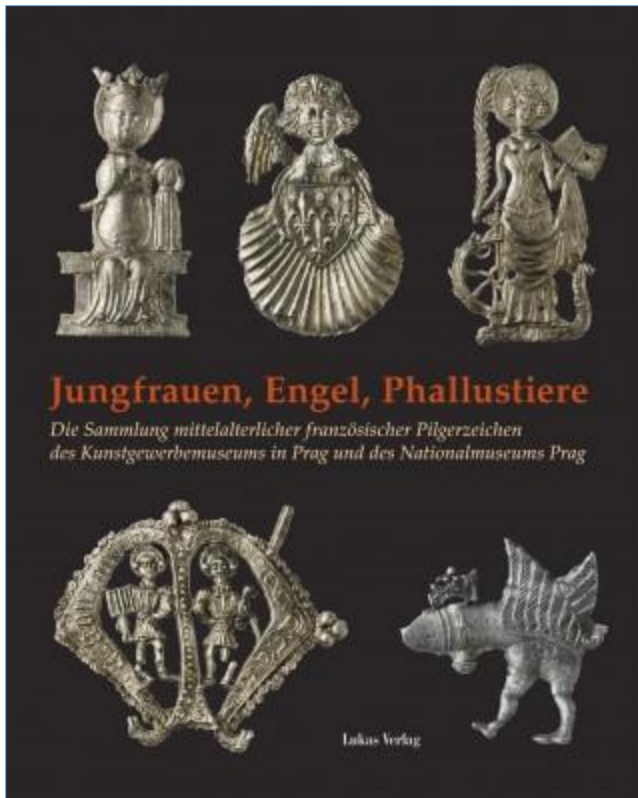




Book review Hartmut Kühne, Carina Brumme, and Helena Koenigsmarková, *Jungfrauen, Engel, Phallustieren. Die Sammlung Mittelalterlicher Französischer Pilgerzeichen des Kunstgewerbemuseums in Prag und des Nationalmuseums Prag*, introduction by Jean-Claude Schmitt, Berlin (Lukas Verlag für Kunst- und Geistesgeschichte) 2012.

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Those who are familiar with medieval pewter badges know that they open up a vast world of medieval visual language that remains unparalleled in any other medium. Because of this unique insight into the social world of the Middle Ages scholarly attention for badges is steadily increasing. Scholars who study religious and secular tokens in order to make sense of the sometimes elusive Middle Ages often hark back to the same published badges over and over again.

A large collection of badges in Prague is less well-known, although it contains almost as many badges as the impressive collection in the Musée National du Moyen Age in Paris. Fortunately, the Prague collection with its well-preserved badges has been made accessible to a large audience in a publication, beautifully illustrated and well-written in German. The authors are

well-known scholars who have won their spurs in the field of medieval badges - the German badge specialists Carina Brumme and Hartmut Kühne, and Helena Koenigsmarková, director of the Museum of Decorative Arts, who was also responsible for a publication in Czech on the badges of the Museum of Decorative Arts in 1986.¹



Figure 1

The writers too modestly recommend the book as “a hopefully useful instrument for further study” [“ein hoffentlich brauchbares Material zur Weiterarbeit”]. The catalog is certainly more than that. Highly illuminating is the contribution on the history of the Prague collections. The collection has a long past going back to the nineteenth century. In 1894 an art dealer in Paris sold the badges to Freiherr Adalbert von Lanna, one of the chief initiators of the Prague Museum of Decorative Arts (UPM). Some of the badges were sold on, but over 450 badges found a home in Prague. In 1962 the collection was distributed between two museums - the Museum of Decorative Arts, now housing 217 objects, and the National Museum holding the remaining 245 objects. Hartmut Kühne and Helena Koenigsmarková nuanced views of the museum treasures is enlightened with an account on the badges’ find history and subsequent vicissitudes. According to the nineteenth-century provenance, the insignias were found in the Seine, but caution is needed regarding this statement. Kühne and Koenigsmarková convincingly hypothesize that nineteenth-century art dealers mixed badges from different private collections to arrange for compilations that were supposedly more

