

Care and conservation of manuscripts 14

Proceedings
of the fourteenth international seminar held at
the University of Copenhagen 17th–19th October 2012

Edited by
M.J. Driscoll

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The vignette on the cover is taken from the allegorical representation of Professor Arnas Magnæus/Árni Magnússon's scholarly activities that adorns the oldest series of publications of the Arnamagnæan Commission 1773–1809.

Passed along from generation to generation: The history and conservation of Magdeburg privileges granted to Lazdijai

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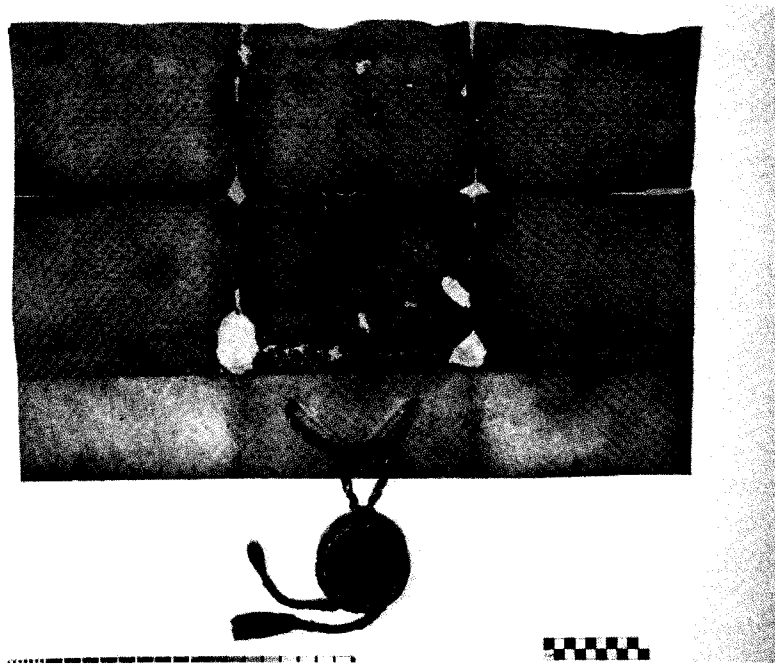
Museums are the main fosterers and creators of local communities' self-consciousness. This historical self-consciousness is frequently supplemented by, and its new 'textures' are created from, new data retrieved by investigators and local enthusiasts.

One case of creating local historical self-consciousness are the five extant privileges of Lazdijai town. It could be stated that they were given a second life when in 2005 the poor condition of these privileges was identified, and the Alytus Museum of Regional Studies handed them over to the P. Gudynas Restoration Centre at the Lithuanian Art Museum. To understand the importance of these privileges, one should look closer at their history and the conservation process.

History

Moving to the history of preserving Lazdijai privileges it should be pointed out that since the second half of the sixteenth century, when the network of Lithuanian urban settlements was developing rapidly, each growing town was trying to get Magdeburg (in other words German) rights and to acquire the status of a self-governing town. In 1597, Lazdijai town was granted such rights (Fig. 196). These rights were later approved another four times by confirmation privileges.¹ At first glance it might be treated as an ordinary case in the history of Lithuanian towns. However, looking more closely at the list of currently known and preserved priv-

Fig. 196. *Zigmantas Vaza privilege dated 1597 granting Magdeburg rights to Lazdijai GEK 2318 after the conservation treatment.*



ileges granted to sixteen Lithuanian towns, presented in the table below, it should be clear that the extant privileges of Lazdijai are exceptional (Table 4). The following two aspects reveal the uniqueness of these privileges. Firstly, the very factor of survival: the data presented in the table show that none of the towns except Lazdijai have managed to preserve all privileges. Secondly, the place of storage: the Lazdijai privileges are stored in the nearby town of Alytus, while the privileges of other towns were scattered and are now found in the archives of Vilnius, Warsaw and Cracow.

At that time it was required that privileges granted to towns be stored, like the rest of the town archive, in the town hall. In practice, however, they were often stored in churches or in the homes of town officials.

