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MEDIEVAL SECULAR BADGES IN POLAND AGAINST THE EUROPEAN BACKGROUND

SUMMARY

Secular badges seem to be very similar to pilgrim ones. They often have similar forms and are made of the same type of raw material – in most cases a lead and tin alloy. Sometimes they were made by the same craftsmen and traded by the same sellers (see Spencer 1998). The symbolism of secular badges, however, is completely different and more diverse than that of their pilgrimage ‘counterparts’ – it refers to a broad spectrum of issues – from chivalry to sexuality.

In Poland no wider research on secular badges has been conducted and thus, there is no monograph published to-date. It should also be noted that individual badges that have been presented in various collective publications are often misinterpreted.

The main objective of this book is to show the ideological contents and ‘topoi’ of late Middle Ages culture using secular badges as an example. The secondary goals of this study, although no less important, are more traditional archaeological issues related to chronology, range of occurrence and formal analogies.

The small number of finds from the area of present-day Poland does not allow broader conclusions to be drawn, although the find loca-

tions of the presented artefacts themselves lead to some hypotheses. Considering the issue of the distribution of the artefacts in question in Poland (Fig. 60), however, we can get an incorrect picture. This is mainly because of the state of research and number of publications. The presented data show that the majority of artefacts discussed in this work were discovered in Wrocław (34 of 72 items included in the catalogue), but from personal communication we know that in Gdańsk (from where ‘only’ 16 published specimens are known) about 400 such artefacts have been found. Despite some inaccuracies, we can observe that the greatest intensity of badges occurs in cities that had direct contacts with the Hanseatic zone (Szczecin, Gdańsk, Wrocław, Elbląg).

Badges (and other items discussed in this work) are characterized by a great variety of representations and motifs. The majority of them, despite some imperfections allow for the precise, at least in formal terms, determination of the representations. It is clearly perceptible that many secular motifs appear primarily on oven tiles, but also on other everyday objects. In addition, for example, motifs known from chivalric romances (Lancelot) present on murals in the tower house

in Siedlęcín should be mentioned. This may indicate the townspeople and the knights' need to be surrounded by certain images that functioned in the culture, and which they had at least fragmentary knowledge of, even if the specific source of their origin remained unknown. This is confirmed by adopting names known from chivalric romances (Witkowski 2002, pp. 82-83, footnote 100). Based on even a cursory read of medieval literature, the transmissions of some stories in time and space – topoi known from antiquity are apparent; for example, the legend of Alexander the Great, or the motif of Aristotle and Phyllis (appearing in iconography or on aquamaniles), which was especially popular in the late Middle Ages. This phenomenon also occurs in literature that was not always associated with a readership from court circles. An example are stories known from French *fablieux* (W krzywym zwierciadle 2005), and Italian novella from the 13th century (Dawna nowela włoska 1973), which also appear later, amongst others, in the 14th century work *The Decameron* (Boccaccio 1974). A similar path can be taken by myths, even if their primary content is in some way disturbed. It is worth recalling the history of Melusine associated with the French House of Lusignan, whose image appears on Slovak diadems discovered in girls' graves. Bearing in mind that the two-tailed mermaid originates from antiquity (see Chapter IV), we can probably observe a parallel formation of topos – an idea not necessarily associated with a medieval source (French heraldic legend).¹ The question arises, what did this symbol mean to a specific medieval recipient?

The problems discussed in this book are divided not according to the form or typology of artefacts, but to the symbolic contents they represent. Five basic groups of representations were identified. It allowed for the consideration of mainly research problems and not just the examination of artefacts themselves. Due to the various possibilities for interpreting individual

items, they were sometimes discussed more than once in cases of different issues.

The first group consists of artefacts associated with physical fitness and courage – badges emphasizing personal features, such as courage and strength (lions, roosters) or weapon skills (crossbow, shooting fraternity's rooster, axes). There are also items associated with the chivalric-courtesy culture, such as tournament diadems or badges in the form of a knight's gauntlet, which have not been discovered in contemporary Poland.

Artefacts connected with clients and servants (livery badges) are the second category. They were worn to show affiliation a powerful patron. Artefacts that can be linked with secular military orders (Figs. 24c, d), are related to the above category. Artefacts of this category illustrate well the very idea of showing membership of an organization (or relations of other kinds) by wearing the distinctive sign of a person or an association. Professional identity signs could have functioned in a similar manner – confirming an affiliation to a particular profession or guild (badges with an anchor).

