

# From Religious to Profane and Somewhere In-between: Ambiguity in Medieval Pilgrim's Badges

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## Introduction

In medieval Europe, the visitation of a holy site was an important and honourable venture, strongly encouraged by the Church. Emerging in the fourth century and reaching their pinnacle by the latter half of the twelfth century, pilgrimages became one of the most popular ways in which spiritual and physical well-being were sought by medieval Christians. While the oldest and most important pilgrimage was to Jerusalem—where thousands of pilgrims routinely gathered to experience the city in which Christ himself had once dwelt—an abundance of European shrines provided ample opportunity for less distant voyages.<sup>1</sup> Yet, even these could result in anywhere from several hours to several months spent away from home. Most often, saintly relics (bodily or otherwise) could be found at the climax of a pilgrimage, which was marked by a shrine. Because shrines were associated with miracles, both past and future, pilgrimages were pursued for a wide variety of reasons. Some journeyed to holy sites in search of absolution, advice, or clarity, while others sought to remedy their medical ailments. No matter the individual motive(s), a unifying characteristic is that pilgrimages were thought to be beneficial, and thus worthy of the often arduous trek.

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<sup>1</sup> Brian Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges* (London: The Boydell Press, 2010), 1-3. See also; Jonathan Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage: The Medieval Journey to God* (Mahwah, N.J: HiddenSpring, 2003), 122-123.

## Pilgrims' Badges

First introduced in the latter half of the twelfth century, metal pilgrims' badges served as tokens of holy travel. They initially depicted religious iconographies such as shrines, saints, and/or their relics. Occasionally, a description or location was engraved, indicating who/what appeared on a badge or where it was obtained. Much like modern-day souvenirs, pilgrims' badges met the needs of individuals desiring to materially prove their voyage(s). And because they gained rapid popularity, pilgrims' badges were extremely profitable. In fact, it is estimated that millions were produced between the late twelfth to the early sixteenth centuries.<sup>2</sup> The more successful a shrine, the more of these souvenirs it produced. Additionally, popular holy sites tended to have a greater variation of badges available to buyers. Often, they were tied to a particular holy figure in a way that was intelligible to all of Christendom; therefore, pilgrims' badges successfully overcame linguistic divides all the while spreading religious iconography far and wide.<sup>3</sup> This of course was more specifically achieved by the badges' wearers—the pilgrims who attached these souvenirs to their clothing and wore them from their visitation of one holy site to the next (Figure 1). In a way then, pilgrims' badges were also a form of medieval advertisement—not only for the saints they depicted but also their shrines—which were revenue-producing locales for the Church.

The sale and often the production of pilgrims' badges fell under the authority of the Church. For instance, some churches rented out moulds used for badge production and only they were authorized to come in contact with a shrine. Because saintly relics were believed

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<sup>2</sup> Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges*, 3. See also; Ann Marie Rasmussen, "Material Meanings: What a Medieval Badge Can Tell Us about Translation in the Middle Ages," in *Un/Translatable: New Maps for Germanic Literatures*. Eds. Bethany Wiggin and Catriona Macleod, (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2016), 215.

<sup>3</sup> Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges*, 3. See also; Marike de Kroon, Rasmussen, "Material Meanings," 222 and; "Medieval Pilgrim Badges and their Iconographical Aspects," in *Art and Architecture of Late Medieval Pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles*. Eds. Sarah and Rita Tekippe, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 392.

to possess thaumaturgic powers, it was thought that through touch pilgrims' badges could absorb such power. This belief emerged in the twelfth century following claims that various medical ailments had been cured after having come in contact with a sanctified pilgrims' badge.<sup>4</sup> Thus, the motivation behind purchasing a Church-authorized badge was considerable. Indeed, it was likely seen as a matter of life and death for pilgrims in desperate need of a medical remedy. And along the way, significant capital was raised for the Church.

