might have led the Bishop of Tartu to order such an extraordinary coin, indeed one that was unique in Livonian minting, in 1545? Little is known about the term of office of Jodokus von der Recke as Bishop, as the medieval archives from Tartu have perished. It is known that he was elected to office in 1543 with the support of the Teutonic Order Master Hermann von Brüggenei, and especially his coadjutor Johann von der Recke, Jodokus' uncle, and he received papal confirmation of his position on 21 April 1544. It was still some further time though before the reluctant Tartu City Council finally allowed the Bishop his ceremonial entry into the city in 1547, which formally recognised the supremacy of the Bishop. It is thought that the negotiations over the terms of the oath of allegiance lasted until the city had finally gained sufficient confirmation of its rights.<sup>16</sup>

There is consequently no reference in any written source to a notable event in the career of the Bishop in 1545. However Lord Jodokus left a series of coins behind alongside the documentary record. Apart from the large collector coin discussed here that was probably intended as a gift for his peers or for propaganda purposes, there were only small coins and shillings issued in the name of Bishop Recke of Tartu that bear the years 1543–1550 or no date at all.<sup>17</sup>

The coins supplement the information available from the documents, as the Tartu shillings issued in 1543 and 1544 all bear the title EL (*electus*), while from 1545 onwards they are as a rule marked EP (*episcopus*). The reverse sides of the coins from 1543–1544 almost always bear an abbreviation referring to the city such as CIVI et al.

13 In 1554–1558 he used a different mark in the form of a cloverleaf. See: Gunnar Haljak, *Livonian Coins, XIII–XVIII Century*, Part I: *Feudal States: Livonian Coins from XIII–XVI Century* (Tallinn: Haljak Coin Auction, 2010), nos. 661–699.

14 Leimus, Kiudsoo, Haljak, *Sestertsist sendini*, 152–153.

15 Haljak, *Livonian coins*, nos. 648–658, 660.

16 Henrike Bolte, *Bischofserhebungen und geistliche Landesherrschaften im spätmittelalterlichen Livland: Dorpat – Ösel – Kurland*, Schriften der Baltischen Historischen Kommission (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2023), 374, 575.

17 Haljak, *Livonian coins*, nos. 640–660.

(*civitas*), and if that is not present then it is because the old coin dies of the previous Bishop Johann VI Bey were being used, apparently either by accident or during the wait for new stamps to be made.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, there are some Recke coins without a date that were minted with a unique pair of dies and bear the title of Bishop, as well as the same abbreviation 'CIVIT' in the legend on the reverse. These coins bear the minter's mark of a bunch of grapes like that on the double thaler discussed here and some of the 1545 shillings. Finnish numismatist Hannu Sarkkinen has studied the coins of Bishop Jodokus in great depth and has concluded that the coins that bear the mark of Erich Beck but no date may have been from the end of 1544 or the start of 1545. The style of the coins that are dated 1544 is notably more robust, but by 1545 the abbreviation for the city disappears from the legend on the reverse, and in 1546 shillings appear with a new minter's mark.<sup>19</sup>

The coins consequently indicate that Jodokus von der Recke had by 1545 reached a position in Tartu where he could employ a new mint master and he had shillings minted bearing his title of Bishop. The last coins that explicitly mention the city of Tartu in the legend on them may have been minted a little earlier, at the turn of the year 1544–1545, and it can be concluded from this that the city had to submit to the Bishop in some issues, primarily in recognition of his papal confirmation, no later than 1545.

It appears that Jodokus had the large coin discussed here minted in 1545 to commemorate just this event, as it would not otherwise make any sense. The medieval mint in Tartu stood somewhere in the city near to the market square and it was usually owned jointly by the Bishop and the city, who were served by one single mint master.<sup>20</sup> When there was a dispute between the Bishop and the city however, things would have been quite different and nobody in the city would have wanted to mint such an impressive coin at the mint that stood on its territory.

18 Hannu Sarkkinen, 'Die dörptschen Electusmünzen', *Monetary history of the Baltics in the Middle Ages (12–16th c.)*, *International symposium in Tallinn, 9–10 Dec 2010*, ed. by Ivar Leimus, *Varia historica*, 6 (Tallinn: Eesti Ajaloomuuseum, 2012), 118–127.

19 Sarkkinen, 'Die dörptschen Electusmünzen', 127.

20 Ivar Leimus, 'Mündid', *Tartu: ajalugu ja kultuurilugu*, ed. by Heivi Pullerits (Tartu: Tartu Linnamuuseum, 2005), 189.



FIG. 5. TOKEN WITH THE YEAR 1545 FROM JAKOBI STREET 5, TARTU.

There is another find that points to the title of Bishop being recognised in 1545, and that is a token of copper alloy that was found during the excavations at Jakobi 5 in Tartu (Fig. 5).<sup>21</sup> One side of it shows the coat of arms of the diocese or city of Tartu on a Renaissance-type shield, with the year 1545 above the shield, while the other side shows a similar shield with a circle on it and again the year 1545 above the shield. It is not clear what the circle signifies, but it may refer to the ring of office of the Bishop that came with his confirmation from the Pope. A circle or ring in medieval heraldry was a reference to the succession of a bishop.<sup>22</sup> Tokens like this may have been distributed at the official ceremony consecrating Jodokus in his office.

One further detail is that there is a three-leaf design on the side of the token showing the coat of arms, underneath the key and sword, in the same style as that found on the 1545 shillings of Erich Beck.<sup>23</sup> The other side of the token bears a similar mark underneath the circle, though without the stem of the leaves. This strongly implies

that the token was made by the same mint master who minted the great double thaler, and it is reasonable to think it was made for the same event.

In conclusion, very little is known from the archival records of the period in office of the Bishop of Tartu Jodokus von der Recke. Visual analysis of his coins and tokens indicates though that it is highly probable that the Bishop had already gained some degree of power in the city as early as 1545, rather than from 1547 as was earlier thought.

### CV

**Ivar Leimus** is researcher at the Estonian History Museum and senior researcher at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Art History of Tallinn University. His primary research fields are monetary and economic history, and medieval urban life. He has also published, commented on, and translated late medieval and early modern texts and chronicles.

21 Mai-Britt Tomson, Keiti Randoja, Rivo Bernotas, 'Keskaegne ja varauusaegne elamukvartal Tartus Jakobi tänaval', *Tuulus*, 2020, 63.

22 Gert Oswald, *Lexikon der Heraldik* (Regenstauf: Battenberg, 2021), 331.

23 *Fortegnelse over en stor og sjælden samling baltiske mønter fra ordenstiden, Rigas selvstændighed og inder polsk herredømme samt mønter fra Kurland* (København: Sagførerernes auktioner, 1937), nos. 1231–1233.

