Bringing Pilgrimage Home: The Production, Iconography, and Domestic Use of Late-Medieval Devotional Objects by Ordinary People

Sarah Blick
Art History Department, Kenyon College, Gambier, OH 43022, USA; blicks@kenyon.edu

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Abstract: Tracing the devotional beliefs and practices of everyday people during the late Middle Ages through documents is tricky, as most were written with other purposes in mind. To make up for this, it is necessary to examine the abundant material culture that survives from this period. By analyzing a variety of finds and comparing them with well-known objects used by the upper classes, it becomes evident that ordinary people shared the same religious views and practices. Both classes were interested in pieces that inspired active devotional and amuletic practice. They were intended to be gazed at and handled, then rested on a tabletop or nailed to a wall. Some folded, some rang, some could be blown through, while others were gazed upon. Lower quality materials and production of pieces had no impact on their ultimate use in the home.

Keywords: devotional; amuletic; pilgrimage; private devotion; reliquaries; mirrors; bells

1. Introduction

“It is notoriously difficult to assess how well ordinary people of the late-medieval period understood the theological significance of the mass—or indeed, the basic tenets of their faith in general” (Humpfrey 1993, p. 58; Jacobs 2013, p. 202, n. 11). In comparison to the upper classes (especially affective piety among the upper classes and nuns and monks), documents are mostly silent on how the devout among the lower classes practiced spirituality on an individual level (Belting 1994; Van Os 1994; Brantley 2007; Hamburger 2007; Rudy 2011; Blick 2015). This essay proposes a way to begin to fill this somewhat-overlooked area by examining how mass production of interactive pieces, with similar forms and iconography as more-expensive objects, reveals that the lower classes were aware of and up-to-date on the latest developments in personal devotion and amuletic practice. Pewter, as the most popular and best surviving medium used to create such pieces, will be the focus of this article. Its malleability allowed artisans to make works that, with their intricate imagery, complex movements, and construction, could not be taken in at a glance; they were intended to be gazed at and handled, placed on a tabletop or nailed to a wall, rather than worn by the devotee.

1 Not all movement was appropriate for devotional pieces. Spinning parts, found in toys and secular badges of the same period, were not used, presumably because it would have been disrespectful to watch a sacred figure spin. Some secular badges incorporate spinning, such as 15th-century pins in a tracery hexagonal shape with cusping and crockets surrounding a sun- or starburst and windmill badges with sails that rotate (Spencer 1998, p. 297; Spencer 1990, p. 103, cat. 235).

2 Some pilgrim badges with moveable parts, such as the tiny swords with scabbards produced at Canterbury as souvenirs of the martyrdom of Becket and at Mont-St-Michel as an emblem of the Archangel Michael, were not necessarily designed to create a personal devotional object (Spencer 1998, pp. 93–9, cat. 66–72c). See also the virtual exhibition http://www.inrap.fr/preventive-archaeology/Virtual_exhibitions/Virtual_exhibitions/Making_Pilgrim_Badges_at_Mont_Saint_Michel/The_historical_context/p-1478-Pilgrims_and_the_Mount.htm.
viewed close up and then stepped away from, this action, too, linked them to richer forms of devotional objects.

It should be noted that precise terminology describing these pieces, the people who interacted with them, and their perceived function is difficult because value judgments are embedded in the words typically used to discuss any of these aspects, such as “lower classes”, “common people”, “ordinary people”, etc. Obviously, there were very poor and less poor people who were not rich, ordinary and extraordinary people who had different abilities and understanding, and so forth. Nuanced distinctions are not really possible because so few documents which reference this material name the users of these pieces; much less comment on their particulars. This essay presumes that those who purchased and used these objects were not wealthy or they likely would have chosen to buy something made of finer materials (following a hierarchy of gold, then silver, then silver gilt, etc.) and with finer workmanship. Terms like “sacred” and “secular”, too, pose problems because these divisions were often non-existent and, even when weighed toward one side or the other, were liable to change, depending on how the owner of the piece viewed and used it. A pilgrim “souvenir” was sometimes regarded as merely commemorative, but there are many instances where it was viewed as a carrier of sacred power and protection. Likewise, a statue or box—no matter its medium—could be pleasantly decorative or be revered as a direct touchstone to the divinity depicted or contained therein in the form of relics. Obviously, how something was treated by its owner/viewer determined its value; a sliver of wood might be just that or it could be part of the True Cross. To that end, I will continue to use these general terms, but will endeavor to be specific when investigating these objects.

For example, the study of the production and use of pilgrim souvenirs has revealed a glimpse into the devotional interests of all classes. After pilgrims bought, displayed, and enjoyed their souvenirs, what happened to them? Their fates varied; they could be sewn into a manuscript, cast into a bell, or placed into moving water. Most were used, initially, for public display, attached to clothes, or worn around the neck. At times, though, their owners transformed them into private devotional objects. Some were pinned to small boards roughly fashioned into Gothic tracery (Figure 1). Nails driven through ampullae and badges attaching them to a wall in one’s home or stable also accomplished the same thing (Figure 2). Going beyond pilgrim souvenirs—for most of these pieces were not strictly connected to pilgrimage—devotees used all kinds of cheap adornment to create interactive works of art as reliquaries and sacred images to be used at home. Because not everyone had the skills to make inventive homemade devotional objects, artisans in the late Middle Ages mass-produced specially designed pieces made of low-quality metal which spurred individual prayer.