Although pilgrimages emerged as (and for many remained) a purely religious pursuit, this was not the case for all medieval pilgrims. Beginning in the fourteenth century, they were increasingly "becoming a social occasion with an element of tourism."<sup>5</sup> This is not to say that religious motivations ceased to play a role in the pursuit of pilgrimages; however, a shifting attitude can certainly be discerned from the emergence of secular badges, some of which satirized ecclesiastical traditions. Approximately 60 percent of surviving pilgrims' badges are religious, while the remaining 40 percent are secular in nature.<sup>6</sup> Within the secular category, crude badges can be found. Thus, romantic symbols such as an intricate rose or heart are categorized alongside markedly more outrageous badges—for instance, an animalistic phallus or an anthropomorphized vulva.<sup>7</sup> Compared to their religious variant, secular badges more often tend toward the incomprehensible. Accordingly, the following portions of this paper will demonstrate—

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<sup>4</sup> Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges*, 15-17. See also; Sarah Blick, "Bringing Pilgrimage Home: The Production, Iconography, and Domestic Use of Late-Medieval Devotional Objects by Ordinary People," *Religions* 10, no. 392 (2019), 6-7 and; Lee, "Material and Meaning in Lead Pilgrims' Signs," 167.

<sup>5</sup> Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges*, 1.

<sup>6</sup> Ann Marie Rasmussen, "Moving Beyond Sexuality in Medieval Sexual Badges," in *From Beasts to Souls: Gender and Embodiment in Medieval Europe*. Eds. E. Jane Burns and Peggy McCracken (Indiana: University of Notre Dame, 2013), 224.

<sup>7</sup> For the above mentioned examples, refer to the Kunera Database ([www.kunera.nl](http://www.kunera.nl)) objects: 01604 ("Rosebud with scroll"), 03688 ("Frame in the shape of a crowned heart with flowers around it"), 05926 ("Phallic animal with a woman on its back..."), 00665 ("Vulva figure dressed as pilgrim...").

through an analysis of three badges which may be religious or profane—the various ways these miniature works of art can be interpreted.

## The Wilsnack Wafers

The Wilsnack Wafers badge (Figure 2) exemplifies the religious badges purchased and worn by medieval pilgrims. This badge is made up of three circles which (when studied from the bottom, to the top left, followed by the right) depict the Flagellation, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection of Christ.<sup>8</sup> Although they are no longer present in our instance, the uppermost circles were once topped with a small decorative cross each. Additionally, the three wafers were likely painted red (Figures 1 and 4) with a tiny hollow triangle connecting each wafer, used to stitch the badge to pilgrims' clothing. Due to their fragility, these decorative and utilitarian accents have worn or broken off over time. However, some variations of the Wilsnack Wafers badge have (rather impressively) managed to remain structurally intact, providing an indication of what our badge may have looked like in its complete form (Figures 3 and 4).<sup>9</sup>

The Wilsnack Wafers badge under review was discovered by a Dutch collector in the region of Nieuwlande (Zeeland, Netherlands), in 1992. The site at which it was found had been water-bound for centuries but as the coasts receded, objects once at the bottom of the sea surfaced. From this point, our badge was discovered with the use of a metal detector, and in 2003, welcomed into a private

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<sup>8</sup> Rasmussen, "Material Meanings," 216-217.

<sup>9</sup> Contemporary paintings and other forms of medieval artwork in which the Wilsnack Wafers badge is depicted—including in Books of Hours, woodcuts, and engravings—further attest to the original shape and colouring of our badge. See; Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 43. For examples of medieval paintings depicting the Wilsnack Wafers badge refer to the Kunera Database, objects: 23470, 11807, 06401, 23298. For engravings, see objects: 11841, 11852, 11856, 11693 (choir stall). For woodcuts, see objects: 23295, 23296, 23297.

collection.<sup>10</sup> The German shrine from which the Wilsnack Wafers badge originates is associated with a miracle story that is well-documented due in large part to the theological controversies that would come to surround it. The legend behind the wafers dates back to 1383, when the church in Wilsnack (present day Bad Wilsnack) was set to flames. Amongst its burned remains, the parish priest Johannes Kabuz found three sacramental hosts, which were miraculously unharmed but stained with the blood of Christ. Almost instantaneously, and for nearly two centuries thereafter, Wilsnack became one of Northern Europe's most popular pilgrimage sites.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, by 1475 numerous contemporary sources documented what one medievalist has referred to as "a pilgrimage epidemic."<sup>12</sup> Take, for instance, the mass children's pilgrimage to Wilsnack of 1475, allegedly consisting of several thousand children and youths.<sup>13</sup> By this point, several major campaigns had already been launched by various Church authorities in an attempt to cease the Wilsnack pilgrimage. In fact, the first treatise condemning Wilsnack was launched as early as 1405, "for theological reasons, the blood of Christ could not be left behind on earth," its author Jan Hus argued.<sup>14</sup> Other ecclesiastical dignitaries denounced the veneration of the Wilsnack Wafers, their fraudulent origins, and warned against heresy. Nevertheless, the shrine remained popular until the years of the Protestant Reformation.<sup>15</sup> Because of this, as well as its impressively documented history, we are left with little uncertainty regarding the meaning and symbolism behind the Wilsnack Wafers badge. However, as we shall soon see, this is by no means the case with all pilgrims' badges.

