Objects depicted in the miniatures and margins of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves

Master of Catherine of Cleves, *The Holy Family at Supper.*

One of the miniatures in the Hours of the Virgin shows a domestic scene of the Holy Family at dinner. Mary is suckling her child and Joseph uses a spoon to eat porridge or pap from a wooden bowl. The setting is a simple but fully furnished late medieval interior. The Virgin sits on, or in front of, a chair with a rush seat, and under her wide white robe we can see the edge of the rush matting. Joseph sits in a barrel seat. The room is paved with red flagstones and decked by a wooden ceiling.

In the middle of the back wall is a large, open cooking hearth. On it sits a three-legged cooking pot with one handle and a lid. Identical pots have been excavated at Cleves House in Haarlem (no. 2a). Such cooking pots were covered by pieces of wood or brick, and about 1400 earthenware lids for them appeared; one of these has also been found at Cleves House (no. 2b). Above the fire, a brass cauldron with an iron handle is suspended from an adjustable pot-hook. A similar, but smaller pot-hook dating from the first half of the 15th century was found in 's-Hertogenbosch (no. 2c), and an identical cauldron was found in Rotterdam (no. 2d). Fire tongs stand by the hearth and an iron trivet hangs above them. In the niche above is a small jug; a pair of bellows sits next to the fireplace. The cupboard with Gothic crenulations behind Joseph is crowded with objects including a red-ware plate (no. 2e) and white-ware dishes (no. 2f) or wooden trenchers; on the cupboard stand an earthenware plate (no. 2g) and an earthenware *lechefrites* or dripping pan (no. 2h). Nearby, a small shelf holds a candlestick, apparently bronze, with a candle stub, of a non-specific type (no. 2i). Two racks hanging above Joseph are filled with barely identifiable objects. Joseph wears wooden pattens to prevent soiling and wear of his pointed leather shoes (nos. 2j and 2k). A pair of scissors, of the same type found at Cleves House (no. 2l), hangs on the wall behind the Virgin. Finally, a complete pewter service is stored on the wall rack behind Mary, with at least two large and two small jugs (no. 2m), one large and one small salt cellar (no. 2n), and a row of plates (no. 2o). A spectacular find of twenty-three pewter plates from the latrine drain of Cleves House in Haarlem (no. 2o) and a single plate from the moat are closely comparable to the pewter.
depicted in the Book of Hours. Not only are these plates contemporary with Catherine’s Book of Hours, but all are stamped with the common arms of Cleves-Mark, as it is found in the top corners of Ms. M. 945 fol. iv of the Book of Hours. The plates in Haarlem must have belonged either to Margaret of Cleves or to her sister Catherine. After Margaret’s death the castle became Catherine’s property until she disposed of it in 1434.
Objects depicted in the miniatures and margins of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves

Master of Catherine of Cleves, St Gregory the Great: Border with gold and silver coins.
New York, Morgan Library & Museum, Ms. M. 917, p. 140.

A gold
6 obverse: coat of arms of Utrecht with a small (unrecognizable) coat of arms of the bishop in the centre, DVX ROD EPS TRAIECT
1 reverse: John the Baptist, standing, S IOHANNES BAPT.
- Utrecht, Rudolf van Diepholt (1423–1455), John’s florin, from c. 1449: divided coat of arms of Utrecht-Diepholt, FLORINI POSTVLA TRAIECTENS / S IOHANNES BAPTISTA
note: the wrong opening of the obverse legend seems to be inspired by that on the florin of Duke Arnold of Guelders (below no. F), and continues with an equally wrong reference to Rudolph as a bishop, since at first he was only a postulate
note: the reverse of this coin type is a very general one that has been used by many other authorities in the same way; because of the symmetry in the representations, 1–6 are here combined

B silver
5 obverse: coat of arms of the Burgundian state, DEI GRA DVX BG Z CO
2 reverse: short cross with two lilies and two lions, MONETA NOVA COMITIS FLADS
= Flanders, Philip the Good (1419–1467), quarter groat, from 1434: PHS DEI GRA DVX BG Z CO FLA / MONETA NOVA COMITIS FLADS

