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**Attempt at specifying the attribution of late medieval leather amulets
from Central and Eastern Europe**

Abstract. We determine the function of the so-called leather amulets, of which we already know 50 specimens, mainly as identifiers of medieval messengers. In several cases, we managed to identify the connection between the amulets and document/letter cases, and to specify other tangible attributes of messengers. Owing to the diversity of the iconographic programme and, occasionally, also of inscriptions, we were able to identify the issuers of these artefacts, albeit not without some reservations: rulers, the wealthy, municipal self-governments, trade organisations, *minnesingers*, bishops, religious fraternities, commanders of the Teutonic Order, and Jews. As for now, we know of only one workshop where the amulets and document cases were manufactured in, specifically, in Nysa, Silesia; however, only part of the known products were made there. The origin of the amulets not discovered yet in Western Europe is still to be determined, along with specifying the function of love amulets and identifying coats of arms of commanders known from the amulets, as well as narrowing down the identification of the emblem of a mermaid with a specific trade organization.

Keywords: Late Middle Ages, messenger identifiers, Central and Eastern Europe.

Introduction

Impressive as the scientific output of Polish historians regarding research on sending letters and documents is, its primary focus is put on the actions taken by Hanseatic messengers and touches upon the issue of identifiers known from written sources and iconography only to a small extent (see, for instance, Radziwiński 1990; Czaja 2012; 2014; Sobczak 2016); it has never addressed the so-called leather amulets, mysterious as they are, the number of which has recently reached 50 specimens. Meanwhile, by analysing the attributes of messengers, it is possible to identify the sender, and his political and social standing, among others. Although German researchers also address the attributes of messengers (e.g., Boockmann 1998; Brandtner 2000; Menzel 2013; Bergerbusch 2018), they use mainly terms included

in written sources and complement them with modern formulations. In this respect, the work of Robert Walser (2004) stands out, as it takes account of many issues that concern messengers mainly from the area of the Reich in the 15th century. Though the author makes references to iconographic sources, he includes not a single drawing. Nonetheless, he extensively addresses the problem of identifying the attributes of messengers, albeit sadly, he does not know of any leather amulets. As seen in the works of historians, archaeological finds such as leather amulets and document cases, whose ideological programme is sometimes identical, get overlooked completely (Wachowski, Jaroch 2009; Wachowski, Krawczyk 2019 in press). Another valuable source is abundant iconography, especially miniatures depicting the handing over of documents. Thus, it is vital that the work of at least three scientific disciplines is put to use, namely, history, history of art, and archaeology.

The source term in German *Bott* for a messenger gives rise to no concerns, since it can be found on a mid-15th century playing card from a pack of cards depicting court officials of the Reich (Fig. 1: a). Moreover, this messenger was shown with three attributes: a letter with a seal (*insigel*), a small shield with the coat of arms of the Reich on his neck (*schild*, here *Brustschild*), and a small letter case at his belt (*Brieftasche*). Most generally, a few groups of attributes are known. The terms of the



Fig. 1. Imperial messengers of the Reich and their attributes: a – playing card from the pack The Court Officials of the Reich, depicting a messenger, mid-15th century (after to Bartlett 2006, Fig. 3, p. 270); b – imperial document case, mid-14th century, Germanisches Nationalmuseum in Nuremberg (after Karel IV 2006, cat. no. 54)

first group inform us of the form: *buchse* (varying spelling), *Kapsel*, *laden*, *bryfsack*. The terms of the second group also specify the sender: *riches buchse*, *Reichsbrief-tasche*, *marckgrafen püchsen*, *stat busse* (The Council of the City of Gdańsk). Other items listed include the messenger's staff (*Botenstab*), a spear, and a sword. The latter is an attribute of bellmen, though. In Silesia, the term *gleube briue* occurred, meaning a letter of credence, whereas the message itself was conveyed orally. In turn, leather amulets of the dukes of Opole bear an inscription of an apotropaic nature that reads, WER DI TAFIL BI IM TRIT DEN VORMIDE SORGE VN LITT. Most likely, the term *TAFIL* stands for the impression of the coat of arms with an inscription made on leather, that is, in this case, an entire amulet. Such a broad meaning of the term "table" is applied by art historians. Owing to iconographic sources, it was possible to expand the list of mail users to include the Jewish circle.