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<sup>10</sup> Interview with private collector (by author), December 9, 2022.

<sup>11</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 25. See also; Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage*, 408 and; Rasmussen, "Material Meanings, 217.

<sup>12</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 28.

<sup>13</sup> Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage*, 410.

<sup>14</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 27. See also; Sumption, *The Age of Pilgrimage*, 409-412.

## The Comb

Our second badge under review depicts a comb (Figure 5 and 6), which was purchased in 2013 by a private collector. Unfortunately, the merchant from whom it was acquired did not have any information regarding the badge's provenance.<sup>16</sup> The "H"-shaped comb—with sometimes concave top and bottom pieces as is the case in our instance—was typical of the late Middle Ages. Most often, the sizing and distance between combs' teeth were distinct on either side of the shaft—wide-toothed on one end and fine on the other.<sup>17</sup> However, when depicted in pilgrims' badges, combs tend to have uniform teeth, likely due to manufacturing complexities. The detailing present on medieval combs (as well as comb badges) is extremely diverse and variable.<sup>18</sup> In our case, cross hatching can be found on the top and bottom shafts of the comb, while its centre is decorated with two small triangles. On its back side, our comb badge has a pin which would have been used for its attachment to pilgrims' attire (Figure 6).

While some pilgrims' badges are specific to a holy site, as we saw with the Wilsnack Wafers, the imagery of a badge is by no means always indicative of its origin or symbolic associations. This, unfortunately, is the case with our comb badge, leaving its "true" meaning a mystery. There is a possibility that the badge is emblematic of Saint Blaise, a physician-turned-bishop, who resided in Asia Minor during the reign of Diocletian or Licinius.<sup>19</sup> As a result of the fourth century persecution of Christians, Blaise fled his homeland eventually to be discovered and because of his refusal to

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<sup>16</sup> Interview with private collector (by author), November 5, 2022.

<sup>17</sup> Andrea F Jones, "Intimate Objects and Medieval Sexuality: A Review of *Medieval Sexuality 2009*," UCLA: Center for the Study of Women. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7db9859j>, 18.

<sup>18</sup> Refer to the Kunera Database ([www.kunera.nl](http://www.kunera.nl)) for other examples of comb badges.

<sup>19</sup> Ante Skrobonja, Amir Muzur, and Stanko Jurdana, "Cult of St. Blasius, Patron Saint of Throat Sufferers and of Otolaryngologists, in Croatia," *International Journal of Pediatric Otorhinolaryngology* 69, no. 3 (2005), 302. See also, Fernando and Gioia Lanzi, *Saints and Their Symbols: Recognizing Saints in Art and in Popular Images* (Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2004), 98.

renounce Christianity, tortured with a carder's comb then executed.<sup>20</sup> Thus, the instrument of Blaise's torture became symbolic of his martyrdom. As the cult of Blaise spread throughout European Christendom (presumably 500 to 600 years after his death) so did his associations.<sup>21</sup> For example, because wool trading was important to medieval England, and centred in Yorkshire, Blaise came to be regarded as that city's patron saint. Similarly, because the iron comb (with which he was tortured) resembles the tools of carpenters and stonecutters, Blaise is also considered the protector of these vocations.<sup>22</sup> The list goes on and on. Considering the evolution of Blaise's saintly associations, it does not seem far-fetched to suggest that perhaps somewhere along the way, the domestic comb too, became emblematic of Blaise. However, such a conclusion is purely speculative and fails to account for the pilgrims' badges that undoubtedly depict St. Blaise holding a wool, rather than a domestic, comb (Figure 7). Therefore, alternative meanings behind our comb badge must be considered.