C gold
3 obverse: coat of arms of Utrecht with (unrecognizable) coat of arms of the bishop in the centre, DVX ROD EPS TRAIECT
4 reverse: standing saint with mitre and crosier, DVX ROD EPS TRAIECT
= Utrecht, Rudolf van Diephol (1423–1455), Martin’s florin, from c. 1449: coat of arms of Utrecht with a small one of Diepholt, in a trefoil, MON RODOLP POSTVLA TRAIECT / S ANCTE MERTIN EPS
note: as before with A, the incorrect opening is probably inspired by the florin of Duke Arnold of Guelders (below no. F)

D silver
7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14 obverse: crown
- Denmark, Eric of Pomerania (1396–1439), penny, from c. 1400
note: this coin type was not current in the Low Countries, and therefore it is not easily comprehensible how this illustration was included in the manuscript

E gold
11 obverse: facing bust crowned, SIG ROMANO
10 reverse: orb, DVX ARNOLD GELRIE IVL.
- Dortmund?, city (with the name of Emperor Sigismund, 1410–1437), apple florin, from 1419: orb in multifoil, SIGISMVMD ROANORV REX / JOHN THE BAPTIST STANDING, MONETA NO
- Dortmund?, city (with the name of Emperor Sigismund, 1410–1437), half albus, from 1419: crowned bust facing, SIGISMVMD RONOR RX / LONG CROSS, MO TREMON
note: the text on the obverse illustration is not fully readable, but probably comes closest to an abbreviated version of sigismundvs romanorvm rex; obverse and reverse design are not found in this combination on any late medieval coin circulating in this area – possibly the miniaturist took elements of different examples (one gold, one silver) and coloured them both in gold
note: here the complete legend of a Guelders florin (below no. F) was given on the illustration of quite another coin,

F gold
15, 19, 22 obverse: coat of arms of Guelders-Jülich, surrounded by four small coats of arms, DVX ROD EPS TRAIECT
17, 23 reverse: John the Baptist, standing, S IOHANNES BAPTISTA
- Guelders, Arnold of Egmond (1423–1473), Arnhem florin, from 1423: DVX ARNOLD GEL Z IVL Z COMIS Z / S IOHANNES BAPTISTA
note: the miniaturist copied (parts of) the obverse legend of this coin a number of times on other coin illustrations on this page: above nrs. A, C and D

G silver
21 obverse: lion rampant of Holland, GVILM DVX DEI GRA COM HOL Z ZE
16, 24 reverse: long cross with two lions and two shields of Bavaria, MONETA NOVA HOLAD Z ZE
- Holland, William VI (1404–1417), half lion, from 1411: GVILM DVX DEI GRA COM HOL Z ZE / MONETA NOVA HOLAD Z ZE

H silver
25 obverse: coat of arms of the Burgundian state, PHS DEI GRA DVX BVRC G HOL
18, 20 reverse: long cross with two lions and two lilies, a rosette in the centre, MONETA NOVA HOL
- Holland, Philip the Good (1419–1467), groat, from 1434: PHS DEI GRA DVX BVRC G HOL / MONETA NOVA COM HOL
Twenty-five gold and silver coins fill the margins around the miniature of Pope Gregory the Great and the text of the prayer to this saint. The tiles on the floor beneath Gregory’s feet are alternately decorated with golden yellow discs against a dark ground. In other miniatures the decoration of the floor tiles agrees with the marginalia, and here it is certainly the intention that coins are indicated. The degree of realism in the coins in the margins is so great that all can be identified. In other words the miniaturist must have had the real coins available to copy. These are all coins that were in circulation in the second quarter of the 15th century. The most recent coin depicted on this page dates from 1434 under Philip the Good.

In the late medieval period, coin circulation in the Low Countries was truly international and usually a great number of types can be encountered, originating from various kingdoms, principalities, duchies, counties, lordships and cities in Western Europe, and sometimes with dates ranging well over a century: old coins were never withdrawn from circulation. Most of the coins depicted here would have been very common in daily use in the middle of the 15th-century Netherlands, with one exception. The Danish penny struck by King Eric of Pomerania (1412–1439) is not a usual phenomenon in Dutch circulation, and one wonders why it is included here—and how the illuminator got hold of it in the first place. Several of the coins in the miniature are repetitions, and often represent obverse and reverse of one type: all in all these twenty-five images represent only eight different coins. The larger silver ones—all coins seem to be in the appropriate size, except B that has been made too large—may have paid for one day’s work of a labourer. The gold coins were worth a great deal more, but the total sum is nothing in comparison to the duchess’s yearly expenses, let alone the income of her noble husband’s estate. All coins are coloured according to their type, except the two in the middle at the right-hand side, where the miniaturist seriously messed up things. The side with the orb stems from a gold florin of Dortmund, whereas the other side with the facing and crowned bust was possibly drawn after a small silver coin of the same place—in the late medieval period the designs orb and bust were never combined on one coin as seems to be suggested in the manuscript.