In the case of Lazdijai, in the beginning privileges were stored by residents themselves (as proved by seventeenth-century data). As this

Table 4. *The situation of extant Magdeburg privileges granted to Lithuanian towns (mid-fifteenth to end of eighteenth century).^a*

Town	Granted privileges	Preserved originals	Present storage place
Alytus	5	–	–
Joniškis	6	–	–
Jurbarkas	3	1	Warsaw
Kėdainiai (private)	7	2	Vilnius
Kretinga (private)	1	–	–
Kudirkos Naumiestis	4	3	Warsaw
Lazdijai	5	5	Alytus
Merkinė	9	–	–
Skudodas (private)	3	–	–
Šiauliai	3	–	–
Šventoji	1	–	–
Trakai	12	3	Vilnius
Varniai	1	–	–
Veliuona	4	–	–
Viekšniai	2	–	–
Virbalis	3	2	Warsaw

^a The table was compiled based on *Lietuvos magdeburginių miestų privilegijos ir aktai, I–VI* (Vilnius, 1991–2008).

community of inhabitants properly appreciated the value of the protected documents, supposedly they made copies of the privileges. This is demonstrated by one act of the mid-seventeenth century which indicates that an official who came to inspect the town was given a copy of the privilege by the residents. Later a copy of this privilege was found in the archive of the noble family Radvilos, who were also interested in Lazdijai town, its rights as well as the income generated from it (Fig. 197). It is thought that the inhabitants of Lazdijai stored these privileges until the end of the nineteenth century, when they were placed in the neo-baroque brick church built in the town in 1894–95.² The fact that they were kept in the church was proved by a later history of privileges. For instance, in 1913 they were accidentally discovered by Jonas Reitelaitis, a priest and historian (1884–1966), in the church of Lazdijai (Fig. 198). After the First World War he handed them over to the Museum of Lazdijai Gymnasia; when the Second World War broke out, however, he took them back to the Lazdijai church. Finally, in 1961, he handed them over to the Alytus Museum of Regional Studies, where they remain to the present day.³ It is therefore largely thanks to the initiative of Jonas Reitelaitis that the Lazdijai privileges have survived, although one should not forget the contribution of the inhabitants of the town generally and their efforts to preserve them. For example, four privileges contain two significant requirements for town residents in case of fire. Firstly, that breweries must be built outside the town, and, secondly, that house chimneys should be made from brick and properly maintained. In this respect Lazdijai was not an exceptional case, as similar requirements were set for the dwellers of other towns as well.

In 1597 Magdeburg rights were granted to Lazdijai; these were later confirmed on a further four occasions. On most of these the content of the original privilege from 1597 is repeated without anything new being added. One of them, however, dated 1636, is exceptional in its content. It is a small format document, and appears to have been written with some urgency, as it only briefly describes the essence of the privilege, which was then endorsed by a signature and a stamp of a ruler. This privilege was later invalidated since it could be seen through comparison with the other texts that it did not reproduce the content of the original privilege from 1597 correctly. As a result, the privilege was ignored.

The extant confirmation privileges reveal the problems of document archiving. At that time, a rule to record important documents in the

Fig. 197. A fragment of a transcript from the first half of the seventeenth century of the Lazdijai Magdeburg privilege dated 1597, National History Archive of Byelorussia, Radvilos Fund (694), inv. 1, file 1234, p. 1.