Who could be the sender and the recipient of mail in the 14th and the 15th century? In this respect, the list is quite long: rulers, the wealthy, municipal self-governments, trade organizations, *minnesingers*, bishops, religious fraternities, commanders of the Teutonic Order, and Jews. In the following considerations we make an attempt at ascribing the leather amulets and cases to the listed entities.

The Reich

As for the area of the Reich, we have at our disposal the highest number of terms related to medieval messengers. We have already mentioned the term *Bott*. On the very same card, there is also a wax seal on a letter/document specified in written sources as *insigel*, considered the most important identifier and, in fact, it is most common in scenes involving messengers. On his neck, the messenger from the card in question has an emblem shaped as a shield with an imperial eagle. At present, a shield positioned in this manner is referred to as *Brustschild*, but in the sources, only the general term *schild* appears, rather in the sense of a shield not as an element of armoury, but an applique shield with the coat of arms that could be placed also somewhere else, for instance, on a messenger's garments. The other of the artefacts related to the messenger of the Reich is in our view an imperial document case from mid-14th century (Fig. 1: b), though in the literature, other interpretations of its function also appear (*Karel IV* 2006, cat. no. 54). Of the several terms that specify the form of this chest-like document holder, the one that seems most accurate in terms of its significant size (62 by 45 by 18 cm) is *laden*. In modern German, we most often encounter the general term *Brieftasche*, but it is the expression *des riches buchse* (*Reichsbrieftasche*) that has an identifying nature. In reference to other entities, the terms *unter meiner büchsen* (priest Albrecht of Monachium); *marckgrafen püchsen*; *in seiner laden* (electoral adviser Lorenz von Schaumburg) were used. Many cities of the Reich had their messengers specialising in forwarding

various messages. In the hierarchy, the group that handled solely the delivery of mail, referred to as *brivedregher*, had a low position (Walser 2004, p. 30).

Czech lands

On the miniature from the Velislaus Bible from 1325–1349, messengers were depicted with cylindrical containers (Fig. 2: a). The original leather cases, albeit from the 15th century, are known from Italy¹, though they are not necessarily related with messengers. A document case could be an identifier only if it contained coats of arms or emblems of the sender. Nonetheless, on the discussed miniature, as on many others, the case is found at waist high, on messengers' backs, with solely the bottoms of these cylindrical containers visible. Another object from the miniature in question is a straight stick in the hand of one of the messengers, referred to in German as *Botenstab*. On the Nowy Targ square in Wrocław, a leather and metal applique in the shape of a shield was found, depicting a Czech lion (Fig. 2: b, c). Perhaps it was the source *schild*, fixed to the messenger's clothes. In the literature, a spear is mentioned as one of the attributes of messengers. This weapon appears in most miniatures depicting messengers, yet it is extremely difficult to link it to a specific sender. In the Czech Republic, a highly rare spear from the turn of the 16th century was found, bearing an inscription that says, WIKTOROIN Z ZEROTINA (Fig. 2: d), which most likely belonged to a messenger of this prominent, noble family that most likely had their messenger. Recently, in Nysa, a leather amulet was unearthed that could be deemed a kind of an identification document of a bellman of the Czech King, because in the inscription his function and name was mentioned (Wachowski, Krawczyk in this volume).

Duchies of Silesia

In the National Museum in Wrocław, there is a leather case that was re-used for storing a tablet of vows of a Wrocław craftsmen guild. The artefact is decorated with highly rich impressions of scenes associated with tragic love (Samson, Dawid) and depictions of coats of arms that belonged to the Czech family of the Przemyślidas (2), the Piast dukes of Opole (1) and the Piast dukes of Świdnica and Jawor (1). The scenes and the coats of arms are framed with a border and inscriptions in the Gothic majuscule (Fig. 3). The writings that surround the coats of arms are twofold: homagial for the Czech coats of arms (DEZ WNZhIT IM DI GVTE DI IM WONIT IN DEMVTE) and apotropaic for Piast coats of arms (WER DI TAFIL BI IM TRIT

¹ <https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/316448311289935766>.

