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## CHAPTER 8

# ***MEDIEVAL PILGRIM BADGES***

## **SOUVENIRS OR VALUABLE CHARISMATIC OBJECTS?**

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This study will consider pilgrim badges and their contexts together with written sources relating to the pilgrim phenomenon in the Medieval Period. Pilgrim badges are mostly small, metal reliefs depicting saints, holy persons, crosses, symbols or natural shells which can be connected to a place and church where relics or other devotional objects are kept. The badges were bought at the holy place and brought home. Pilgrim badges consist of two main categories, as physical objects once fastened to the outfit (cloak, hat or bag) or as impressions, facsimile reliefs, cast on medieval church bells. In Norway a total of ca. 70 original badges have been found, including facsimile reliefs and molds. In the Nordic countries altogether the number is ca. 500, including ampullas. Most of the pilgrim badges can be dated to the High and Late Medieval period, ca. 1130–1537, but some of them cannot be dated with more accuracy. The main focus in this study will be on the Norwegian material, other European finds

will be used as examples when relevant. The analysis consists of two levels: firstly, an individual level. Who were the pilgrims, what were their motives and where did they go? What did the badges mean to the owner? Transformation and change of social status through 'rites de passage', penance and indulgence are central. Secondly, a collective level, the Catholic church and the local community, will be considered. Included here are aspects of religion and magic. What was the relation of the badges to the pilgrims in medieval society, economically and socially? In relation to the function of the badges and their meaning, I want to find out how they were used as charismatic objects, and what charismatic effects they had. Were these objects perceived as a form of icon? By proximity to sanctity they were believed to have protective and healing powers. Finally, the term 'pilgrim badge' and its usefulness will be discussed, compared to 'souvenir'.

## INTRODUCTION

Trondheim, on the fringe of the Catholic medieval world, was in the Middle Ages a magnet and place of attraction and the home of St. Olav's shrine. This was a sacred place for both Norwegian and international pilgrims, and the martyr became the most popular saint in the north. Today, the old pilgrim roads are used again

by modern pilgrims and hikers. The pilgrimage is enjoying a renaissance period, attracting more people every year. The sacred journey or pilgrimage is an important practice in the world religions of Buddhism, Islam and Christianity. Also the Greeks and Romans in antiquity went on sacred journeys to visit temples and other sacred places (Coleman & Elsner 1995). The usefulness

of the concept 'pilgrimage' in different cultural settings across time and space has been debated (see e.g. Eade & Sallnow 1991; Coleman 2002), but it will be used here, seen in a historical and culture specific context, and not as a universal homogeneous phenomenon (Coleman 2002; Eade & Sallnow 1991:2-3). The aim of the trip was the sacred place. These places had cathedrals where graves of the saints, relics, a holy picture, a miraculous cross or sculpture were located, or they represented a place or city where one believed miracles had happened (Davies 1994; Jensen 2015). Not just relics, but also pictures, icons and sculptures were different forms that transmitted sanctity after the death of a saint (Jaeger 2012:132). At the sacred places different rituals, processions and masses took place. But the motives and reasons for pilgrimage and hazardous travelling were manifold.

To bring something home, a souvenir from the Holyland or other places, was a habit harking back to the very beginning of Christendom, and the item could be a pebble, a shell, a palmleaf or a bottle of healing oil or water (Sande 2009). Today, we usually call such items 'souvenirs'. Collecting souvenirs from holidays to remember distant places and certain occasions seems

a normal activity. Also for pilgrims in the Middle Ages, it was important to bring home objects which could show where you had been. Moreover their souvenirs were even more valuable, and served more needs. At the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century the production of badges in metals such as lead and lead-tin alloy (pewter) began (Andersson 1989; Hopper 2002:134; Spencer 1968). Badges were produced and sold at the most visited sanctuaries. In Aachen a total number of 130,000 badges were sold during the feast days of 1466, which meant that this production occupied quite a lot of people (Krötzl 1994:101). Although there were other popular saints and shrines in Norway, like St. Sunniva at Selja, Bergen and St. Hallvard in Oslo, there were no badges related to them as far as we know. Norwegian pilgrim badges were only connected to St. Olav and Trondheim.

In this essay I will examine pilgrim badges, as the physical remnants of pilgrimages brought back from the sacred places with intention, i.e. as meaningful objects. Pilgrim badges are found in medieval churches and monasteries, in graves, in settlements, along medieval roads, and several new finds have been made by metal detectorists. In London and Paris, and other places,

a great number of pilgrim badges have been found in water deposits along rivers. This pattern is not recorded in Norway so far. The role and meaning of these badges are not fully understood and opinions vary. Some people see the pilgrim badges as ordinary tourist souvenirs wasted after use. I rather want to show that these objects represent valuable, charismatic and powerful amulets people cared for through life (Gilchrist 2008; Jaeger 2012; Sande 2009:99). Also, pilgrim badges had a function as a signifier of status and they represented ‘the sign’ of a pilgrim (Spencer 1968).

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

Although pilgrimages in Christianity can be traced back to the 4<sup>th</sup> century, pilgrimages from Norway and Scandinavia are seldom documented until the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century (Bjelland 2000; Krötzl 1994:103). The earliest sources of possible long distance pilgrimages from Norway is a Menas ampulla of clay dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> century found in Asker (C7965), and stones with runic inscriptions of Jerusalem pilgrimages from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries (Andersson 1989:137; Krötzl 1994:103-104). Pilgrimages to

Trondheim started shortly after the death of King Olav (1030, Figure 60).