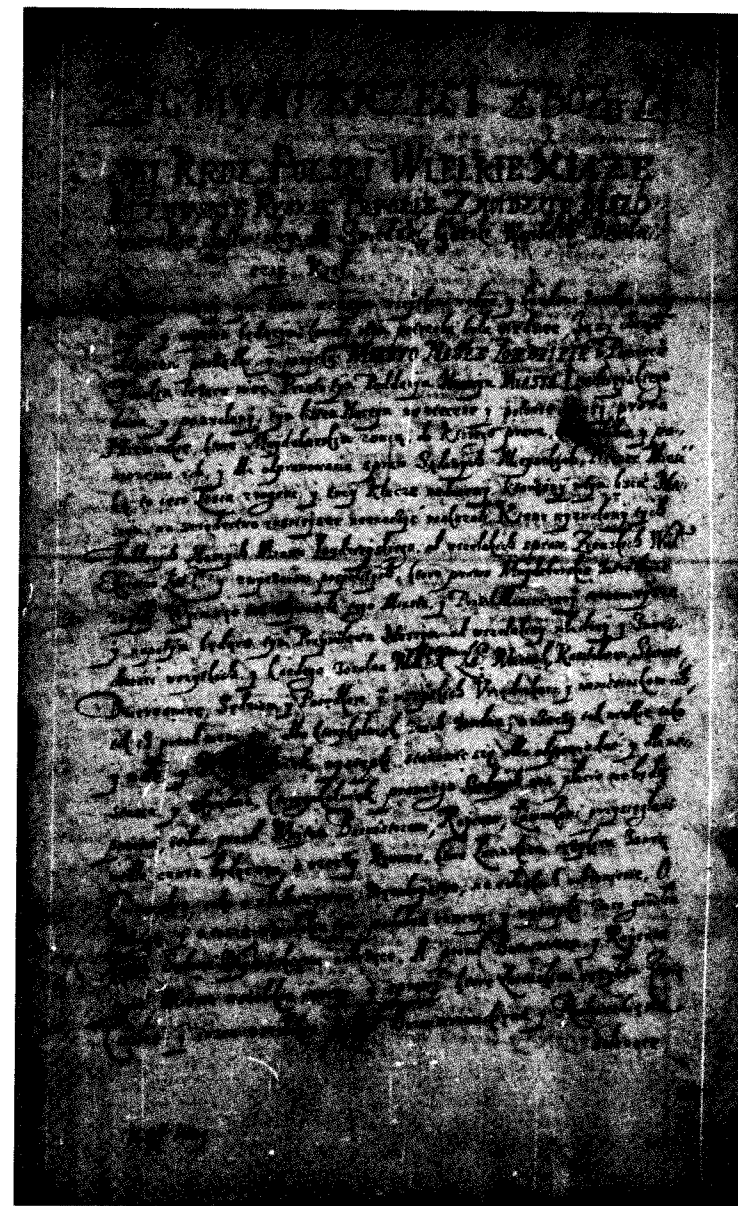
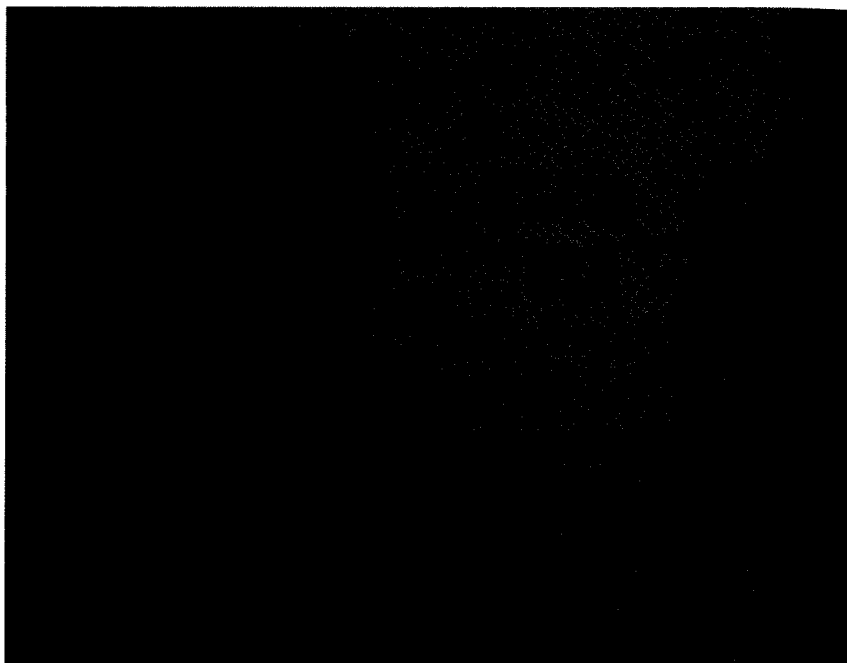


Fig. 198. Privilege custodian priest Jonas Reitelaitis photo dated 1949, J. Reitelaitis Memorial Museum.



Lithuanian State Chancery Books, the Lithuanian *Metrica*, was observed.⁴ However, two records out of the five privileges (1636 and 1669) under investigation were missing in the Lithuanian *Metrica*.⁵

It is difficult to say why they were not recorded in the Lithuanian *Metrica*. Again, the survival of these privileges reveals new peculiarities of document archiving of the former State chancery.

