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A lid from a 14th century salt cellar found in Turku, Finland

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Immonen, V., 2013. A lid from a 14th century salt cellar found in Turku, Finland. *Fornvännen* 108. Stockholm.

The lid of a pewter vessel was found in the area of Medieval Turku in 1998. The object is richly decorated with relief scenes depicting the Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi. The find context suggests a production date in 1350–1400. Such a date is supported by similar finds from around Europe, the nearest ones from Kalmar and Pärnu. In addition to these hexagonal vessels with pointed lids, there is another similar group of vessels with flat lids. Their decoration and inscriptions in addition to evidence from visual arts and written sources indicate that the vessels were used as salt cellars.

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In 1998, a major urban excavation took place in the area of Medieval Turku (Sw. Åbo) on a property owned by Åbo Akademi University. Among the numerous finds is a hexagonal pewter lid which has repeatedly been described as a fragment of a “Hanseatic jug” (Pukkila 1999, p. 40; Ahola et al. 2004, p. 199; Kostet et al. 2004, p. 46; Seppänen 2012, p. 353 Kuva 104). The piece, however, is not from a jug, but belongs to a small group of pewter vessels of a different form and function. Most recently Anu Mänd (2008, pp. 110–117, 171) has argued that they were *viatica*, containers for unconsecrated altar bread used by priests when visiting the sick and dying. A use as salt cellars has also been suggested (e.g. Schaefer 1923, p. 64; Tegnéř 1984).

The lid from Turku was found twisted on purpose into a flattened roll, making the description of its shape and decoration somewhat tricky (figs 1–2). In its current deformed state it measures 7.8 by 5.0 by 2.1 cm. The lid has a projecting central part with remains of a missing ornament

on its top. On one of the six sides, a hinge with a hinge pin is attached.

Due to the awkward shape of the item, the decoration on the lid’s reverse is difficult to discern, but what can be seen are a crosshatched background and at least one heraldic lily. On the upper surface, the hinge partly covers a frieze circling around the rim. The frieze consists of rows of hemispheres and surrounding circles in relief. The rest of the surface is divided into six triangular relief scenes with crosshatched bands stretching from each corner to the centre. Each scene has a decorative ribbon along its lower and upper part. Each ribbon is a set of triangles between double lines, every other being crosshatched and every other furnished with a small hemisphere in the middle.

The six scenes represent two iconographical entities: the Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi. The most important scene, opposite to the side with the hinge, depicts the Virgin and the Child. They are seated on a bench, Mary wear-



Fig. 1. This 14th century lid of pewter was found in Turku in 1998 (Turku Museum Centre inv. no. 21816:MT1281). The measurements of the deformed object are 7.8 x 5.0 x 2.1 cm. Photo by author.



Fig. 2. The other side of the lid found in Turku. The lid has been rolled up and flattened on purpose. Photo by author.

ing a crown and holding her symbol, a rose, the queen of flowers, in her right hand. The Child Jesus sits on her left side. Above them shines the six-pointed star of Bethlehem.

The next three scenes depict the three Magi. The first of these kings is kneeling and, facing the Child, holds a *ciborium*-like vessel in his hand. This king has placed his crown in front of him. The second king stands holding a gift for the Child in his left hand. He points upwards with his right arm. He is not facing the Child but the last of the Magi, as if indicating the star to him. This third king is standing as well and raising his right hand in a gesture of awe. Unlike the other figures wearing loose, draped robes, his gown has a handsome row of buttons and sleeves with ball-like ornaments.

In the Annunciation scene, to the left of to the scene with the seated Virgin and Child, Mary stands next to a vase with a lily, the symbol of her purity. A nimbus surrounds her head. Mary raises her hands, and her body is turned towards the scene on the left, depicting the angel Gabriel. He is kneeling, with one of his wings breaking the ornamental ribbon. The angel holds a scroll in his hands with the inscription AVE [maria] GR[atia plena], i.e. the Angelic Salutation. All scenes ex-

cept this last one are adorned with curling stems and six-petal flowers.

The lid was found in the remains of a log building (RA 165) erected in 1400–1410 and later destroyed by fire (Seppänen 2012, pp. 352–356). The single-room building was floored with halved logs or planks resting on timber joists, and had a central fireplace. The find assemblage from the house consists of both table- and kitchenware, which leads Liisa Seppänen to conclude that meals were taken there.

