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FAMILIAR YET UNKNOWN? COMINES’ TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN FLANDERS AND ITS CLOTH SEAL FINDS

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Starting from the 13th century at the latest, the textiles meant for long-distance trade were marked with leaden seals indicating the site of production, quality of the cloth, distributing merchant, etc. Whereas the initial product – woven cloth – normally does not allow to pinpoint the exact place of production or has not survived at all, these small artefacts are well-suited to reconstruct, among other things, the late medieval and early modern trade connections and consumption patterns. However, whilst the archaeological study of cloth seals began in western Europe already more than 40 years ago, there are still numerous items and even groups of seals that are until today either unidentified or have not been handled at all. The present paper discusses one distinctive category of leaden cloth seals that were recently ascertained as quality marks of the well-known medieval and early modern Flemish textile production centre Comines (Dutch: Komen). Alongside the finds, we also give an in-depth overview of the historical background of Comines’ cloth production and trade during the 14th and 15th centuries. As of 2022, only eleven cloth seals of Comines are known to the authors but publishing this corpus will help to change the situation in the future. As the collected data shows, these finds can be expected from both rural and urban sites.

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Introduction

The last few decades have brought many important changes to archaeological research, and among other things, the constantly increasing use of searching devices has had a dramatic impact on our understanding of the past. The gradual acceptance of metal detectors by heritage officials, their use by both amateurs and professionals and publication of the collected data offers many new ways on how to study the landscape and interpret the material culture. Quite often the finds that were previously regarded as rare prove to be, in fact, rather common. This is especially true of small finds: tiny metal artefacts were previously relatively rare discoveries during urban and rural excavations, but now form a considerable share of the total collection due to the regular use of the metal detector. If leaving aside the legal and methodological issues related to metal detecting enthusiasts, also the more or less adequately documented stray finds give us additional information on the distribution and use of everyday items.

One of the fields that has significantly benefited from the use of metal detectors and the evolving cooperation between hobby searchers and public institutions (museums, heritage offices, universities, etc.) is the study of medieval and early modern trade. Namely, many goods were sealed with small metal discs bearing either textual or visual information about the producer, owner or distributor of the commodity. Perhaps the best example is the cloth seal: to confirm the origin and quality of the textile, normally a small leaden seal was either pressed or attached to the fabric (Figs 1–2). This practice started most likely in Flanders already in the 12th century, and by the mid-13th century the use of cloth seals was also common in other places with developed textile industries such as Holland, France, Italy, Germany and Spain (Van Laere & Trostyansky 2010, 105).

Every year, tens of thousands of seals were clipped to the cloth before the products were transported to local or distant markets, from where the bales of textile often reached even further because of the redistribution of merchandise. Finally, either at the final stop of the commodity or before dividing the cloth into smaller segments, the seals were removed and discarded. What happened to the seals afterwards depended on various aspects but a notable number of the discs found their way into the soil and can be used now, after rediscovery, as good evidence for the historical textile trade. This is particularly true as the archaeological textiles – if found at all – are difficult to link with exact production sites. And since the historical sources are not too explicit about the types of textiles traded, cloth seals can greatly contribute to our knowledge about distribution patterns.

The study of cloth seals started about 40 years ago with a seminal publication by Walter Endrei and Geoff Egan (1982), but for a long time the latter remained a relatively lone actor in the field (most important contribution: Egan 1994), although occasional studies appeared here and there from the 1970s to the 1990s (e.g. Liebgott 1975; Taavitsainen 1982; Schütte 1993; Orduna 1995). Only in the late 1990s and even more so in the 2000s the overall situation changed, thanks to the growing focus on historical archaeology, widespread use of detecting devices as



Fig. 1. Isaac Claesz. van Swanenburg (1594–96), ‘Het vollen en verven’ (‘Fulling and dyeing’). In the upper corner one can see the quality control and sealing of the proofed cloth with a leaden cloth seal (see also the enlarged image of the scene below). Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden (S 422).



Fig. 2. Cloth seal attached to the bale of cloth. Sculpture on the facade of the Stedelijk Museum De Lakenhal, Leiden. Photo by Maxim Mordovin.

well as the cooperation with amateurs and museums. As a result, many important papers and catalogues have been assembled during the last 15 years (Hittinger 2008; Sullivan 2012; Elton 2017; Mordovin 2018; Van Laere 2019, to name a few). Moreover, the rising number of online databases and forums have helped to boost the research enormously all over Europe. Still, even today there are several regions where the study of cloth seals is in its infancy – including the Baltic States. Only a handful of brief overviews have thus far touched on this topic (e.g. Kvizikevičius 1998; 1999; Berglund 2010), some of the unearthed seals have found their way into published excavation reports, but all in all generalisation at national or regional levels is yet missing. Neither is it the aim of the present paper, although it can be regarded as a first step in this direction.

Regardless of the work that has been done recently on the identification of cloth seals all over Europe, there is a significant number of finds that for one reason or another are not tied to the place of production. Sometimes this is not possible as the markings on the disc are too vague to be associated with total certainty to the known persons, settlements or organisations behind the artefact. On other occasions, the finds have not been identified because there are no exact matches published elsewhere or the symbols on the seal require specific knowledge of the heraldry of the textile producing regions. This is also true for the group of cloth seals under discussion in this paper: whereas the first relevant find was unearthed and published already ten years ago (Russow et al. 2013, fig. 4: 3), it took time and another almost perfectly survived example to understand that the initial suggestion – a cloth seal

of the Hanseatic town of Bremen – was inaccurate. Only thanks to the communication between the authors of the present study was it possible to link the origin of the coat of arms on the disc to the well-known Flemish textile production town Comines (Fig. 3: 1).

It appears that up to the present day the cloth seals from Comines have not been published in the major scientific literature or uploaded to online databases, and although a few random finds might theoretically be hiding in highly regional journals, general knowledge of this particular group of seals is inadequate.¹ This article aims to fill the gap, and for that purpose, we will introduce the corpus of all relevant finds known to us as of spring 2021. We will also give an extensive overview of the history of Comines' textile production, distribution areas of its products as well as an analysis of the coat of arms used on the seals. In addition, some thoughts on the afterlife of the cloth seals will be presented as well. Hopefully, the publication of the current paper will help to change the present rather biased finding situation towards a more even distribution map of Comines' cloth seals, which in turn supports the research of the medieval textile trade at large. This study is also a good example of how the known, available historical sources can be supported or supplemented with archaeological finds, creating a more detailed, comprehensive image of the medieval trade.

Contextual information

Only 11 cloth seals of Comines are currently known to us.² Of these, one find comes from the vicinity of Демидів (Демидів) in Ukraine (Fig. 3: 2) and ten from Estonia – one from Voorepera (Fig. 3: 3), one from Võduvere (Fig. 3: 4) and the remaining eight from Tallinn (Fig. 3: 5).

Before placing the finds in a wider framework, it is important to describe the contextual background of the corpus handled in the present paper. In general, Comines' cloth seals have been found in two broader categories of sites: 1) as stray finds in rural areas and 2) finds unearthed during rescue and salvage excavations in suburban sites. Thus far we have no data on seals from the heart of towns, such as places connected either with commercial activities (e.g. customs, marketplaces, shops, etc.) or plots of long-distance merchants engaged in textile trade. No Comines' seals have emerged from castle sites either.

¹ Databases consulted: bagseals.org, finds.org.uk, DIME, Dutch artefacts, PAN. Bagseals.org has a list of errata for Elton 2017, mentioning 'key' as an element for Comines-Warneton (https://bagseals.org/bagseals_001_001/Errata). The database itself does not include images of Comines' cloth seals.

² After the completion of the paper, one more Comines' cloth seal was documented in the archaeological collection of the Haapsalu Castle in Western Estonia. The unpublished finds (HM 9206) of the investigated courtyard are stored in the Foundation of Haapsalu and Läänemaa Museums, the excavation (2017–2018) report is still in progress. The castle was one of the residences of the Prince-Bishopric of Ösel–Wiek as well as the canon residentiary. This find adds another dimension to the paper (the first find from a power centre) but due to space and time limits, we have left the main text of the present paper unchanged.