The next group consists of badges linked with love. On the one hand, most of them are probably love tokens – items given to each other by lovers. It cannot be ruled out, however, that they could be presented or worn on certain occasions, such as weddings or engagements. On the other hand, in the late Middle Ages we can observe the phenomenon of 'fashion for love'. This is clearly visible in the literature from this period (see Chapter 3) and in the iconography. Princes wear belts with the inscription AMOR (Fig. 34), their horses' caparisons bear captions AMOR AMORI (Fig. 14b). Perhaps items with a love character are only a manifestation of this phenomenon, clearly perceptible in the culture of those times.

Badges with fantastic creatures are a separate problem. Their interpretation without relying on Christian writings is difficult. It should not be ruled out that for a medieval audience, who did not know these texts, they had only a simplified meaning. For example, a dragon was understood only as evil or Satan, a mermaid

¹ Perhaps mistakenly explained by researchers? Representations of two-tailed mermaids may be of different origins than the legend, especially that in iconographic terms, the 15th-century images of Melusine present her as a winged serpent.

with a mirror as a metaphor for vanity. Images seem to refer to well-known, ancient myths and topoi. They can also be an expression of local heraldic legends (as in the case of the aforementioned Melusine).

A single badge linked with the symbolism of a game is even more difficult to determine in terms of function. It is interesting that gaming boards are shown on both its sides, which seems to contradict its function as a badge – an item worn on a part of an outfit. Perhaps they were merely lucky amulets or signs of belonging to a gamers' club (which requires confirmation as to whether such clubs existed at all in the Middle Ages).

Repetition of certain secular motifs is clearly visible on other artefacts – especially on oven tiles. Most scenes are related to social occasions (wedding or engagement) but also to entertaining, sometimes presented in a satirical manner (see a game of backgammon – Figs. 59c, d). Representations of fantastic creatures are popular (see, amongst others, Pavlík and Vitanovský 2004). Some similar motifs also appear on floor tiles and misericords, known mostly from churches of Western Europe (England, the Netherlands).

It cannot be excluded that some of the badges played a different role. On archaeological sites², many toys made of tin³ have been discovered. These are usually miniature everyday items: mugs (Wiśniewski 1995, p. 339, Fig. 4g), jugs (Paner 2012, p. 328, Fig. 9), plates (Paner 2012, p. 329, Fig. 11) spoons (Paner 2008, p. 531, Figs. 2 c, d, g), cooking vessels – amongst other Grapens (Rębkowski and Romanowicz 2012, p. 357, Fig. 12) and baskets (Paner 2012, p. 330, Fig. 14). Gridirons are also known with representations of fish on them (Høst-Madsen 2012, p. 578, Fig. 17). These artefacts can be seen as a symbolic equipment of a 'burgher's chamber' or 'kitchen' – reflecting the reality, traditionally associated

with the world of girls' childhoods. Some of the badges can be treated as toys, especially those depicting knights, weapons (see a toy halberd; Høst-Madsen 2012, p. 578, Fig. 17) and animals. Of importance is also a table with the image of gaming boards (Fig. 57a), which may have been equipment for knights' rooms. These artefacts are usually associated with the world of boys' imagination. Most likely, however, the purpose and symbolism of these items differed depending on their owner.

Slightly different seems to be the problem of tin spoons and diadems. Descriptions of these items in various parts of the book allowed for the better presentation of research problems. Spoons seem to be mostly gifts on different occasions – baptism, engagement or wedding. These items are deprived of their utilitarian function (not suitable for eating – most of them have a completely flat bowl) hence they had a symbolic meaning. In the case of this group of finds again some differences between the artefacts known from Wrocław, and those from England, the Baltic Sea and the North Sea areas can be seen. Most of the artefacts from the north represent fish, while the finds from Wrocław (Figs. 27c, d; 48) present more complex and diverse patterns.

The problems discussed here represent for the first time in Poland an attempt to undertake a comprehensive study on the issue of the secular badges. It is certainly an area worthy of further research. Despite the fact that the discovered artefacts are not made of precious raw material, their ideological content is often far more complex than that known from silver or gold brooches or rings with precious stones. Secular badges provide a great deal of information on the problem that Malcolm Jones (2001) described as the pop culture of the Middle Ages. Indeed, it seems that badges along with oven tiles, often representing similar issues, best illustrate some elements of everyday life in the period in question.

² In the area of today's Poland the largest number of artefacts of this kind is from Gdańsk (see Paner 2008, 2012). The majority of them are dated to the late Middle Ages and the Post-Medieval period.

³ Tin, generally considered to be a cheap and popular material, against the background of toys made of wood or clay seems to be a more luxurious material.