By the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, according to Adam of Bremen, Nidaros was a major shrine and lots of pilgrims came from faraway places (Blom 1981:307; Krötzl 1994:109). Seen as a martyr, he was claimed a saint the year after his death (Lindow 2008:106). Christianity was established and St. Olav was to become the most popular saint in the Nordic countries (Blom 1981:307). Also in the Baltic region and the British Isles outside the Scandinavian settlements, in East Anglia, Yorkshire and the urban centers in England and northern Germany the cult of St. Olav became popular (Lindow 2008:106-107).

However, the Norwegian pilgrim tradition started before the shrine of St. Olav was established in Nidaros (Bjelland 2000; Nedkvitne 2009:131). People, in this early phase meaning the aristocracy, traveled as pilgrims to far away places like Jerusalem and Rome (Bjelland 2000; Krötzl 1994). Harald Sigurdsson (Hardråde) visited the sacred places of Palestine in 1034, where he took a ritual bath in the River Jordan (Soga om Harald Hardråde; Krötzl 1994:104). King Sigurd Jorsalfare is probably the most well-known. He visited Santiago de Compostela in

**Figure 60.** St. Olavs body deposited in the shrine, ca. 1300.  
Detail from altar frontal, Nidaros Cathedral. Photo: Eirik I. Johnsen,  
© Museum of Cultural History.



1109, and Jerusalem the year after, although as an armed pilgrim on a crusade (Jensen 2015:121; Molland 1981:295). Two hundred years later the pilgrimage would become a mass phenomenon, but the Reformation put an end to international pilgrimage by forbidding it (e.g. Bjelland 2000:324; Luthen 1992:139; Molland 1981:299). In Norway, the role of the pilgrimage can still be detected in place names, stone crosses and old roads.

## **PILGRIM BADGES AND FACSIMILE RELIEFS: NORWEGIAN FINDS**

Pilgrim badges are mostly, small, metal reliefs depicting saints, holy persons, crosses, symbols or natural shells which can be connected to a place and church where relics or other devotional objects are kept. They are decorated on one side only. The badges were bought at the holy place and brought home. Pilgrim badges consist of two main categories: physical objects or impressions, facsimile reliefs, cast on medieval church bells. In Norway a total of ca. 70 original badges have been found, including facsimile reliefs and molds. In the Nordic countries altogether the number is ca. 500,

including ampullas (Andersson 1989). The badges from Scandinavia relate to a period of more than 300 years from the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Andersson 1989:16). The main focus in this study will be on the Norwegian material<sup>24</sup>, other European finds will be used as examples when relevant.

Badges of lead alloys were produced in several places such as Rome, Rocamadour, Cologne and Santiago as early as the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century (Andersson 1989:16; Spencer 1968:139). The production of pilgrim badges was licenced by the church. The producers could be different sorts of craftsmen, such as goldsmiths, mirror-makers, woodcarvers or specialists in petty wares of tin and lead, and the trade was monopolized by individual persons or certain families (Andersson 1989:18–19; Spencer 2010:7–8). In Santiago in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, production was even more organized, with unions for souvenir makers. The metal badges were formed as thin plaques,

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<sup>24</sup> Concerning the Norwegian finds, this essay is based on the works of Roar Hauglid (1938, 1944), Kurt Köster (1983), Lars Andersson (1989), and later finds documented in the university museums' databases [www.unimus.no](http://www.unimus.no), and [www.digitalt.museum.no](http://www.digitalt.museum.no). Recently, two pilgrim badges depicting St. Bridget of Vadstena have been recorded at Hedmarksmuseet, Hamar by the author and archaeologist Kristian Reinjord (HKH 14424-14426).

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**Figure 61.** St. Olav pilgrim badge, Bø church, Telemark (C36647/112), late 15th century. Height: 4.4 cm. Photo: Ellen C. Holte, © Museum of Cultural History.

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free figurines, and openwork with empty spaces meant for silhouette effects and other material on the reverse (Andersson 1989; Spencer 1968). The last is a more complex type to produce. The size is mostly between 4–6 cm high. Mostly, the badges have holes, loops or pins for fastening to the clothing, hat or bag. Nevertheless, some of the pilgrim badges have no physical features for fastening (e.g. St Olav from Bø C36647/112, Figure 61).

Most of them cannot be dated with accuracy, because they mostly represent stray finds without contextual information.

Badges made of lead and lead-tin alloy (pewter) became widespread, while other metals were not that common. One reason for this may be that they were cheap and the technique simple. Lead and tin are metals with low melting points and probably did not demand highly skilled handiwork (pers. comm. Conservator Elin Storbekk, Museum of Cultural History). Badges could also have been made of perishable materials like cloth, leather or paper not surviving to today, or even valuable materials like gold and silver (Spencer 1968:137, 2010:7–12; Webb 2002:163).



In Norway ca. 55 original badges are recorded. Most of them are made of lead and lead/tin alloy or copper alloy, some are natural shells and one is made of parchment (Figure 62–63).