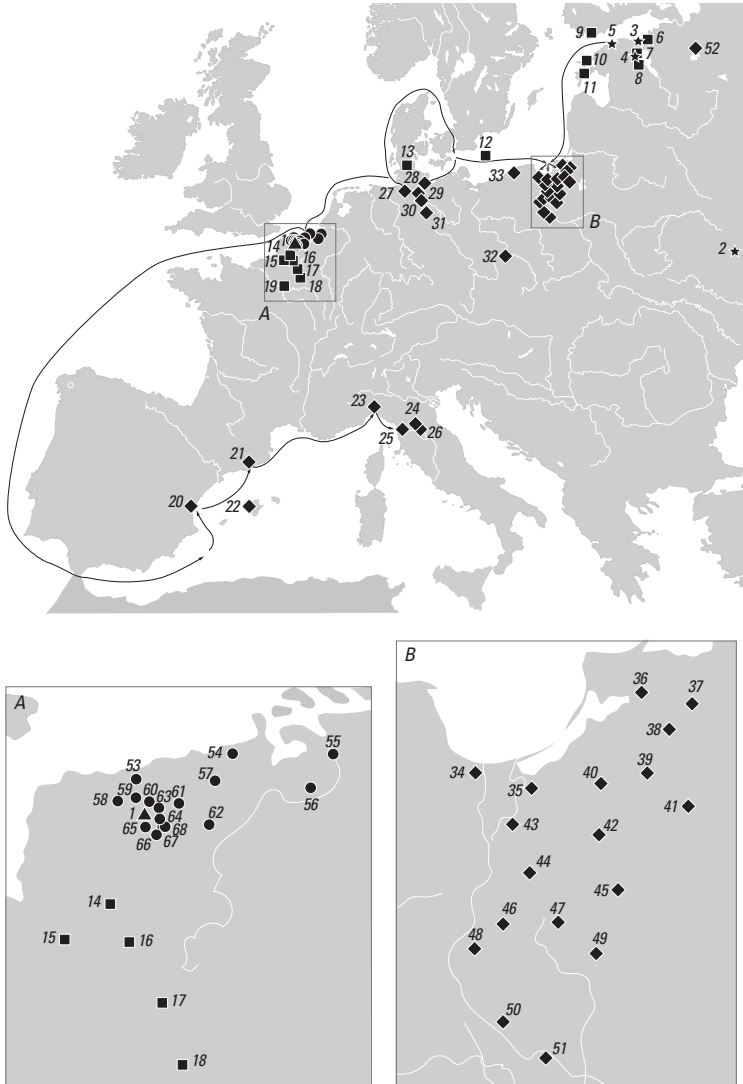


Fig. 3. Places mentioned in the paper. Triangle – Comines’ textile industry, pentagon – sites of Comines’ cloth seals, square – place names mentioned, circle – cloth production sites in the vicinity of Comines, diamond – market/consumer sites mentioned in written sources. Draft by Jaana Ratas.

1 – Comines, 2 – Demydiv, 3 – Voorepera, 4 – Võduvere, 5 – Tallinn, 6 – Narva, 7 – Laiuse, 8 – Tartu, 9 – Uusimaa, 10 – Island of Hiiumaa, 11 – Island of Saaremaa, 12 – Island of Bornholm, 13 – Holstein, 14 – Cambrai, 15 – Amiens, 16 – St Quentin, 17 – Laon, 18 – Reims, 19 – Paris, 20 – Valencia, 21 – Barcelona, 22 – Palma de Mallorca, 23 – Genoa, 24 – Prato, 25 – Pisa, 26 – Florence, 27 – Stade, 28 – Lübeck, 29 – Hamburg, 30 – Lüneburg, 31 – Wittingen, 32 – Legnica, 33 – Slupsk, 34 – Gdańsk, 35 – Elbląg, 36 – Kaliningrad, 37 – Sępólno, 38 – Bartoszyce, 39 – Lidzbark Warmiński, 40 – Orneta, 41 – Reszel, 42 – Miłkowo, 43 – Malbork, 44 – Rodowo, 45 – Działdowo, 46 – Łasin, 47 – Lubawa, 48 – Chełmno, 49 – Dąbrówno, 50 – Toruń, 51 – Włocławek, 52 – Novgorod, 53 – Dixmude, 54 – Bruges, 55 – Antwerp, 56 – Dendermonde, 57 – Langemark, 58 – Poperinge, 59 – Ypres, 60 – Wervik, 61 – Kortrijk, 62 – Enguien, 63 – Menin, 64 – Halluin, 65 – Warneton, 66 – Lille, 67 – Tourcoing, 68 – Roubaix.

Of two Comines' seals found in the Estonian rural areas, the first was discovered in 2016 by two metal detectorists in eastern Virumaa at Voorepera village (Fig. 3: 3). The relatively well-preserved item (Fig. 4: 1) was a single find from the plough zone; the nearby artefacts within the radius of 100 m are mainly from the 12th–14th centuries (Tasuja 2017, 10–16). The seal can be regarded as a chance find from the medieval rural settlement without a clear connection to past households. Still, two aspects should be highlighted here: firstly, about 600 metres to the north of the place of discovery lies the main medieval land route between the trading towns of Tallinn and Narva, the present-day Tallinn–Narva highway (Mickwitz 1938, 144; Bruns & Weczerka 1962, map 36). Secondly, some 400 metres to the west, the former manor house of Voorepera (in German *Worropen*) can be found. Although the manor itself was founded in the 17th century (Naaber 1981, 133), it cannot be excluded that the site had some importance already earlier, as the village of Voorepera belonged to the Cistercian monastery of Kärkna up to 1426 and later to the Livonian Order (Johansen 1933, 670–671). Thus, the seal might represent trade with the manor.

The second rural find was also discovered with a searching device, in the field of the present-day Võduvere village in the district of Jõgevamaa in 2017 (Fig. 4: 2). The new collection of metal artefacts (Luik 2020, 5–6 and catalogue) confirms the results of the previous landscape surveys of 1986 (finds: AI 5423) and 2013



Fig. 4. Estonian rural finds of Comines' cloth seals. 1 – Voorepera (AI 7788: 1), 2 – Võduvere (AI 8267: 30). Photos by Jaana Ratas, drawings by Kersti Siitan.

(finds: AI 7241) that the settlement history of this place reaches back at least to the Final Iron Age (i.e. 11th–12th centuries). Historically, the seal seems to be connected with the former Kõssima (other variations in historical sources: Kossima, Kõssimaa) village on the right bank of the Pedja River; the village was relocated to a new place at some time in the second half of the 19th century (EKLA F 200, EKS. stip. ar. m 14:2). The geographical location of the village on the shallow river section might indicate an old river crossing, especially as approximately 4 kilometres from the deserted village lies the historic land route between Tallinn and Tartu (Mickwitz 1938, 144; Bruns & Weczerka 1962, map 36); the latter was an important Hanseatic town and major centre of trade with northwestern Russia. In addition to the medieval trade route, one should also mention Jõgeva manor (Germ. *Laisholm*) that can be found about 150–500 metres south of the studied village site. However, the first written evidence of the manor dates only from 1601, and it is not known whether there was a medieval predecessor nearby. Another central point, the Laiuse Castle of the Livonian Order, is situated circa 10 kilometres from the find site as the crow flies.

More information is available on finds from Tallinn. The first two cloth seals of Comines came to light in 2011 during the rescue excavation at Tartu Rd. 1 (Fig. 5: 1). This investigated suburban plot is located near the junction of the main medieval roads and not far from an important river crossing, the Kivisilla (in English *Stone bridge*) Bridge. The vicinity of the waterfront, as well as the trunk road, is well-attested through documented structures, eco- and artefacts: besides on-site fish processing also the remains of a late medieval inn were found (Kadakas et al. 2013; Russow et al. 2013). It is hard to tell if this medieval institution supported on-site commercial activities, but among other trade-related items also seven fragments of medieval cloth seals were collected. Chronologically, the Comines' seals (Fig. 6: 1–2) are connected to the late 14th–15th-century deposits that are interpreted as levelling layers of previous buildings, among others perhaps a predecessor of the above-mentioned 15th-century inn.

Another Comines' cloth seal was found about 300 metres to the west of Tartu Rd. 1, where rescue excavations were recently organised at Estonia Ave. 7 (Fig. 5: 2). Here, the find context differs from the previously mentioned site as this plot has not been interpreted as a public institution but as private property in the Karja Gate suburbs established around the late 14th century or about 1400 AD. The fieldwork (Heinloo 2019; 2021) has unearthed late medieval plot boundaries, a cesspit, well and drainage system, yet the function of the buildings, and thus what activities can be associated with this place, is still open to discussion. Nevertheless, the noteworthy collection of small lead alloy finds, including at least 17 cloth seals, suggests the living quarters of a metalworker. This interpretation is further supported by dozens of forges as well as the residue of slag and metal collected during the first two excavation seasons (Heinloo 2019, 226–227). The exact operating time of this probable workshop is currently unknown; the Comines' cloth seal (Fig. 6: 3) as a possible piece of scrap metal was found in the upper turf/organic layer that is dated to the second half of the 15th century or the turn of the 15th–16th centuries.



Fig. 5. The sites of Comines' cloth seals in Tallinn. 1 – Tartu Rd. 1 (2011), 2 – Estonia Ave. 7 (2018–2020), 3 – Jahu/Väike-Patarei St. (2018–2019). Draft by Jaana Ratas.