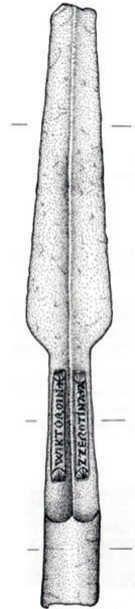


Fig. 2. Attributes of Czech messengers: a – miniature from the Velislav Bible: Jacob receives documents, 1325–1349 (after *Velislavova bible*: <https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/290834088429950500/?lp=true>); b – appliques with a Czech lion (the collection of Institute of Archaeology Wrocław University); c – applique with a Czech lion (after Wachowski 2013, Fig. 41: b); d – spear of a Czech messenger of a noble family with the inscription WIKTOROIN Z ZEROTINA (after Žákovský 2008, Fig. 2)



Fig. 3.
Case of a messenger with the coats of arms of the Przemyślida family and the dukes of Opole, and representations of tragic love (Samson and David), mid-14th century, Wrocław (after Fercowicz 2002, p. 427)

DEN VORMIDE SORGE VN LITT). The form and artistic programme of this artefact are a clear reference to the discussed case from Prague, though it is smaller. In the title of our considerations, the so-called leather amulets are mentioned. It is an appropriate term, as most of the artefacts include an inscription of an apotropaic nature. Moreover, these items have the identical form and structure: the lower edge and the narrowed-down upper side are not sewn. However, in our considerations, there is a significant fact that in a quite numerous group of amulets with coats of arms (though not only) we deal with identical or very similar representations as in the mentioned document case, which suggests that both these objects were part of the same set. And so, on the identifier from Wrocław we have a scene with Samson (Wachowski, Krawczyk 2019, Fig. 4: d), on the identifier from Bydgoszcz a coat of arms of Bolesław II of Opole, a coat of arms with a likeness of buffalo horns (Siwiak, Siwiak 2009, Fig. 10), whereas on the identifier from Nysa, there is a visible coat of arms of the Przemyślida family (Fig. 4: a). On the tombstone of that duke between the feet a coat of arms with buffalo horns was also applied; Fig. 4: b). Furthermore, identifiers with the coats of arms of the Przemyślida family and those of the dukes of Opole were unearthed in Kraków (Radwański 1961, Fig. 11), Nysa (3 specimens; Sachs 1982, Fig. 5, 6 – misattributed to Wrocław; Wachowski, Krawczyk 2019, Photo 66), and in Prague, Czech Republic (Bravermanová *et al.* 2016, Fig. 11). The issue gets somewhat complicated by a new find of a leather document



Fig. 4. Analogies to the representations of tragic love and the coats of arms of the Przemysłida family and the dukes of Opole: a – failed identifier with the coat of arms of the Przemysłida family, mid-14th century, Nysa (after Wachowski, Jaroch 2009, Fig. 12: b); b – tombstone of Bolko II of Opole, Opole, Franciscan church (photo by L. Marek)

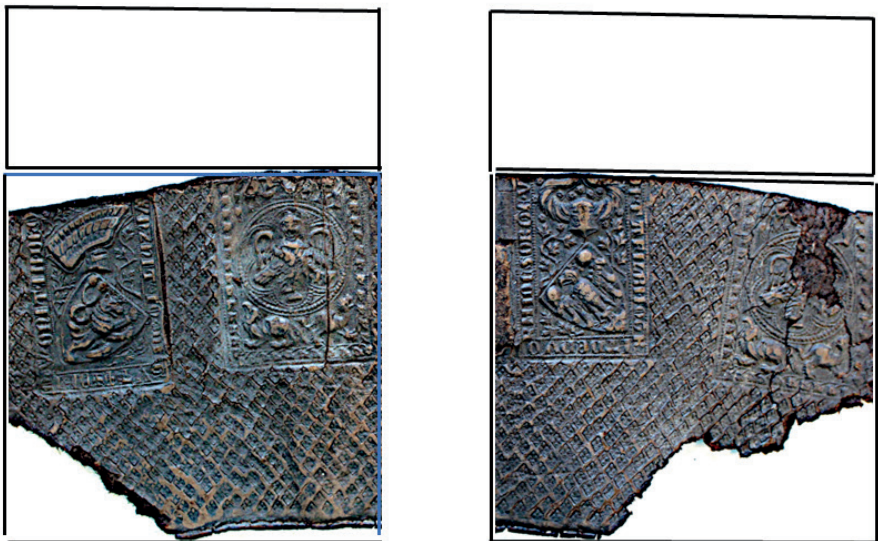


Fig. 5. Fragment of a case of a messenger of the dukes of Opole, second half of the 14th century, Wrocław (after Wachowski, Krawczyk 2019, Fig. 5)