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3 Denis Bruna (2006, fig. 109–15) first noted these kinds of objects and their use for personal devotion.
4 They could act as devotional objects and be a source of succor for the remainder of the pilgrims’ lives (Koster 1985, pp. 94–96). Sometimes pilgrims made them more powerful by casting them into bells, morses, tankards, or baptismal fonts, or placing them in cattle troughs or fields to guard against vermin infestation.
5 Amsterdam, Historisch Museum, c. 1500 (Kamme 2000, p. 135, fig. 8). Badges are from Wilsnack and Blomberg, Amsterdam.
6 Many pilgrim souvenirs (especially ampullae, though they could be hung up by their handles) have been discovered with nail holes through them. See, for example, badges such as that of Adrian of Geraardsbergen, found in Middelburg in 1983 and now in Zeeuws Museum, inv. M84-004-94. My thanks to Hanneke van Asperen for this reference. See also http://www.findsdatabase.org.uk/hms/pas_obj.php?type=finds&id=001462469ED018D2, http://www.findsdatabase.org.uk/hms/pas_obj.php?type=finds&id=00147AC7E1101B08.
Figure 1. Carved board with pilgrim badges. Amsterdam, Historisch Museum, c. 1500. Badges are from Wilsnack and Blomberg, Amsterdam. Photo: Amsterdam, Historisch Museum.
2. Private Devotion—Upper and Lower Classes

The movement toward forms of private devotion for all classes in the later Middle Ages was facilitated by the production and distribution of small devotional objects that allowed the individual to ask for optimal health and salvation (Duffy 2006, pp. 57–58; Ringbom 1984, p. 19). The images were not strikingly different from those found in churches, just as the same prayers recited in church were repeated at home. Although St. Gregory (540–604) recommended the daily veneration of images to make the invisible visible and to increase emotions in the worshiper, few early-medieval examples of such pieces survive in the West. Beginning in the twelfth century, private images appear regularly in miracle stories and by the 13th century, portable images became popular throughout all
the property-owning classes. In the 14th and 15th centuries, the lower classes begin to acquire private devotional images on a broad scale (Ringbom 1984, pp. 14, 52–58).

3. Public versus Private Images

Just as the wealthy used tiny richly illuminated books of hours, precious devotional jewelry, and small sculptures in their homes during prayer, so did the lower classes, using cheaper versions. For instance, an image of St. Anthony’s tau cross was considered powerful whether it was made of gold or lead (Figure 3). Medieval commentators made no distinction regarding media in relation to the effectiveness of a devotional image and so, while the rich sought pieces made of the same precious metals and gems seen in public spaces, the lower classes purchased private devotional images made of pewter, pipe clay, bread dough, wax, and paper maché (Marks 2004, p. 18). Typically, class distinction in pilgrim souvenirs was denoted by the media used rather than the particular design. Sometimes the same badge was made from gold or silver or was hand-painted (as were the elaborate badges from Aachen and Our Lady of Undercroft, Canterbury Cathedral), while others featured colorful paper or shiny metallic backgrounds which showcased openwork badges. Some artisans copied expensive-looking items, creating tiny metal replicas of ivory mirror backs and jeweled brooches. That neither object was particularly associated with religious practice reflects the integration of sacred and secular.


Still, the small scale of devotional objects, whether rich or poor, emphasized that the action was a private one. While it could be claimed that personal ownership of images diffused the centrality of the cult image, the replication of the cult image in important ways strengthened its perceived power because worshippers wanted their own version of the public image. The reproductions held a similar capacity for the sacred power as the miraculous originals, many of which were enhanced by their role

as contact relics, having been touched to the original piece and absorbing a kind holy radioactivity spreading outward (Finucane 1977, p. 26). Sophisticated or crude, large or small, all images were “essentially archetypes, containing levels of meaning within their histories and emblems that reified their powers of healing and salvation” (Roffey 2006, p. 27).8

Private images could be venerated anywhere. Bishop Reginald Pecock (c. 1395–c. 1461) wrote that they could be venerated “before a bare wall in a church, or in a corner of a church or of another house, or in the field” (Pecock 1860, p. 169),9 but the most popular and most recommended place for keeping devotional images (for those people who did not have the luxury of a private chapel) was the bedroom or a private secluded place (Figure 4). Here, they were nailed to the wall or placed on a domestic altar or in a niche, separated from the room with a curtain (Ringbom 1984, p. 271, fig. 70; Heyne 1899, p. 271, fig. 70; Schultz 1892, p. 106.). In addition to images, miraculous wells and newly-found relics were celebrated, but not all discoveries were approved, as “stones, wood, trees, or fountains on account of anyone’s dream or deception” were repeatedly banned in multiple dioceses (Golding 2001, p. 145).10 Their repetition reflects their ineffectiveness. Many church officials eventually gave up trying to ban them and instead placed them under episcopal control.


4. Market

To counteract the proliferation of unofficial images and relics, churches encouraged veneration of approved images. Some churches tightly controlled pilgrim souvenir production, renting out casting

8 Old Testament pictures were rarely found in private homes, but New Testament iconography was common to both church and home. With popular images, institutions could lose power, so some recalled worshipers by making their images more compelling through elaborate and sumptuous materials or through the aura of sanctity “conferred by age or authenticity” or by indulgences (Belting 1994, p. 410; Ringbom 1984, p. 53). Also portable were images in single sheets and small pamphlets, booklets, schedules, and quires (Aston 2004, p. 166; Belting 1994, p. 409).
9 English modernized.
10 Bans included Wells (1258), Exeter (1287), Lincoln (1290).
molds and denying touch access to shrines of those badges not made in such molds (Cohen 1976). Money played a part in this decision because badges, commonly sold at patronal festivals, raised significant funds for various churches. When the Church of St. Andrew’s, Canterbury, decided to sell “scuchons” (perhaps badges in the shape of the saltire cross) during 1519–1520, it purchased four leaves of gold paper to make the badges (at 4d or pence) and paid a painter 13d to create them, which they then sold individually for 3s 5d (Campbell 1998, p. 72, pl. XXVIIc; Marks 2004, pp. 83–84; Cotton 1917). Experiments today with replica molds and lead–tin alloy of the same mixture has shown that a badge a minute could be cast with the potential for thousands of badges in a single day, further increasing their profit potential. Yet, with so many badges lost or placed in fields and rivers (and found centuries later on river foreshores), it is apparent that they were not all revered equally and that every purchaser did not venerate every cheap piece of metal. This aspect of reception is the most difficult to trace. While there are many examples of deliberate placement of objects in rivers as votives from Neolithic times onward, Jennifer Lee has examined the ambiguity of such a determination for pilgrimage souvenirs. (Merrifield 1987; Lee 2014) It seems that some intangible element determined the depth of devotional reverence and how devotees handled what were, under normal circumstances, humble, almost-worthless objects.