The most comprehensive assemblage originates from the other side of the Hanseatic town where between spring 2018 and spring 2019 more than 220 cloth seals, including five from Comines, were discovered at Kalamaja suburbs (Fig. 5: 3). Based on the characteristics of the deposits, the extreme variety of artefacts as well

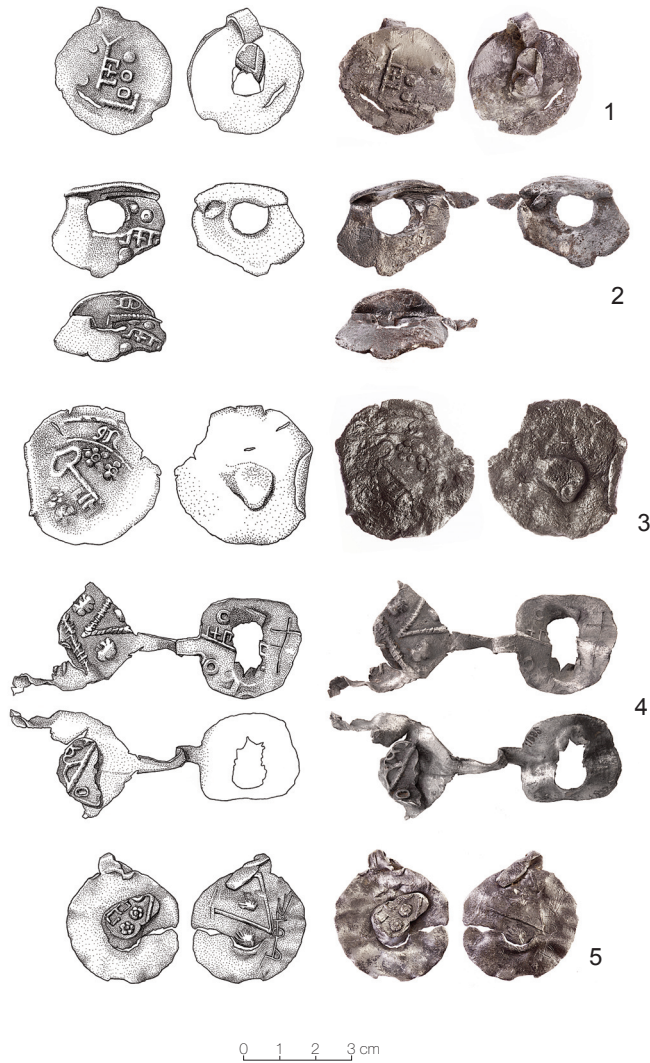


Fig. 6. Finds from Tallinn. 1–2 – Tartu Rd. 1 (AI 7032: 1667/1, 1933/7), 3 – Estonia Ave. 7 (AI 8013: 6), 4–8 – Jahu/Väike-Patarei St. (AI 7909: 1885, 12053, 12127, 17415, 23885). Photos by Jaana Ratas, drawings by Kersti Siitan. (*Continued on the next page.*)

as the relatively narrow time frame of the finds, it is quite certain that the excavated area between Jahu and Väike-Patarei streets was used as a landfill from about the second half of the 15th century until the early 16th century, with the most intense discarding taking place before 1485 (Russow et al. 2019; Leimus & Tvauri 2021). The stratigraphical and contextual information – we are handling tens of thousands of stray finds here – does not allow us to connect the artefacts either to their original place of use within the urban space or to straightforwardly explain the remarkable



Fig. 6. *Continued*

number of lead alloy finds collected. The cloth seals were scattered all over the excavated site, and the first attempt to chart the location of the Comines' finds (Fig. 6: 4–8) brought no clear pattern of discarding. Despite that, probably two explanations prevail. Firstly, the artefacts might have landed in the landfill after the removal of the seal from the cloth, as part of the usual waste deposition. Whether it happened in a relatively short period and the finds come from only a few locations inside the walled town is difficult to answer at present since the find complex has not been thoroughly studied. Alternatively, a similar interpretation as for Estonia Ave. 7 can be proposed: the landfill also included hundreds of fragments of other lead alloy items and scrap metal, therefore the cloth seals might belong to the collection of metal finds meant for reuse. In one way or another, the artefacts from this site provide an excellent insight into the late-medieval textile trade in northern Baltics.

The findspot of the Ukrainian seal (Fig. 7) is not known precisely. We only know that it was found beside a bridge over the Irpen River, in close vicinity of the village of Demydiv located north of Kyiv. The territory has never been investigated archaeologically. The only scientific project here was to look for traces of the legendary 'Battle at the Irpen River' between the armies of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Principality of Kyiv. During the fieldwork linked to this project, several 13th–14th-century rural settlements and a medium-size fortified centre were identified. The latter is most probably datable before the mid-13th century. And even if the authenticity of the battle is widely discussed, the appearance of the site in late medieval sources describing it as an important river crossing en route to Kyiv explains the appearance of a Comines' cloth seal in this region. This crossing is also present in several cartographic sources from the early modern period (Sulimierski

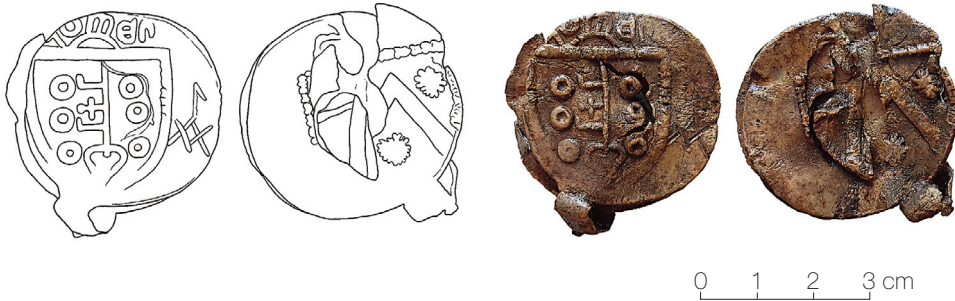


Fig. 7. Comines' cloth seal from Demydiv (Inv. No. Д-132). Photo and draft by Igor Prokhnenko.

et al. 1880, 952–955). Most probably, a toll point was located beside the crossing and the seal was lost during the process of checking the delivered textiles.

Comines and its cloth production

The preliminary identification of the finds from Comines was based primarily on the inscription above the coat of arms. To confirm this identification and to get an acceptable dating, we have to get acquainted with the historical background of both the very production centre, namely Comines, and its international trade, including our regions. Therefore, in the following chapter, we will summarise the available historical data regarding these topics and then use it as a framework for further interpretation and evaluation of the finds.

The Flemish town of Comines, divided today between France and Belgium, never belonged to the most prominent textile production centres. It is one of four small towns – along with Menin, Warneton and Wervik – on the banks of the Lys River between large textile manufacturing centres such as Lille, Ypres and Kortrijk (Ammann 1954, 19–20). The origins of their industrial activity are obscure, but by the end of the 13th century, the towns on the banks of the Lys were selling their fabrics on the international market under the single name *draperie de la Lys*. This is the only example of a geographical denomination without an administrative counterpart in the medieval textile trade – some sporadic mid-13th-century mentions of *Camina* or *Camuna* cloth in certain Iberian documents can most likely be associated with Dixmude. It seems that when Dixmude, Langemark, Poperinge and Wervik had already succeeded in securing a foreign clientele, the drapery of Comines had not yet risen to the rank of a true export industry (de Sagher 1961, 1–2).

The importance of the town increased significantly by the 14th century when it was gradually absorbed into the sphere of influence of Ypres (Melis 1990, 318). Situated halfway between Lille and Ypres, Comines provided Ypres with a direct connection to the Scheldt basin and thus a water route to the largest seaports. At the same time, the main land route crossing the river led from here via Lille to Amiens,

St Quentin, Cambrai, Reims, Laon and, of course, Paris. To secure the strategic position of the town, the toll on the road from Ypres to Comines that had already been in force in 1309 was renewed in 1354 by the lord of the town Hellin de Waziers. The surviving documents include many details regarding the regulation, standardisation and quality of the traded production (de Pauw 1899, 299; Duvosquel 1994, 258, 260–261; 2009, 347). The first known direct regulation of the local cloth industry was confirmed by the same Hellin de Waziers in 1359. This deed, as well as the attempt to develop the cloth industry in Comines, immediately faced opposition from Ypres. The latter made every effort to prevent the further development of cloth production in the town, which resulted in several legal conflicts. The struggle ended in a compromise in 1367 when the citizens of Comines promised to give up the imitation of the heavy, high-quality and expensive Ypres' cloth – the so-called *de la grande moison* – and restricted its production to simple, lighter, ordinary fabrics, often called *slechte draperie* (that is poor cloth: Eberstadt 1899, 222; Sagher 1961, 2).

Soon after ending the quarrels with Ypres, Comines changed hands. In 1373 the town came under the rule of Nicholas, also known as Colart de la Clite (de Commynes et al. 1855, i) through his marriage to Jeanne de Waziers, Lady of Comines and Halluin (also spelt as Halwyn and Halewyn: Clemmensen 2006, 38: No. 182). The family originated from the bourgeoisie of Ypres, and Nicholas was the first to be introduced to the higher nobility after getting the rank of councillor by Luis II (de Male), Count of Flanders (Kervyn de Lettenhove 1859, 264). In 1332–1334, Nicholas' son, Jean de la Clite, was mentioned as an advocate in a dispute between Ypres and Poperinge. The strong ties between the family and the city of Ypres continued until the very last moment, which is well illustrated by the fact that even in 1372 Colard de la Clite participated in a court case issued by the city of Ypres against Poperinge (de Pauw 1899, 194: VII, 198, 256: XXII). After moving their seat to Comines, the *de la Clites* took this more noble-sounding name for their family name.