Other vessels of the same type

The lid from Turku has several parallels in museums across Europe (fig. 3). One is a lid which was also found in the area of Medieval Sweden, during excavations in the Medieval harbour area of Kalmar Castle and town in 1932–1934 (Olsson 1974, pp. 208–211). The shape and relief decoration of the two objects are identical. The similarity is so close that the two were probably cast in the same mould or in moulds sharing a prototype. On the better-preserved lid from Kalmar the object's profile is pointed, curving towards the centre, where a hound with an S-shaped tail is seated on the top (fig. 4). Moreover, the lid's reverse is decorated with six lilies placed on a



Fig. 3. The distribution of 14th century hexagonal vessels in Europe.
Black triangle = vessels with pointed lids and information on provenance.
White triangle = unprovenanced vessels with pointed lids in museum collections.
Black square = vessels with flat lids and information on provenance.
White square = unprovenanced vessels with flat lids in museum collections. Map by author.



Fig. 4. Pewter lid discovered in Slotts fjärden in Kalmar with its hound figure intact (Olsson 1974, p. 210, fig. 173).

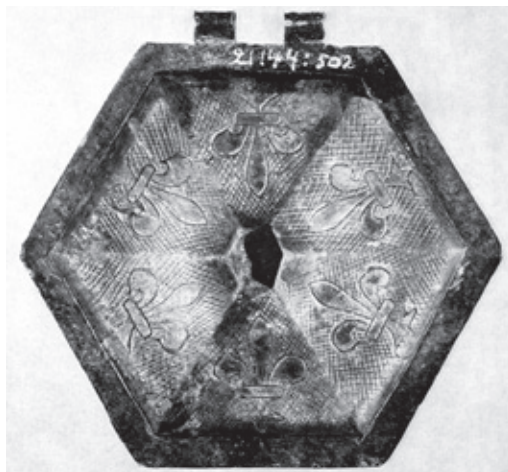


Fig. 5. The reverse of the Kalmar lid has six lilies on a crosshatched background (Olsson 1974, p. 211, fig. 175).

crosshatched background (fig. 5). Göran Tegnér (1984) dates this piece to the latter part of the 14th century.

Another matching lid made of lead was found in the River Thames in London in 1846 (Smith 1848). The figure on top is missing and the frieze around the rim has an inscription explaining the scenes and naming the Magi: AVE MARIA · : GRACIA · PLENA : DOMINVS : TE[cum] : + REX IASPAR · REX · MELCHIOR · REX · BALTASAR · . Where the hinge overlaps the inscription the text has been engraved on it. There are further subtle differences. For instance, the scroll in the angel's hands has one letter more than on the lids from Turku and Kalmar, reading AVE GRA instead of AVE GR.

In addition to the three lids, also entire vessels with similar lids have survived. In 1879, a museum acquired a pewter vessel from the church of St. Christopher in Werne, South Westphalia, Germany. Albert Ludorff (1893, p. 111, Tafel 102) identified the vessel as "a Gothic reliquary". The height of the object is 8 cm, and the diameter 7.1 cm. The knob is missing. The decoration on the lid is comparable to that on the lids from Turku, Kalmar and London. The rim is broken, but has the remains of the inscription MARI . . . CIA · PLEN under the Annunciation scene. The

body of the container is likewise hexagonal and supported by three cast feet, each adorned with bushy-bearded faces. The panels forming the sides are decorated with a set of Gothic arches framing figurative allegories of the twelve months. An inscription under the scenes gives the names of the months. The bottom of the body is decorated with yet another Annunciation scene.

The collection of Albert Figdor in Vienna housed another hexagonal pewter vessel with a pointed lid. The diameter of the object is 7.5 cm and the height 9 cm. The hound figure sits intact on the lid which is decorated with the familiar set of scenes on its upper surface, and six lilies on the reverse. The rim has a similar frieze as the lids of Turku and Kalmar (von Walcher-Moltheim 1904, p. 83; von Falke 1930, p. 224, Tafel LVI Nr 226; Haedeke 1963, p. 62).