According to one curator at the Museum of London, pilgrims' badges depicting combs do not possess a religious connotation. This argument is supported by the fact that cosmetic combs were sometimes considered to be romantic and/ or sexualized objects by medieval Europeans. They were often gifted to women as "love tokens"—a tradition which was particularly popular among the aristocracy. Such combs were typically made of ivory and decorated with intricate scenes of courtship on their central frame (Figure 8).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Giovanni Capriotti, "The Painting Owned by the Schiavoni Confraternity of Ancona and the Wooden Compartments with Stories of St. Blaise by Giovanni Antonio da Pesaro," *Il Capitale Culturale* 7, (2018), 189. See also, Lanzi and Lanzi. *Saints and Their Symbols* 98.

<sup>21</sup> Blaise is commonly regarded as the patron saint of wool combers, throat ailments and protector of animals. For further information on Blaise and his saintly associations see; Skrobonja, Muzur, and Jurdana, "Cult of St. Blasius," 302. See also; Lanzi and Lanzi. *Saints and Their Symbols*, 98-99.

<sup>22</sup> M.M Banks, "St. Blaise's Comb." *Folklore* 45, no. 1 (1934), 77. See also, Lanzi and Lanzi. *Saints and Their Symbols*, 99.

<sup>23</sup> 96.99/1, Medieval Pilgrim Souvenirs, Museum of London Archives, London, England. See also; Jones, "Intimate Objects and Medieval Sexuality," 18 and; Martha Easton, "Was It Good

But, since ivory was not available to the lower classes, comb badges may have emerged as a replication of this aristocratic tradition, likely sold alongside the scores of secular badges that appeared at medieval festivals. By the late fourteenth century, celebratory occasions such as the beginning of a new season became popular sites for the sale of inexpensive souvenirs.<sup>24</sup> Thus, it is possible that our comb badge was purchased on one such occasion and gifted to a loved one—it may very well be a token of affection, conveying a similar message as a heart-shaped pilgrims' badge. However, an erotic connotation to our comb badge must also be considered due to the existence of similarly shaped, but more sexually explicit badges. Take, for instance, the comb badge which depicts a copulating couple within its central frame (Figure 9). This badge almost certainly satirizes the aforementioned comb-gifting tradition by mocking the scenes of courtly love depicted in the combs of the elite. In another (less telling) instance, a comb badge is embellished with four phalluses (Figure 10). According to the Museum of London, this comb may be a pun of the Anglo-Norman word *penil* which doubly meant “little comb” and “penis.”<sup>25</sup> Taking this into account, our badge may have a related—but notably more tame—connotation to these romantic and/or sexual badges.

## The Mer'man'

Our final badge under review (Figure 11) is by far the most puzzling. It depicts what at first glance appears to be a double-tailed merman. However, upon closer inspection, an oversized vulva equipped with male genitalia becomes central to the badge. The mer'man' tail appears to be scaled and snake- or fish-like. The figure wears a crown, a woeful expression on its face and to further confuse matters, an upside-down shield on its breastplate, all the while

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For You, Too?' Medieval Erotic Art and Its Audiences," *Different Visions: A Journal of New Perspectives on Medieval Art* 1, (2008), 20.

<sup>24</sup> Jennifer Naumann, "Wicked Wives: The Animate Vulva, Social Satire, and Fear of a Female Pilgrim," *Atharot* 24, (2006), 7.

<sup>25</sup> 96.99/1, Medieval Pilgrim Souvenirs, Museum of London Archives, London, England.



exposing its androgynous genitalia. This badge was found along the Thames River (London, England) in 2013 by a detectorist and was purchased one year later by a private collector.<sup>26</sup>