a



b



c



d



e

Fig. 6.
Case of a messenger with the coats of arms of the Przemyśłida family and the dukes of Świdnica and Jawor: a – case, mid-14th century, Wrocław (after Ferco-wicz 2002, p. 426); b, c – seals, one with the coat of arms and the other with the likeness of the ruler standing, belonging to Bolko I of Świdnica, from the years 1280–1292 and 1293–1301 (<http://www.poczeta.com/bolkoi.htm>); d – *denarius quartensis* of Bolko I (after Schubert 1911, p. 214); e – seal of Henryk I of Jawor from 1323 (after Gumowski 1936, Table CXI, 65)

case on which only impressions of the coats of arms of the dukes of Opole and the Przemyślida family were applied, without the coat of arms of the dukes of Świdnica and Jawor (Fig. 5), which inspired us to investigate the personal situation in both these duchies.

The coat of arms of Jadwiga of Anhalt (†1259), wife of Bolesław II Rogatka, was put on the seals and coins of some dukes of Świdnica and Jawor and it also can be found on the opposite side of the duke's document case at the National Museum in Wrocław (Fig. 6: a). Bolko I the Strict, son of the mentioned couple, used his mother's coat of arms on a seal with the coat of arms, a seal with the likeness of the ruler standing, and on the *denarius quartensis* (Fig. 6: b–d), whereas his son Henry I of Jawor (†1346) incorporated his grandmother's coat of arms in his seal (Fig. 6: e).

Another problem is the representation of the coats of arms of the Przemyślida family and the dukes of Świdnica and Jawor with the heraldic courtesy maintained, which would suggest dependence on the Czech lands. Meanwhile, the Duchy of Świdnica and Jawor enjoyed independence until the death of the widow of Bolko II the Small, Agnieszka of Świdnica, in 1392, when it was annexed to the Czech lands. In this respect, it is worth mentioning events that show that this independence was not complete. In the light of the Świdnica peace accord in 1350, Bolko II of Świdnica and Jawor had no the right to freely use his land without the consent of the Czech King. In turn, in 1384, Czech King Waclaw IV gave his permission to among others Świdnica and Jawor to organize their own armed troops to protect merchants against robbers. The coat of arms of the duke of Świdnica and Jawor (two plumes) can be seen on the document case and never on the already quite numerous so-called amulets with the coat of arms of the dukes of Opole. Perhaps for this reason in 1381, Agnieszka of Świdnica had to use a letter of authorization instead of an amulet-identifier of the messenger, while the message itself was forwarded orally (AP Wrocław, Ref. no. 95, p. 3).

From the year 1323, the Duchy of Opole was under the rule of Bolko II of Opole (†1356), who in 1324/26 married Agnieszka of Świdnica, daughter of Bernard of Świdnica and sister of Bolko II of Świdnica. From 1327, the duchy was a Czech fiefdom; the heraldic courtesy it is not surprising then. The two mentioned cases from Wrocław aside, the coats of arms of the Przemyślida family and of Bolko II of Opole are known from amulets in Nysa, Bydgoszcz, Kraków and Prague in the Czech Republic (Wachowski, Krawczyk 2019, pp. 87–91). It is somewhat surprising that in this case, the rarely encountered coat of arms of Bolko II of Opole is used, known from his tombstone.

Though the presented information allows us to explain the origin of the coat of arms (plumes) of Bolko I (the coat of arms of his mother Jadwiga of Anhalt) and the way Bolko II of Świdnica applied it. In turn, the decisions that were taken as a result of the peace accord in Świdnica in 1350 (partial dependence on the Czech lands) explain the depiction of the coat of arms of the Przemyślida family and the

coat of arms of the dukes of Opole in the convention of heraldic courtesy and the use of the homagial writing. This coat of arms could not be used by Agnieszka of Świdnica after the death of Bolko II of Świdnica (†1368). The period when the case from the National Museum in Wrocław was legally 'valid' was in the years 1350–1368. In turn, the case from the archaeological study in Wrocław, without the coat of arms of the dukes of Świdnica and Jawor could come into existence after 1368 or even as late as after 1392.

