

Paul Gulden — mint master of sixteenth-century Tallinn. Some remarks on the book of Ivar Leimus¹.

Mint masters were officials who travelled extensively during the late medieval and early modern period in Europe and offered their services on an international scale. Most of the masters who worked in Livonia (today's Estonia and Latvia) were originally from Germany. The life and career of Paul Gulden, who was active in the second half of the sixteenth century, were particularly eventful.²

Paul was born in Annaberg, an important mining and minting town in Saxony. He probably left his hometown in late 1555 or early 1556, as his name appears in the list of people participating in the Shrovetide revels of the Tallinn Black Heads, i.e. unmarried merchants, in 1556. In 1557, he celebrated Shrovetide revels with the merchants of the Great Guild and a year later became a guild member. The Great Guild, an organisation of married merchants who were predominantly burghers of Tallinn, was the most prestigious guild in the city.

In 1558, the Livonian War broke out, completely changing the map of the Eastern Baltic region. Already during the first year of war, the armed forces of Ivan the Terrible conquered Tartu, Narva, and many other Livonian centres. Frederick II of Denmark bought the Bishopric of Ösel-Wiek (comprising the island Saaremaa and West Estonia) for his brother Magnus in 1559. Tallinn surrendered to Eric XIV of Sweden in 1561. The Livonian branch of the Teutonic Order was dissolved in 1561–1562 and as a secular duchy it became a vassal of Sigismund II Augustus, King of Poland. At times, Livonia was almost entirely in the possession of the Muscovites, who, however, finally had to retreat before the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and the Swedes. Truces were made in 1582 and 1583, respectively, but new hostilities broke out between the Russians and the Swedes in 1590 and later between the Swedes and the Poles.

In 1559, Paul was employed as a mint master by Gotthard Kettler, who was the last Livonian Master of the Teutonic Order (1559–1561). In 1561, Gulden became the mint master of the city of Tallinn. In wartime, in addition to his main occupation, he engaged in profitable trade with the Russian enemy. During one of his business trips, the mint master visited Tartu, where Duke Magnus stopped briefly on his way to Moscow. According to a promissory note, Paul Gulden had supplied the duke with gold chains, jewellery, gold and silver dishes, gold brocade, gold borders, good pears, etc. worth a sum of 4238 thalers, a huge amount for the time period. This money he would never see again.

The same year, the mint master was also in Narva, where he was detained by the Russians, taken to Moscow and imprisoned. Surprisingly, he was saved by the Tatars, who set fire to the suburbs of Moscow during their raid in June 1571. Due to the strong wind, the whole city burnt down in a couple of hours. After a long and dangerous journey, Gulden was back in Tallinn by the next May. However, the position of city mint master had by then already been filled, and thus Paul had to go abroad again in 1574.

The next couple of years of Gulden's life remain in the shadows. He probably visited Riga first and assisted the local mint master in setting up the first rolling press for minting. The fol-

¹ Leimus I. 2021, 552 pp.

² Leimus I. 2020.

lowing year, he appeared in Gdańsk. In 1578, he tried to interest King John III of Sweden in a coin press. Finally, in 1579, he entered the service of the Administrator of the Duchy of Prussia, George Frederick of Brandenburg-Ansbach. Since at that time, coins were not minted in Königsberg, the Margrave agreed to send his mint master to Denmark, where King Frederick II was intending to set up a coin press in Frederiksborg in 1581.

After working for the Danish king for almost four years, Gulden was dismissed in July 1585 and returned to Königsberg. There, the construction of a new modern mint had begun a year before. In 1586, Paul Gulden was appointed to the position of mint master. His coins seem to have been slightly underweight or substandard, which not only attracted the attention of Prussian officials, but also resulted in a long investigation conducted by them. Finally, exhausted, Paul Gulden died in 1593. His accountant and warden Eberhard Hausslaib was held responsible for his death and was forced to flee from Königsberg.

In a very concise form, this is a biography of an ordinary man of the Early Modern period. However, thanks to numerous archival materials (kept in, among others, Tallinn and Berlin), we know much more about him, his friends and enemies, family relations, and even his character than is typical for the period.

The Estonian numismatist and historian Ivar Leimus has written a novel on Paul Gulden, his life, career, and destiny. This is probably the first-ever novel written about a mint master. Apart from the personal history of Paul, the reader gets acquainted with everyday life in the Eastern European cities of the time and meets several historical characters — not only crowned heads, but also those of the middle class. In a word, this is not only a biography of a mint master, but a book on his time, as well as an adventure novel, fascinating and instructive to read. For now, the book is available only in Estonian, but hopefully it is only a matter of time before it will be translated into more widespread languages.

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