Most of these badges have forms well-known to the places of origin, with place names around the image, though some are hard to identify because the images were used in many places. This is true especially of the depiction of Jesus on the cross (Calvary groups), and the madonna with child. Pilgrim badges depicting St. Olav and St. Bridget of Vadstena dominate. The production of pilgrim badges of St. Olav has also been documented by the finding of a casting mold, found near the medieval church of Trondenes, Harstad (Figure 64).

Other Scandinavian places visited by Norwegian pilgrims are documented by pilgrim badges from Stockholm in Sweden and Kliplev in Denmark (Figure 65)<sup>25</sup>.

Among exotic finds originating from long distance journeys are badges from Lucca (volto santo), Rome (Peter and Paulus) and Bari in Italy (Figure 66), badges

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**Figure 62.** St. Bridget pilgrim badge, Oslo (C1830), 15th century first part. Height: 6 cm. Photo: Lill-Ann Chepstow-Lusty, © Museum of Cultural History.

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25 T18098/c, Følling church and C1253, Hovedøya monastery.

**Figure 63.** St. Ursula depicted on a piece of parchment (C13793/a), Hopperstad church probably 16th century first part, Sogn og Fjordane. Photo: Lill-Ann Chepstow-Lusty, © Museum of Cultural History.



**Figure 64.** Mold of sandstone (above) with a casted impression (under). Trondenes, Nordland (Ts2298), 15th century first part. Photo: Tromsø University Museum ©. Production of pilgrim badges can possibly be linked to the priest Svein Erikson, who also was deacon of Nidaros.



of St. Maria, from Rocamadour, France (Figure 67) and Tours<sup>26</sup> (St. Martin).

Natural shells connected to St. James, assumed to originate from Santiago de Compostela in Spain, are proof of quite a long distance pilgrimage (Figure 68)<sup>27</sup>.

Several shells and fragments of shells are represented in the Norwegian finds. Badges in the form of a shell were also cast in metal as lead and copper alloy, in different forms and sizes (Andersson 1989:107, 117; Köster 1983; Mitchiner 1986; Spencer 2010:246–247). Shell badges were also sold at Mont Saint Michel in France, but these also depict the Archangel Michael (Lamy-Lasalle 1970:Pl. XXVIII; Ward-Perkins 1993:Pl. LXX, 28). As the shell symbol was also used in decorative mounts, especially on belts, it can be difficult to sort out what represents pilgrim badges and what were mounts for decorative use (see e.g. Egan & Pritchard 2002; Spencer 2010). Several recent detector finds in eastern Norway belong to this

26 Selje monastery B9025/c, Bryggen in Bergen BRMo/50364, BRMo/50366, Lübeck nr. 7425

27 KHM: C53157, C60747, C60754, C59959, Aks.2018/21, Hamar: OF97399, Trondheim: N39053, N39926, 4N40763, N160576, N4609

group and need to be discussed further<sup>28</sup>. The shell was also used as a general symbol of pilgrimage and could be incorporated into other items.

Intermediate, or middle-range pilgrimages are documented by pilgrim badges from Canterbury (Thomas Beckett, Figure 69), Maastricht (Servatius), Elende (Madonna), Cologne (St Ursula, The Three Magi/Kings), Gottsbüren (oblat with crucifixion) and Königslutter (Christ with Peter and Paul, and Emperor Lothar II)<sup>29</sup>.

The contexts for the Norwegian finds comprise two main categories: church finds and finds from urban settlements. Today, more stray finds have been uncovered because of metal detectors in rural areas, near medieval churches and ancient roads. This corresponds well to Sweden and Denmark, but here too several pilgrim graves have been excavated with pilgrim badges in situ (Andersson 1989). Many pilgrim graves have also been excavated in Germany (Köster 1983). A long tradition

in Norway was to bury people in churches, under the floor. New burials have been dug into older ones, and may have disturbed the context and find situation. Because of this, and in comparison with neighbouring countries, there is reason to believe that many of the pilgrim badges found in churches originated from graves, and that possible grave finds have been underestimated.

The badges are commonly seen as a result of pilgrimages made by individuals, who by foot, horse or ship made the journey themselves. This is of course difficult to know for sure. Falsifications and replicas, or obtaining badges through theft or as gifts must have been part of the medieval world as indicated in contemporary literature (e.g. Webb 2002:73; 163 with references).

The practice of casting copies of pilgrim badges on church bells seems to be a tradition in the Rhine area in Germany and in the Scandinavian countries in the Late Medieval Period (Andersson 1989:20; Hauglid 1944). In the work of Lars Andersson (1989) he refers to 80 Scandinavian bells, whereof 7 were Norwegian medieval bells. This includes medieval church bells in Gjerde, Sauda, Ullensvang and Nedstryn churches in the west, Rakkestad and Hol churches in eastern Norway, and Alstahaug

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28 One way is to look at the holes and ruffles and the technique used. According to Köster the medieval badges have two holes at the muscle part, and ruffles on both sides (C59958, C60754, C60747).

29 Hamar: HKH13662, Selje monastery B9025d and Bergen BRMo/2802, Voss church, Bergen: BRMo/50365, Ma101, Voss church



**Figure 65.** Pilgrim badge St. Hjaelper, Hovedøya monastery, Oslo (C1253), Late Medieval. Photo: Lill-Ann Chepstow-Lusty, © Museum of Cultural History.



**Figure 66.** Pilgrim badge St. Nicolaus, (C34738/BO49\_255), ca. 1300/1400. Lom church, Oppland. Height: 4.5 cm. Photo: Lill-Ann Chepstow-Lusty, © Museum of Cultural History.