¹ Dagmar Hejdová, Olga Herbenová, and Helena Koenigsmarková, *Katalog Sbírky Středověkého Uměleckého Řemesla, prosinec 1986 - únor 1987* (Prague 1986).

attractive to future buyers. (p. 22) Reasons for this assumption are the similarities between badges from Prague and others in the Paulus-Museum of Worms, the Kunstgewerbemuseum in Berlin, the Bossard and Figdor collections – both lost for the most part – and possibly the Historisches Museum in Basel. (The majority of badges from these museums were acquired around the same time as the Prague badges). At least one badge depicting the reliquary head of John the Baptist had been offered for sale before being presented to Adalbert von Lanna. **(Figure 1)** An additional argument is to be found in the composite badges; these were composed of mixed and matched fragments to obtain more complete, more salable specimens. The Seine designation seems to have been used as a “mark” of authenticity of the entire group rather than a geographical indication of every single badge.

Despite their call for caution with regard to the badges’ find site, the authors do assume that the majority of the badges were derived from the Seine (p. 29), and a provenance from France does seem plausible. Most of the pilgrims’ souvenirs originate from cult sites in France, such as Boulogne-sur-Mer, Le Puy, Mont-Saint-Michel, Cléry, Vaudouan, Montreuil-sur-Mer, Luzarches, Noyon, Saint-Fiacre-en-Breuil, Saint-Josse-sur-Mer, Amiens, Sainte-Catherine-du-Mont, Saint-Leu-d’Esserent, Saint-Maur-des-Fossés, Saint-Nicolas-de-Port, and possibly Sainte-Barbe-en-Auge, Chartres, and Marseille. Of the cult sites outside of France only a few of the most famous are represented – Rome, Santiago, Aachen, and Maastricht. This is not surprising; these sites attracted many pilgrims from France. The “foreign” badges are a minority, however. The areas of focus of the Prague collections might have been a result of the choices of the art dealer who sold the badges, and, to a lesser extent, of the collector Adalbert von Lanna who was presented with more badges than those held by the museum. Part of the shipment from Paris was sold to other collectors.



Figure 2

A comparison between the Prague badges and the collection of the Musée National du Moyen Age is obvious because of the many insignias from French sites of pilgrimage and their nineteenth-century provenance from the Seine. Not surprisingly, the Musée National du Moyen Age is mentioned regularly in the Prague catalog, as is the

Prague collection in the 1996 catalog of the Musée National in Paris,² but the catalogs are not interchangeable. There are some striking differences that merit mention. First of all, the Prague catalog contains some objects from the fourteenth century, but most date from the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries.

Objects of an earlier date, e.g. ampullae, are missing. Second, the Prague museums own many “profane” badges that are conspicuously lacking in Paris and in other museum collections compiled around the same time. **(Figure 2)** These often unusual and sometimes explicit badges possibly did not fit the view of the Middle Ages of many nineteenth-century collectors, or were considered inappropriate for a museum collection. Whatever the reason for their absence, it is both unique and enlightening that the Prague museum does possess this type of badge.

Figure 3



² Denis Bruna, *Enseignes de Pèlerinage et Enseignes Profanes (Musée National du Moyen Age - Thermes de Cluny)* (Paris: Réunion des Musées Nationaux, 1996), e.g. pp. 102-103, 123-124, 212 and 279.

The authors note that the badges in the Prague collections often have a pin on the reverse for attachment, (**Figure 3**) as opposed to most badges of German manufacture. This immediately brings to mind English badges that also often have pins instead of eyelets.³ The authors propose that the presence of a pin might indicate production in France, perhaps north of the Loire, or an even more specific region of production (p. 29). This might be taking it a step too far. Many badges from France --not just the earlier plaques-- have eyelets as means of attachment, e.g. those from Saint-Antoine-L'Abbaye, Saint-Josse-sur-Mer, Saint-Quentin, and Saint-Claude. Nevertheless, the relatively large number of pins is significant and certainly merits further attention.