Among these potentially worthless pieces, though, were a class of objects that demanded interaction and, by examining these, we are provided with evidence for distinctive forms of veneration among the lower classes. Their forms responded to changing needs of the faithful as they were intended to be gazed at and handled, then rested on a tabletop or nailed to a wall. The novelty of the interactive souvenirs drew customers to one’s stall, as later pictorial evidence points to the sale of both religious and secular pieces at religious sites and at religious fairs, where pinwheels and noisemakers attracted attention (Figure 5). For example, in order to cope with enormous crowds, the tightly-controlled monopoly on pilgrim souvenirs was opened every seven years for the jubilee at Aachen and artisans who wished to distinguish their wares from their neighbors created multi-layered badges, frames, mirror badges, and folding diptychs. These works tapped the upper end of the lower-price market, their artisans hoping to attract the pilgrim with more money and more complicated tastes by creating distinctive souvenirs.

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11 Only certain artisans in Le Puy-en-Velay were allowed to sell badges; other kinds of souvenirs were not regulated.
12 Pieter Aertsen, *Retour d’un pèlerinage à Saint Antoine* (c. 1500), Musées des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels, paints a stall with pilgrim souvenirs and toys, including small windmills, drums, and crossbows.
5. Pilgrim Souvenirs or Private Amulets?

Although these common devotional pieces were sold at pilgrim sites, their generalized iconography often makes it difficult to assign them to a particular church or to determine whether they were truly pilgrim souvenirs or private amulets purchased locally. Documents regarding pilgrim souvenir purchases are sparse; complicating matters, sometimes religious objects were resold elsewhere, meaning that not all pieces were acquired at a particular pilgrimage site. Most pilgrims at the lower end of the market visited local sacred sites rather than far-off shrines. When nearby, religious assistance could be repeatedly called upon. The purchaser of the piece, of course, knew whether it was obtained on pilgrimage or purchased by a peddler who brought it from a distant pilgrimage site. Either way, it is evident that they were used for both private devotional and amuletic purposes.

Belief in amuletic magical practice through the manipulation of religious images and texts also crossed class boundaries and the choice of what served as amulets was vast. Holy names, spoken or inscribed, were easily at hand. Most popular were those of the Three Kings (against epilepsy), as the Magi were believed to be magical sages (Skemer 2006, p. 62, n. 15). Names could be written anywhere: in water, butter, apples, cheese, or molded into bread and then eaten as medicine. Stones, sticks, and

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13 There were attempts to regulate the trade. By the 13th century, 100 stalls were licensed to sell scallop shell pilgrim souvenirs at Santiago de Compostela, but selling them outside the town boundaries courted excommunication (Stalley 1988, p. 410; Köster 1985, p. 86).
14 http://peregrinations.kenyon.edu/vol2-1.pdf; (Bugslag 2006).
leaves were also used, as well as pottery sherds, wooden boards, small metal sheets, printed amulets, and papal lead seals. Because the Gospels were believed to ward off evil, manuscripts, especially if their vellum had been cut from devotional books, were thought to be capable of stopping fire and flood (Skemer 2006, p. 110, 127–29). Some devotees rinsed the ink from holy books and drank the liquid as medicine (Skemer 2006, p. 137; Swartz 2001, p. 178). Chanting or listening to certain words was also thought efficacious. Rhyming words helped spur memory and prayers were intoned in multiples of three, five, seven, or some other sacred number (Skemer 2006, pp. 80, 92). Written words, even if not directly read, manifested power; many amulets with inscriptions inside remained closed, because to open them might lessen their effect. This notion was mocked by reformers who particularly pointed to nonsense words used therein (p. 127). Nonetheless, wearing an inscribed amulet meant that, in a crisis, one would be protected even if one forgot to speak the holy words (p. 148).

Amulets (and sometimes pilgrim souvenirs, particularly ampullae on cords) were worn over the heart (considered the gateway to the soul and in need of protection against the devil). Sometimes called “books of the heart” (p. 135), amulets were commonly small reliquaries or phylacteria worn around the neck, or tiny metal (usually lead) plates inscribed and placed on the body for healing purposes. Alternatively, amulets and pilgrim souvenirs were pinned to walls in homes, stables, special trees, and even carefully placed in fields. William Tyndale (1492–1536) condemned itinerant friars who went door to door promising better crops or safe childbirth using the amulets they sold (Skemer 2006, p. 70, n. 127; Hopeful 2002). Such practices were not considered to be useless superstition, for when clerics criticized amulets and charms, they criticized their misuse rather than their effectiveness (pp. 5–6, 12–13). In “a world charged with signs”, amulets and pilgrim souvenirs co-opted significant holy symbolism, thus amulets and souvenirs became interchangeable (Gellrich 1985, p. 62; Skemer 2006, p. 143).