A John’s florin, Utrecht from 1423 (nrs. 1, 6)
B quarter groat, Flanders from 1434 (nrs. 2, 5)
C Martin’s florin, Utrecht from 1423 (nrs. 3, 4)
D penny, Denmark from c. 1400 (nrs. 7, 8, 9, 13, 14)
E apple florin?, Dortmund? from 1419? (nrs. 10, 11)
F Arnhem florin, Guelders from 1423 (nrs. 15, 17, 19, 22, 23)
G half lion, Holland from 1411 (nrs. 16, 21, 24)
H groat, Burgundian Netherlands from 1434 (nrs. 18, 20, 25)
Among the scenes of the Passion depicted in the Cleves Hours is that of Joseph, the wealthy man of Arimathea, appealing to Pilate to release the body of Christ and allow it to be removed from Golgotha for burial. Joseph is accompanied by Nicodemus. Pilate is seated on a Gothic throne, clad as a 15th-century magistrate. He wears fashionable red shoes with pointed toes, hose and a tunic edged with gold, over a white shirt; on his head is a liripipe and over that a sort of turban, which gives him an exotic appearance.

In his left hand Pilate holds a thorn branch (doornstokken) or justice rod, a symbol of judicial power that was in use in various Dutch towns for a long time (Koldeweij 1982, pp. 38-43). In 1559 Pieter Bruegel showed Justitia with this attribute in drawings and engravings. Two justice rods survive in Leiden: one in a silver mount and dated 1686, the other without a mount. Among the many justice rods preserved in Amsterdam is one particularly long thorn branch measuring more than two metres. Smaller ones were also used there (no. 3b-a).

In the hunting scene depicted in the lower margin a hunter, on foot, is armed with a boar-spear, designed for hunting larger game. Three of his five hounds run before him, chasing a hare; the hunter blows his horn in order to startle the game (see no. 3b-b).
Nam cruxem adora
amus tibi: sa pauce et passi
one tua redemptio mundum.
THE CHURCH FATHER, AMBROSE, is shown as the bishop of Milan. The marginal decoration of this page consists of eleven mussels, more or less opened, and a crab in the centre of the lower margin. This edible brown crab (*Cancer pagurus*) is known in the Netherlands as the North Sea crab. The miniaturist was not very accurate in his depiction, since the crab has ten legs and two claws, whereas in reality it has eight legs. Three limpets have attached themselves to the mussel that is second from the bottom of the page.

The light yellow tiles on the floor in the miniature are decorated with a sieve, a reference to catching and rinsing the shellfish depicted here.

St Vincent is shown as a deacon. He wears a remarkable blue-lined dalmatic of which one half is red and the other purple. Round his left wrist he bears a blue maniple. In his left hand he holds a book, and in his right a meat-hook that refers to his martyrdom. It is probable that the round object depicted on the dark floor tiles refers to the millstone with which Vincent’s body was weighted when it was thrown into the sea.

Raspberry canes (*Rubus idaeus*) spring upwards from the lower margin, bearing fourteen berries. In the left margin are three examples of the Red Admiral butterfly (*Vanessa atalanta*), with Cabbage Whites at top centre, below and right.
The back wall of the room in which St Valentine stands is covered with a green brocade cloth, and the floor is laid with tiles decorated with an alternating pattern of human heads—a possible reference to the saint's beheading. The martyr is shown as a deacon, with a sword and book as attributes. Like St Vincent (M. p. 268), he carries a blue maniple on his left wrist. The names Ihesus and Maria are embroidered in gold on his red-lined purple dalmatic.