The last decades of the 14th century brought changes not only in the ownership but also in the economic life of the town. Among the first measures was once again to settle the tense relations between Comines, Ypres and Poperinge, which were achieved in 1373 on similar terms as two decades earlier (HUB III, 57: 116, note 1). Then, in order to raise the town's income, the landlords attracted many weavers from their former hometown both with more lucrative conditions and especially with higher security, which became almost tangible after the siege of Ypres in 1383. According to contemporary sources, the immigration of the clothiers and the improvement of their status in Comines resulted in the locals receiving the nickname *Trapeniens* at that time. The best sign of economic prosperity, which sprung from the cloth production and cloth trade, is the construction of a new belfry to proclaim the wealth of the town (Sagher 1961, 3).

The flourishing of the cloth industry in Comines is also documented by several early 15th-century charters, including one from 1416. The significance of the latter, issued by John the Fearless, Duke of Burgundy and Count of Flanders, is that it designates Comines as a *ville de draps*, that is 'town of cloth' (Sagher 1961, 20:

210). The most unusual aspect, however, is that unlike other textile production centres, Comines did not have any strict regulations regarding the cloth-making process and the characteristics of the fabrics. One thing is clear from the 15th-century sources that until it was possible, English wool was used for the local textiles (Sagher 1961, 62–64). Also, Comines most probably imitated some specific Ypres fabrics – this would explain why there was no strict regulation. Thus, it seems that the local weavers enjoyed almost complete freedom in cloth-making, producing the best quality fabrics in the whole history of the textile industry in Comines (Sagher 1961, 3). At the same time, the textiles were not completely finished in Comines. The final step, namely shearing, which significantly increased the value of the cloth, was done in Bruges, and thereafter Bruges became the main distributor of Comines' cloth via its port on the Zwin estuary (Sagher 1961, 4).

The first regulations and the compromise with Ypres opened the doors for the cloth of Comines to reach the markets under its own name too. Although its fabrics were still sold along with textiles from other towns of the Lys valley, there are many written sources which enable to trace Comines' cloth. It is clear from contemporary documents that the main redistribution place in the late 14th and early 15th centuries was the regional fair of Bruges. The *Comensch laken* (Sagher 1961, 3–4) from Bruges' records can be identified as the production of Comines, where *laken* originally meant *a full-length piece of woollen cloth*. Bruges was also that 'hub' from where the cloth of Comines spread to further markets. There were two larger 'consumption regions' for Comines' cloth: the Baltic and the western Mediterranean.

The first more significant amount of Comines' cloth can be found in the Hansa accounts of the Baltic region (Ammann 1954, 43, 45–47). One of the earliest known documents of this kind, dated 1354, proves that already in the mid-14th century not only the fabrics of Comines but also their imitations were favourably known on the Novgorod market (HUB III, 373: 596). In the 1360s Comines' cloth was already present in the large trade centres along the southern coast of the Baltic Sea region, such as Königsberg (today Kaliningrad, Russian Federation; in 1361: Renken 1937, 119, note 64), Lübeck (in 1364: Jahnke 2009, 82) and Hamburg (in 1369: Sagher 1961, 5). These textiles regularly recur in Vicko von Geldersen's records compiled in 1369–1372. This Hamburg merchant was selling Comines' cloth to retailers in Holstein, Wittingen, Stade and Lüneburg (Nirrnheim 1895, 14: 108, 21: 149, 28: 182, 41: 245). According to the archival material of the Teutonic Order, by the 1380s the cloth from Comines made its way to almost all major markets of the Eastern Baltic region and its neighbours. In 1385 it is first mentioned in Thorn (today Toruń, Poland; Sattler 1887, 36: 67; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 84: 338), nine years later it appears in the hands of merchants from Bornholm who traded it in Königsberg (Sattler 1887, 268: 598; Laczny & Sarnowsky 2013, 43: 94). In the same year (1394), Comines' cloth appeared in large quantities in the cargo, stored in Denmark, of a ship which had been wrecked in the Baltic. The goods were transported by a merchant from Bruges with the intention of selling them in Danzig and Elbing (today Gdańsk and Elbląg, Poland; Koppmann 1877, 155: 185, art. 4). In the last decade of the 14th century, Comines' cloth referred to as *Comesche* frequently occurs in

Königsberg's accounts (in 1393/1394–1399: Renken 1937, 123, 129, 131). Of the total quantity of identified cloth, 7% arrived from Comines. In 1401 a Hanseatic trading post official in Novgorod complained again about the quality of the most likely counterfeit cloth sold as originating from Comines (HUB V; Sagher 1961, 19: 209). Two years later the cloth – seemingly authentic – appears in Hildebrand Veckinghusen's account books as *van Comen*. The merchant traded different goods from Bruges to Eastern Baltic cities (Lesnikov & Stark 2013, 195: Af2 f.123v18).

Around the turn of the century, the cloth from Comines was regularly purchased by the merchants in the main Hansa cities of the Eastern Baltic, namely in Danzig in 1400/1401³, in 1402⁴, in Elbing in 1401⁵, and in Thorn in 1399⁶ and in 1400⁷. From these markets, the fabrics were transported to smaller towns of the Teutonic Order: Bardenstein (today Bartoszyce, Poland) in 1400⁸, Heilsberg (today Lidzbark Warمیński, Poland) in 1400⁹ and in 1401¹⁰, Kulm (today Chełmno, Poland) in 1401¹¹, Leslau (today Włocławek, Poland) in 1400¹², Liebstadt (today Miłakowo, Poland) in 1401¹³, Radau (today Rodowo, Poland) in 1402¹⁴, Schippenbeil (today Sępól, Poland) between 1399 and 1402¹⁵, and Wormditt (today Orneta, Poland) in 1402¹⁶.

Even more references are provided by the *Schuldbücher* (Debt books) of Königsberg and Marienburg from the years 1403–1405. It seems to have been the most prosperous period for Comines' cloth trade when its fabrics were sold in larger amounts in the largest Hanseatic centres, such as the above-mentioned Danzig¹⁷, Elbing¹⁸, and Thorn¹⁹, as well as in their immediate vicinity: Gilgenburg (today Dąbrówno, Poland)²⁰, Graudenz (today Grudziądz, Poland)²¹, Heilsberg (today Lidzbark Warمیński, Poland)²², Lessen (today Łasin, Poland)²³, Löbau (today Lubawa, Poland)²⁴, Rössel (today Reszel, Poland)²⁵, Soldau (today Działdowo,

³ Heß et al. 2008, 159: 766, 160: 774–775, 182: 908

⁴ Heß et al. 2008, 177: 882, 179: 891, 180: 895–896, 183: 912, 186: 927, 929

⁵ Heß et al. 2008, 216, 1096, 1098–1099, 2018: 1111, 2019: 1115

⁶ Heß et al. 2008, 58: 149

⁷ Heß et al. 2008, 122: 557

⁸ Heß et al. 2008, 351: 1925

⁹ Heß et al. 2008, 219: 1114

¹⁰ Heß et al. 2008, 228: 1179

¹¹ Heß et al. 2008, 160: 774

¹² Heß et al. 2008, 273: 1433–1434

¹³ Heß et al. 2008, 345: 1899

¹⁴ Heß et al. 2008, 186: 927

¹⁵ Heß et al. 2008, 351: 1925, 357: 1948, 359: 1951

¹⁶ Heß et al. 2008, 349: 1913

¹⁷ Sattler 1887, 16: 12, 26: 39; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 51: 70, 66: 177

¹⁸ Sattler 1887, 16: 14, 37: 68–69; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 52: 72, 85: 345, 86: 348–349

¹⁹ Sattler 1887, 33: 57, 178: 20; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 79: 298; Laczny & Sarnowsky 2013, 93: 59

²⁰ Sattler 1887, 46: 93; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 99: 456

²¹ Sattler 1887, 44: 88–89; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 96: 436–437

²² Sattler 1887, 40: 76; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 89: 382

²³ Sattler 1887, 42: 83; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 93: 407

²⁴ Sattler 1887, 43: 86; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 94: 420

²⁵ Sattler 1887, 42: 82; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 92: 401

Poland)²⁶, Stolp (today Słupsk, Poland)²⁷, Wormditt²⁸, and also in further towns such as Legnitz in Silesia (today Legnica, Poland)²⁹.

After a five-year silence in the written sources, in 1409 and 1410 Comines' cloth returned as a relatively well-selling product on the market of Danzig (*Cummysch/Cumysch/Cumych/Cunysche laken*: Jenks 2012, 12: 88, 13: 99, 24: 173, 41: 267, 50: 344, 85: 606, 109: 830, 118: 909, 162: 1341, 171: 1407, 174: 1432, 183: 1514, 210: 1805; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 120: 181). In the same year its fabrics were also mentioned in Marienburg (Sattler 1887, 54: 145; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 132: 339–340). By the end of the first quarter of the 15th century, the name of Comines gradually disappeared from the archival documents of the Eastern Baltic region. In 1417 it still appeared in Marienburg (*Comissche laken*: Sattler 1887, 60: 5; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 208: 5), and in 1422 Comines' cloth was sent from Bruges to Reval (today Tallinn, Estonia; HUB VI, 263: 473: *eynen terlingh Cumesscher lakene*). Some years later (1426), two larger bales of Comines' cloth were on board a boat captured by the Danes. These commodities belonged to a merchant from Thorn (Ropp 1876, 282: 381/36).