6. Types of Interactive Souvenirs

In the late Middle Ages, many people enjoyed pranks and illusions. While the very wealthy purchased automatons and spinning wine fountains with bells, by the fourteenth century, advanced casting and assembling techniques made complicated pieces easier to produce, reducing their price for the lower classes. Some of this complexity appears in the secular market which sold such toys as a hollow-cast bird made with moving parts which could bob and stick out its tongue. Production of these intricate objects opened up possibilities for devotional interaction through movement and touch.

7. Three-Dimensional Devotional Sculptures

Reformation critics singled out three-dimensional pieces as having the greatest effect on the viewer (Kahnsitz 2005, p. 10; Marks 2004, pp. 18–19), a view reflected in many northern countries where bequests to parish churches of three-dimensional figures far outnumbered the two-dimensional. Whether two- or three-dimensional, devotees responded first to the figures’ reputation for healing, but the notion that these figures were alive and responsive was enhanced by their apparent reality. For instance, the Salve Regina prayer asks Our Lady to “turn to us thy merciful eyes . . . ” (Marks 2004,

15 Churches bought batches of printed amulets, sold by itinerant peddlers, to distribute to parishioners.
16 Some believed that talismans should be kept from the uneducated as they could not understand them (Skemer 2006, p. 59, n. 111).
17 Automatons were popular adornments for late medieval public clocks, such as that on the tower of Orvieto Cathedral, cast in 1351 from the same metal composition as bells. A mechanical rooster crowed and fluttered its wings with every clock stroke (Trugoni 2003, pp. 86, 89–90). There are also stories of the 16th-century king Charles V being entertained by military automata and wooden birds that seemed to fly around the room without support. (see also Truitt 2015; Roy 1980, esp. pp. 63–64; and Scot 1930, p. 198.) At fairs, jugglers used illusion to make one think that their heads were cut off and laid on a platter like John the Baptist.
18 Bird, Late 13th/early 14th century, Museum of London (Forsyth and Egan 2005, pp. 52, 56, 143, and fig. 9). Some pilgrim souvenirs ended up as toys. In 1487, a child, given a Becket pilgrim badge to play with, choked on it, and was only saved by appealing to the popular saintly figure Henry VI (Grosejean 1935, no. 133).
perhaps the figures’ realism encouraged devotees to touch, lick, and kiss such sculptures, typically starting at the feet (often shod in silver shoes), then attending to the hands and face (Marks 2004, pp. 170, 220; Aston 1988, p. 152, n. 91, p. 226). They were not mere blocks of wood or stone, but read as “hands”, as “feet”, and so on. Some have argued that the focus on the image of the divinity over relics in the later Middle Ages was meant to de-localize sanctity (Vauchez 1997, pp. 448–53), but it actually produced the opposite effect, creating multiple localities of sanctity through each church’s patronal image. Having access to them at one’s parish church, or even better, one’s home, allowed people to touch and interact with divinity as they wished. Seeing the image repeatedly encouraged thoughts of the saint and their life and tribulations. These thoughts were meant to spur empathy and, by extension, a real connection with the holy figure. They could turn to the saint whenever they needed support, comfort, or absolution prompted by the easily accessible image.

This touch formed part of a visionary practice. In the normal course of things, objects on the altar were off-limits to the laity. To counteract this exclusivity (and hasten their time through Purgatory), the very wealthy had entire chapels created with figures, which allowed them to imagine themselves as witnesses to sacred events standing near and touching the sacred figures (Gelfand 2012). This imaginative slippage, emphasized through spiritual exercises, was facilitated by certain churches and cities which were identified as alternative Jerusalems or Bethlehems. Beyond this, the sacred event could recur, with the correct prayers, in one’s home.

Three-dimensional votives adorned saints’ shrines and in the homes of the wealthy; Charles V (1338–1380) owned a tableau of small gold religious statues (Ringbom 1984, p. 36). The same demand for three-dimensionality was satisfied for a much larger population by the production of low-cost hollow cast figures (made with slush casting), either placed on pedestals or nailed atop walking staffs. For example, one could place a three-dimensional, hollow, standing figure of Thomas Becket (late 13th/early 14th century) with detailed episcopal robes on the top of one’s walking stick (Lee 2014, pp. 9–10; Spencer 1998, pp. 72–73) (Figure 6). Other hollow-cast figures of Becket feature him on horseback or standing on the back of a flamboyant peacock, the latter referring to either the incorrupt nature of the saint (as peacocks were believed to never decay) or the practice of taking a vow on a noble bird (Spencer 1998, pp. 75–77). A copy of the reliquary bust of Charlemagne from Aachen was similarly used and a lovely seated Virgin, dating from the first half of the 14th century, was “an example of the ordinary man’s devotional equivalent of the rich man’s ivory” (Spencer 1990, p. 25). The line between toy and devotional object was not always clear. For instance, hollow busts of Christ as the Man of Sorrows and three grotesque tormentors were probably used as finger puppets (Egan 2005, pp. 64, 141–43, 146; Spencer 1998, p. 166, fig. 180b).