Conservation

Introduction

The physical condition of the manuscripts was critical even in the second decade of the twentieth century. Priest Jonas Gutauskas, who published the texts of privileges in the first book of the publication *Mūsų senovė*

(‘Our Antiquity’) in 1921,⁶ mentioned that the parchments themselves had deteriorated and their texts were illegible in places; the text of Vladislovas Vaza confirmation privilege GEK 2325 was lost and almost illegible. The curators of the Alytus Museum of Regional Studies collections were worried about the poor condition of the manuscripts and supposedly huge costs of manuscript conservation. A favourable decision to conserve all privileges and several important documents from the collections of this museum was taken after discussions with conservators who were involved in the implementation of the project on evaluating the condition of collections in Lithuanian museums. In 2005, upon receipt of funding from the Ministry of Culture, the objects selected by conservators were handed over to the P. Gudynas Restoration Centre at the Lithuanian Art Museum.

When choosing a strategy for the conservation of privileges, museum workers, historians and restorers had to consider the following questions: What was the significance of these documents to the ethnic culture of the region? What was their value to local people? How in general was the memory of locations handed over from one generation to another? We recognise that cultural memory works on a subconscious level, and comprises the foundation of any significant communication. The decision was made to observe the principles of moderation and minimal interference as well as to apply only necessary procedures to preserve that stratum of oblivion and memory retained in the subconscious. In essence, we have decided only to create conditions for further storage, investigation of objects and their careful and moderate use in education, thereby maintaining the so-called general view of privileges.

Assessment and present state

We were faced with severe damage to the parchment surface and structure: dirt, impurities on the surface and deeply penetrated between fibres, various types of stains, rust deposits and holes, mechanical damages, tears, huge deformations, hydrolysis of the hide impacted by moisture and microorganisms, traces of previous restorations, conservation of the sample’s wholeness and function, destruction of the text ink and legibility problems, conservation and exhibition dilemmas. Although much effort was made, we failed to find information on the storage conditions and conservation of earlier documents.

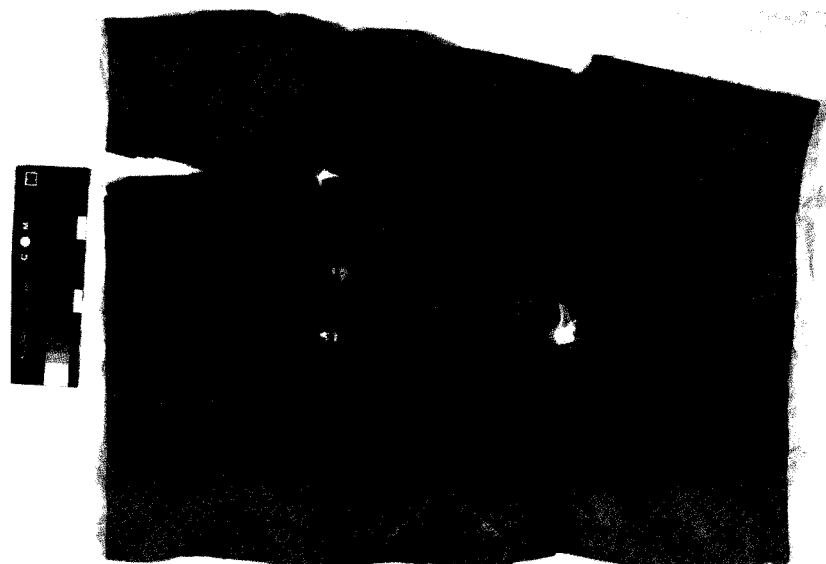
During the examination of the condition of the manuscripts it was observed that all of them were dirty, and the ink of all privileges, although heterogeneous, was damaged. On the other hand, the condition of the documents and the type of damages differed greatly. The Zigmantas Vaza privilege GEK 2318 (Fig. 199a) had already been conserved; patches of thick skin and manual scooping paper were glued to its reverse side (one of them protected a rusty miniature depicting the coat of arms of Lazdijai) (Fig. 199b). The main problems with this parchment were extreme deformations, cracking on folding lines and drying due to numerous impurities. Moreover, the seal was separated from the document. The seal and the bracelet made of red-green silk thread were dirty. Unfortunately, the text of the Vladislovas Vaza confirmation privilege GEK 2325 (Fig. 200) was lost. Only a few words which most were probably written in another ink have survived. The beginning of King Vladislovas' signature was legible as well. A wax seal in a wooden box which was hanging at the bottom of the privilege was missing. The box and the bracelet made of white-red silk thread were dirty. The condition of the Mykolas Višnioveckis privilege GEK 2320 and the Augustas III privilege GEK 2322, compared to the condition of the other three manuscripts, was satisfactory. Formerly, the Augustas II privilege GEK 2321/R720 had been folded into ten equal parts, and, judging from the nature of the damage, the folded document had been kept in unfavourable storage conditions: serious parchment losses and large severely damaged and transparent areas of the hide impacted by hydrolysis could be seen around holes. The damage was impacted by microorganisms and parchment hydrolysis. The text of the privilege is illegible and suffers from previous water damage. The document had already been repaired; its lost fragments were attached with patches of thick hide, similar to parchment, although still very rough and thick (Fig. 201). In some places these patches were loose, whereas in others they were firmly stuck. Microchemical analysis showed that the composition of the glue was albumen. The seal was split and a large part of it was lost; its bracelet was broken and dirty. A metal seal box was deformed and rusty, and its cover was lost.