The issue of the positioning of the coats of arms of the dukes of Opole, Świdnica and Jawor on the case of the National Museum is difficult to explain unequivocally. The fact that Bolko II of Opole and Agnieszka of Świdnica were siblings is not thoroughly convincing. Bear in mind that all the amulets with the coat of arms with a likeness of buffalo horns can be identified with Bolko II of Opole, who nevertheless died in 1356. Bolko II of Opole aside, as the user of the document cases and the so-called amulets, one should also consider Władysław Opolczyk (†1401), who after the death of Bolko II of Opole took over the Duchy of Opole. Perhaps for this duke, the tradition of Jadwiga of Anhalt was no longer of any significance and he did not include the coat of arms of the dukes of Świnica and Jawor on the newer case.

The Duchy of Mazovia

It seems that the so-called amulets of all kinds had already gone through an inscription-free phase. However, in the case of two Masovian artefacts, specifically, from Płock (Fig. 7) and Gdańsk², we can be saying of depictions of coats of arms alone, at least based on the previous findings.

The State of the Teutonic Order

When it comes to the Teutonic Order, things get peculiar. This is because the identifiers do not extend the borders of the State of the Teutonic Order. Therefore, it was a swift local courier mail service with good infrastructure, such as post horses' stables in castles. There is a well-known term of a place at a castle where mail was received and forwarded, namely, *bryffstall*; in turn, the name for stables for courier horses was *bryffswoykenstall* (Radzimiński 2019, p. 227). All the artefacts bear coats of arms and an inscription in the border that always contains the words AVE MARIA, rarely more extensive. The identifiers from Elbląg (Fig. 8: a) and

² We have obtained the information on the identifiers and wax tablet cases, as well as the permission to publish some of the Gdańsk artefacts owing to Beata Ceynowa, MSc, of the Museum of Archaeology in Gdańsk.



Fig. 7.
Leather identifier of the dukes of Mazovia, second half of the 14th century, Płock (after Trzeciecki 2000, Fig. 18)



Fig. 8. Leather identifiers of Teutonic commanders, second half of the 14th century: a – Elbląg (according to Wachowski, Jaroch 2009, Fig. 14: d); b – Chojnice, second half of the 14th century (after Walenta 2002, Table X)

Olsztyn (Michalski 1998, Fig. 63: 1) belonged most likely to Commander Ludolf König, which allows us to conclude that the amulets with the commander's coat of arms served as identifiers. Moreover, 4 identifiers of messengers of commanders were unearthed in Gdańsk (inf. B. Ceynow). The easternmost find is Królewiec (Kulakov 2005, Fig. 90).

The Wrocław bishopric

The first Wrocław bishop to use the tile of the duke was Henryk of Wierzbno, the duke of Nysa and the bishop of Wrocław in the years 1302–1319. Although until 1477, Otmuchów was the seat of the collegiate, bishops have been spending more time in Nysa from as early as the 13th century. For this reason, it was vital to communicate Wrocław and Nysa or Otmuchów. A leather amulet depicting *agnus dei* in a tondo (Fig. 9) is a reference on the one hand to several medieval municipal seals of Wrocław that show Saint John the Baptist or just his head on a bowl (the patron saint of the cathedral and the city, we shall recall); on the other hand, municipal seals of Nysa from the 14th century show Saint John the Baptist holding *agnus dei* in his hand. Most likely, the intention was to emphasise the position of the seal's issuer – the duke of Nysa and, at the same time, the bishop of Wrocław. Sadly, the severely damaged artefact does not allow us to fully decipher the inscription. Based on the fragmentary readout <...>MICH T<...>G<...>VOR MIDE<...> it is difficult to conclude whether we are dealing here with a homage text (the Duchy of Nysa was dependent on the Czech lands). Nonetheless, on the amulet with the coat of arms of the dukes of Opole, the word VOR MIDE (*vermeiden*) was used in the apotropaic context.