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19 One poor troubadour could give an image nothing, but “received a silver shoe slipped off and thrown to him as a gift” (Belting 1994, p. 305).
21 See also (Spencer 1987, p. 224, fig. 85: 8.6 cm h × 2.8 cm w × 2.6 cm d), private collection; Spencer 1990, 25.
22 These figures were possibly from the Boxley Rood pilgrimage site. (see also Egan 1997, p. 414; Egan 1998, pp. 281–82, no. 930–31.) One of these heads still retains a flat base; another has an internal second tube that enabled the head to be extended and then pushed back.
Also manufactured were flat figures soldered onto round or square thin tubes that rise from a base. The imagery of holy figures posing on pedestals was something seen throughout church art, whether as sculpted jamb figures or as part of painted rood screens.\textsuperscript{23} The bases ranged in form, from eight-spoked cusped and beaded wheels to solid circles with inscriptions (AVE MARIA GRA[cia] PL[ena]) to stands with four legs cusped with trefoils (Figure 7). Most of the flat figures discovered

\textsuperscript{23} For example, the figures from the 15th-century screen at Branham Broom parish church, Norfolk: https://www.flickr.com/photos/52219527@N00/23395013335/sizes/l.
thus far date to the 15th century and feature a wide variety of saintly figures from a cardinal (possibly Jerome) to St. Martin, St. Barbara, and the Virgin and Child (Praha Museum of Decorative Arts 1985).24 These could be grouped together, as in the 14th-century Annunciation scene with the angel Gabriel kneeling and grasping a three-dimensional lily/fleur-de-ly on its circular stand supported by three cabriole claw feet. Measuring $8 \times 6.5$ cm, it was a significant work cast in separate pieces and soldered together.25 Another is a 15th-century piece with a Virgin and Child placed in a monstrance-shaped frame. This is, in turn, surmounted by Christ on the cross and then flanked by angels grasping chalices to capture the blood, all supported on a narrow tube soldered onto an openwork base (height 5.7 cm).26

Figure 7. St. Barbara flat figure on framed stand, 15th century. Praha, Museum of Decorative Arts, Prague, Czech Republic. Photo: author.


25 Stedelijke Musea, Bruges. Another example of a free-standing souvenir is the less elaborate cross on a circular socle braced by two arcs on either side. On one side is the corpus with the INRI board above and on the other a beaded outline of the crossbeams (Bruna 2006, pp. 79–80, cat. 70).

These statuettes could be set up on a mantle or table or placed in a carved tabernacle of their own. Some rare examples depict an entire three-dimensional scene, such as the 14th-century diorama of the Virgin and Child resting on a crib/chasse reliquary bed by an altar before which Charlemagne kneels; all is enclosed in a tiny architectural structure\(^{27}\) (Figure 8). That architectural frames were widely used is supported by the many surviving fragments of three-dimensional Gothic tracery.\(^{28}\)

![Figure 8. Pilgrim souvenir diorama with Charlemagne kneeling before the Virgin and Child, 14th century. Photo: After Koldeweij, “Karel de Grote-souvenirs”, pp. 124–26, pl. 10.](image)

\(^{27}\) 95 mm h × 43 mm × 21 mm d. (Koldeweij 1989, pp. 124–26, pl. 10).

\(^{28}\) The upper portion of a traceried Gothic pinnacle measured 6.3 cm (Praha Museum of Decorative Arts 1985), p. 25, no. 190 [UPM 5 646/1894]).
8. Folding Objects

Artisans and their customers were aware of the dramatic and emotional potential of hiding and revealing a sacred object. Objects were placed under cloths, behind screens, doors, shutters, curtains, and into special containers (Marks 2004, p. 243). By hiding the image at least some of the time, viewing became a privilege of heightened anticipation. For example, when congregations prepared parish church altars for Lent: “On the wall are curtains and hangings to be hung and raised. In the choir are to be set dosers, tapits [both ornamental hangings], and bankers (tapestry chair coverings), and a veil that was before the crucifix shall be removed and a pall put behind him because that which was hidden before the passion of Christ is now opened and showed” (Speculum 1936, p. 46 quoting Speculum 1936, p. 122).

Private devotional objects echoed the drama of concealment and exposure. As early as the ninth century, certain illuminations and decorative initials had curtains sewn over them to protect and decorate the image and to allow the reader a sense of revelation as they turned over the cloth to reveal the colorful picture beneath.²⁹ For example, a Missal from Nuremberg, c. 1420, features a green silk curtain sewn to the top of an illumination of the crucified Christ flanked by the Virgin and St. John (Lohr 1986, p. 149, cat. 26).³⁰ Such an image, placed facing the canon page, was kissed during the Mass (Sciaccia 2007).

The same kind of suspense and privilege was found in folding retables on church altars or in wealthy private homes. In northern Europe, the retable’s gold (unlike many painted Italian altarpieces) was hidden inside, to be revealed only on special feast days, while its exterior was commonly painted using neutral or grisaille coloring (Kahnsnitz 2005, p. 14). As the viewer went deeper, the images often became more realistic, more colorful, and more dramatic, going from two- to three-dimensional or sculptural. Both rich and poor were enamored with the devotional possibilities of the triptych and diptych form. The wealthy had small, but sumptuously painted, ivory, alabaster, or precious metal versions, while the lower classes, as seen by many finds, had similar access to the folding and unfolding form, though done in base metal. Some of the more elaborate versions created tiny oratories, such as a late 15th century piece that features Saints Barbara and Catherine on the exterior wings and Gabriel and the Virgin Mary on their interior. The central image, once riveted to the back, is now missing (Bruna 2006, p. 274, cat. 530; Spencer 1998, pp. 154–55, figs. 165a,b; see also Bruna 275ff).

Far more prevalent were tiny folding pewter triptychs, latched in the center, often backed by colored paper and painted, and whose iconography was almost as varied as that seen on larger, fancier triptychs.³¹ Annunciation scenes with Gabriel on one wing and the praying Virgin on another are typical, as are heraldic shields, usually decorating both sides. Though small, these were used to illustrate whole iconographic cycles, as seen on the two panels of a triptych from the first half of the 14th century, adorned with a program of the infancy of Christ, including the Annunciation (center top), Visitation (top left), Adoration of the Magi (center with horses and groom waiting to the left), and the Massacre of the Innocents (bottom) (Spencer 1980, pp. 26–27; Tait 1955–1956, pl. XIVC). Cast as openwork (with cusped tracery), it was backed by a diaper pattern made of thin lead (Figure 9).

