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A RELIGIOUS MEDALLION FROM THE GILT DRAGON

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A curious item was discovered inside a concretion of cannon balls salvaged from the Gilt Dragon. The piece, a religious medallion made of brass and showing considerable wear, was found together with 22 black glass rosary beads (see [3], p. 223). These can be viewed at the Western Australian Maritime Museum in Fremantle, Western Australia where they are on display.

The Gilt Dragon sank on 28 April 1656 on a reef 5.6km off the Western Australian coast 120km north of Perth (between Moore River and Ledge Point) at a latitude of 31°13'S and longitude 115°21'E. The wreck was discovered in 1963, but archaeological excavation was only first carried out in 1972.

The medallion, a devotional medal, may have been taken by a pilgrim who went to the church of Santa Maria di Provenzano in the Italian city of Siena, according to Buranelli [2]. This church, built in 1594, guards a tabernacle of the 15th century, and a relief of a Madonna that is part of a Pietà that was said to belong to Provenzan Salvani. Salvani, a famous person of 13th century Siena, is cited by Dante Alighieri in the Divine Comedy, Purgatorio, song XI. (It is known that from 1260 to 1269 the city of Radicondoli was occupied by the Guelfi, and was then reconquered by the Senesi under the command of Provenzan Salvani.)

The image of Santa Maria (after which the church was named) probably was considered miraculous, and for this reason was pressed on small medals to be carried around the neck or sewn on the hat. Considering

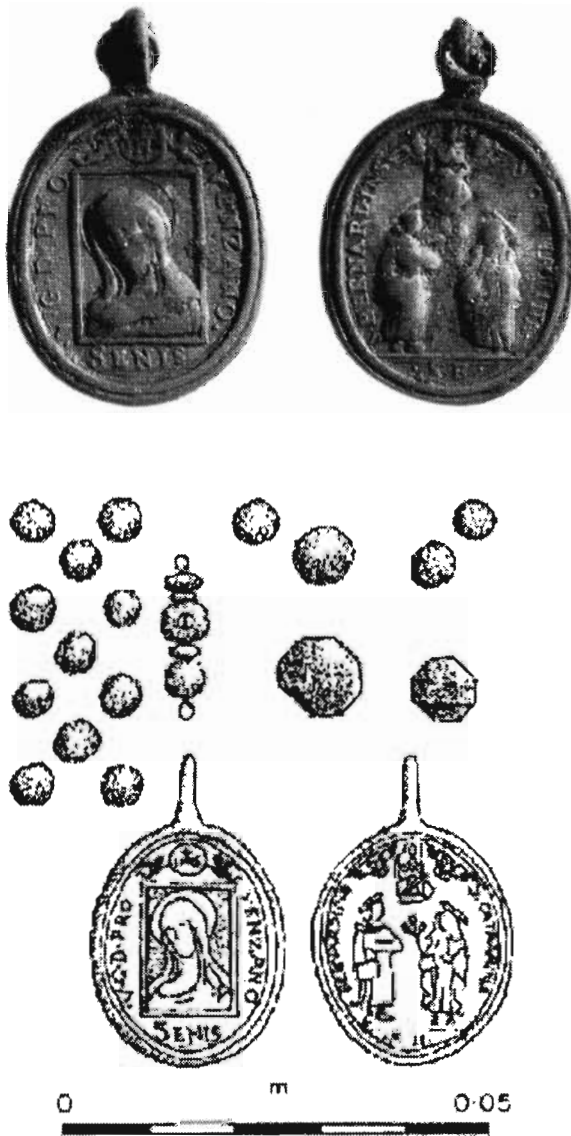
the date of sinking of the ship and the wear on the piece, the medallion most likely dates back to the 16th century.

The medallion is described by Green [4] as being part of a Catholic rosary. Green points out that the wearing of rosaries was banned in the United Netherlands, and indeed no Catholics were allowed to hold an official post or legally worship, either in public or private. The Heeren XVII were often petitioned by *predikanten* of the True Christian (Calvanist) religion in Batavia about the non-observance of the anti-Roman Catholic regulations, and stated in 1654 that it was impossible to prevent Roman Catholic priests from going out East in disguise. Green also observes that during this period the Governor General of Batavia was Johan Maetsuyker, a highly suspect Catholic sympathizer.

SOME HISTORICAL FACTS ABOUT THE CITY OF SIENA

Quoting from [5], Siena's origins are not clear. What is known is that Siena was a Roman colony called "Sena Julia". Several statues of the wolf with the two twins (the symbol of Rome) can still be found in the city. Siena became important in the late 12th century when it started supporting the "Gibellini" (supporters of the emperor), as opposed to the "Guelfi" (who supported the Pope). Siena soon clashed with Guelfian Florence. Not only were Florence and Siena supporting different political figures, but they were also limiting each other's trade.

THE CATHOLIC ROSARY MEDALLION FROM THE GILT DRAGON



Obverse: A crowned bust of the Virgin Mother in a rectangular frame (in the centre), at the top, IHS seal, supported by two winged cherubs, and surrounded by the legend. Left, V. G. D PRO, right, VENZANO and below, SENIS

Reverse: Two saints standing, a seated figure above, flanked by two winged cherubs (their faces). Left, S. BERNARDINS, right S. CATHARINA and below S.H.

Metal: Brass Shape: Oval with suspension loop at the top.

In 1260 the rivalry between the two cities culminated in the bloody battle of “Montalperti” in which Siena massacred Florence’s army. This was Siena’s “greatest hour”, but it did not last long. After the battle the Pope excommunicated Siena, which led many nobles and traders to leave the “unholy” Siena in search of easier profits and trading partners in Guelf cities, including Florence. Furthermore the death in 1266 of King Manfred of Naples and Sicily (who supported Siena and the Ghibellini cause) left Siena without an important ally. In 1269 Florence and other Guelf cities attacked and conquered Siena, which soon become Guelf as well. For the next three centuries Siena was relatively peaceful, until in 1552 Karl V of Spain conquered the city, causing a great revolt that forced him back out. Soon thereafter the weakened city was re-conquered by Florence. Since then Siena’s fate was always closely related to that of Florence, and later to that of the Kingdom of Italy.

On the obverse of the medal IHS is an abbreviation for IESUS HOMINUM SALVATOR, which translates as SAVIOUR OF MANKIND. V.G.D. PRO is an abbreviation for VIRGO GENETRIX DEI PROVENZANO SENIS which translates as VIRGIN MOTHER OF GOD, PROVENZANO OF SIENA

The reverse depicts the saints Bernardine and Catherine who were closely associated with Siena. St. Bernardine (1380 – 1444) was a member of the Fransiscan order, and in his younger days took charge of La Scala hospital in Siena. St. Catherine (1347(?) – 1380) was a tertiary sister of the Dominican order. In 1375 she sought to mediate in the armed conflict between Florence and other communes and the papal government,

and then later on behalf of Pope Urban VI in his opposition by a rival Pope. Further details may be found in [1]. The S.H. that appears in the exergue (below) is an abbreviation for SANCTA MARIA referring to the Madonna on the throne.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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