Fig. 9.
Leather identifier of Wrocław
bishops (after Wachowski,
Krawczyk 2019, Photo 69)

Jews

Sometimes, a term that appears in the literature as an attribute of a messenger is *Botenstab*. In the iconographic sources, a messenger indeed happens to be depicted with a straight stick at times, which can be considered a messenger's staff (Fig. 10: a). In Bytom, an object was unearthed that could be identified as a messenger's staff. Below a richly decorated frieze there is the Star of David carved (Fig. 10: a). The use of messengers also among Jews is confirmed by a scene from a 14th-century French miniature (Fig. 10: b).

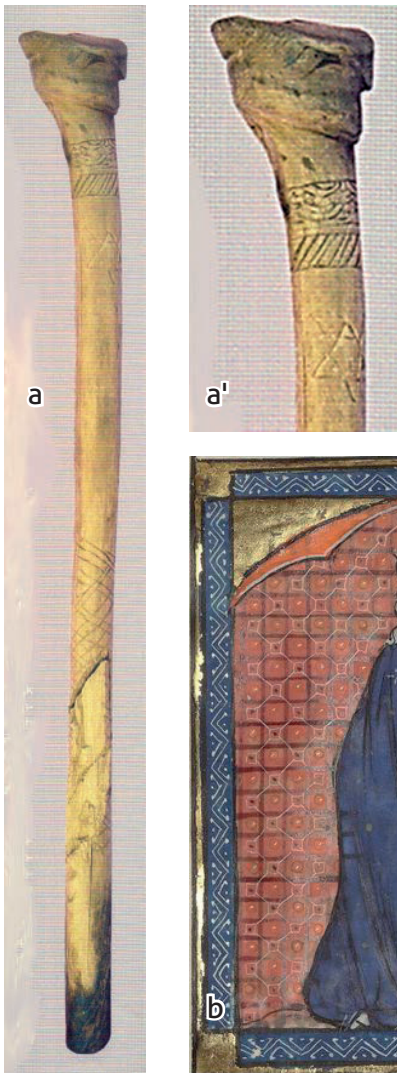


Fig. 10. Identifiers in the Jewish circles: a, a' – staff with the Star of David, Bytom (after *Bytom* 2004, p. 32); b – miniature with a scene of a letter/document being handed over (file:///D:/Pictures/amulet_apotrop/(335)%20Pinterest.htm)

Hanseatic sphere of influence

The area of the State of the Teutonic Order partially overlaps with the Hanseatic sphere of influence, and its influence was more extensive. The main Hanseatic city on the south coast of the Baltic Sea was Gdańsk, where most of the artefacts come from, not only those related to forwarding messages. That city had messengers of its own, as evidenced by, among others, the expression, *stat busse mit dem taken*³. With some reservation, we could include as one of the municipal messengers the court officer shown on a 15th century bas-relief by a stairway leading to a courtroom at the City Hall in Wrocław (Fig. 11: a). In the cities, there were also merchant organizations (Walser 2004, pp. 25–29), most likely related to sea trade, as probably evidenced by the emblem of a mermaid visible on the amulets from Gdańsk (Fig. 11: b) and on the small-size cases from that trading hub (Fig. 11: c) (Darznik, Gomolizsek 2016, Fig. 40: d), as well as on the amulets of Hanseatic cities located farther inland, such as Wrocław (Płonka, Wiśniewski 1990, Fig. 2) and Kraków (Zaitz 2012, Fig. 12). Perhaps the term *lopere*, that is, Läufer (Walser 2004, s. 30) is associated with messengers of merchants.

Religious fraternities

Identifiers that belonged to religious fraternities, as we believe, occur sporadically as early as in the 14th century; their style and the form of lettering (Gothic majuscule) bear resemblance to the “coat-of-arms” group. Most likely, they were created in the workshop in Nysa, which is suggested by the inscription identical to the products of that workshop (the identifier with the scene showing Samson fighting a lion). The specimens from the 15th century are more numerous and bear solely inscriptions made in Gothic minuscule. Some specimens have transitory characteristics.

