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Kunera

A Dutch saint and a database of badges and ampullae

by Hanneke van Asperen, Radboud University of Nijmegen, The Netherlands

In the course of the year 1998, two junior researchers at the Radboud University of Nijmegen (The Netherlands) started work on a database of medieval pilgrimage souvenirs and profane badges. Their goal was simple: to make the highly scattered material accessible to researchers and interested laymen. The database could serve also as an instrument of documentation for these fragile objects which are inevitably subject to corrosion and damage. The vulnerability of the material becomes alarmingly apparent when one compares the nineteenth-century drawings of badges with the actual objects in the Musée du Moyen-Age in Paris. (Fig. 1) Arthur Forgeais who directed the dredging operations of the Seine (beginning in 1848), was fascinated by the numerous finds of small metal objects that emerged from the riverbed. Fortunately, he decided to publish these finds,¹²¹ and soon after, a large portion of these metal finds came into the possession of the Musée du Moyen Age in Paris. In 1996, the museum published a catalogue of the *Enseignes de pèlerinage et enseignes profanes* in the collection.¹²² One can immediately see the deteriorating effects of oxygen on the objects since their initial discovery almost 150 years before. Oxidation causes the objects to crumble and metal fatigue causes clips and pins to break off. Clearly, documentation of these fragile pieces is vital for the preservation of detail. Now that the scholarly world has begun to realize the value of badges as a source of information on late-medieval life, the creation of a database is no luxury.



Fig. 1: Ampulla from Boulogne-sur-Mer.
On the left: drawing from Forgeais (1863): 23-24.
On the right: photographic reproduction from Bruna (1996): 88.

The idea for the database originated with Radboud University professor Jos Koldeweij, a renowned and widely-published expert on pilgrim's souvenirs and secular badges.¹²³ Under his

¹²¹ Arthur Forgeais (1862-66). *Collection de plombs historiés trouvés dans la Seine*. 6 Vols. Paris, Aubry, especially parts II (Enseignes de pèlerinage) and IV (Imagerie religieuse) which focus on the badges.

¹²² Denis Bruna (1996). *Enseignes de pèlerinage et enseignes profanes*. Paris, Réunion des Musées Nationaux.

¹²³ Some of his early publications on the subject: A.M. Koldeweij (1985). *Der gude Sente Servaes. De*

supervision, two art historians started to work on an inventory of badges. They collected literature and brought the objects together in a database that was developed especially to fit the needs of the project: an instrument that focused on archaeological objects from an scientific point of view. In the database, every badge is complemented with the relevant scholarly literature so that the visitor to the database can easily retrieve and check the information first hand. Furthermore, every object is provided with an iconographical description and iconclass codes, allowing the visitor to search for elements within each depiction. Finally, there is room for an image as well because a verbatim description can *never* replace a picture.

The project was christened Kunera. At the time, the university was still called the Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen – in 2004, the name was changed to Radboud University – and its initials supplied the first part of the name: KUN. Kunera was an obvious choice. Cunera, or Kunera in Middle Dutch, was highly-venerated saint in the Netherlands during the Middle Ages.¹²⁴ During her life, Cunera joined the retinue of the 11,000 virgins who journeyed with St. Ursula on her pilgrimage to Rome. On the way back, the pilgrims stopped at the harbour of Cologne. There, they were attacked by the Huns who had besieged the port. Unlike many others, Cunera survived the massacre. A king called Radboud – his name can hardly be accidental – hid her underneath the fabric of his cloak and carried her off to his residence in Rhenen, situated between Nijmegen and Utrecht. Cunera was ultimately martyred when, because of the attention of the king, she made the queen envious of her position at the court. All the badges from Rhenen that have been found so far show Cunera being strangled. (Fig. 2) The cloth used to strangle her occupied an important position in the ceremonies at the church of Rhenen, mainly as a cure for throat diseases, and, as such it occupies central place in the pilgrim badge. The fabric is wrapped around Cunera's neck with the queen holding one end, and a servant, the other. Cunera hardly seems affected as she stands upright with her hands folded in prayer.