**Figure 67.** Fragment of pilgrim badge depicting Madonna de Rocamadour, 13th-14th century, Sjøhaugen, Nordland (T512291). Photo: Julie Holme Damman, ©Tromsø University Museum.



**Figure 68.** Shell badge, Alstadhaug church, Nordland, (T-18846-134). Height 7.3 cm. Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, © NTNU University Museum.



**Figure 69.** Pilgrim badge depicting St. Thomas Beckett, (HKH13662). Detector find from Domkirkeodden, Hamar, Hedmark. Width: 1.6 cm. Photo: Margrete Figenschou Simonsen, Museum of Cultural History.

church in Trøndelag (Andersson 1989; de Groot 2015; Hauglid 1944). The bells generally have two or more pilgrim badge reliefs around the rim, but one of the Gjerde bells has an exceptional number of images (Andersson 1989; de Groot 2015; Hauglid 1944; Lange 1986; [www.niku.norgeskirker.no](http://www.niku.norgeskirker.no), Figure 70).

The reliefs of pilgrim badges on the bells are mostly of the same type as the original badges, e.g. St. Bridget, St. Olav and St. Servatius, but they also throw light on sacred places not documented on the original badges, like St. Brynolf in Skara, Sweden (Gjerde, little bell). Unfortunately many of them are Calvary depictions without a known place of origin. What do these images represent and how should they be understood? To decorate the bells with images of known saints seems an obvious reason but perhaps not the only one. Or are they some kind of votive offering or gift? (e.g. Andersson 1989:20–22; Hauglid 1944; Åmark 1965). The images are probably not cast in the bell metal. It is more likely that a copy or facsimile relief of an original badge is put on the bell's surface when it was made (Andersson 1989:21–22; Hauglid 1944:63–64, Åmark 1965). Examples of identical images from one bellmaker indicate that badges were

**Figure 70.** Pilgrim badges, Gjerde church little bell ca. 1500, Etne, Hordaland. After Hauglid 1944: 67.



copied in a mold and not melted down (Andersson 1989:21–22).

Instead of personal, physical objects the facsimile reliefs are copies of objects, and the relation to the original object is diffuse. We do not know how the images were copied or who the owners of the original badges were. Nevertheless, they are images of known and popular saints and holy persons and well-known religious situations, like Jesus on the cross at Calvary, St. Servatius, St. Olav and St. Bridget with their attributes. Their use is quite different though, and can be seen as serving the society or collective, the church and the parish. This question will be discussed later in this essay.



**Figure 71.** St. Sebald and fellow pilgrims, *Legenda Aurea*, 1492. After Gad and Gad 1975:105.

## STATUS AND DRESS

Clothing and bodily adornment are important ways of expressing identity. In the Middle Ages dress was regulated according to social class or group, status and income. Certain colors and fabrics were legally restricted and controlled (Effros 2002; Hodges 2000; Høiaas 2009:40–41; Molaug 2009:51–52). Dress and clothing can be seen as a coded language with different symbols and signals, and clothing was used to distinguish particular social groups (Effros 2002).

Pilgrims were easily recognizable by their outfits and accessories. At the start of the journey their equipment was consecrated, blessings being given by the bishop or priest (Luthen 1995:19). The pilgrim became a member of a distinct social group in the church (*ordo*)

(Halvorsen 1996:21). Their status was marked by certain elements: a long dress of cheap fabric, a staff, a bag and also a hat with a broad rim, folded upwards in the front (Halvorsen 1996:21, Figure 71).

The staff often seems to have had a metal stud on the end (Figure 72).

This is well documented in paintings, on grave-stones, and described in texts of the time (see e.g. Gad & Gad 1975; Hopper 2002; Jensen 2015; Luthen 1992). Also, excavated pilgrim graves with badges in situ confirm this pattern (Andersson 1989; Köster 1983). In the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer writes: ‘They set thir signes upon their heddis, & som upon thir cappe’ (cited in Hopper 2002:133). The badges could also be hung around the neck as pendants (Ward-Perkins 1993:256). An old word



**Figure 72.** Part of wooden staff, with a preserved iron stud. The staff is fastened with four iron wedges and a ring. Detector find near the Pilgrim road, Hardbakken, Dovre, Oppland (C59186). The wood is radiocarbon dated to the Early Medieval Period,  $870 \pm 30$  BP, 1050–1140 AD calibrated (Beta-353188). Photo: Mårten Teigen, © Museum of Cultural History

for 'pilgrim badge' is 'pilgrim sign' which indicates that the badges had a function as a signifier of status (Spencer 1968). The badge was a visible sign of the pilgrim's status and credentials as a pilgrim, and authenticated the trip (Hopper 2002:133). Pilgrim badges also served as personal adornment, decorating the clothing and manifesting prestige in relation to the range of places visited (Hopper 2002:133; Ward-Perkins 1993:256). William Langland, a 14<sup>th</sup> century cleric writes: 'You can see by the signs in my hat how widely I have travelled – on foot and in all weather, seeking out shrines of the saints for the good of my soul' (cited in Hopper 2002:133). These objects were quite visible on the bearer's outfit, especially shells recorded to be as much as 8 cm high<sup>30</sup>. These badges, combined with other equipment and clothing, made these individuals easily recognizable.