The Figdor container is hexagonal and flat-bottomed. It stands on three feet adorned with masks. The six sides of the vessel have relief decorations, each side depicting the figures of two apostles standing under a Gothic arch. Under each scene runs a Low German inscription stating the names of the figures. The bottom of the vessel is decorated with the Agnus Dei motif on the inside surface, and on the outside with a double-eagle coat-of-arms. The vessel has passed through a



Fig. 6. Pewter vessel found in the altar of the church of St. Margaret in Teufenbach, Austria. Height 5.4 cm, diameter 7.1 cm (Haedeke 1973, Tafel 5).

long line of owners in Munich and Vienna. Otto von Falke (1930, p. 224) dated the object to the 14th century and suggested that it was made in the Lower Rhineland.

Another vessel of the same shape was found in the late 19th century when the altar of the church of St. Margaret in Teufenbach, Austria, was dismantled (Haedeke 1963, p. 62; 1973, pp. 47–48). The vessel was secured with wax which was stamped with a seal. An inscribed parchment was also attached indicating the year 1439 as the time of deposition. This container is thus a sepulchre reliquary. Its height is 5.4 cm and diameter 7.1 cm (fig. 6). The reverse of the lid has a set of six lilies, and on the outer surface, the rim is decorated with a frieze of hemispheres.

Unlike the previously described items, each of this lid's six scenes depicts a heraldic shield. The coat-of-arms with a double eagle remains unidentified, while the others belong to France, Burgundy, Mainz, Salzburg and Cologne. The side panels of the body have pairs of apostles standing under Gothic arches. No feet are extant, and the inscription under the panel scenes is corrupted, though it seems to give the names of the apostles in Low German. The bottom of the vessel has a relief with the Annunciation on its inner surface, whereas the outer relief bears the coat-of-arms of the town of Novara in the Piedmont

region in Italy (Lacher 1906, p. 597). Hermann Fillitz (1978, pp. 311–312) suggested that the item was made in Northern Italy in c. 1400–1430.

The Museum für Angewandte Kunst in Cologne has two further vessels of the same type originating from the collection of Wilhelm Clemens (Haedeke 1976, pp. 75–76). One with its lid and three feet surviving measures 6.2 cm in height and 7.4 cm in width. The lid has lost its knob, but is decorated with six coats-of-arms, one belonging to the Italian Colonna family, two to the Holy Roman Empire, one to the city of Rome, one to the Italian Orsini family, and the last one to the Kingdom of Naples under the Capetian House of Anjou. The six side panels depict allegories of the twelve months in Gothic arches.

The other vessel in Cologne is missing its lid and feet, measuring only 2.3 cm in height and 6 cm in diameter. It has similar but not identical allegories of the months on its sides accompanied with an illegible inscription. Hanns-Ulrich Haedeke (1963, p. 62; 1976, pp. 75–76) dated both vessels to the early 15th century, and suggested that they originate from Italy. He identified them as receptacles for hosts, or pyxides.

The southernmost member of the group is in the Museo Diocesano in Bressanone, Italy (Lacher 1906, p. 598; e-mail from Marlies Tschisner, 20 March 2013). The vessel was found inside the

Fig. 7. Pewter container in the Civico Museo di Storia ed Arte in Trieste (Buora 1992a, p. 87) with the seal of Angelo Canopeo, the Bishop of Trieste in 1370–82, stamped on wax. Height 9 cm.



altar of a church in Ospitale, Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy. It has lost its feet and knob. The lid is, however, decorated with the familiar depictions of the Annunciation and Adoration, and an inscription around the rim. The body of the vessel has the allegories of the months accompanied by an inscription.

In 1992, a bottom fragment of a hexagonal pewter vessel was found in Pärnu, Estonia (Kriiska et al. 1995). The upper part of the body is missing, but the side panels are decorated with pairs of apostles standing under Gothic arches. The upper surface of the bottom panel has a relief depicting St. George with the dragon, and the Hand of God. The reverse has a quatrefoil surrounding a coat-of-arms with a heraldic lion. On a stylistic basis, Mänd (2008, pp. 110–117, 171) dates the scenes to 1370–90.

The last item related to the vessels with pointed lids was acquired into a museum collection in 1901 (Oldeberg 1966, p. 114; Tegnér 1984, p. 295). It was found during dredging in the harbour of Visby on Gotland. The object consists of fragments of limestone which once formed a casting mould. The four-part mould produced hexagonal vessels with side panels depicting pairs of human figures standing under Gothic arches. The mould has been dated to the 15th century (Tegnér 1984, p. 295). The limestone of the mould

is not local, but the object nevertheless shows that some of these vessels may have been made in the Baltic Sea region. It is probable, however, that Visby was not the only production centre. Most likely relatively inexpensive pewter containers were made in various locations across Europe.