The somewhat static representation of the martyr, like that of every saint depicted in this manuscript, is surrounded by marginal decoration that noticeably differs from all the rest. Here the margins are filled with fantastic flowering vines, with long, narrow, spiral-shaped leaves, red and purple flowers with seven petals of varying sizes. In the lower margin two large dragonflies consume a fat fly.

JK
5a  Objects depicted in the miniatures and margins of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves

Master of Catherine of Cleves, Sts. Cornelius and Cyprian; Border with birdcages.

---

5a-a  Birdcage, wood, 16th century, 22.8 x 12.2 x 18.7 cm, found Haarlem. Haarlem, Municipal Bureau of Archaeology.

5a-b  Miniature birdcage, pewter, 14th or 15th century, 3.7 x 2.2 x 2.2 cm, found Dordrecht. Private collection.

5a-c  Miniature birdcage, pewter, second half 15th century, 4.1 x 2 cm, found Delft. Private collection.

5a-d  Miniature birdcage, the Netherlands, pewter, second half 16th century, 1.7 x 2.8 x 1.8 cm. Private collection.

5a-e  Miniature birdcage, the Netherlands, pewter, first half 17th century, 9 x 5.2 cm. Private collection.

5a-f  Miniature birdcage, pewter, second half 18th century, 2.4 x 1.8 x 0.6 cm, found Amsterdam. Private collection.

TF THE SAINTS CORNELIUS AND CYPRIAN are shown in their full ecclesiastical dignity, as pope and bishop, respectively. Cornelius wears the papal tiara and a green chasuble over a blue-lined red one, with a white tunic below it. In his right hand he holds the papal cross and in his left hand, a horn. The horn is his attribute because of the similarity between the sound of his name, Cornelius, and the Latin word for horn, *cornu*. Cyprian wears a red mitre, a red-lined blue cope and a purple tunic below. In his left hand he holds a crosier and in his right hand a sword, referring to his martyrdom by decapitation. Cyprian was bishop under Cornelius; their feasts fall on the same day and they are frequently venerated together.

Eight different birdcages depicted in the margins of this page do not seem to have any relationship to the saints depicted. However, the page is remarkable in that once it has been carefully studied, it will never be forgotten. Moreover, the page has been personalized in a skilful and unobtrusive manner: the cage at the lower right has a cover embroidered with the letters *cd* and an abbreviation mark—*Catharina Duxissa*, referring to Duchess Catherine who commissioned the Book of Hours. In all the other cages small birds are visible; the songbird in the cage next to the top in the right-hand margin seems to be a male goldfinch.

Late medieval birdcages are known from other pictures, paintings and illuminated manuscripts, but the collection depicted in the Hours of Catherine of Cleves is unique. Few cages from this period have survived, but a rectangular one made entirely of wood and dating from about 1600 has been excavated in Haarlem (no. 5a-a). Many miniature moulded pewter cages have also been excavated; the earliest dates from the 15th century (nos. 5a-b-f). One such example, complete with bird, was found at Nieuwlande, in the province of Zeeland, in the 1980s (present location unknown).

The cage excavated in Haarlem is identical to the one shown on fol. Ms. M. 945, fol. 107r in the lower margin, where it hangs from a tree. We find similar wooden cages in the lower margin of fol. Ms. M. 945, fol. 32r in which the Christ child and his cousin John catch birds in a net trap.

JK
**5b** Objects depicted in the miniatures and margins of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves

Master of Catherine of Cleves, *The apostle Matthew; Border with axes.*


---

**5b-a** Broad axe, iron, marked on the blade with a sickle moon, 15th century, 1.61 cm (with new shaft), 32.4 cm (blade), found Brummen (Gld.). Deventer, Museum De Waag, inv. 3315-3. Literature: Zwolle 1980, pp. 183-4, no. 39.


**5b-c** Axe, iron with fragment of the wooden shaft, second half 15th century, found 's-Hertogenbosch. City of 's-Hertogenbosch, Department of Building History, Archaeology and Monument Preservation, inv. 6935 (DBSP).

**5b-d** Axe, iron, 15th or 16th century, found 's-Hertogenbosch. City of 's-Hertogenbosch, Department of Building History, Archaeology and Monument Preservation, inv. 6907 (RMAB).

**5b-e** Axe, iron, second half 15th or first half 16th century, found 's-Hertogenbosch. City of 's-Hertogenbosch, Department of Building History, Archaeology and Monument Preservation, inv. 16350 (DBLO excavation).