Servatiuslegende en de Servatiana: een onderzoek naar de beeldvorming rond een heilige in de middeleeuwen. De Geschiedenis van de Kerkschat van het Sint-Servaaskapittel te Maastricht, Vol. I. Assen, Maastricht, Van Gorcum: A.M. Koldewij, S. de Bodt (1985). *Middeleeuwse pelgrimstekens. Antiek*, 4: 240-244. R.M. van Heeringen, A. M. Koldewij, et al. (1988). *Heiligen uit de Modder. In Zeeland gevonden pelgrimstekens*. Utrecht, Clavis. His latest publication on the subject: A.M. Koldewij (2005). 'Shameless and naked images'. *Obscene badges as parodies of popular devotion. Art and architecture of late medieval pilgrimage in Northern Europe and the British Isles*. Leiden, Boston, Brill Press: 493-510.

¹²⁴ For a list of contemporary sources on the life of Cunera, see Fons van Buuren (1997). *Sint Cunera van Rhenen, een legende*. In: Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, Marijke Carasso-Kok (eds.). *Gouden Legenden. Heiligenlevens en Heiligenverering in de Nederlanden*. Hilversum, Verloren: 109-125, especially p. 199, n. 3. See also E.M.T. Emonds (1922). *De Legende van Sinte Kunera in de Middeleeuwen*. Published dissertation, University of Leiden. For the ceremonies and customs during the holy days at Rhenen, see H.P. Deijns (1987). *Het Cunerafeest in Rhenen in 1571. Maandblad Oud-Utrecht*, 7-8: 75-79.



Fig. 2: Badge from Rhenen, found in Nijmegen, 1993. Nijmegen, Museum Het Valkhof, inv. 1994.01.27.

Crowds of pilgrims attracted craftsmen to the area of Rhenen and to many other pilgrimage sites. Metalworkers, including gold- and silversmiths, produced pilgrimage souvenirs to sell to the pilgrims who flocked there. The database Kunera focuses on the metal badges and ampullae, mainly of pewter, that were produced in Europe and the Near East from the twelfth century onwards, peaking in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The stamped medals that came into use during the fifteenth century are included. After the sixteenth century, badges, for the most part, fell into disuse. The cheap mass-produced badges were replaced by double-sided pendants and single-leaf prints. In some places, the tradition of badges was continued. In Sankt Wolfgang am Abersee, for example, badges were produced until well into the eighteenth century.¹²⁵ These are exceptions to the rule, however; so that the database has an obvious final date of 1600 (or 1599 according to Kunera's methods).

From the foregoing, it may look like the database is limited to pilgrimage souvenirs. This is certainly not the case. Religious badges do not always come from a site of pilgrimage. Because of their immense popularity, saints like Christopher, Catherine and Barbara, were venerated by many. Their cult was not limited to one site. Badges of these saints met the needs of a wide public and were produced at many different locations. Not all badges featured religious iconography, many depicted a wide variety of profane subjects. Some have literary sources, like the tale of Reynaert the Fox, while others depict objects of everyday life or parody the society of the day. When categorizing the badges, the religious and the profane cannot always be separated. In the Middle Ages, there was a fine line between the sacred and the secular that cannot not always be discerned by the present-day viewer. The distinction was probably not always relevant to the men and women in the Middle Ages. The secular badges comment on religious life, and religious

¹²⁵ Georg Wacha (1978). Der Hl. Wolfgang auf Wallfahrerzeichen. *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Volkskunde*, 81: 263-273.

badges sometimes include profane elements.¹²⁶ The profane and religious badges complement each other. They should not be separated. Therefore, Kunera includes both.

Since its initial stages, Kunera has come a long way. After first entering objects from large (published) collections, the focus shifted to unpublished objects and obscure articles. Currently, Kunera contains the descriptions of over 10.000 objects in private and public collections all over Europe and the United States. The database mainly contains information on original objects (8500 entries and counting). Other material sources complement the core of original badges: moulds (58 entries), cast badges on bells, baptismal fonts and pewter cans (902 entries), painted badges on paintings, in prints and manuscripts (383 entries). Now all of the entries are on line. They can be viewed at www.ru.nl/ckd/kunera. Because the work on the database continues and new finds – both archaeological and scholarly – occur constantly, Kunera is updated regularly.