Hexagonal vessels with flat lids

Besides hexagonal vessels with pointed lids, there is another group of similar containers. The body has similar dimensions, decorated with reliefs and standing on three supports. Here too the knob is shaped as a hound. The main difference from the former group is in the lid, which is flat and divided into two parts by a hinge placed across it. The lid is covered with one large figurative scene on either side. Moreover, the motifs used in the decoration of the side panels differ from the ones on vessels with pointed lids.

I am aware of six of these flat-lidded vessels (fig. 7). Five are similar in shape and housed in the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin, Museo civico medievale in Bologna, Musée national du Moyen Âge in Paris, Civico Museo di Storia ed Arte in Trieste, and in the Figdor collection in Vienna (von Walcher-Moltheim 1904, pp. 81, 83; Buora 1992b, p. 256; Le Pogam 1993, p. 49). In all five cases the lid's upper surface is decorated with the Annunciation scene and has the inscrip-

tion BOSETUS ME FECIT . AVE GRATIA PLENA. DOMINUS TECUM around it. On the reverse, the lid has the Golgotha scene with the text CUM SIS IN MENSA PRIMO D(e) PAUPERE PENZA, CUM PASCIS EUM, PASCIS, AMICE, DEUM, or “when you are at the table, think first of the pauper; when you feed him, friend, you feed God”. Each of the six side panels is adorned with a biblical figure or a saint in a barbed quatrefoil.

The sixth vessel, in the Victoria and Albert Museum (North 1987; Homer 2001, p. 76; North & Spira 2000, p. 40), is of the same shape, but its decoration is distinctive. Here the lid is again divided into two parts by a hinge. It has scenes representing the Annunciation and Adoration of the Magi, and the arms of England and France as used before 1340. In contrast to the other containers of the same type, however, the side panels have a scrolling foliage and a frieze with the inscription AVE MARIA [=maria] GRACIA PLENA DOMINUS TECUM BENDI[c]T[a]. The object dates from c. 1300.

The flat-lidded vessels date from the decades around 1300 (Buora 1992a; 1992b, pp. 257–258). The provenance information for these items is poor, except that the vessel in Bologna is known to have been found in the high altar of the church of St. Blaise near Faenza in 1873. The piece in the Civico Museo di Storia ed Arte in Trieste, however, was covered in wax stamped with the seal of Angelo Canopeo who was Bishop of Trieste in 1370–1382. This indicates that both vessels were used as reliquaries. In sum, it seems that the vessels with flat lids predate those with pointed lids. Their distribution is also different, more southerly, with no known examples in the Baltic region.

What do the hexagonal vessels reveal about their use?

The use of these small hexagonal base-metal vessels has long been a matter of debate. There are two principal interpretations, the first being that they were *viatica* or containers for unconsecrated altar bread needed when visiting the sick (e.g. Haedeke 1963, p. 62; Mänd 2008, pp. 110–117, 171; on the term *viaticum*, see Källström 1939, pp. 102–104). They cannot have been *ciboria*, which are chalice-like vessels used to contain the Blessed Sacrament, as hosts could only be kept in recep-

tacles with gilt surfaces. The second interpretation is that such vessels were secular salt cellars (Schaefer 1923, p. 64; Tegnér 1984). Both of these views can be defended with evidence provided by the objects themselves.

The decoration on the vessels is mostly religious, supporting the idea of an ecclesiastical function. Six of the pointed lids show depictions of the Annunciation and the Adoration, but two lids, in contrast, have a set of secular coats-of-arms. Similarly, in three cases the side panels depict the figures of the apostles, but in four vessels they are replaced by allegories of the twelve months. Such allegories are not overtly liturgical, but the Labours of the Months are commonly found in the sculpture of Central European churches, and in Books of Hours which were for devotional use. Nonetheless, many secular artefacts also displayed religious and devotional motifs during the Middle Ages, and one cannot determine the use of an object on the basis of its pictorial motifs alone.