During investigations it was discovered that parchments of all five privileges were made of ox hide. Microchemical analysis conducted on a sample of coloured wax identified the red pigment cinnabar, and in the composition of the glue used for sticking old repairs albumen. Ink resistance to isopropyl alcohol was evaluated as resistant.

Fig. 199. Zigmantas Vaza privilege dated 1597 granting Magdeburg rights to Lazdijai GEK 2318 before the conservation treatment.

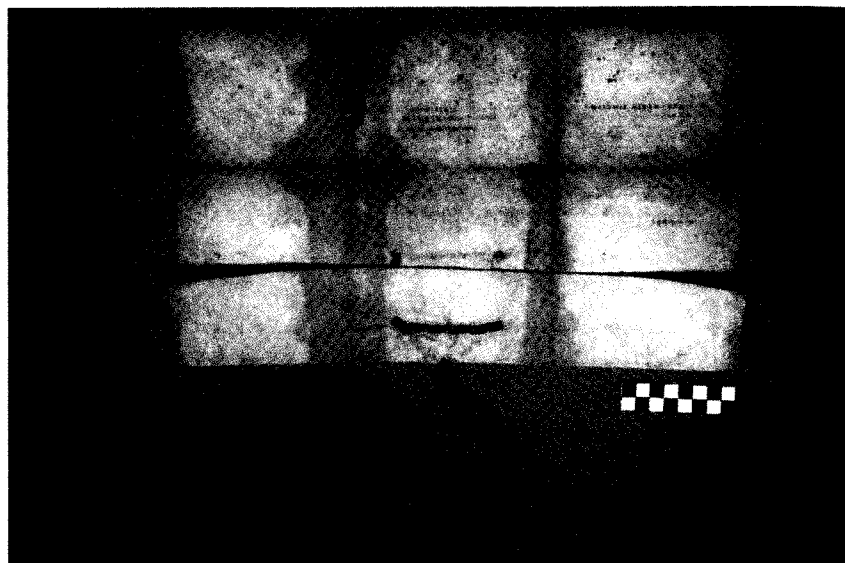


(a) the front side

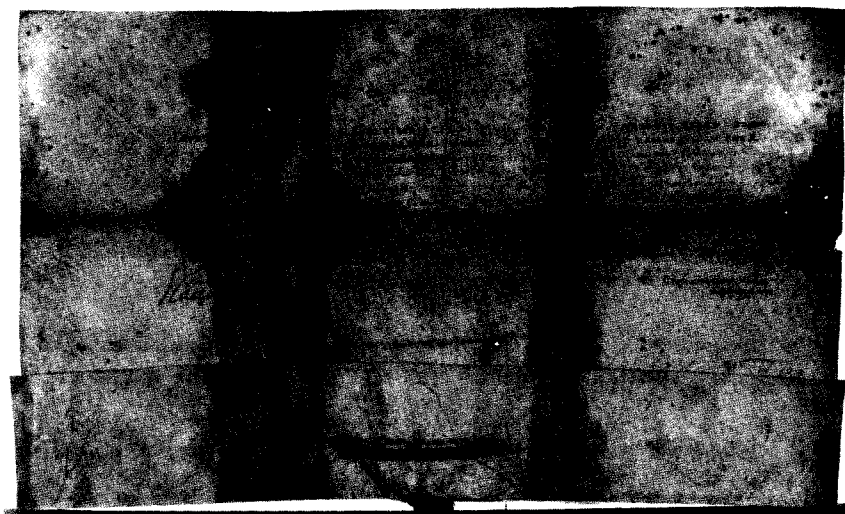


(b) the back side

Fig. 200. *Vladislovas Vaza confirmation privilege dated 1636 GEK 2325 after the conservation treatment.*