Kunera on-line is probably best illustrated with an example of an entry. (Fig. 3) Whenever available, the described object is provided with an image. (Fig. 2) The textual fields include further details like a description (in Dutch and in English), iconclass codes (an iconographic classification system), the inscription, its method of attachment, measurements (in centimeters), materials, land and place of origin, and the archaeological site where the object was found. The ‘source’ field indicates the nature of the described object: whether the depicted badge is an original, a mould, a cast, or a reproduction. In the case at hand, the description of the Cunera badge in the Museum Het Valkhof, the fields medium, artist, measurements, technique and material are not filled in. Only when the described object is a visual source or a cast badge, is such data applicable. Thereafter, what follows is a general dating with a reference. The bibliography and the present whereabouts of the object are listed below. The cited literature concerns the badge at hand, and these references offer the visitor the possibility of checking the data on the screen. At the same time, it assists in the search for further reading. Through the bibliography, the visitor gains an clear insight into the literature on the subject of medieval badges and ampullae.

Object	
Inventory-number	08102
Description	Cunera between two women who are strangling her with a piece of cloth, each standing under a different arch of the gothic arcade that is framing them
Iconclasscode	11HH(CUNERA)
Iconclasscode	31E2354
Inscription	(S)NUTE KUNERA
Attachment	Eyes
Measures	6,4 x 4,5
Material	Pewter
Land of origin	Nederland
Place of origin	Rhenen
Source	Original

¹²⁶ A.M. Koldeweij (2005): 493-510.

Country of site	Nederland
Site	Nijmegen
Medium	
Artist	
Measures	
Technique	
Material	
Starting date	1450
Final date	1499
Comments	Date according to Kevelaer & Nijmegen 2001, p. 181, nr. 107
Literature	
Author(s)	
Title	De gouden eeuw van Gelre (tent.cat. Kevelaer, Nijmegen, Zutphen, Roermond)
Place	Geldern
Year	2001
Page(s)	p. 181, nr. 107, afb. III-107
Collection	
Inventorynumber	1994.01.27
Collection	Nijmegen, Museum Het Valkhof

Fig. 3: Entry on the badge from Rhenen. Description from www.ru.nl/ckd/kunera.

Kunera still has a long way to go. For two more years, the Netherlands Organisation of Scientific Research (NWO) will support the database project financially. After that, its preservation is guaranteed, because Kunera is part of the Center of Art-historical Documentation (CKD) of the Radboud University that manages several databases on different subjects. Ideally, however, Kunera will raise new funds to ensure a continuation of the work. Even with 10,000 entries, the contents in the database form only a part of all the badges in private and public collections. Especially in the private collections, there are many badges which have not yet been documented. Kunera therefore makes no claim to be exhaustive, but it does aim to at least to include as many Dutch and Belgian finds as possible. Fortunately, the research of the Dutch and Belgian material is well under way and publications on the subject are manifold.¹²⁷ Nonetheless, a lot of work still needs to be done. There are some practical problems to solve as well. The on-line version of Kunera is still in its infancy and one can detect some shortcomings. At the moment, the database offers the possibility of browsing different categories or entering query words in one single search field. Hopefully, a specialized search with multiple search fields will be an option in the future. Despite its faults, Kunera provides an impressive body of data that is accessible to researchers and others. Because of the combination of badges, material sources and references,

¹²⁷ Most impressive is the work of H.J.E. van Beuningen and A.M. Koldewij, in *Heilig en profaan. I: 1.000 laat-middeleeuwse insignes uit de collectie H.J.E. van Beuningen* (Cothen: Stichting Middeleeuwse Religieuze en Profane Insignes, 1993) and *Heilig en profaan. II: 1200 laatmiddeleeuwse insignes uit openbare en particuliere collecties* (Cothen: Stichting Middeleeuwse Religieuze en Profane Insignes, 2001) with a third volume on the way.

the database offers a unique tool for further study. Its makers are hopeful that Kunera will prove to be a helpful instrument in the field of medieval pilgrimage. 🍷