The anthropologists Victor and Edith Turner have claimed that Christian pilgrimages can be defined as rites of passage, a liminal phase in transition between social roles (Turner & Turner 1978; see also Jensen

2015:68–71). They are characterized by a liberation from profane social structures symbiotic with a specific religious system. Other common traits are the joining together of companions, purity rituals and a change in social status. Criminals could, for example, go on a pilgrimage and gain the social status of a free person, and in some way enter a new social class. Through the rituals at the sacred places the individual was transformed. In a society where most people were illiterate, physical proof must have been important, e.g. physical objects or letters. For pilgrims awaiting a new status as a free person, a pilgrim badge must have been important evidence of their pilgrimage, and thus the badge could serve as a visual sign and proof of a fulfilled pilgrimage. In the year 1199 Pope Innocent III gave the priests in the Vatican the right to cast and sell 'lead and pewter signs bearing the images of the apostles Peter and Paul with which visitors adorn themselves for the increase of their own devotion and as proof of their accomplished journey' (Spencer 1968:141 with refernces, see also Molland 1981:294, or Webb 2002:163). A pilgrim was regarded as a holy person, a 'sancrosanct' that all good Christians were expected to help and give food and shelter (Spencer

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30 Shell: N40763, Trondheim and C33968/TG 1869, Tønsberg. Even bigger ones existed, see Spencer 1968.

1968:143). The pilgrim was a person of unquestionable honor. That pilgrims would be respected and helped on their journey was assured by several letters and laws from 1152 onwards (Blom 1981:308; Luthen 1992:28–29). Along the roads, shelters (*sælehus*) for pilgrims were built (Blom 1981:308; Weber 2007:186–187). In the National Act (1274) roads, boats and grasslands for the pilgrim's horse were protected and the king's men had a duty to serve them (Blom 1981:308; Luthen 1992: 29–30). The grasslands were called *Olavs vanger*. The badges could serve as easily recognizable passports and signs of persons demanding respect and help (Spencer 1968:143). It was important to legitimate oneself, and false pilgrims are also mentioned in written sources.

From illustrations and excavated pilgrim graves it seems as though the pilgrim's dress was quite common and standardized. Placing the pilgrim badges on the hat, coat or bag was the norm in life and death. A humble attitude with cheap clothing seems to be the rule, at least when it comes to the ordinary and religious pilgrims. But pilgrimages and visiting the shrines were common practices among people from all classes, after a first phase connected to the upper class and warrior

elite (e.g. Bjelland 2000; Krötzl 1994; Nedkvitne 2009). In both paintings and literature, people are depicted with exclusive clothing: the middle and upper class pilgrims and secular pilgrims (Hodges 2000, Figure 73; Winny 1980).

There were also pilgrims who did not carry a staff, but traveled by horseback or by boat (Olsen 2013). In the general prologue of the *Canterbury Tales* (end of 14<sup>th</sup> century, Winny 1980), pilgrims are described in great detail: the monk had a gold pin to fasten his hood, the merchant had a beaver hat from Flanders, the lawyer had a belt of silk (lines 196, 274, 331). The widow from Bath had scarlet socks and new shoes, pearls, sharp spores and a hat 'as brood as a bokeler'<sup>31</sup>. She had been to Jerusalem, Rome, Bologne, Santiago and Cologne (lines 467–475). Only the pardoner is mentioned with a pilgrim badge, 'a vernicle from Rome sewn on his cappe'<sup>32</sup> (line 687). Though this must be interpreted as a satire of moral decay in the Late Medieval Period, since the pilgrimage

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31 A bokeler is medieval shield type (No. buklare)

32 A pardoner was a person selling indulgences and the vernicle (Veronica) is a pilgrim badge with the image of Christ's face, sold in Rome. See e.g. Spencer 2010: 251–252.



**Figure 73.** Canterbury pilgrims, unknown artist 1455-62.  
Photo: Wikimedia Commons.

is described as a holiday excursion with other than religious motives, Chaucer's poem tells us that pilgrims were all kinds of people and that not everyone was humble and poor (Winy 1980:6-7). The picture of the pilgrim is probably more complex and varied than is often indicated. The dress of travelling nobility and secular pilgrims was quite different from those of the poor

beggar or criminal (Hodges 2000). However, Bridget of Vadstena, a pilgrim of the aristocracy, saint and founder of the Bridgettines, was depicted in the later Middle Ages with traditional pilgrim equipment: staff, bag and hat with pilgrim badges (Figure 74).

These show that the symbols of a pilgrim were still the same in the 15-16<sup>th</sup> century.



**Figure 74.** St. Bridget of Vadstena. The pilgrim badges on her hat probably are meant to show pilgrim badges as the Holy face (Rome) and the three oblates (Wilsnack), The Bavarian State Library. After Luthen 1992:73.