The first aspect warranting further exploration is the basic form of this badge—that is, the merman/triton (counterpart to the female mermaid/siren). Vulva aside, this badge is characteristically masculine. For instance, if we refer to images in medieval manuscripts from 1350 to 1500 (correlating with the dating of this badge), mermaids tend to appear with their breasts exposed and are commonly accessorized with a mirror and/or comb. Mermaids were meant to encapsulate the sinful and cunning nature of women. They were vain but appeared coy by hiding their breasts with their long seductive hair, and beautiful but manipulative for luring sailors out to sea to their eventual deaths. Meanwhile, mermen are a later addition to manuscripts, appearing chiefly between 1400 to 1500. Within the first fifty years of this period, they are portrayed as thoroughly clothed or armoured and are typically equipped with a headpiece. However, from 1450 to 1500, mermen match mermaids in their clothing—or rather, lack thereof—as their upper bodies become increasingly bare. Yet, when depicted alongside their female counterparts, the mermen of medieval manuscripts tend to appear especially masculine—armoured and wielding weaponry.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it can be concluded that such accessories were meant to emphasize the gender and gendered roles of medieval merfolk. The aforementioned traits of mermen from medieval manuscripts—particularly their armoured or clothed appearance—are often apparent in pilgrims' badges depicting mermen (Figures 12 and 13). However, unlike these badges, the masculinity of our mer'man' is significantly undermined by its vulva.

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with private collector (by author), November 5, 2022.

<sup>27</sup> Chloe Victoria Ruby Crull, "Idealizing the Bodies of Medieval Mermaids: Analyzing the Shifted Sexuality of Medieval Mermaids in the Presence of Medieval Mermen," *Berkeley Undergraduate Journal* 35, no. 1 (2021), 9-15.

Indeed, the centrality of the female genitalia in our mer'man' badge is reminiscent of the Sheela-na-gig, a vulva-exposing figure found most prominently on church corbels throughout the British Isles (Figure 14). Sheelas have been variably defined as pagan goddesses, protectors, and perhaps most convincingly, symbols of fertility. The Sheela's often outward-turned feet, posture, and most prominently—her oversized genitalia (possibly alluding to a dilated cervix), are suggestive of a woman in labour.<sup>28</sup> Interestingly, these same features can be found in our mer'man 'badge, from its out-turned feet/fins, to its disproportionate vulva. However, the masculinity of its features from the waist up suggest that instead of giving birth to an infant, our mer'man 'badge is exposing, or perhaps birthing, an additional set of genitalia. Alternatively, some scholars maintain that rather than a symbol of fertility, the Sheela's "exposed vagina function[s] as a site of religious anxiety, connected to original sin, death and decay."<sup>29</sup> If we are to accept this latter interpretation, Sheelas (like mermaids) encapsulate a moralistic warning against temptation, which according to Christian doctrine leads not only to death, but also damnation.<sup>30</sup> While this understanding of the Sheela better accounts for the morose expression upon the mer'man' face, neither can wholly account for the remaining traits depicted within this badge.

Finally, it goes without saying that the dual sexuality of our mer'man' necessitates further exploration. In Ovid's Book Four of the *Metamorphoses* (an origin story of the hermaphrodite), Hermaphroditus—aptly named after Hermes "the phallic god" and Aphrodite "the goddess of love"—was born male.<sup>31</sup> According to the

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<sup>28</sup> Brenda Freitag, 1-2, 80-81

<sup>29</sup> Easton, "Was It Good For You, Too?," 16.

<sup>30</sup> Christina Weising, "A Vision of 'Sexuality,' 'Obscenity' or 'Nudity'? Regional Differences in the Images of Corbels," in *Sexuality in the Middle Ages and Early Modern Times: New Approaches to a Fundamental Cultural-Historical and Literary-Anthropological Theme*. Ed. Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2008), 338-345.

<sup>31</sup> Lisa Verner. "Medieval Monsters, In Theory and Practice," *Medicina Nei Secoli Arte e Scienza: Journal of History of Medicine and Medical Humanities* 26, no. 1 (2014), 46. See