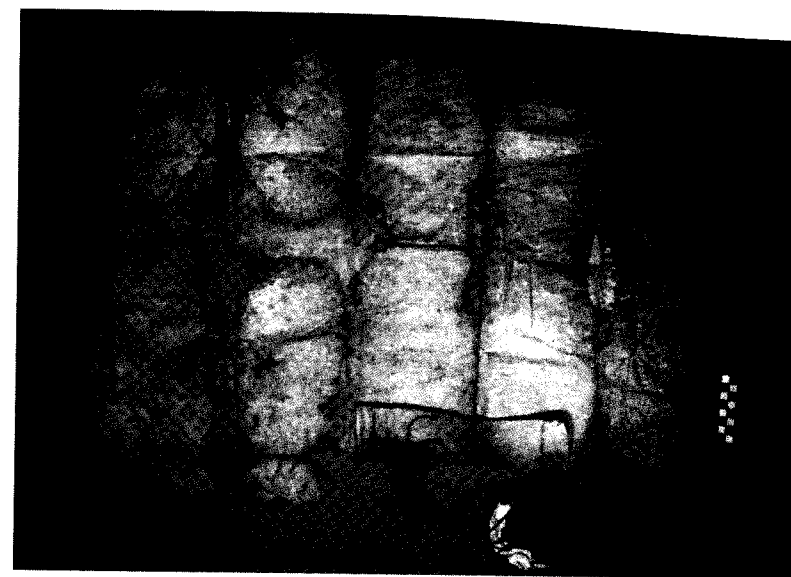


(a) photographed in normal light

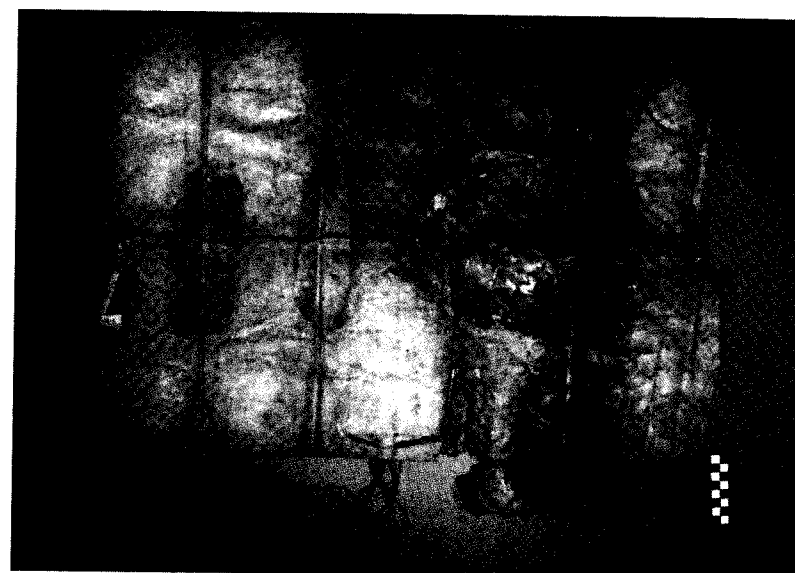


(b) photographed in UV light

Fig. 201. *Augustas II confirmation privilege dated 1718 GEK 2321/R720 before the conservation treatment.*



(a) the front side



(b) the back side

Suggested plan for conservation and future preservation

The following conservation programme was worked out:

1. Photography of the documents and their more severely damaged fragments with a Canon EOS 300 D in direct and raking light, as well as IR and UV light (to highlight hardly visible and/or invisible characters of the text).
2. Technological investigations to examine the condition of the manuscripts.
3. Cleaning of the surface of the parchment.
4. Removal of the old oxhide patches, which would be store with the document.
5. Straightening of deformations.
6. Restoration of the wholeness and function of the sample.
7. Cleaning of extant seals, their boxes and silk bracelets.
8. Improvement of storage conditions by mounting and boxing.