The inscription on the pointed-lidded containers repeats the Angelic Salutation. This phrase appears often on liturgical objects such as communion vessels (e.g. Immonen 2009b, pp. 7, 55), but it is particularly common on ciboria. For instance, Tegnér (1984, p. 295) points out a small 14th-century ciborium of gilt copper in the collection of the National Historical Museum of Sweden. It is hexagonal and has a pointed lid (cf. Oldeberg 1931, pp. 35–36). The body’s six sides are decorated with a frieze giving the Angelic Salutation. The Salutation is not, however, exclusive to liturgical artefacts. It appears frequently on such secular artefacts as brooches, finger rings, spoons and even the 14th-century Mörkö Cannon (British Museum inv. no. 1899, 1209.3; Tegnér 1984, p. 297; Immonen 2009b, pp. 119–120, 130).

The lid from London also has another inscription: the names of the three Magi. Like the Angelic Salutation, their names often appear on Medieval artefacts, for instance, a 15th-century gold ring found on the same property in Turku as the lid, and on Scandinavian drinking horns (Immonen 2009a, p. 209; 2009b, p. 132). Thus, neither the Angelic Salutation nor the names of the Magi reveal conclusively whether the hexagonal pew-

ter vessels were used in an ecclesiastical or secular context.

The containers with flat lids offer another approach to the question. They have an intriguing inscription beginning with the words CUM SIS IN MENSA. Maurizio Buora (1992a) points out that this phrase is similar to a verse in Bonvesin de la Riva's (c. 1240–c. 1313) *De quinquaginta curialitatibus ad mensam*, or "Fifty courtesies at the table", written in the vernacular during the last quarter of the 13th century (Diehl & Stefanini 1987, pp. 219–221). The Latin verse is, however, older than this. It appears in Albertanus of Brescia's (c. 1195–c. 1251) work *De amore et dilectione Dei et proximi* ("On love and delight in God and neighbour") written in 1238, and also in his third sermon (Ahlquist 1997). In both instances, the beginning of the sentence is slightly different to the one appearing on the vessels: *quisquis es in mensa*.

Tegnér (1984, pp. 298–299 note 3) suggests that the verse appears even earlier than the 13th century, deriving from the Latin *facetis* literature. The genre provided instructions on correct conduct, at the table in particular, and had a wide circulation in the Middle Ages. The verse *quisquis es in mensa* appears in a short 12th-century poem which summarises table etiquette (Glixelli 1921, pp. 26–28; Brentano 1935). The poem appeared in different versions and was translated into several languages which indicates its popularity (Santich 1999, pp. 31–32).

Although it is possible to argue with Buora (1992a) that the inscription CUM SIS IN MENSA should be interpreted as a reference to the Eucharist, its original literary context is clearly secular and related to table manners. This can be considered a positive indication that the hexagonal vessels with flat lids were used at the dining table as salt cellars. By extension, the similarity of shape between the two vessel types allows us to apply the idea of secular use to the vessels with pointed lids as well. There is, however, even further evidence to be taken into account.

Salt cellars at secular and sacred tables

We can base arguments on the use of the hexagonal vessels on their find contexts, visual arts, written sources and known Medieval salt cellars.

Unfortunately the contextual information accompanying the vessels is mostly very weak. Four of the ones with pointed lids were discovered on sites seemingly not connected with ecclesiastical activities, in the urban areas of Kalmar, London, Turku and Pärnu. In Turku, the building in which the lid was found was used for meals.

On the other hand, in three cases the vessels were obtained from churches, the first from the church of St. Christoph in Werne, the second from the altar of the church of St. Margaret in Teufenbach, and the third from the altar of a church in Ospitale, Cortina d'Ampezzo. Additionally, two of the containers with flat lids were used as reliquaries. In the case of the St. Margaret's container, however, the vessel appears to have been broken when inserted into the altar, and thus its use as a reliquary was secondary. This very likely applies to the other vessels as well (Buora 1992a).

With such inconclusive provenances, another approach to the issue is offered by visual representations of salt cellars, which are common in scenes with dining tables, both in sacred and secular art. Some salt cellars in these images are open bowls standing on a foot, while others are ornate vessels with lids (Bisaccia et al. 1997). Among this diversity of designs, Tegnér (1984, pp. 298–299; Krause 2002, pp. 49–51) points out the altarpiece of the Church of St. Ulrich and St. Afra in Augsburg. The work, painted in c. 1460, has a panel where St. Ulrich sits at a table set with a pewter vessel (fig. 8). The salt cellar has a pointed lid, and its body stands on three feet. It is thus almost identical with the hexagonal containers with pointed lids.