Because of the nature of the material – with an emphasis on French cult sites – a specialist in French medieval studies would have been a useful addition to the team of experts working on the book. The authors make a number of tentative attributions – Rue (nos. 63-67), Notre-Dame-de-l'Epine (nos. 93-102), Notre-Dame-de-Vaux (nos. 103-106), and Notre-Dame-des-Ardilliers (no. 107) – that might have been more persuasive with the insights of a specialist in French church or devotional studies. The attribution of badges to Sainte-Barbe-en-Auge (nos. 143-155) is tempting, but problematic. Pilgrims' souvenirs will certainly have been produced in this popular site of pilgrimage, but it is difficult to pinpoint which ones. The general iconography of the proposed badges does not point to any specific site and inscriptions are lacking. Other badges in the catalog are categorized wrongly. An unidentified badge is assigned to the



³ Brian W. Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges. Medieval Finds from Exeter* (London: The Stationery Office, 1998), p. 4.

group of erotic insignia because it shows a bare-chested woman (no. 364), but it is a religious badge of St Agatha with her hands tied behind her back while executioners tear off her breasts with pincers. **(Figure 4)** Parts of the pincers are still visible, if only faintly. When the authors describe a badge of an archangel (no. 260), they write that “St Michael can be excluded, and therefore also a provenance from Mont-Saint-Michel.” After comparison with two badges that were found in the Netherlands I am convinced that the badge does depict St Michael.⁴

Figure 5



Some substantiated new identifications that will meet with general approval form important contributions. An especially beautiful and hitherto-unknown badge is identified as a souvenir from Bourbon L’Archambault (no. 26) which held a relic of the cross with dynastic implications. **(Figure 5)** The abbess depicted on quite a few badges was reputed to be St Odile (no. 138-142), but she is now convincingly identified as St Austreberthe of Montreuil-sur-Mer. It is unclear though why the authors did not recognize a sixth badge with a similar abbess as St Austreberthe (no. 176), which is listed as St Gertrud of Nivelles instead. The badge does not have much in common with known badges of St Gertrud, but the frame does show remarkable similarities with some badges from Boulogne-sur-Mer, not far from Montreuil. One of these is, in fact, in the Museum of Decorative Arts and is included in the catalog (no. 69). The animal at

⁴ H.J.E. van Beuningen, A.M. Koldewij, D. Kicken, and H. van Asperen, *Heilig en Profaan 3. 1300 laatmiddeleeuwse insignes uit openbare en particuliere collecties* (Langbroek: Medieval Badges Foundation, 2012), p. 150, nos. 2422-2423.



her feet is not a mouse, which usually accompanies St Gertrud, but the wolf from a well-known miracle story of the life of Austreberthe.

A paleographer or a specialist in medieval script would have protected the authors from a few obvious mistakes. A badge with a depiction of a saint, identified as St Bernard in the catalog, (no. 156) reads S VINCENT. The inscription on an especially intriguing badge (no. 67, attributed to Rue in the catalog) reads S:SAUVOURS:DE D [Saint Saviors of D] instead of

the rather cryptic S:SAUNOM:A... **(Figure 6)** The French inscription suggests

Figure 6 a site of pilgrimage in a French-speaking area, but it does not point to Rue. The plural indicates a cult of more than one miraculous image or relic, which is confirmed by the badge depicting both a crucifix and a Man of Sorrows. Another badge, probably from the same site, depicts two crucifixes (no. 66). The inscription on the frame of another badge depicting St Michael from Le Mont-Saint-Michel (no. 206) reads TOM BE, perhaps referring to nearby Tombelaine, and not AD III04 as indicated in the catalog. Other minor mistakes are AW GNW S DEI which should have been AN GNU S DEI (no. 2), and the erroneous AMOR instead of AMOURE: E (no. 365).

The often-substantiated, but sometimes under-researched suggestions are both the strength and weakness of the catalog. The book opens up a range of subjects that deserve further study. Despite the points of criticism that arise when focusing on the details the book is a worthy addition to the library of historians in the field of medieval studies, whether they concentrate on devotion, pilgrimage, culture, art, or church history. Especially those scholars with an interest in France will find the book a useful tool offering, a wealth of (French) material, some interesting

new attributions, valuable insights on nineteenth-century collection history, and many suggestions for further research.

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