Christological fraternities. The 14th century is the period to which two specimens depicting agnus dei in an arcade were dated to: Wrocław (Fig. 12: a) and Gdańsk (*Targ Sienny* 2016, cat. no. 173). The identifier, which was found in Nysa, lacks a border (Fig. 12: b), while the abbreviation “nar” can be read as Nahrung, that is, food, in this case, spiritual food, specifically, the Blessed Sacrament.

Marian fraternities. The oldest identifier seems to be a specimen from Wrocław with the inscription in Gothic minuscule: “maria” written vertically in the field and “maria” repeated six times in the border (Fig. 13: a). We are familiar with a vertical inscription “maria” in minuscule without a border from the artefacts from Gdańsk (Fig. 13: b) and Vilnius (*Katalog Wilno* 2010, p. 196). An interesting solution was applied in the specimen from Kędzierzyn-Koźle. The writing is in two lines, though

³ For more on the messengers of Hanseatic cities – see Czaja 2012.



Fig. 11. Artefacts related to municipal messengers: a – Wrocław, city hall – court officer (photo by L. Marek); b – amulet (after *Targ Sienny* 2016, cat. no. 172); c – case (the collection of Museum of Archaeology in Gdańsk, access provided by B. Ceynowa)



Fig. 12. Leather identifiers of Christological fraternities: a – Wrocław, second half of the 14th century (Institute of Archaeology Wrocław University, not published); b – Nysa, 15th century (the collection of District Museum in Nysa, not published)



Fig. 13. Leather identifier of messengers of Marian fraternities: a – Wrocław, second half of the 14th century (after Wachowski, Krawczyk 2019, Photo 76); b – Gdańsk, 15th century (after *Targ sienny* 2016, cat. no. 171)

shifted into “ria-ma” (Fig. 14: a). The identifier from Nysa with the letter “a(ve)” is an exceptional find (Fig. 14: b). Pulled over a slat, it got partially destroyed back during the manufacturing stage, which clearly indicates the workshop in Nysa.

The fraternity of Saint John the Evangelist. The sole specimen was found in Kraków. The artefact shows characteristics of the 14th century, such as a border with an inscription (unfortunately it is a pseudo-legend in Gothic majuscule). A tondo shows an eagle on a band (Fig. 15), which is the symbol of Saint John the Evangelist.

Fig. 14.
Leather identifier of messengers of Marian fraternities from the 15th century:
a – Kędzierzyn-Koźle (after Wachowski, Krawczyk 2019, Photo 77); b – Nysa (after Tondera 1966, Fig. IIa)

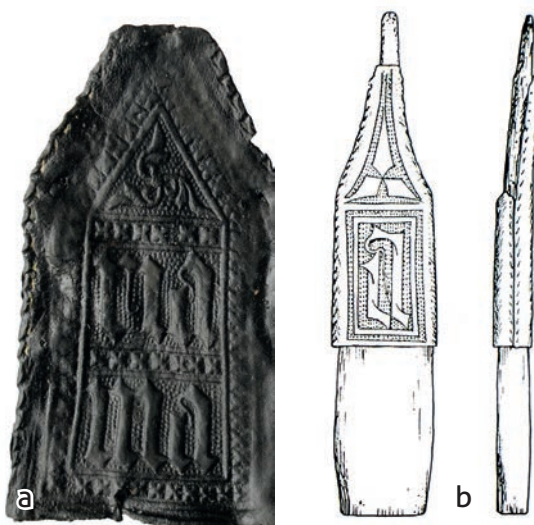


Fig. 15.
Leather identifier of messengers of the fraternity of Saint John the Evangelist, second half of the 14th century, Kraków, Exhibition at the Kraków Cloth Hall (photo by L. Marek)

Minnesingers

With some reservations, we discuss here the so-called love amulets, the function of which is difficult to determine unequivocally. We even have no certainty as to whether messengers were used in the relations between lovers in the convention of courtly love. Nonetheless, the form of these objects is identical to that of the previously discussed leather identifiers. The sole type of depiction is a couple in love in varying scenery. The artefact from Nysa seems the oldest (Fig. 16: a). The scene and writings on the amulet from Sieradz (Fig. 16: b) bear a clear reference to the stamp from the case (Fig. 6: a). In turn, the most love amulets have impressions made by a stamp identical to that on the artefact from Ptakowice⁴ (Fig. 16: c). We have recorded the biggest assemblage of love amulets in Silesia, where most of them were manufactured in a workshop in Nysa (Wachowski, Krawczyk 2019). Love amulets made their way farthest east to Lviv (Fig. 16: d and footnote 3), and two specimens made their way to Vilnius (Fig. 16: f)⁵. The only case for wax tablets with a love scene (*Fundacje* 2010, p. 308), originally interpreted as a woman dancing with death (Nawrońska, Tandecki 1997, p. 132, Fig. 4) was unearthed in Elbląg (Fig. 17). It is difficult, however, to conclude based on a one-time fact whether love amulets and cases were part of the same set.