myth, the attractive young Hermaphroditus acquired his second set of genitalia from an infatuated water nymph who routinely showered him with unwanted love and affection. Although he ignored the nymph's attempts at seduction, one day, Hermaphroditus entered her lake at a time that she had prayed to never again be separated from her love interest. As the gods would have it, the nymph's prayers were answered and the two beings were united, thus creating the dual-gendered hermaphrodite.<sup>32</sup> Therefore, like the mermaid (and possibly the Sheela-na-gig), the mythical origins of the hermaphrodite possess a degree of embedded misogyny: a potential commonality between these somewhat human, somewhat mythical, creatures is the role of the woman as seductress. Because of them, men are recurrently led to damnation—or, as is the case with Hermaphroditus, become a “lesser” version of themselves. Our mer‘man’ badge appears to portray some combination of these three monsters (as medieval bestiaries referred to them). As already mentioned, this badge, equipped with its armoured attire, displays an obvious masculinity. Yet, the upside-down shield of the mer‘man’—which among medieval knights was regarded as a symbol of dishonour, shame, or impending death—despondent expression, and most obviously, its vulva, do not match its otherwise macho demeanour.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, it is possible that this badge was intended to encapsulate a lack of virtue, vices, or the commitment of a sin—perhaps one so terrible that it earned our mer‘man’ the vulva it so shamefully displays. Yet, even with such a conclusion, the question of just who would have purchased and/or worn this badge remains no less of a mystery.

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also, David A. Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 169.

<sup>32</sup> Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 169-170.

<sup>33</sup> Robert W. Jones, *Bloodied Banners: Martial Display on the Medieval Battlefield* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2010), 20. See also; Joelle Rollo-Koster, *Death in Medieval Europe: Death Scripted and Death Choreographed* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 156.

## **Concluding Remarks**

As can be seen from the small sample of pilgrims' badges addressed in this paper, this medieval art form was extremely diverse—both in its imagery and symbolism. Sometimes, as is the case with the Wilsnack Wafers, the meaning(s) of pilgrims' badges can be easily discerned. On the other hand, these tiny objects can also be (and oftentimes are) near impossible to interpret, as has been exemplified by our comb and mer'man' badges. Consequently, one cannot conclude with complete certainty whether our comb badge was a symbol of St. Blaise, a romantic gift, an object filled with sexual innuendo, or perhaps all of the above. Similarly, the symbolic meaning of our mer'man' badge remains just as, if not more, complex.

## Images



*Figure 1.* Pilgrims' badges attached to a hat as depicted in a painting c.1500. © Kunera Database, accessed December 14, 2022. Object number 11807.



*Figure 2.* Wilsnack Wafers under review. Unknown artist, c.1475-1525. Provenance: Wilsnack, Germany. Lead-tin-alloy cast, 3cm x 3cm. Private Collection, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Private Collector (2022).



*Figure 3.* Wilsnack Wafers Complete. Topped with decorative crosses and three triangles for attachment to pilgrims' attire. © Kunera Database, accessed December 14, 2022. Object number 00130.



*Figure 4.* Wilsnack Wafers. Damaged but with the remnants of red paint, indicating the original colouring of this badge. © Kunera Database, accessed December 14, 2022. Object number 24489.

*Crossings (Number 7)*

*Figures 5 & 6. Comb badge under review, front (left) and back (right). Unknown artist, c.1375-1425. Provenance: Northern Europe. Lead-tin-alloy cast, 2cm x 1.5cm. Private Collection, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Author (2022).*



*Figure 7. Saint Blaise depicted holding a carder's comb in his right hand and a crozier in his left. © Kunera Database, accessed December 14, 2022. Object number 00130.*



*Figure 8. Double-sided ivory comb decorated with a courting couple. Made in Paris c. 1320-1330. London, Victoria and Albert Museum. Photo: Valerie McGlinchey (2010), Creative Commons/Wikimedia, (cc) BY-SA 2.0 uk*



*Figure 9. Double-sided comb decorated with a copulating couple. © Kunera Database, accessed December 14, 2022. Object number 06869.*



*Figure 10. Double-sided comb decorated with phalluses. © Kunera Database, accessed December 14, 2022. Object number 08120.*



*Figure 11.* Mer'man' badge under review. Unknown artist, c.1350-1550. Provenance: Northern Europe. Lead-tin-alloy cast, 2.7cm x 3.1cm. Private Collection, Winnipeg, Manitoba. Photo by Author (2022).



*Figure 12.* Merman equipped with armour, helmet and sword. © Kunera Database, accessed December 14, 2022. Object number 00601.



*Figure 13.* A clothed bifid merman holds each end of his tail. © Kunera Database, accessed December 14, 2022. Object number 06862.



*Figure 14.* Sheela-na-gig. Located at the Church of St. Mary and David in Kilpeck, England. Photo: Nussy-Pic (2015), Wikimedia Commons, (cc) BY-SA 4.0.