In the Mediterranean, Comines' textiles were in most of the cases hidden within the production of Wervik and Kortrijk (Melis 1967, 153–154; 1990, 301, 326–327). In this form, its cloth is traceable from 1391 until 1410, but under its own name it appears at least in two Francesco Datini's warehouses: in Barcelona (1396, 1398–1399) and Palma de Mallorca (1397 and 1403). Its presence in Valencia should also be considered in the same period (Melis 1967, 154–161; 1990, 320–321, 324–325, 342, 344). Apart from the Iberian warehouses, the cloth from Comines made its way to the heart of Datini's realm, e.g. Florence, Pisa and Prato (Sagher 1961, 4; Melis 1990, 300), and it was also traded in Genoa, as evident already in the mid-14th-century records (Sagher 1961, 4) and appearing in a register issued in 1400 (Melis 1972, 294).

Some of the above-cited documents provide information about the value and appearance of the cloth. According to it, Comines' fabrics belonged to the cheaper branch of higher- or medium-quality production, with prices similar to the fabrics of Poperinge, Dendermonde, Enghien, etc. (Renken 1937, 132, note 100). According to the Italian accounts, Comines' textiles were inferior in quality and price compared to some of Wervik's and Kortrijk's fabrics (Melis 1990, 300–301, 342). Regarding the colour, Vicko de Geldersen's accounts call it *grùnmenget*, meaning that at least some of the fabrics were green (Nirrnheim 1895, 41).

The decline of the industry

The heyday of Comines' cloth lasted only about half a century. It seems that in the long term it could not compete with the more developed and stratified textile

²⁶ Sattler 1887, 43: 85; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 94: 419, 193: 986

²⁷ Sattler 1887, 47: 95; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 100: 465

²⁸ Sattler 1887, 39: 73; Link & Sarnowsky 2009, 88: 370

²⁹ Sattler 1887, 266: 595; Laczny & Sarnowsky 2013, 39: 77

industry of neighbouring Tourcoing and Roubaix (Delsalle 1990, 596). The first, although a bit unclear sign of the decline is the disappearance of Comines' cloth from Italian sources after 1410. It is not certain, however, whether this indeed reflects a real economic situation or whether the absence of textiles produced in the Lys valley from the 15th-century Italian documents is simply a consequence of the death of Francesco Datini in 1410 (Rossi 2013, 22) and the collapse of his enormous merchant empire.

From 1425 onwards the symptoms of the crisis were, nevertheless, well observable. The peak of the production was in 1427 and since then the amount of cloth produced was gradually decreasing, never to recover again (Sagher 1961, 9, 40: 222–223). According to the local archival sources, the amount of cloth produced dropped from 2911 pieces in 1432 and 3367 in 1435 to 610 in 1474 or even 162 in 1478, only slightly improving to 270 in 1484 (Sagher 1961, 40–41: 222). The heaviest blow to the local industry was the ban of selling English wool in Flanders, documented as early as 1427/1428.

Being aware of the worsening economic situation, the magistrate took several steps to avoid the disaster. As a first step, the town council launched a struggle against the rural weavers to protect its industry, joining with the other *smalle steiden* (i.e. small towns) alongside the large city of Ypres to obtain privileges in favour of the urban clothiers (Sagher 1961, 7, No. 213: 11 March 1428). At the same time, the magistrate kept receiving with great honour German merchants who visited the town, trying to persuade them to buy its products. At least three such occasions were documented in the second quarter of the 15th century: in 1428/1429, 1439/1440 and 1441/1442 (Sagher 1961, No. 235: 59, 64, 65). Most probably, as a result of these talks, Comines – among many others – was included in a special agreement signed in 1442 and renewed in 1457 by the German merchants with the city of Bruges concerning its staple good and cloth-trading rights (*lakenen van Comen*: HUB VIII, 405: 630, 406).

From 1430/1431 onwards the sources document that Comines tried to replace English wool with Spanish wool but the Hanseatic merchants regularly refused to buy these fabrics. The superior quality of English cloth was vividly manifested by the fact that the members of the town magistrate bought English textiles for themselves (Sagher 1961, 62: No. 235, art. 4 [1430/1431], art. 6 [1433/1434]; 63–64: art. 10 [1437/1438]).

It seems that the invested efforts temporarily resulted in the return of Comines' cloth to the international market in the Eastern Baltic region. At least in 1434, after a short hiatus, its fabrics were mentioned again in the Danzig accounts (Hirsch 1858, 252: 22; Jahnke 2009, 82). Five years later its textiles were aboard a ship sailing from Lübeck to Reval, which wrecked on the shore of Ösel (i.e. Island of Saaremaa) and then was looted by peasants from the Island of Dagö (Hiiumaa) (HUB VII, 286: 572). In a couple of years, Comines' cloth showed itself on another ship, which left Bruges via Lübeck most probably for the Eastern Baltic (in 1441: HUB VII, 343: 679). A *terling* of *Kumesche laken* was transported from Bruges to Hamburg in 1445 (Ropp 1878, 119: 221). In 1453 a complaint was made by the city council of Danzig

about detaining a ship with different textiles – including *Kommese* – aboard by the Danes (HUB VIII, 699: 1160, art. 26).

The economic situation of the town aggravated after the change in ownership, which led to a huge indebtedness of the whole domain, divided into two parts after 1453. After the death of Jean [I] de la Clite in 1443 and the death of his brother Colard de la Clite in 1453, half of the heritage passed to the hands of younger Jean [II] de la Clite while another half to his underage nephew Philippe, known as *de Commynes*. However, the domain was governed for at least another decade by Jean de la Clite with his own and Philippe's rights (de Commynes et al. 1855, xiii; Kervyn de Lettenhove 1859, 265; Clemensen 2006, 26). While these family troubles had already put the finances of Comines in a rather unfavourable state (it was greatly impoverished by bad management), the overall economic situation in Flanders was getting even worse. By the end of the 15th century, the relations with Hansa declined, leading to moving the German merchants from Bruges to Antwerp in 1485 (Munro 1966, 1148). This process relegated Bruges, the primary redistribution market for Comines' cloth, to a secondary position. At the same time, the demand for Flemish cloth began to decrease, giving way to the already well-known and popular Dutch and Brabant fabrics, and especially to English cloth. The final stage in the downfall was the privileges granted to Antwerp by Maximilian I, transferring to Antwerp the staple in alum, the chief and rare dye-fixing mordant for the cloth-finishing industry (Sagher 1961, 6; Munro 1966, 1149–1150).

To overcome the difficulties, the magistrate started to look for new feasible solutions, settling their ideas in the new regulations (*keures*) adopted in 1451 (Sagher 1961, 7, No. 220: 20 February 1451). According to these *keures*, textile production decreased radically, predominantly to lower-quality cloth, new types of fabrics were introduced and started to imitate English cloth, which was saleable and demanded on the market. As a result, in this decade the fabrics of Comines temporarily returned to the Eastern Baltic markets. In 1453 *Kommese*-textiles were aboard a ship that was detained by the Danes on its sail to Danzig (HUB VIII, 699: 1160). The next – and also the last – mention of the fabrics from Comines outside Flanders appeared in 1469. A ship sailing from Lübeck to Reval was wrecked on the rocks of Uusimaa. Among many other commodities, it was shipping *brede Kumesche* and *nye Kumesche laken* (HUB IX, 437–440: 558). These designations perfectly correspond to the 1451 regulations, where the *brede* – that is broad – can be undoubtedly identified with the higher-quality broadcloth made of English wool (*fyne breede [...] lakenen van Ingelscher wulle*: Sagher 1961, 30: 220), while *nye* may refer to the newly introduced, cheaper fabrics, made of different other wool (*andre lakenen die men maken mach van diversche manieren van wullen, als Ingelsche, Scotsche, Vlaemsche, Spaensche ende zuudersche wulle*: Sagher 1961, 32).

The last significant change in the history of Comines, which without a doubt affected its cloth production, took place in August 1472, resulting in radical changes in ownership. One of the two main lords of the town at the time was Philippe de Comines (also de Commynes), Nicolas de la Clite's son (Michaud 1837, iii). The latter was bailiff of Flanders from 1445, while Philippe – who was born in the same

year in the Castle of Comines – inherited a part of the domain ca 1465. Being a childhood friend of Charles the Bold, later Duke of Burgundy, he was a prominent member of his ducal court until he unexpectedly resigned in 1472 and went into the service of King of France Louis XI. As a consequence, all Philippe's property, both moveable and immovable – including his property in Comines – was immediately confiscated in the same year (Michaud 1837, iv; de Commynes et al. 1855, xi, xvii–xviii).

The almost complete collapse of the textile industry in Comines did not mean its end. At the beginning of the 16th century sealed and unsealed fabrics of the town were sold on local markets (Sagher 1961, 10), but no written or archaeological evidence of its presence outside Flanders has been found so far. Only a final interesting fact to be mentioned is that around 1530 the clothiers of Bruges attempted to introduce new cloth in the style of Comines. However popular the textiles from Comines were, the radical transformation of the late medieval political and economic relations hindered their return to the formerly occupied markets (Sagher 1961, 238).