Treatment

The Zigmantas Vaza privilege GEK 2318: The parchment was cleaned with a latex eraser, eraser powder Wischab, a soft natural hair brush and with moist cotton swabs. Old repairs, weakly stuck patches of oxhide, were lifted and removed with a teflon spatula. The parchment was humidified in a Gore-Tex system using a water and isopropanol mixture (1:1). Tears were temporarily glued with a sticky Filmoplast P band, and the parchment was partially flattened on a vacuum table and pressured under weights. Tears were glued, and missing parts of the samples were restored using 6 % isinglass (sturgeon glue), plastified with 0.3 % gum tragacanth and Japanese paper Hadaura (49 g/m²). The restored parts were retouched with pastel. The seal was cleaned with a soft brush and with foam beaten from hydroxypropyl cellulose (HPC) Klucel G solution in water. The silk bracelet was cleaned with hexane, and loose threads were twined.

The Vladislovas Vaza privilege GEK 2325: The parchment was dry-cleaned. The wooden box of the seal was cleaned with an HPC Klucel G solution in water. The silk bracelet of the seal was cleaned with hexane. The parchment was humidified in the Gore-Tex system, stretched on the stretching frame and pressured under weights.

The Mykolas Višnioveckis privilege GEK 2320 (Fig. 202): The parchment was cleaned with erasers, eraser powder and brushes and humidified in the Gore-Tex system, stretched on the stretching frame and pressured under weights. It was only after the second flattening that the parchment became sufficiently straight. Tears and crumbled rust deposits on the parchment were glued with Japanese paper Hadaura (49 g/m² 6 % and isinglass).

Fig. 202. *Mykolas Višnioveckis confirmation privilege dated 1669 GEK 2320 after the conservation treatment.*



The Augustas II privilege GEK 2321/R720: The seal was separated from the parchment. Loose or weakly stuck hide patches were lifted with a teflon spatula. The parchment was dry-cleaned but remained extremely dirty. The reverse side was therefore cleaned with the H. H. Schmedt company parchment and book-leather cleaner Art. 3868-010, diluted with

distilled water (1:4). As the ink of the privilege turned out to be pure-water-soluble, the parchment was humidified in the Gore-Tex system in a mixture of water and isopropanol (1:1), and firmly stuck hide patches were removed with a teflon spatula. Glues were removed with a scalpel. After the first cleaning the remaining albumen glue hardened, deforming the edges of the parchment. Using the high absorption sponge 'Saugwunder' WSM-01-02 the remaining glue gelatinated and was removed. The parchment was humidified one more time in Gore-Tex system in a water and isopropanol (1:1) mixture, partially flattened and straightened on a vacuum table. Creases were flattened with a teflon spatula on the surface of the sample covered with a Hollytex film. Later the wholeness and function of the parchment were restored on a vacuum table. Two-layer patches of an appropriate shape were made of Japanese paper of mitsumata (32 g/m²) and kozo (49 g/m²). 1 % funori solution was used to humidify the paper prior to glueing and to distribute its fibres homogeneously and to glue two layers of Japanese paper to one layer. 1 % and 2 % isinglass were used. The prepared patches were glued to the parchment with 3 % isinglass (Fig. 203). Currently, compatibility of the parchment and conservation paper is still being investigated.

The Augustas III privilege GEK 2322: The parchment was dry-cleaned and then wet-treated with moist cotton swabs using a water-isopropyl alcohol (1:1) mixture. Then it was humidified in Gore-Tex membrane, water and isopropanol mixture (1:1). Then the parchment was stretched on the frame, flattened and dried. The seal was cleaned with a soft squirrel hair brush. The box of the seal was dry-cleaned with a bristle brush, rust accumulation was removed and its surface was treated with 10 % tannin solution in ethyl alcohol. The silk bracelet was treated with hexane. Loose silk threads were twined (Fig. 204).

Boxes for storing the parchments were made of museum quality cardboard.