## MOTIVES

Why people went on long and often hazardous journeys, is hard to understand in our secular society. Research on modern pilgrimages has shown that aspects of the physical trip in itself, as well as some kind of spirituality, may be relevant factors across time and space (e.g. Jensen 2015). Letters, pilgrim passports, wills and

property lists, along with contemporary literature are different source materials for illuminating motives. For some pilgrims it was not something they did voluntarily, thus the trip could have been forced upon them as penance for crimes. Prestige, combined with warfare, were central factors for the elite pilgrims who went to Palestine in the early and high Middle Ages (Bjelland 2000; Nedkvitne 2009). Other motives often seem to be connected to healing, such as causes of illness, help for oneself or others, giving thanks for help received and blessings, as well as redemption of one's own sins or penance for crimes committed, or perhaps just a wish to travel (Hamilton 2003:106–107; Jensen 2015:124). Pilgrimages were used as punishment for incest, sorcery and murder (Molland 1981:297; Jensen 2015:124)<sup>33</sup>. The motive of pure devotion was also perhaps always relevant (Krötzl 1994:100). Pilgrimages were sometimes combined with other needs like trade, clerical meetings, and warfare (crusades) (Bjelland 2000; Krötzl 1994:100; Luthen 1992). Several pilgrim badges have been found at

<sup>33</sup> DN VIII, nr. 122, for Rome, 1339. DN XI nr. 249, for Trondheim and Vadstena, 1482, DN IX nr. 94, for a 7 year pilgrimage outside Norway, 1325. DN VIII nr. 9, for Rome and Dacia, 1320-1330.

Bryggen, Bergen (BRMo/50364, BRMo/50365, BRMo/50366, Lübeck nr. 7475), which may indicate a link between the Hanseatic traders and pilgrimages, and that visits to shrines were also combined with trade. In 1347 King Magnus Eriksson applied to the pope for permission to visit the Holyland, and to bring with him falcons to sell to the Sultan of Iraq and other Arabian customers (Luthen 1992:30). The link to trade can also be seen in the spreading of the cult of St. Olav to the British Isles and Germany (Lindow 2008:106–107).

Furthermore, people made a vow of pilgrimage which was binding and hard or impossible not to fulfill. The merit gained by travel and worship could outweigh the accumulation of sins and ensure salvation for the individual pilgrim. Some places had more to give than others, and a system of measuring this existed. Indulgences, or the remission of temporal sin, became a major motive for pilgrimages, but the relationship between forgiveness and penance was unclear to the secular people (Halvorsen 1996:20; Hamilton 2003:108–109).

Cathedrals and shrines attracted pilgrims. To stay for special feastdays and participate in masses and processions provided extra merit. The chance for a miracle

cure was easiest through proximity to the relics or other holy objects in the sanctuaries. It was generally understood that relics could cure illness and protect against all kinds of danger (Vedeler 2009:74). Every miracle was precisely recorded, and the incident documented in the hagiography or miracle book. Studies of recorded miracles show that they happened both close to and far from the shrines, after the visit (Andersson 1989). Miracles often happened during masses or sermons during which a lot of people were gathered (Andersson 1989; Krötzel 1994:226–228). In Trondheim, several miracles happened on Olav's feast days. Pilgrims with illnesses were placed near the relics for healing, and could stay there for a longer time, day and night; they could also sleep in the church. The relics could also be held over the pilgrim, moved around the person's body, or people could sleep close to it (Krötzel 1994:217, 227–228).

In the *Canterbury Tales* we meet pilgrims with other than devotional motives, like leisure and curiosity, and searching for a new spouse (Lunden 1992; Winny 1980:6–7). This may indicate that motives varied and that religious motives were not necessarily the most important for every pilgrim. Pilgrimages could in the

Late Medieval Period also be made by professionals who undertook the journey on behalf of others.<sup>34</sup> This profession, called ‘palmerer’, has survived in the surname ‘palmer’ (Hopper 2002:133; Spencer 2010:4). To sum up, the pilgrimage as a mass phenomenon, included different social groups with different motives, not only religious ones.

## AMULETS

An amulet is an object carried on the body or kept at home to protect against affliction (Gilchrist 2008:124). Its protective powers could be healing, apotropaic or exorcistic (ibid.). In a study of British finds, Roberta Gilchrist lists different types of amulets used in medieval graves: textual amulets, charms and consecrated objects. Pilgrim badges belong to the group of consecrated objects, sacralized by physical contact with

relics or a shrine. This turned them into secondary relics with apotropaic power (Gilchrist 2008:129 with references; Spencer 2010:248). Pilgrim badges found in graves are placed by the head or the legs of the deceased, and in one case the badge is related to a bag. In one female grave a badge in the form of a Pièta was found. Analysis shows that the deceased had suffered from severe rickets, and the badge had probably served as an amulet (Gilchrist 2008:129–130). In another grave a lead sheet with animal hair was placed on a man’s leg. The animal hair probably signified healing magic. In about 60 medieval graves from western Europe, lead papal bullae were found placed in the hands or on the chest of the dead. The bullae’s deposition in this context is explained either as once attached to a papal indulgence document for the dead individual, or the lead itself may have served as an amulet (Gilchrist 2008:129–130). The images of Peter and Paul on the bullae, may also be a parallel to coins with emperor portraits, which in early medieval contexts, together with bracteates and medallions, were used for protective purposes. Finds in different contexts, e.g. settlements, show that the bullae were used a long time after their original use

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34 A document in the archives confirms this. It says: ‘Brother Klaus at St. Bridget’s altar in Vadstena monastery, confesses that Eilif Olafsson has correctly made his Pilgrimage with Confession and Offering. Herbrand Aasulfsson from Romenes in Skien county, “Be it as good and powerful as if the Man himself had done it”. DN I, letter nr. 898, dated 1472.