St. Ulrich's salt cellar is exceptional. Usually, lidded salt cellars are of a type that appears in the illustrated manuscript *Les vœux du paon* ("The vows of the peacock") produced in France around 1350 (fig. 9; Morrison 2010). In a banqueting scene where the peacock is offered to Aristé, a long table is set with a variety of vessels and cutlery, among them two small containers of grey metal. The vessels have pointed lids, but their footless bodies have the shape of a truncated cone.

Similar simple, cylindrical salt cellars appear commonly in 15th-century works of ecclesiastical art, and such containers also survive (e.g.



Fig. 8. Detail of the altarpiece of the Church of St. Ulrich and St. Afra in Augsburg, painted c. 1460 (Landolt 1968, p. 108). St. Ulrich sits at a table set with a salt cellar.

Bessemans 1998). The altarpiece painted by the Master of the Vienna Schottenstift c. 1469–1480, placed at the Benedictine Schottenstift Abbey in Vienna, has a panel with *The Death of the Virgin* (Häring 1976, p. 28). The scene shows a background wall with a niche where an undecorated pewter salt cellar is stored. It is circular in shape and has a lid. Another undecorated salt cellar is shown in the Weingartner Altarpiece painted by Hans Holbein the Elder in 1493 and kept at Augsburg Cathedral (Krause 2002, p. 197, Tafel III). The work includes a panel depicting *The Birth of Mary*, where a round and lidded salt cellar is on the table next to the bed where St. Anne is resting. Lastly, a circular, lidded vessel of pewter with no decorations appears in *The Holy Family at a Meal* of c. 1495–1500 by Jakob Jansz (fig. 10; Gaimster 1997, colour plate 2).

The fact that St. Ulrich's salt cellar appears on the table of a high-status clergyman together with the use of such vessels as reliquaries implies that there may have been some association between churches and hexagonal containers. I would

suggest that this was not based on the use of such containers as *viatica*, but rather on the use of salt. Salt, as a substance that preserves things from corruption, has various Christian meanings and connotations (Latham 1982), and accordingly it played a liturgical role in the Roman Rite. As Tégner (1984, p. 298) writes, during the rite of baptism, a few grains of salt were placed in the child's mouth, and salt was also exorcised and blessed in the preparation of holy water for the *asperges*, the rite of sprinkling a congregation (Braun 1924, p. 298; Lempiäinen 1965, pp. 108–109).

Though necessary for liturgical purposes, ecclesiastical salt cellars are rare in Medieval inventories (Oman 1957, p. 101). In Finland, the only written reference to a potential Medieval salt cellar is in the inventory of Tammela Church composed in 1626 (Hiekkänen 2003, p. 131; 2007, p. 343). The Reformed Church grew less enthusiastic about the liturgical use of salt during the 16th century, and so the salt cellar in Tammela was probably a survival from the Middle Ages. The known examples of Medieval ecclesiastical



Fig. 9. A scene in the illustrated manuscript *Les vœux du paon* (“The vows of the peacock”), produced in France c. 1350 (Morrison 2010, p. 308). The peacock is offered to Aristé who sits behind a long table with two footless salt cellars.



Fig. 10. A pewter salt cellar is depicted in *The Holy Family at a Meal* of c. 1495–1500 by Jakob Jansz (Gaimster 1997, colour plate 2).

salt cellars are even fewer in number. No such piece survives in Finland, and salt cellars are not mentioned among the valuables confiscated by the Swedish Crown during the Reformation (Källström 1939). This is perhaps due to their low monetary value, as salt cellars were commonly produced in base metals.

Some opulent and unique ecclesiastical salt cellars are known in Europe, though. The Metropolitan Museum of Art has a mid-13th-century salt cellar consisting of a gold-mounted boat of pure quartz which rests on a knopped stem and base of gold. William D. Wixom (1999) suggests that the piece may originally have been made for an aristocratic table in France and then donated for ecclesiastical purposes. Another much later piece is an ecclesiastical salt cellar at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Oman 1968, pp. 37–38). This vessel of gilt silver was made in c. 1550–1600, possibly in Toledo. The piece is hexagonal in shape, measures 9 cm in height, and the hemispherical receptacle for salt on top is lidless. The six sides are each embossed with the figure of an apostle in a niche.