As for identifiers, it is difficult to take a stance on the way they were worn. Perhaps, as shown on the mentioned playing card (Fig. 1), they were worn on the neck (Brustschild). Owing to iconography, we know how the identifier of the Marian fraternity was worn. At the belt of Saint Elizabeth, who was visiting Mary, there is a fixed amulet whose form is identical to that of our specimen from the excavations in Nysa (Fig. 14: b); likewise, it bears the letter “a” (Fig. 18). It is the only iconographic source that we know of that involves a depiction of the so-called leather amulet.

Summary

The discussed leather amulets expand the list of messengers’ attributes known from literature and iconography. For some attributes, their material equivalents were successfully identified (letter cases, shields – proper coats of arms on a shield, a messenger’s staff, a spear). Also, the ideological content of the amulets and the cases was successfully proven to be related to each other. It was largely the analysis of the depictions and inscriptions on these items that allowed us to make the attempt

⁴ Moreover, Nysa – Sachs 1982, Fig. 8; Wrocław – Wachowski, Krawczyk 2019, Photo 75; Bytom – Bytom 2004, p. 67; Lviv – *Katalog Lwów* 2011, p. 232.

⁵ <https://pl.pinterest.com/pin/317292736239800820/>.



a



b



c



d



e



f

Fig. 16. Love amulets of minnesingers, 14th century: a – Nysa (after Sachs 1982, Fig. 1); b – Sieradz (after Kufel-Dzierzgowska 2007, Fig. 3); c – Ptakowice (after Kubów 2008, p. 1225); d – Lviv (according to temporary exhibition PAC from Lviv in Wrocław Museum of Archaeology); e, f – Vilnius (after *Katalog Wilno* 2010 and <https://pl.pinterest.compin317292736239800820>)



Fig. 17.
Leather case for wax
tablets with a love scene,
Elbląg, second half of
the 14th century (after
Fundacje 2010, p. 309)



Fig. 18.
Way in which the identifier of the
Marian fraternity was worn. Altar
painting, the Visitation Scene, Vyšší
Brod, Czech Republic, ca. 1440 (after
Česká malba 1950, Fig. 233)

at determining the entities who used messengers' services. These were rulers, officials and noblemen of the Reich (Fig. 1) and of the Czech Kingdom (including high officials and nobility, likewise) (Fig. 2), the dukes of the Duchy of Opole (Figs. 3–6) and of the Duchy of Masovia (Fig. 7), as well as bishops of Wrocław (Fig. 9), who at the same time were the dukes of the Bishopric of Nysa. Within the borders of the State of the Teutonic Order, there was an efficient courier mail in place, the services of which was used by the commanders (Fig. 8). Messengers were also used in Jewish circles (Fig. 10). In the Hanzeatic sphere of influence, the recorded messengers included those of German city councils, the city council of Gdańsk and some unidentified trade organization with the emblem of a mermaid (Fig. 11). The services of messengers were also used by, though mainly later in the 15th century, Christological and Marian religious fraternities and the fraternity of Saint John the Evangelist (Figs. 12–15). A vast part of the leather amulets bear love scenes (Figs. 16, 17), which allows us to link them to the chivalry and courtly culture, yet not necessarily with *minnesingers*, about whom there is no information as to whether they were using messenger services. The issue of the origin of the leather amulets remains difficult to unravel. Though quite many (50), they were all unearthed in Central Eastern Europe, mainly in Poland. In Nysa, Silesia, there is even a confirmed manufacturing plant. Nonetheless, such finds are still non-existent in Western Europe where, as we believe, an exceptional form of leather amulets was created.

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