attached to documents, probably as amulets for apotropaic or protective reasons. In Gilchrist's study she also finds that on some rare occasions 'magic' objects were deposited with the deceased. These objects are fossilized sea urchins, pieces of lead, coins, single beads, rods, ash, pearls, white stones, ancient objects (Roman), pearls, potsherds, tiles, jet and amber. Gilchrist thinks these were intended to protect the dead, or for healing rather than guarding against demonic spirits (Gilchrist 2008:148). These graves break the normal pattern of the Christian burials, as Christian graves usually do not contain grave goods or coffins. Of primary importance in Christian belief was maintaining physical integrity, so that the body was able to be transformed and resurrected (Gilchrist 2008:121). Amulets, instead of objects of commemorative display, were therefore preferred as grave goods. Gilchrist suggests that the magico-medical charms placed with the dead were intended to treat or heal the corpse in the grave to prepare for resurrection on Judgment Day. This exemplifies, according to Gilchrist, the medieval belief that the body might heal after death, and is not only related to saints but also to common people (Gilchrist 2008:149).

The metal lead seems special, and there are interesting parallels in small crosses and small bent pieces/packages or amulets of lead with runic or Latin inscriptions, which were found several places in Scandinavia and are dated to the Middle Ages<sup>35</sup>. They have been found in different contexts, such as burials and settlements, but most of them are stray finds (Gjerløw 1980:18–22; Imer & Stemann-Petersen 2016). The inscriptions are either Christian or magic formulas, which can be interpreted as apotropaic. Also, in English and French burials lead-plates with necrologic or exorcistic inscriptions have been found from the period of ca. 1000–1200 (Gjerløw 1980:18–22). A church meeting held in Arboga, Sweden in 1412 decided that 'inscriptions in lead' (skrift i bly) to prevent illness and fever were forbidden (Ejerfeldt 1981:217). This shows that lead was used for magical purposes in spells and charms.

The deposition of consecrated objects, like pilgrim badges, papal bullae, and inscriptions of sacred names, suggests no clear distinction between magic and religious amulets placed in the grave. The boundary

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35 Called 'runebrev', i.e. 'rune letters'.

between religion and magic seems indistinct, and according to Gilchrist (2008:123), even demonic magic is a type of religious practice in which spirits are called on for favors. New types of amulets, in medieval graves compared to earlier periods, like rods and textual amulets, are examples of a redirection of folk magic serving Christian purposes. She concludes that people put charms and materials with occult powers in the graves to heal or transform the corpse, to ensure its resurrection and to protect the dead in purgatory (Gilchrist 2008:153). Hybridization in the liturgy of the medieval church is also seen in the use of older, pagan 'magic' rituals, such as the use of water for the newborn in baptizing, and the use of the ritual combing of the priest's hair before mass (Lasko 1956:343; Simonsen 2015; Steinsland & Sørensen 1994:72).

In urban settlements like Paris and London, but also in Kalmar, Uppsala and in Lödöse, pilgrim badges were found in river deposits, springs and harbour basins (Andersson 1989:19; Hopper 2002:133; Merrifield 1987:108–109, 113). It has been claimed that the river finds show that pilgrim badges were just ordinary tourist junk thrown away after use (e.g. Sande 2009). In the

Thames not only badges, but also a lot of coins, knives and swords, were found bent and folded before deposition (Merrifield 1987:110–113). The deposition of votive gifts or offerings in waterlogged places such as moors, springs and wells was a ritual that had a long tradition in Europe. The bending of the objects has been explained as an ancient pagan form of 'killing' an object to be devoted (Merrifield 1987:91). Instead of items thrown away as rubbish, river finds indicate votive offerings.

In a cupboard (triptych) in Voss's medieval church, four pilgrim badges were found together (Andersson 1989; Hauglid 1938). The badges were found in 1936 when the church was restored (Hauglid 1938:117). In England, scallop shells have been documented as votive offerings put into the foundations of new buildings, and as votive offerings in particular churches (Spencer 2010:248 with references). In Selja, Sogn og Fjordane, in connection with a grave, five pilgrim badges were found together in a clump, stitched together (Hauglid 1938:117)<sup>36</sup>. The pilgrim badges were deposited outside the coffin, probably

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36 B9025a-d. Their origin are Bari, Lucca, Maastricht and Noblat, one is not identified according to place (Hauglid 1938, Andersson 1989)

put in a bag or purse, but not placed on the skeleton. This find indicates the use of badges as amulets, not necessarily placed on the body.

Many of the Norwegian finds of pilgrim badges are without loops, clasps or pins for fastening. Badges without such a system, were perhaps not used on the clothing, bag or hat. They could have been used as 'loose' amulets put in a purse, a bag or put away for protecting the home<sup>37</sup>.

### **PILGRIM BADGES AS CHARISMATIC OBJECTS, ICONS AND RELICS**

Charisma can be explained as supernatural and exceptional powers or qualities of divine origin or exemplary, special talents or gifts, which create admiration ([www.brittanica.com](http://www.brittanica.com), Jaeger 2012:11). Stephan Jaeger claims that charisma is also a quality in works of art, which can be seen in its effects or the reactions of people.