**Matthew**, barefoot as befits an apostle, wears a red toga and yellow under-tunic. He sports an eastern turban and has a remarkable long, forked beard. He holds two attributes in his hands: an axe and in the other, *manu velato* (with covered hand), a book. The margins around the miniature and the text are ornamented by fine *rinceaux* that are framed at the corners by curling leaf-work. In the upper and lower margins and on the right are twelve axes with short wooden handles, which strongly resemble Matthew’s axe. Thus in a certain way the marginal decoration is one with the miniature itself. The axes are in three groups of four and arranged in swastika or sunray formations. The miniaturist of folio 104 played a similar optical game in the bas-de-page, superimposing three fish over each other to form a decorative pattern. It is impossible to say whether the illuminator thought of the axes in a sunray pattern himself, or found the idea elsewhere. The compilation of such patterns is universal, as is shown, for example, by the well-known ‘three hares with two ears each, and three all together’. In the early Middle Ages this motif must have come from China to the West, where, for example, it was used by a stonemason in the late Gothic cloister of the cathedral of Paderborn. In the second quarter of the 13th century the master builder from Picardy, Villard d’Honnecourt, drew four masons carving each other, linked in a radial formation, in his famous sketchbook.

Axes of the type held by St Matthew have been found at various archaeological sites. A large broad axe found in Brummen in Gelderland has more or less the same measurements as Matthew’s axe (no. 5b-a). In 's-Hertogenbosch various late medieval axes have come to light; a few are reasonably well preserved.

---

*J.K.*
6a Objects depicted in the miniatures and margins of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves

Master of Catherine of Cleves, St Martin; Border with insignias.

6a Insignia with partially reversed inscription, before 1383, pewter, found Verdronken Weide, Ypres, excavation and property of the Vlaams Instituut voor het Onroerend Erfgoed (VIOE) [Flemish Institute for National Heritage]. Literature: forthcoming, with that of other insignias from Verdronken Weide in the series Relicta Monografieën of VIOE.

THE PRAYER TO ST MARTIN opens with a large red initial M and the saint's name. The miniature shows the well-known scene of the young Roman horseman who rides into Amiens and gives half his cloak to a poor beggar who later appears to Martin as Christ, clad in that same half of a cloak (shown in the upper left corner of the miniature). The beggar supports himself on two crutches, one under his right arm and one under his right knee. A wooden begging bowl hangs from his girdle. A second beggar sits on the ground before St Martin and holds up his begging bowl.

Both the prayer to St Martin and the miniature are surrounded by a marginal decoration that has not been understood until now. In the left margin are two blue and three red, five-pointed stars. These seem to be folded out of coloured paper or parchment and fastened to the ground with a gold-headed pin. The lower, upper and right margins are filled with meandering scrolls or ribbons that continuously cross each other. Into these scrolls twelve golden plaques are plaited. The oval plaques have two slits through which the ribbons thread. The two plaques in the middle of the upper margin bear the names JHESUS and MARIA; the others all have different geometric patterns. A unique archaeological find from the Verdronken Weide (Drowned Meadow) in West Flanders clarifies the meaning of this marginalia, and demonstrates that it would have been immediately recognizable to the late medieval reader. The Verdronken Weide is a low-lying area outside Ypres where the English razed the entire parish of St Michael's during the siege in 1383. It was never rebuilt. Most of the evidence of habitation dates from the 14th century, and from before 1383. Among the thousands of small metal finds is an oval, moulded pewter plaque that is similar to the oval golden plaques shown in the Hours of Catherine of Cleves. The marginal decoration of the manuscript helps in the understanding of the plaque—a cheap imitation of a luxurious item of jewellery made from costly materials—and vice versa. The pewter plaque has a flat reverse and would have been sewn onto a garment by two small rings. Laces and ribbons could have been threaded through the kidney-shaped openings in the plaque. The plaque—it is not clear whether this is a profane or religious insignia—has an inscription, partially reversed, with the word AMOURS at its centre.