Description and heraldry of the cloth seals

The discussed cloth seals are not completely identical but their overall appearance is very similar, yet the collection is too small to provide a typological analysis of the artefact. They all belong to the single-riveted, two-part type after the terminology established by Geoff Egan (Egan 1994, viii). Both parts (discs) of the seals depict coats of arms. According to the best-preserved and less stylised seals (Figs 4: 2; 7), the blazoning of the first one is *a key palewise sable between 6 cinquefoils 3,3*. The most important detail in identifying these seals is the inscription above the coat of arms on four of them (Figs 4: 1–2; 6: 4; 7). Written in gothic majuscule, it says COMENE, which is a mixture of the Dutch (Komen) and French (Comines) names of the town, referring to its medieval pronunciation. The same spelling appears in the contemporary late medieval town regulations (e.g. in 1428: Sagher 1961, 25), and even in 1899 (de Pauw 1899, 158). The described blazon perfectly corresponds to the coat of arms of Comines as it appears on an etching by Johannes Willemszoon Blaeu of 1662 (Fig. 8) and, together with the fact that it is directly related to the inscription, leaves no doubt that it must be the coat of arms of the medieval town.

The second coat of arms is somewhat more intriguing. Being made of lead, the tinctures of the coat of arms are not identifiable but the fields and figures are well observable. According to the best-preserved examples (Figs 4: 1–2; 6; 7), its blazoning is *a chevron between three escallops & border*. The coats of arms help to connect several more or less damaged seals to the better-preserved ones, creating a distinctive group of finds.

The identification of the second coat of arms – lacking any assisting inscriptions – was more difficult. If the first one belonged to the town, then the second one should



Fig. 8. Coat of arms of Comines on the etching by Johannes Willemszoon Blaeu, 1662 (top left: arms of Comines; top centre: arms of Flanders; top right: arms of Phillipe de Commynes).

represent the lords of Comines or the region. As it was discussed above, the textile industry in Comines gained its importance not earlier than in the mid-14th century. From that time onwards, until the decline of the local cloth production in the late 15th century, only two families bore the seignury of Comines: *de Waziers* (de Commynes et al. 1855, xi; Duvosquel 2009, 346–347) and *de la Clite de Comines* (de Commynes et al. 1855, xi, xiii, xvii, xviii; Clemensen 2006, 26, 38; Pattou 2016, 6–7). From the end of the 15th century, Comines was owned by the *d'Halluin* family (Pattou 2016, 11). Among these families, the coat of arms on the cloth seals corresponds to the *de la Clite* or in Dutch *van der Clyte* family, which inherited Comines in 1411 through marriage between Jeanne de Waziers and Colaert de la Clite after the death of Jeanne's father Hellin de Waziers (Pattou 2016, 7–8). Their earliest known coat of arms appears on a charter issued in 1369, granted to Colaert de la Clite (also Colard or Colart; Demay 1873, v. II. 23: 5046). According to the French publication, the blazon is *Écu au chevron accompagné de trois coquilles, à la bordure*. In the roll of arms of the Peace Conference held at Arras and issued there in 1435, the *de la Clite* arms appear at least three times, namely for Colard [II] de la Clite *dit de Comines*, his brother Jean [I] de la Clite, *seigneur de Comines*, and the latter's son, also Jean [II] de la Clite (Clemensen 2006, 26, 38). The coat of arms of Jean de la Clite as one of the first knights of the Order of the Golden Fleece, reappears in a 17th-century manuscript compiled by Jean-Baptiste Maurice (Maurice 1667, 10; Fig. 9). Jean's nephew and an heir of the seigniry of Comines

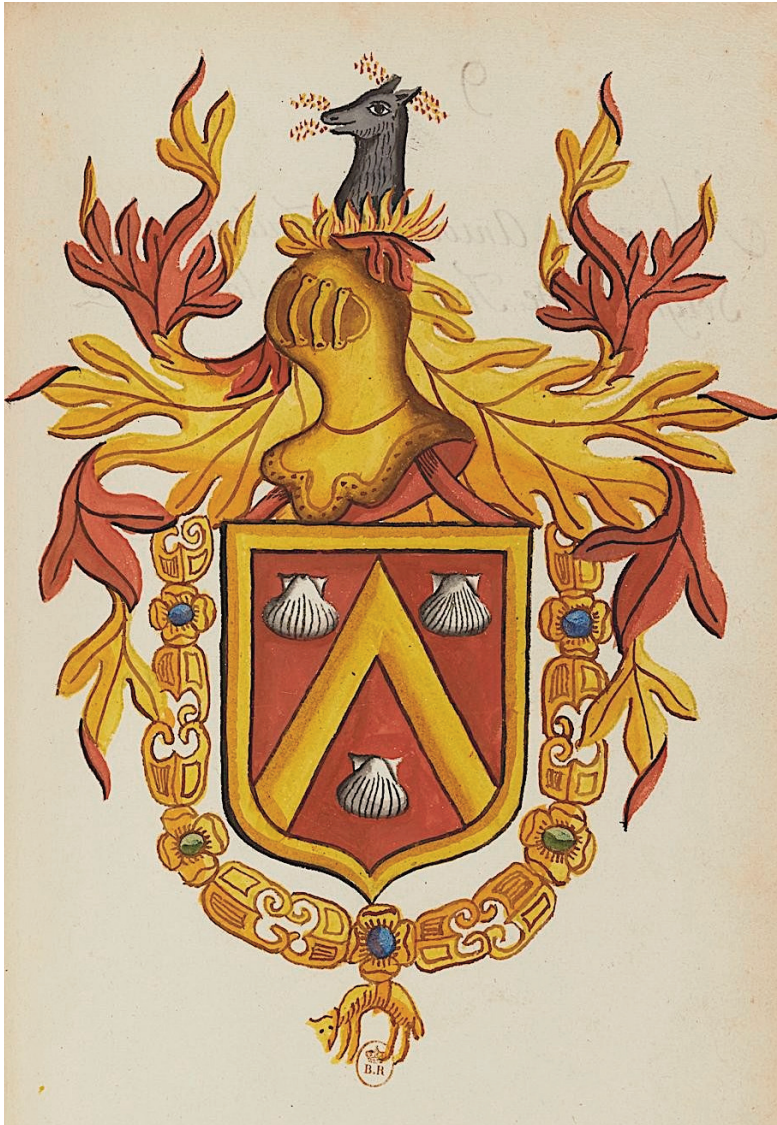


Fig. 9. Coat of arms of Jean de la Clite (Maurice 1667).

was Philippe de Commines, a famous French historian and statesmen, a prominent member of the court of King Louis XI (Michaud 1837, iii–iv; de Commynes et al. 1855, xi–xiv). Philippe de Commines's arms are known from two sources. One is a late 15th-century illustrated codex of Saint Augustine's *La Cité de Dieu* (RMMW, 10 A 11, fol. 1r, 6r; Fig. 10), while the other is his tomb, located now in the Louvre. The blazon is the same in both cases: *Gules, a chevron Or between three escallops Argent & border* (see also Pattou 2016, 10).

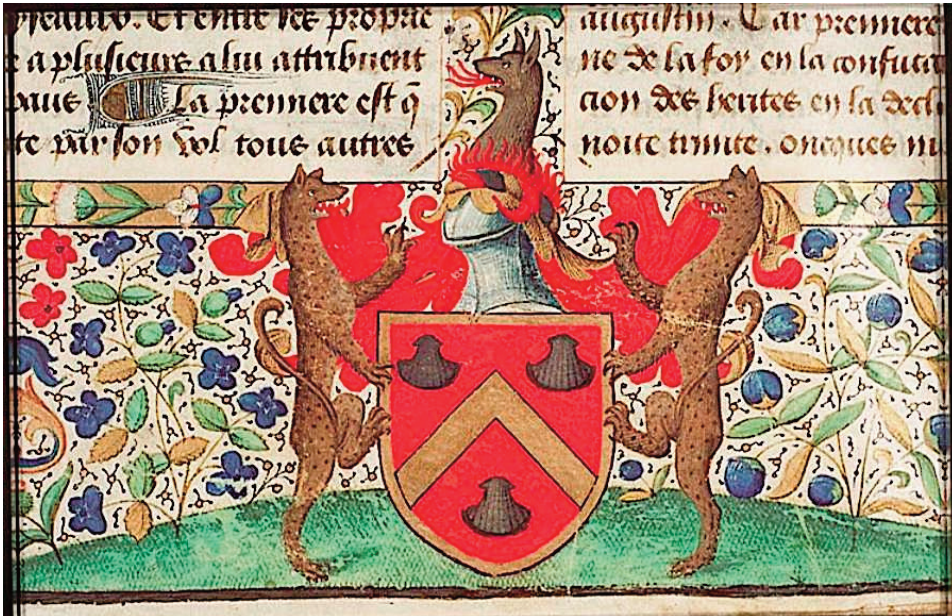


Fig. 10. Coat of arms of Philippe de Commines (RMMW, 10 A 11, fol. 1r, 6r. The Hague).