If the 14th century hexagonal vessels were indeed viatica, that would account for the rich religious decoration and their secondary use as reliquaries. Both features, however, are compatible with the salt cellar explanation too: the Annunciation and Adoration motifs appear on secular objects, and there is no reason why ecclesiastical salt cellars could not have been transformed into reliquaries. Furthermore, the discovery of pewter lids in urban, non-ecclesiastical contexts, the hound figures adorning them, and the presence of the *CUM SIS IN MENSA* inscription on the flat-lidded containers are all consistent with a use as salt cellars. Accordingly, the lid from Turku is probably a fragment of a 14th century salt cellar, and it belongs to a type which has a conspicuous concentration around the Baltic Sea region.

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Summary

In 1998, a major urban excavation took place in the area of Medieval Turku (Sw. Åbo). Among the numerous finds is an ornate pewter lid from a hexagonal vessel belonging to a small known group. Such containers have been suggested to be *viatica* or salt cellars. I describe the find from Turku and compare it with other similar vessels. Then I present and weigh various arguments on the Medieval use of such containers.

The lid from Turku has been purposely rolled up and flattened. It has a projecting central part with remains of a missing ornament on top. On one side is a hinge. The decoration on the lid's reverse is difficult to discern, but what can be seen are a crosshatched background and at least one heraldic lily. On the top side, the surface is divided into six triangular scenes. These scenes represent two iconographical entities in relief – the Annunciation and the Adoration of the Magi.

The lid from Turku has several known parallels among archaeological finds and museum pieces across Europe. One is a lid found in the Slottsfiärden inlet at Kalmar. The shape and relief decoration of the two objects are identical. In the better-preserved lid from Kalmar, the object's profile is pointed, curving towards the centre, where a hound with an S-shaped tail is seated on the crest. Moreover, the lid's reverse is decorated with six lilies placed on a crosshatched background. The lid is dated to the latter part of the 14th century.

Another matching lid of lead was discovered in the River Thames in London in 1846, while a bottom piece of a similar vessel was found in Pärnu, Estonia, in 1992. In addition to the fragmentary finds, also entire vessels with similar lids have survived. Their bodies are hexagonal and supported by three cast feet. The panels forming the sides are decorated with a set of Gothic arches, framing either pairs of apostles, or the figurative allegories of the twelve months. On some vessels,

instead of the Annunciation and Adoration motifs on the lid is found a set of six coats-of-arms.

Besides the hexagonal vessels with pointed lids, there is another similar group of containers. The main difference from the aforementioned group is in the lid, which is flat here and divided into two parts by a hinge. The lid is covered with one large figurative scene on each side. The two sets of inscriptions on the lid read, firstly: BOSETUS ME FECIT. AVE GRATIA PLENA. DOMINUS TECUM, and secondly: CUM SIS IN MENSA PRIMOD(e) PAUPERE PENZA, CUM PASCIS EUM, PASCIS, AMICE, DEUM, or 'when you are at the table, think first of the pauper; when you feed him, friend, you feed God'. The latter phrase can be traced to a 12th-century Latin poem summarising table etiquette. It seems that the vessels with flat lids are older than the vessels with pointed lids. Their distribution is also different, more southerly, with no known examples from the Baltic Sea region.

We can base arguments on the use of the hexagonal vessels on their find contexts, visual arts, written sources and known Medieval salt cellars. If they were indeed *viatica*, that would account for the rich religious decoration, and the secondary use of the containers as reliquaries. Both features, however, are compatible with the salt cellar explanation: the Annunciation and Adoration motifs appear on secular objects as well, and there is no reason why ecclesiastical salt cellars could not have been transformed into reliquaries. Furthermore, the discovery of pewter lids also in urban, non-ecclesiastical contexts, the utilization of hound figures as knops, and the presence of the *CUM SIS IN MENSA* inscription on the flat-lidded containers are all consistent with their use as salt cellars. Accordingly, the lid of pewter from Turku is probably exactly that: a fragment of a 14th-century salt cellar.