

# Pewter Casting / Pilgrim Badges

Cynagua/Mists War, AS 39

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Pilgrim badges were mass-produced objects distributed at various religious shrines of the medieval period and worn on clothing as proof of a pilgrimage and as a talisman. From the twelfth to the late fifteenth century images and ideas were spread by means of these small mass-produced articles of pious devotion, made of inexpensive pewter alloy (1). A close relative to pilgrim badges are “secular” badges, which are made the same way but don’t have the same religious connotations. Both the pilgrim and secular badges, bought as souvenirs of successful pilgrimages, were made in large quantities and have often been retrieved from rivers, into which they were cast for good luck.

The first known object made of the alloy known as pewter is a flask found in a grave of 1580-1350 B.C. at Abydos in Upper Egypt. It contains 86.6 percent tin, 6 percent lead, and small quantities of copper, iron, and silicon. Pewter, which has a very low melting point, could be easily molded; when shapes became unfashionable or wares were battered, the wares could just as easily be melted again. It is believed that this is the reason that there is not much surviving pewter that can be dated before 1600.

Many of the cast badges that were sold to travelers were made using a carved block of soft slate or soapstone, in conjunction with a flat backing plate, with the alloy poured from the edge. One of the advantages of this combination of stone mold and pewter is that literally hundreds of copies of a pattern could be easily made to offset the effort of the mold creation. This technique represents one of the earliest examples of a true 'mass production' process.

I have made two different ‘badges’ for this competition.

The first is based on a badge found in a Norwegian dig. The badge has been dated to the late 14<sup>th</sup> Century. I’ve included the original find for you to look at. As you can see, it is a circle conjoined to an X with a flower in the middle. Using that design, I carved a similar design into a soapstone block. It is intended to be a pin, as was the original.

The second is a Pelican in its Piety. This particular design is based on a needlework pattern in *Esemplario di Lavori* by Niccolo Zoppino, called Aristotile (2). This badge has been created as a token to wear on a necklace or to stitch onto a garment using the loop at the top. Attached is a print-out of the picture from the book that was used to base the carving on.

How I cast: I carved my molds from soapstone, and used a lead-free tin/antimony pewter. I started by cutting the soapstone into slabs, and then sanded it smooth. Then the design gets carved. Once my design and sprue (the pewter access funnel) were carved, I clamped a backing piece of soapstone to the face of my carved slab. Then, using a cast iron melting pot, I melted my pewter. Using a small iron ladle, I poured the molten metal into my mold. Once the metal had cooled enough to no longer be molten, I unclamped my mold and dropped out the badge. After letting the badge cool to the touch, the sprue excess was cut off and the edges smoothed with a fine grit file. As you can see, I was able to repeat these steps several times over to produce multiple badges. This is similar to the method that badges were made in the past.

## Bibliography:

- (1) Brian Spencer  
Pilgrim Souvenirs and Secular Badges - Medieval Finds from Excavations in London: 7.  
London: Stationery Office. 1998. ISBN:0-11-290574-9
- (2) Mistress Elspeth of Morven and Mistress Kathryn Goodwin  
Flowers of the Needle  
self published, 1985