²⁹ Fictive curtains, too, were used to frame important images and give the viewer a sense of ceremony when seeing Christ or Mary or other sacred personages.

³⁰ See also Hague, National Library of the Netherlands, MS 130 E 18, fol. 86v, where a miniature of a funeral mass is still covered by an attached curtain and there are also traces of pilgrimage badges (Van Asperen 2009, pp. 324–25, no. 1 43). Rudy (2015, pp. 84–85, fig. 66) suggests that the book owner treated the miniatures with curtains as altarpieces. My thanks to Hanneke van Asperen for these references.

³¹ Colored-paper backing can be seen on the pilgrim badges which decorate the hat of Saint Sebaldus, Saint Veits Altarpiece, by the Meister des Augustineraltars, 1487, Nuremberg, Nationalmuseum. Dabs of paint can also be seen on the badge in the upper left in Book of Hours (Use of Angers) with pilgrims’ badges, in Latin, illuminated manuscript on parchment, France (Angers?), 1450–1475 http://www.textmanuscripts.com/medieval/book-of-hours-use-of-angers-96384.
Figure 9. Pilgrim souvenir triptych, first half of the 14th century. Norfolk, Lynn Museum. Photo: After Spencer, Medieval Pilgrim Badges from Norfolk, pp. 26–27.
The most spectacular finds of this kind are late-14th/early-15th century elaborate diptychs from Aachen. Cast of pewter with openwork elements soldered on one example pictures on its interior panels Saints Catherine and Barbara flanking the Virgin and Child and Cornelius and Anthony flanking Christ Salvator. Above the women, the Holy Tunic is repeated (this time backed by rays of light) and above the men is the nimbed vernicle portrait, with both showing the back side of the Calvary scene on top. Another example features an interior panel made of paper painted with a black-robed angel holding up the white tunic of Mary on a red background. The architectural structures of some examples display loops, allowing the devotee to wear, or more likely, hang, the folded diptych as they wished (Figure 10).

Folding was integral to another form of devotional object, a sort of do-it-yourself reliquary. Only two (almost) complete examples survive, though many fragments have been found. Cast in openwork designs, they laid flat until the purchaser pulled the soft metal apart and folded the object into shape, firmly fastening it with the built-in clips. One example features two long sides made of gabled and cusped Gothic arches and a four-part quatrefoil decorated roof line. At its gable end stands a bishop saint with a pilgrim kneeling in devotion (Figure 11). Unfortunately, the opposite end does not survive. The hollow cage allowed one to see and rattle the object placed within (probably a pebble or other physical souvenir taken from the site). Earlier reliquary-shaped ampullae had been slush cast in the form of reliquaries which contained holy water or oil. In contrast, the folding reliquary allowed the pilgrim to place their own relic inside. Once filled, they could be votive gifts. Perhaps they were expressly created for children, as some late-medieval Italian preachers recommended that children should play with and decorate toy altars, and a number of fragmentary remnants appear to have once formed miniature altars.35

32 111 mm × 57 mm (Van Beuningen et al. 2001, pp. 59–66, 326).
33 The other example has three vertical sides and two roof panels that could be folded into a three-dimensional reliquary châsse. Measuring 7.7 × 3.5 cm, done in openwork patterns with clips (Pieters et al. 1997–1998). Now in Oostende, Heemkundig Museum De Plate. See also Kühne et al. 2012, p. 150, cat. 266; and Praha 1985, p. 25, no. 186 (UPM 5 641/1894), 14th–15th century, 4.3 cm in height.
35 Fragments of tiny furniture are described in Egan 1998, p. 127. See also (Webb 1990, p. 159); and (Trexler 1980, p. 377).
Figure 10. Pilgrim souvenir diptych from Aachen, Germany, late 14th/early 15th century, Cothen, Collection of H.J.E. van Beuningen. Photo: After Van Beuningen et al., Heilig en Profaan 2, pp. 59–66, 326.
9. Lockets, Chains, and Cylinders

As the desire for ever-greater personal interaction with the divine grew, so did the demand for sacred jewelry. Of interest are those that encouraged touching or manipulation with hinged containers, lockets, chains, and loops. Most common are pins, brooches, and necklaces that featured hidden cavities filled with relics made of precious metals, enamels, and gems. Those with less means copied these ornaments in lead or copper alloy, like the Carpow Reliquary, meant to contain a tiny sliver of the True Cross.36

Lockets functioned similarly and could contain small, flat items picked up on pilgrimage. An example of this is the openwork piece from the 14th century, which shows a bishop with a crozier and a king holding a model church with the inscription +AVE MARIA GRATIA PLENA DOMINUS TECV(M).37 Another locket—here revealing a slippage between sacred and secular—copied a mesh, pendant purse (decorated with lattice patterns of pierced quatrefoils) with fictive drawstrings and tassels. It held coins or other good luck tokens, drawing wealth to their owners (Koldeweij 2006, pp. 116–17, cat. 309–11. Koldeweij 2006, pp. 153–57, on coinage adopted for pilgrimage and amuletic reasons). These were sometimes suspended from fleur-de-lys in circular beaded and hatched frames which attached to a larger chain, though there are instances of suspensory loops dangling miniature secular objects such as scissors or a pair of pattens. Religious figures were also dangled on chains for pleasure or used for ligature charms, such as the pilgrim badges of the Virgin and Child and John the

36 Copper alloy was used more frequently in pilgrim souvenirs in the second half of the 15th century (Spencer 1998, pp. 167–70; Hall 2007, p. 77). A folded textual amulet was found in the Ingleby Arncliffe Crucifix (Skemer 2006, p. 183). Personal reliquary crosses, popular in Byzantium, were often incised with images of holy figures on their exterior. See, for example, the “Reliquary Cross with Saint George [Byzantine] (2000.526.2)” at http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/priv/ho_2000.526.2.htm. In the West, these items were made out of precious materials beginning around 1000.