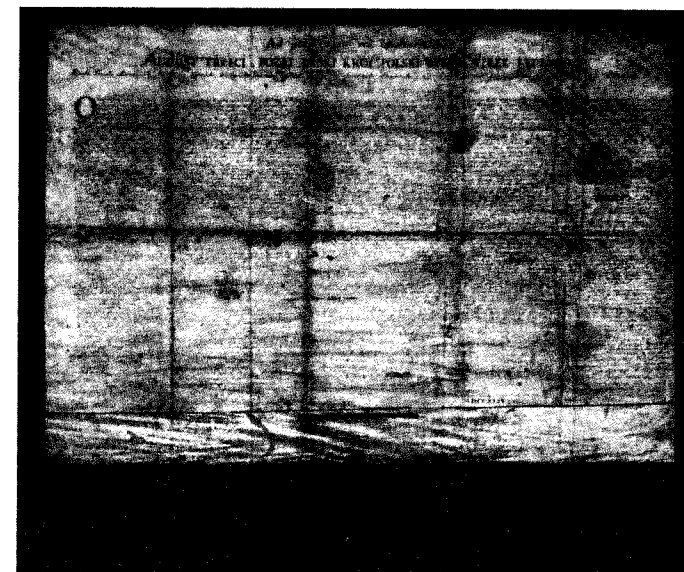
Conclusions

The Magdeburg privileges of the town of Lazdijai are unique samples of manuscript heritage, distinguished by their compactness and their place of storage. The inhabitants of Lazdijai and later the priest Jonas Reitelaitis contributed much to the preservation of these documents. The privileges

Fig. 203. Augustas II confirmation privilege dated 1718 GEK 2321/R720 in the conservation process.



Fig. 204. Augustas III confirmation privilege dated 1744 GEK 2322 after the conservation treatment.



dealt with here open a new niche for the investigation of separate disciplines in history: diplomacy and archives, which in its own turn highlights the importance and significance of these uniquely preserved documents.

The restored documents are more convenient for researchers who can use the photos taken by conservation specialists. Unfortunately, available IR and UV light devices failed to highlight the texts of the privileges. Hopefully, in the future we will manage to cope with this problem through the use of more suitable equipment which is available to forensic science specialists. The Alytus Museum of Regional Studies has already applied for assistance.

The Alytus Museum of Regional Studies organised a temporary exhibition which was coordinated with educational programmes for schoolchildren, where writings of five kings were demonstrated together with the photos and descriptions of their conservation processes. The exhibition and an article in the regional culture magazine *Dainava: dzūkų kultūros žurnalas*⁷ about the storage, contents and importance of the Lazdijai Town Magdeburg Privileges have attracted wide-spread public attention.

Notes

- * Photographs: Vilma Šileikienė and Jurgis Pilipavičius, Researchers: Dalia Panavaitė, Rūta Butkevičiūtė, Jurga Bagdzevičienė, and Restorers Dalia Jonynaitė, Dalia Valujavičienė, Genutė Juknienė from Pranas Gudynas Restoration Centre. English translation: Dalia Šalkauskienė.
1. Zigmantas Vaza privilege dated 1597 granting Magdeburg rights to Lazdijai, the Alytus Museum of Regional Studies [AMRS], GEK 2318; Vladislovas Vaza confirmation privilege dated 1636, GEK 2325; Mykolas Višnioveckis confirmation privilege dated 1669, GEK 2320; Augustas II confirmation privilege dated 1718, GEK 2321/R720; Augustas III confirmation privilege dated 1744, GEK 2322.
 2. For more information see J. Drungilas, 'Alytaus kraštotyros muziejaus unikumai: Lazdijų miesto magdeburginės privilegijos (istorija, turinys, reikšmė)', *Dainava: dzūkų kultūros žurnalas*, 2(24) (Alytus, 2013), p. 3–12.
 3. The documents were handed over to the museum on 22 September 1961 by J. Reitelaitis, who lived in Krikštonys (AMRS, Take Over Act No 82). We express our gratitude to the Chief Conservator of Collections, Ms Anelė Kalašnikovienė from the Alytus Museum of Regional Studies.
 4. On Lithuanian *Metrica* see P. Kennedy Grimsted, 'What is and what was the Lithuanian *Metrica*? The contents, history, and organization of the Chancery Archives of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania', in: P. Kennedy Grimsted with the collaboration of I. Sulkowska-

Kurasiowa, eds., *The 'Lithuanian Metrica' in Moscow and Warsaw: Reconstructing the Archives of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, including an annotated edition of the 1887 Inventory compiled by Stanislaw Ptaszycki* (Cambridge, MA, 1984).

5. For more information see J. Drungilas, 'Alytaus kraštotyros muziejaus unikumai', pp. 7–10.
6. J. Gutauskas, 'Lazdijų dokumentai', *Mūsų senovė*, 1 (1921), pp. 88–102.
7. J. Drungilas, 'Alytaus kraštotyros muziejaus unikumai'.