Some of these qualities are: it enlarges/heroizes the person who possesses it, it inspires imitation, and it stimulates the imagination (Jaeger 2012:22–23). As with persons with charisma, charismatic art can transform a devotee. The pilgrim badge often has an image of a holy person or a saint, on the front. This image can be defined as an icon, an imitation or mimesis of a holy person. The icon recreates the presence of the saint. Icons are powerful images, through their visions of the divine. Divine power resides in the image. It operates in a dialogue with the worshipper. For believers the saints are 'alive' in the image, and use their power in miracles and intercessions, where they can transform a person or a situation (Jaeger 2012:123). Also, through miracle stories, the saints existence and incidents related to them were 'documented'. A goal for the pilgrim was to come close to the saint and their power, since prayer was then most effective (Solhaug 2009:56). A parallel to the icons are the crucifixes and crosses and other miracle working sculptures, visited by pilgrims for

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37 Examples: St. Olav's badges, C36695, C36647/112, C59902, shell: C59958, C60747 and Beckett badge HKH13662.

cures and devotion<sup>38</sup>. In the saint's image the saint was present, and could perform miracles (Solhaug 2009:61). The French called the producers of the pilgrim badges 'miracliers' (Spencer 2010:7). There were in fact reports that people were cured by touching pilgrim badges from Santiago, Rocamadour and Canterbury (Spencer 2010:17). In addition, the pilgrim badges are forms of relics, because of their physical contact with the sacred. They were consecrated objects, which means sacred. A relic is a real physical object related to the saint, or the body itself. According to Jaeger relics work by means of their aura, which can be explained as the sum or accumulation of all the associations that can be linked to an object, and the time gone by (Jaeger 2012:99). The object/relic was real and it had touched the saint. Although pilgrim badges are not real relics, they have been physically close to the shrine. The saints bodies

represented healing power and light, which made the graves sacred (Angenendt 2016:18). This divine power could be transmitted to the individual believer by sight or touch (Jensen 2015:117). The aura principle may have played an important role in the transmission. Icons and relics transmit sanctity through their holy powers, and this was why pilgrims were attracted to them, and undertook hazardous journeys to reach the sacred places. Charismatic art/objects function when people want to live in the higher world they depict, and to behave according to its laws (Jaeger 2012:42–43). The enlarging effect and otherness from everyday life, which the pilgrim badges represent, make them objects of the sublime.

The aura and character as a secondary or indirect relic, make these objects charismatic objects. As valuable amulets, icons and relics they have a sublime character. They represent objects from another realm than everyday life. They were carried, used or given away as votive gifts for their protective, healing and powerful character. Seen in this manner, a pilgrim badge represented more than a simple souvenir, a memory of a certain occasion, proof of fulfilled pilgrimage, or

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38 In Røldal, a miracle working crucifix 'sweated' curing droplets (see page 23). In Borre a miraculous cross was venerated by pilgrims far away, also by Queen Margrete I. The Madonna of Rocamadour was a crude wooden sculpture much venerated. In Norway three pilgrim badges witness this pilgrimage: BM34, BM6242a, Ts12291. In Kliplev, Denmark there was a miracle working crucifix called Sankt Hjaelper, one badge from this place is found in the church of Hovedøya monastery (C1253, Figure 65).

a way to distinguish social groups. Nevertheless, one should not forget that the pilgrim badges could also have functioned as souvenirs, though I think this was not their primary role (e.g. Webb 2002:164-166). Secular badges with religious motifs were also produced, and sold at religious festivals and feast days (e.g. Mitchiner 1986; Spencer 2010). These badges were perhaps ordinary souvenirs in the modern sense.

But what is the link to the pilgrim badges on church bells? What do they have in common? It cannot be the physical object, because the bells do not have the objects, but a facsimile of the original, if the theory is correct. Divine power resides in the image itself, with the holy person. This makes them powerful images, and can explain why pilgrim badges were copied and put on church bells. Perhaps in the medieval way of thinking, the powerful images would protect the church and disseminate divine power whenever the bell was ringing. Their importance and meaning beyond the personal level is thus manifested in medieval church bells, spreading out their holy powers in the parish, hidden but not lost.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

Pilgrim badges were meaningful objects with several functions. Instead of a cheap souvenir thrown away after use, it could serve as a 'valuable' souvenir commemorating a distant place and a long journey. This would bestow prestige. However, the term souvenir does not cover all the different layers of meaning attached to the badge. The pilgrim badge also functioned as a travel pass and proof of a fulfilled pilgrimage. As a sign of status as a pilgrim, it could transform the individual into a holy person, a sacrosanct. The badge was also a sign that the sinner had done penance, and had a new status as a free person. Through the images of saints and holy persons the badges represented icons, i.e. holy images. Also, physical contact with shrines, relics and other veneration objects, turned them into indirect relics. These qualities made them charismatic objects and powerful amulets. As amulets they could be used in magic, for protective and healing functions, or could serve as apotropaic objects. They were probably seen as miracle working objects. Their meaningfulness and qualities were reasons for decorating church bells with

pilgrim badges. That these badges were used on the bells, tells us that they were perceived as 'real' religious images with a certain value. The use of pilgrim badges indicates that the distinction between religion and magic in the Middle Ages was unclear. As holy images with divine power they could protect the church and parish. Every time the bell was ringing holy power was being spread out into the parish. The pilgrim badges were charismatic objects of the sublime.

The concept 'pilgrim badge' is broader than the former 'pilgrim sign'. This enables a broader perspective, which can more successfully convey the different functions of these objects. The difficult distinction between religious and secular badges can also be included and, as shown above, this is important as well.