JK
The beginning and the end of the prayer text accompanying the miniature of the Adoration are framed by two small flower vines in the margin at left. A costly rosary fills the other margins. The iconography of this Adoration, which takes place in the foreground of a grand vista, is fairly traditional. The son of God, seated on the Virgin’s lap, is worshipped by the eldest king who kneels before him and offers a costly golden vessel. Behind him stand the other kings with their gifts. The middle magus points to the star above that has led them to the new-born king. In the thatched stable, somewhat relegated to the background, the elderly Joseph sits. The three kings are richly and fashionably dressed. The old king wears a wide lilac cloak edged with gold brocade; his exotic coronet lies on the ground and a dagger and purse hang from a shoulder strap. The second king is clad in a fur-lined red houpelanelle with a split at its centre in the front; his unusual headgear is lined with ermine. The king on the right wears bright red hose and a green cloak with a dagged hem; the fur collar and edging of the cloak are also dagged.

An extremely valuable and unusual rosary depicted in the margin seems to have a more associative relationship with the miniature: just as the Magi turn to the infant Christ and adore him and his mother, so the believer, with the rosary as an anchor, turns to Christ and the Virgin. The rosary in the margin has thirty-nine bright red beads, and the small golden cross threaded through the middle has four more, slightly smaller red beads. This must be red coral (Corallium rubrum). Both ends of the rosary are finished with a gold-covered tassel with a bunch of small pearls. At the top of the page, two beads down, a golden seven-pointed star is threaded with six pearls. Its centre is red. In fact, the star consists of a single broad contour that loops endlessly through itself. On the other side of the rosary, in the same position, is a small pouch bearing the letters CD (Catharina Duxissa). The golden letters, set with small beads of gold, are probably embroidered, but they could also be metal letters sewn on to the fabric. The pouch appears to be made of blue damask and is bordered with gold around the top, ornamented with three pearls at the lower edge, and two more pearls hanging from the cord that closes the pouch.

In the late Middle Ages, coral was highly valued and commonly believed to protect against and prevent disaster. It was harvested in the north-western Mediter­ranean, where a coral industry flourished in the second half of the 15th century. Red coral rosaries are mentioned in many royal inventories, as are larger or smaller amounts of loose coral beads intended for such rosaries. The rosary in Catherine’s Book of Hours is regarded as the best known illustration of a late medieval string of coral. Until recently no actual examples were known to have sur­vived. In his authoritative work on late medieval jewellery Ronald Lightbown can only cite examples from archives and mention a few in pictures (Lightbown 1992, pp. 31, 346–7). The quantity of coral beads found as the result of recent archaeological excavations is therefore nothing short of spectacular.

Twenty-seven pale pink coral beads dating from c. 1300 are probably the oldest surviving medieval examples. Probably once strung on a silk thread and found in the Hanse port of Greifswald on the Baltic (Mecklenburg-Voor-Pommeren), they may originally have come from a longer string. The length of the present string, c. 8 cm, with a diameter of 2.5 cm, could indicate that it was a child’s bracelet.

The remains of two strings of coral dating from the first quarter of the 15th century were excavated at Lübeck at the medieval ‘Fronerei’, the prison that was also the home of the judicial functionary who was executioner, gaoler and court usher. Forty-one loose beads from one string were found. The second string is exceptional and the context of the find gives rise to speculation. Found in the original order of stringing were 256 coral beads, going from very small (0.35 cm) at each end to larger (1.2 cm) in the middle; threaded exactly half-way along is a phallus amulet (l. 1.65 cm). The magical powers of coral as protection against evil and for increasing fertility add to the significance of this amulet, found precisely at the centre of this unbelievably expensive necklace. Obviously
the place where it was found, the prison and dwelling of the executioner, gives rise to questions: was the valuable string of beads secretly thrown down the privy, perhaps in panic? Other finds from the same cesspit immediately put such speculations into perspective: an equally costly 14th-century silken bridal girdle with silver clasps, ornamented with a head of Christ.
6c Objects depicted in the miniatures and margins of the Hours of Catherine of Cleves

Master of Catherine of Cleves, St Agatha. Border with jewels and gift-wrapping.

6c-a. Pinces, iron, first half 15th century, 10.5 x 3.9 cm, found Burgemeester Loeffplein, 's-Hertogenbosch. City of 's-Hertogenbosch, Bouwhistorie, Archeologie en Monumentenzorg (Department of Building History, Archaeology and Monument Care), inv. nr 11698. Literature: Nijhof 2007, p. 239.