37 Now in Ghent, Oudheidkundig Museum van de Bijloke (3538) (Heins 1897–1915, p. 261; Koldeweij 2006, p. 24, fig. 1.13, 16th century, 50 mm diameter; Van Asperen 2013, p. 230). Secular counterparts can be found too, such as a locket with Tristan and Isolde in Spencer 1998, p. 327. Van Beuningen 2001, p. 360, cat. 1516 illustrates a crude hinged locket with the Vera Icon (front) and the Agnus Dei (reverse), 1350–1400.
Evangelist from ‘s-Hertogenbosch and St. George. The latter had a loop rather than a pin so that it could be wired, perhaps, to armor or connected through another charm in the shape of a Tau Cross (Spencer 1998, p. 159, cat. 176b, p. 186, cat. 206f).

10. Rattles, Bells, and Whistles

Less delicate and purposefully more raucous were rattles, bells, and whistles sold at pilgrim shrines and popular markets. Sweet sounds of singing and chanting were praised and considered necessary for church services, while jangling, loud noises were prized for their ability to scare off demons and threatening weather. Such noises grate and distract—the joyful focus of children and troublemakers—and were used in processions and at fairs and in ceremonies (Spencer 1990, pp. 62–63). The pieces that made these noises are more difficult to identify as devotional. This was probably intentional because, as mentioned earlier, some churches kept control of the pilgrim souvenir trade by renting out approved molds for badges, while allowing artisans to create non-badge objects without oversight or payment. Yet, the devotional was implicit too, as molds used to produce these whistles have been found with molds used to create other, more-definitively religious pieces at the same sites, such as at Mont-St-Michel.

Rattles as noisemakers, produced in the 14th century, were commonly made of reticulated tracery in two hemispherical halves soldered together enclosing small shells (referring to pilgrimage?), pebbles, or bells (Figure 12 left). Some had handles, but most were probably meant to be worn on a cord around the neck or just carried, as their size makes them fit neatly within one’s palm. The user could not only hear the contents shake, but see them rattle around. Again, objects like this are situated between the sacred and the secular; they could just be used as a rattle, but they had the potential to also call upon holy protection for the infant who was shaking it (Spencer 1990, p. 64, cat. 197–98; Spencer 1998, pp. 209–11).

Whistles both sacred and secular were even more popular; it is sometimes hard to tell for which market a whistle was made. For instance, at Rocamadour, molds were discovered for whistles in the shape of a man’s head or a cockerel. The cockerel was a noisy bird who could be used for apotropaic frightening of evil (Spencer 1998, p. 207; Rocacher 1980). Other examples were cast in the shape of boatswains’ whistles with a tube attached to a hollow bulb. With a loop cast as an attachment, people could run a cord or chain through it and wear it around their neck.

A whistle in the form of a man’s head, keeping with the cockerel theme, has a bird perched on top of the head (Spencer 1998, pp. 207–9; Bruna 2006, pp. 296–68, cat. 564–65). Horn-shaped whistles were also popular and have been found with inscriptions that range from the holy (ave maria) to the profane (bla me or blow me) (Spencer 1998, p. 209; Spencer 1990, pp. 63–64, cat. 195–96) (Figure 12 right). A particularly extravagant type was the 15th-century whistle or sifflet, which turned when blown (Bruna 2006, pp. 345–46, cat. No. 673). Boat-shaped whistles could be purchased at coastal sites dedicated to the Virgin, like that of Our Lady of Boulogne-sur-mer, which were decorated with scales and a dragon-head prow and surmounted by a tiny figure of St. Nicolas or trilobe tracery (Spencer 1990, p. 63; Bruna 2006, pp. 89–91). Pottery horns, too, were manufactured at Aachen, Cologne, and St. Nicholas-de-Port near Nancy, France. Just as horns were loudly blown at processions and

38 Many sources exhorted the faithful to make “honeyed” sounds. Basil the Great noted that vocal music was to be like honey smeared in a cup of bitter medicine leading to tranquility and peace (Basil the Great 1857–1866, p. 212) and John Chrysostom wrote of hymns as uplifting the mind with modulated melody (Chrysostom 1857–1866, p. 156). Colossians 3:16 speaks of “singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” My thanks to Rebecca Abbott for her help in suggesting sources and discussing this topic with me.

39 At Mont-St-Michel, the monks required a portion of the profits of the badges sold to be turned over to them. See the INRAP virtual exhibition referenced in note 2.

the exhibition of relics, a whistle such as this would have drawn attention of even the most devout passerby (Spencer 1990, p. 63; Meckseper 1985, vol. 1, pp. 408–9; Van Heeringen et al. 1988, p. 10).41

![Figure 12. (left) Rattle with shells, 14th century, Museum of London, Photo: Museum of London. (right) Secular whistle, 15th century, Salisbury Museum of Art. Photo: After Spencer, Pilgrim Souvenirs ... Salisbury, pp. 63–64, cat. No. 196.](image)

Noise from bells was also believed to scare away evil. The Golden Legend, describing the processions of the Lesser Litany, explained that devils cannot stand the sounds of the bells (called Christ’s trumpets), so they flee and the storms abate. Bells were named after saints that were believed to be efficacious against bad weather, but the name could be changed to that of a demon if they proved unworthy (Ryan 1993, p. 287; Scribner 1987, pp. 14–15). Bells also accompanied the raising of the covers of some shrines.42

However, bells were more important than whistles. They were part of the church furnishings and set the rhythm of the medieval day, sounding the hours (set by sundials, hourglasses, calibrated candles, or water clocks) (Frugoni 2003, p. 86). The sacristan rang bells, calling monks and nuns to worship at certain times of the day and night and regulating meal and sleep times. Bells were integral to the daily and yearly changes in a church and both large and small hand bells were rung during services (Scribner 1987, p. 22). Sacring bells were rung when the host was elevated during the Mass. There was also the Ave Bell rung morning, noon, and night. When one heard it, one knelt and said at least one Ave Maria so that one could receive a papal indulgence, as that paid for in 1481 by Elizabeth Woodville, queen of Edward IV (Duffy 1992, p. 408; Bliss and Twemlow 1867, vol. 13, pt. 1, pp. 90–91).