Philippe de Commines lost his seignury in Comines in 1472 after he had fled from the Burgundian court to the King of France Louis XI (de Commynes et al. 1855, xvii–xviii). Philippe’s uncle Jean de la Clite as the prime heir held the family residence in Comines and he was the only person in the town who was still using the arms of *de la Clite* after Philippe’s treason. Jean died with no male heirs in 1473 (Clemensen 2006, 38) or 1475 (Pattou 2016, 10). Therefore, this year should be regarded as the *ante quem* terminus for dating the seals. It seems that after the extinction of the *de la Clites*, the seignury of Comines passed to the *d’Halluin* family first via the marriage between Jean II’s daughter Jeanne de la Clite and her second husband Jean d’Halluin (Jan van Halewijn) (Coulon 1904, 145; Pattou 2016, 11). Through their great-granddaughter Jeanne-Henriette d’Halluin who in 1559 married Philippe de Croy, the domain was transferred to the *de Croy* family (Coulon 1904, 153). These new landlords – *d’Halluin* and *de Croy*, if they ever issued any cloth seals – must have used their own arms on them.

Dating

All the discussed seals are more or less stray finds with no closely datable archaeological context, if leaving aside the main dating of the Kalamaja landfill in Tallinn where the deposition peak occurred before 1485 (Leimus & Tvauri 2021). Therefore, only the historical background and indirect archival sources may help

in dating these objects. According to the available written evidence, the *post quem* date is the date when Comines' textiles reached foreign markets. The earliest date would be the mid-14th century but considering the presence of the *de la Clite* coat of arms, it cannot be earlier than 1373. Maybe the construction of the belfry in the town in 1359 is one of the signs of the increasing international textile trade. Most probably, moving Ypres' clothiers to Comines in 1383 in connection with the first siege gave that very last impetus and transferred to Comines the international relations it had missed earlier.

The *ante quem* dating is easier to determine: the change of ownership of Comines in 1475 ended the use of the *de la Clite* coat of arms on seals. However, the decreasing amount of the produced textiles and 1469 as the year of the last mention of Comines' cloth on the international market, including the Baltic region, suggests that the seals should be dated no later than the mid-15th century. The font style of the seals – Gothic majuscule – supports the earlier dating to the first half of the 15th century, maybe even ca 1400. This font type was widely used until the end of the first half of the 15th century, when it was gradually replaced by the Gothic minuscule script. Undoubtedly, the once produced seal matrix was not necessarily replaced only because of the new style and fashion, although in the case of leaden seal pressing, such matrices or dies must have eroded faster than in the case of wax seals. According to the available written evidence, the cloth export of Comines reached its peak at the turn of the 14th century, maybe in the very early 15th century. At that very time, its fabrics reached not only the Baltics but also Iberian and Italian ports and customers; also, in that period the Gothic majuscule was the most widespread in epigraphical sources.

There is one more significant group of written sources that may also contribute to clarifying the chronology of Comines' cloth seals. These are the local regulations called *keures*. Many such sources all across Europe usually discuss the sealing of textiles. The earliest known *keures* for Comines, compiled in 1428, contain no reference to the sealing practice in the town (Sagher 1961, 25–27).

A later decree issued by the town authorities in 1451 already included several paragraphs on this topic (Sagher 1961, 30–38). The most intriguing fact is that it differentiates several groups of local fabrics depending on the provenance of their raw material. The first group includes three types of fabrics all produced of English wool (*lakenen van Inghelscher wulle*), namely fine broadcloth (*fyne breede Inghelsche lakenen*), 'other' fine cloth (*andre fyne Inghelsche lakenen*) and narrow fine cloth (*fyne smale Inghelsche lakenen*). The second group consists of fabrics produced of wool of different provenience, e.g. England, Scotland, Flanders, Spain and 'southern' lands (*andre lakenen die men maken mach van diversche manieren van wullen, als Inghelsche, Scotsche, Vlaemsche, Spaensche ende Zuudersche wulle*). The most crucial information in the second part of the 1451 regulation is that there are no references to sealing these textiles. Returning to the first part of the instructions, the *keures* say that fine broadcloth shall be sealed with '[...] 3 groote seighels gheprent metter grooter tanghe gheprent metter grooter tanghe [...]'; the other fine cloth '[...] met 2 groote looden gheprent metter vors. groote tanghe [...]';

and the narrow fabrics ‘[...] *met 2 zeighels van de vors. groote tanghe* [...]’ (Sagher 1961, 30–31). No other textile production is mentioned in this regulation to be sealed.

Considering the history of the Comines’ cloth industry, the chronological frames of its export can be given from the 1360s until the 1460s. This more or less corresponds to what we know about the history of possession of the seignery. As described above, Comines was in the hands of the *de la Clite* family from 1373 until 1475. The chronology of the three archaeological sites in Tallinn confirms the given historical dating. We may even assume that – in the light of the chronological frames of the sites of Tartu Rd. 1 and Jahu/Väike-Patarei St. – the dating may be reduced to the third quarter of the 15th century. Unfortunately, the rural settlements do not provide any further evidence for more precise dating.

Summarising all the above-mentioned data, it seems that the eleven cloth seals attributable to the town of Comines must have been produced in the time interval between 1373 and 1475. Assuming that the earliest mention of the cloth sealing practice in Comines in 1451 is the year of its actual beginning, we may reduce the dating to the period 1451–1473. Undoubtedly, we cannot exclude the existence of such practice from the late 14th century when Comines’ cloth appeared on the international markets, but the lack of such data in the 1428 regulations may support our conclusions. In view of the dateable seal finds from Tallinn, we would date the known Comines’ seals to the decades 1451–1473. However, the future finds of relevant cloth seals might make corrections to this suggestion.

Comines’ cloth seals in a wider framework

The above-described historical sources let us reconstruct the basic outline of the international textile trade in cloth made in Comines. In a very generalised manner, the main axis between the production place and the consumer site was Bruges, where usually the finishing of the Comines’ textiles took place and where the merchant bought goods for their customers to be shipped to the Baltic Sea region. The written evidence reflects well that the cloth of Comines was popular within the realm of the Teutonic Order in Prussia as well as in northwestern Russia through Novgorod. Thus, it is not surprising to have a handful of cloth seals of Comines in the Hanseatic town of Tallinn, which was one of the key players in the northern Baltic trade – in the 1420s and 1430s alone Tallinn imported annually about 12 000 pieces of broadcloth (Leimus 2019a, 215). This exceeded quite certainly the needs of the local urban community and the textiles were redistributed within medieval Livonia as well as within the wider economic catchment area of Tallinn, such as Finland (the rights to trade in textiles in Finnish urban settlements date back to at least the mid-14th century: Leimus 2019b, 210) and northwestern Russia. From this standpoint alone, one can easily agree with the historian Carsten Jahnke (2015, 4) that the leaden cloth seals offer nothing more than proof of the production place, and confirmation of the consumption of textiles within the medieval community.

While this assertion is by and large indeed true, there are still many facets that the leaden seals can help to enlighten, some of which were already mentioned above, such as the afterlife of the seals. Another aspect that might bring new insights into the textile business is the study of the surviving fragments of the fabric between the discs of the cloth seal (e.g. Van Laere et al. 2017 as one of the exceptional cases, but the fibre can also survive inside the disc in a microscopic amount) or textile impressions pressed on the inner side of the seal. These study methods have not been implemented in the present case, but all in all it will improve our understanding of the type and quality of the traded goods.

Whereas the surviving documents reflect rather well the long-distance trade of textiles, it might not be the case for regional marketing where there was either considerably less paperwork or it had a more modest chance of survival. There are several good examples from the early 16th century where the communication between a wholesaler in Tallinn and his client residing in a small urban settlement or central location (e.g. a castle, manor, religious house) reveals a continuous demand for imported cloth (for the Prince-Bishopric of Ösel–Wiek, see Jahnke 2003, 233; for a generalisation on the gentry, see Mickwitz 1938, 29–30), yet the data concerning the previous centuries is poorer. Thus, mapping the cloth seal finds of the rural areas will, on the one hand, supplement the textual sources, on the other hand, it might provide contextual information that is not so well represented in the surviving business papers of the merchant.

On the whole, all three Comines' seals found in rural contexts fit into the wider framework of the late medieval textile trade and consumption. Both the Ukrainian find and the Estonian examples are likely bound with the historical trade routes, discovered either in the neighbourhood of a river crossing (Demydiv, Võduvere) and/or in the vicinity of an important medieval land route (Voorepera). Due to the scarce contextual data – the cloth seals are detectorist finds – it is difficult to explain the nature of the find site and thus nothing absolute can be stated. However, the relative proximity of power and administrative centres indicates the possible direction of the movement of goods: in the case of the Võduvere find, the final destination was likely the Order Castle in Laiuse. For the Voorepera seal, the possible purchaser was a representative of the local gentry, e.g. a nearby manor owner and his servants. The presumed date of the traded textile (ca mid-15th century) probably excludes the average Estonian peasant as the customer because the use of imported cloth in the countryside began in later times (Rammo 2015, 73).

Also, the urban finds of Comines' seals are from 'logical' find sites. Although one would expect this type of object from well-defined commercial sites (market/shop, customs, private property of a merchant), places of nobility or public/civic organisations (purchase by bale), all the present examples are in concordance with the life pattern of the cloth seals. Finding seals in the proximity of a medieval inn (Tartu Rd. 1) supports its use in a variety of ways, from leisure and accommodation to commercial activities. Since the seals were made of easily recyclable material, it is not surprising to unearth seals together with other scrap metal (Estonia Ave. 7, Jahu/Väike-Patarei St.).