6c-b. Insignia in the form of pinces with a wrenched-off breast, indicating St Agatha, pewter, first half 15th century, 5.4 x 3.6 cm, found Burgemeester Loeffplein, 's-Hertogenbosch, Afdeling Bouwhistorie, Archeologie en Monumentenzorg (Department of Building History, Archaeology and Monument Care), inv. nr 10901. Literature: Jansen 2007, p. 133.


6c-d. Mirror insignia in the form of a heart pierced by an arrow with scroll 'AMOURES', pewter, first half 15th century, 2.2 x 2.1 cm, found Nieuwland. Cothen, Collection of the Van Beuningen Family, inv. nr 3262. Literature: Van Beuningen, Koldeweij and Kicken 2001, p. 433, no. 1899.

6c-e. Insignia in the form of a crowned heart pierced by an arrow with scroll 'AMOURES', pewter, first half 15th century, 4.5 x 2.8 cm, found Nieuwland. Cothen, Collection of the Van Beuningen Family, inv. nr 3262. Literature: Van Beuningen, Koldeweij and Kicken 2001, p. 433, no. 1899.

6c-f. Pilgrim's badge in the form of the Three Hosts from Wilsnack (Brandenburg), pewter, first half 15th century, 3.4 x 3.4 cm, found Burgemeester Loeffplein, 's-Hertogenbosch. City of 's-Hertogenbosch, Afdeling Bouwhistorie, Archeologie en Monumentenzorg (Department of Building History, Archaeology and Monument Care), inv. nr 17607. Literature: Koldeweij 2007, p. 157.

The virgin saint and martyr Agatha is shown as a beautiful young noblewoman, clad in a purple dress over which she wears a green-lined white cloak. Both her cloak and girdle are secured by costly clasps with golden chains and medallions. In her right hand Agnes holds aloft her customary attributes, by which she is recognized and by which she was tortured – large pinces and her wrenched-off breast. Similar pinces are known from excavations including a rich early 15th-century site at the Burgemeester Loeffplein in 's-Hertogenbosch (no. 6c-a). Small badges in the form of pinces with a wrenched-off breast, presumably from a brotherhood dedicated to Agatha, have come to light at the same site (no. 6c-b).

In the margins of this page, costly woven material is painted, as if tightly stretched draperies are hung there. Optically we are misled by the miniaturist: on the lower-est of these cloths of honour, which stretch across the entire lower margin, four boxes are placed, while two gold monograms are embroidered on the material. These monograms give the saint's name in abbreviated form, Sancta Agatha, and this is repeated on the larger of the two boxes in the centre.

The four boxes are ingeniously folded, and according to the inscription, these are gifts intended for Agatha. The two green boxes are open to show how they are folded from a single piece of coloured paper. In the left-hand box is a golden pendant in the form of a heart with an arrow through it and a curving scroll; an inscription on this scroll is not decipherable. Similar pendants and insignias are known in pewter imitations of costly precious jewellery (nos. 6c-c-e). Amours, love, of which the text on the scroll speaks, depending on the context, can be regarded as earthly love, or love in the more religious sense, love of God. The jewel in the right-hand box consists of three discs joined together. It is not impossible that this is an expensive variant of the Three Hosts insignia from the popular north German pilgrimage site of Wilsnack that until now has been known only from pewter examples (no. 6c-f). It is more probable that it is an ornamental jewel in the form of a Gothic trefoil. Several such Gothic decorative jewels have been preserved. A fine silver example is to be found in the Colmar gold and silver hoard (hidden mid-14th century; Paris, Musée de Cluny, inv. Cl 20667; Colmar 1999, p. 23, no. 22). The large silver hoard from Pritzwalk (Brandenburg) includes a series of trefoil appliquéd cloak or girdle clasps (hidden around 1300; Berlin, Kunstgewerbemuseum; Berlin and Pritzwalk 2006, pp. 104–110, nos. 183–236). In Göttingen a 14th-century mould has been excavated, including trefoils with hooks and eyes for cloak clasps (Göttingen, Stadtarchäologie [City Archaeology]). While meaningless in itself, in some contexts the trefoil form could carry a religious meaning and might be a play on the Trinity. Both jewels in the lower margin indicate the courtly life of Agatha and Catherine, and also their piety. 

JK