Even during funerals, bells played a crucial role. They would entice those within hearing distance to pray for the souls of the deceased (French 2008, p. 55; Speculum 1936, p. 234). "The first ring was to announce that the person had died and to ask that those within hearing pray for their soul, then more notes would be rung depending on the status of the deceased." Bellmen were "to go about according to

41 For ceramic examples, see Koldeweij 2006, pp. 75–76, cat. 4.10–4.13.
42 Six silver bells accompanied the raising of the shrine cover at Durham Cathedral (Fowler 1964, p. 4).
the use and custom of the town” on the funeral day and the seventh day, month, and year anniversary, ringing hand bells as they walked around the town. The sound of the bell was believed to scare away devils that might attack the soul (Heath 1984, p. 217; Daniell 1997, p. 53). Bell-ringers were paid more than the clergy performing the funeral service, reflecting their importance (Daniell 1997, p. 53; Burgess 1987, p. 188).

Most well-known are the souvenir bells from Canterbury (some inscribed CAPANA THOME, Thomas’s bell), but bells were also sold to pilgrims at Amiens, Mont-St-Michel, and Rocamadour (Bruna 2006, pp. 263–68; Koldeweij 2006, pp. 171–75; Spencer 1998, p. 123). Round in section with clappers inserted and held by a split pin on the top of the bell, they were meant to be resonant. Metal analysis shows they were cast with high-grade pewter (including copper and bismuth) (Spencer 1990, p. 24). Their diminutive size would have lessened their impact on sight, but it was their tinny, clanking sound that probably brought them closer to the annoying sounds of whistles than to the sonorous, deeply meaningful large church bells. As William Thorpe, a Lollard preacher, complained in 1407, “what with the noise of their singing, and with the sound of their piping and with the jangling of their Canterbury bells, and with the barking out of dogs after them, they make more noise than if the king came there away, with all his clarions and minstrels” (Pollard 1903, p. 97). Visually, they referenced the larger bells and perhaps sought to share in the reverence created by true church bells.

11. Mirrors

These figures worked by stimulating the imagination through touch and through gaze. Acting on the latter were pilgrim souvenirs that featured mirrors. For example, every seven years at Aachen Cathedral, between Easter and October 1, the main relics went on display, including the nightgown that the Virgin wore on Christmas, Christ’s first swaddling cloths (Joseph’s stockings), Christ’s loin cloth, shroud, and even the cloth that once wrapped John the Baptist’s bloodied head. Initially, they were shown inside the cathedral. Later, beginning in 1322, the relics were displayed outside from the tower gallery, and scaffolding was set up to give pilgrims a good view (Spencer 1998, p. 259). By the fifteenth century, overwhelmed with pilgrims, the church opened up its souvenir monopoly every seven years to any artisan. Attracting artisans from all over (including Johannes Gutenberg), some created complex badges with tiny mirrors. Unable to directly come into contact with the relic or its shrine, the mirrors allowed the pilgrim to reflect the image of the displayed relic into their mirror, which could then reflect the image onto a piece of bread for ingestion, etc. One mirror badge illustrates the tunic of the Virgin (Aachen’s main relic) and the vernicle portrait of Christ, both surmounted by tiny Calvary scenes with praying, kneeling angels. Surrounding the whole is the inscription AVE MARIA GRACIA PLENA DO[MIN]I.

With the mirror placed near the center of each badge, the act of beholding is emphasized as it was on other mirror badges from 's-Hertogenbosch and Cologne Cathedral (Figure 13). Mirrors were also believed to blind evil spirits, so they were hung from trees and were set into the evergreen Wildman costume during the Nuremberg Carnival. Some pilgrims of the same period wore coronets made of linked mirrors over their hats.44

43 Other bells were associated with St. Anthony pilgrim badges in the shape of a Tau cross (Van Beuningen and Koldeweij 1993, p. 125, cat. 35).
44 (Sunberg 1941, p. 106, fig. 18); (Koldeweij 2006, p. 44, fig. 2.51), illustrating a detail from the Legend of St. Lucy by the Master of the St. Lucy Legend. Bruges, Church of St. James, c. 1480.
12. Conclusions

Scholars agree that personal devotion grew more intense and tactile in the later Middle Ages. Different kinds of devotion focused the attentions of the individual on complicated and emotional ideas (Bugslag 2016). Yet, it has been difficult to trace such devotions among the lower classes. Few documents bothered to record the actions and beliefs of such people. When mentioned, the lower classes featured mostly in terms of large crowds and the response of such crowds. Rarely recorded was a lower-class individual’s devotion. Material culture can, though, give us an idea of how such people practiced their piety. The iconography and added movement of their devotional objects were, not surprisingly, inexpensive copies of the pieces prized by the upper classes. The same New Testament and saintly pictures and the same folding, looping, blowing, and peering through occurs in both. Although mass-produced, these complicated base metal objects moved and interacted with the viewer in the same manner as those made of expensive materials. Still, they had their own creativity and interest, they were not just empty echoes. Instead, whether a small triptych, hollow-cast figure, or assembled diorama, they allowed those of the lower classes to interact directly with the divine.

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