On an individual level, a detailed study of a single cloth seal can provide valuable information about the possible owner of the traded goods. About half of the Comines' seals have intentional scratches on the surface, which should be the house signs of the trader. These marks, if well preserved and personified, could add another interesting aspect to the distribution of the bales. At the present stage of the research, we are not able to make this kind of connections but it is interesting to note that some of the house signs bear certain resemblance (compare Fig. 4: 1 and 2) – if so, then it is possible to speculate that these seals refer to the same batch/merchant despite the fact that the find sites are located more than 100 km apart. Fundamentally, this cannot be excluded, as it is highly likely that the goods were shipped from Tallinn, using the main trade routes. However, we need a substantial amount of additional data to verify such an assumption.

Summary

During the last few decades, the ever increasing use of detecting devices has brought to light an immense number of artefacts that might or might not have good contextual information – depending on the situation and the person using the instrument. Whereas there are many cases where detectorism produces more harm than good, it is not the case with the artefacts of the present paper. The cooperation between hobby searchers and heritage organisations, the steady increase in the use of detecting enthusiasts during planned archaeological research has helped to collect a remarkable number of small metal finds in Estonia. The systematic study of rural plough zones as well as urban fill layers has, among other things, provided us with a relatively broad collection of leaden cloth seals of a distinctive type that can be associated with the well-known medieval textile production site in Flanders – Comines.

The closer historical insight into the textile manufacture and trade of Comines reveals that from the mid-14th to the mid-15th centuries this centre produced cloth on a European scale. Comines' cloth reached the continent's eastern side (Novgorod, very likely as far as Kyiv) as well as the Mediterranean regions, at least up to northern Italy. It is, therefore, a little surprising that to this day there is virtually no archaeological evidence of cloth seals with the relevant markings. Whether this is because of the relatively poor research situation of cataloguing cloth seals in the core consumption areas of Comines' textiles, in northeastern Poland (i.e. the former heartland of the Teutonic Order), or because of other reasons, will perhaps be ascertained in the future. The finds from Estonia exemplify the use of Comines' cloth that stretched from late medieval urban settlements to rural nodal points/power centres.

The present paper should provide a good stepping stone for the future study of Comines' textile trade based on archaeological evidence. The main groundwork has been laid, with outlining the basic temporal and spatial framework of the textile production, and last but not least, the herein discussed corpus of Comines' cloth

seals with an easily recognisable coat of arms on both sides of the artefact should guarantee a relatively straightforward identification of the finds, naturally depending on the state of the preservation of the artefact.

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**TUTTAV, KUID SAMAS TUNDMATU?
COMINES'I TEKSTIILITÖÖSTUS FLANDRIAS
JA SELLEGA SEOTUD KANGAPLOMMILEIUD**

Resümee

Tänu uute otsinguvahendite aktiivsele kasutamisele on viimase paari aastakümne vältel kõikjal leitud varasemast märkimisväärselt enam väikeseid metallesemeid. Selliste leidude seas on üks kõige arvukamaid esemeliike tinapliisulamist kaubaplommid, sealhulgas kesk- ja varauusaegsele tekstiilikaubandusele osutavad tinakettakesed. Neid nn kangaplommi kasutati hiljemalt alates 13. sajandist tekstiilide valmistaja, omaniku või vahendaja kohta info edastamiseks (joonised 1–2).

Kuigi kangaplommide uurimislugu küündib pea poole sajandini, pole see teema end tänaseks ammendanud, sest arvukalt leidub plommi, mis on ühel või teisel põhjusel jäänud tuvastamata. Uuring käsitleb üht sellist leiukogumit – Flaami hiliskeskajegse tekstiilikeskuse Comines'i (holl k Komen) toodetega seotud plommi, mida seni pole osatud ära tunda.

Artikli autoritele on tänaseks teada 11 Comines'i kangaplommi, millest kümme Eestist ja üks Ukrainast (joonis 3). Eesti eksemplaridest pärinevad kaks maapiirkonnast, kuid detektorileidudena puudub neil lähem kontekst. Siiski näib, et nii Ida-Virumaalt Vooreperast kui ka Jõgevamaalt Võduverest päevavalgele tulnud plommid (joonised 3: 3–4; 4: 1–2) seostuvad naabruses asunud keskaegse kaubateega. Ukrainas, Kiievist põhjas asuva Demydiv'i (ukr k Демидів) küla naabrusest detektoriga avastatud Comines'i plomm (joonised 3: 2; 7) viitab ilmselt omaaegsel jõeületuskohal asunud kaupade maksustamispunktile.

Pisut enam saab öelda Tallinna leidude kohta. Esimesed kaks asjasse puutuvat ning 15. saj algupoolde dateeritud eksemplari saadi Tartu mnt 1 kinnistult (joonised 5: 1; 6: 1–2), kus hiliskeskajal asus kõrts või võõrastemaja ning naabrusesse jäi oluline jõeületuskoht. Suhteliselt lähedal paikneb teine leiupaik Estonia pst 7 (joonised 5: 2; 6: 3), kus 15. saj lõpu või 16. saj alguse ladestusest tuli välja ka üks Comines'i plomm. Siin võib kontekst viidata metallasjade ümbertöötlusele, sest lisaks valutööle leiti ka arvestatav kogum tinapliist esemekatkeid, sh 17 kangaplommi. Samasuguse põhjenduse võib oletamisi välja pakkuda Tallinna suurima kangaplommikollektsiooni puhul: Kalamajast Jahu ja Väike-Patarei tn vahelisest kvartalist kogutud enam kui 220 eksemplari, sh 5 Comines'i leidu (joonised 5: 3; 6: 4–8), võivad olla pärit 15. saj keskpaigas tegutsenud metallikäsitöölise jäätmete seast, ehkki samas ei saa välistada, et tegu on tekstiilikaupmeeste poolt minema visatud prübiga.

Tänaseks teada Comines'i kangaplommid viitavad ühe hiliskeskajegse tekstiilikeskuse toodete jõudmisele valmistamiskohast märkimisväärselt kaugele. Prantsuse ja Belgia piirilinna Comines'i tekstiilikäsitöö kaugkaubanduse alged jäävad ilmselt 13. saj lõppu. Suurema tähtsuse saavutas keskus siiski alles 14. saj lõpukümnenditel,

mil toodangumahtude ja -kvaliteedi osas suudeti kokku leppida naabruses asunud tähtsamate kangavalmistamiskeskustega. Ekspordi tõus võib olla seotud linnavalitsemise minekuga uue isanda de la Clite'i / van der Clyte'i suguvõsa alluvusse, sest just 14.–15. saj vahetusse jääb nii linna jõukuse märgatav kasv kui ka kohaliku kangatööstuse toodete parim kvaliteet. Linna isanda rolli selle juures peegeldab muu hulgas ka kangaplommide heraldiline kujundus: ühel pool linnavapp ning tekst „COMENE“ ning teisel küljel de la Clite'ide vapp (nt joonised 4: 2; 7). Keskuse mõjukus kestis vähemalt 15. saj keskpaigani, kuid regionaalselt jätkus kangatootmine ilmselt ka edaspidi. Kangaplommide kasutuse kohta on teateid vaid 15. saj keskpaigast, mis ei välista, et tekstiilide märgistamine algas siiski juba varem.

Kirjalike allikate toel selgub, et 14. saj keskpaigast 15. saj keskpaigani kaubeldi Brügge vahendusel Comines'i kangaga nii Vahemere regioonis kui ka Läänemere lõuna- ja idakalda aladel. Üks olulisi keskusi, kuhu Comines'i tekstiili märkimisväärses kogustes tarniti, oli Novgorod. Teise tuumikalana joonistub välja Saksa ordu halduspiirkond Preisimaal. Seda üllatavam on, et seni pole kõnealuselst piirkonnast ühtegi asjakohast leidu teada.

Plommidel kasutatud heraldiliste elementide, tekstitüübi ning mõnevõrra ka leiukontekstide analüüsi põhjal näib, et seni leitud plommid peaksid kuuluma 15. saj esimesse poolde. Kirjalike allikatega kombineerides võiks Comines'i kangaste kaugkaubandust piiritleda 1370. aastatest kuni 1470. aastate alguseni. Kuna seni pole leitud ühtegi plommi, mis kannaks uue isanda vappi, siis saab praeguses uurimisseisus Comines'i kangastega kaugkauplemise lõpetada hiljemalt 1475. aastaga.

Leitud esemeid laiemasse konteksti paigutades ei ole Comines'i plommide Tallinnast ja maapiirkonnast leidmine üllatav. 15. saj Tallinn oli Läänemere põhjaosa kaubanduses suur vahendamiskeskus, kust toimetati tooteid edasi nii ida suunas kui ka jagati kohalike kaupmeeste toel lähialadele – Soome, aga ka Liivimaa teistesse keskustesse. Importtekstiile vajasid linnade kõrval ohtralt ka muud võimukeskused nagu linnused ja mõisad. Ilmselt on just nendega seotud Voorepera ja Võduvere leiud.

Käesoleva plommikogumi avaldamine muudab loodetavasti senist uurimissituatsiooni põhjalikult, sest väga hea säilivusega leiud ning põhjalik tausta avamine võiks plommide tuvastamise edaspidi lihtsamaks teha.