Medieval bling: the display of jewellery on women’s funerary monuments from England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries

Abstract

This article suggests that more detailed analysis must be done when using artistic sources, in particular, funerary monuments, as evidence for medieval dress. Using archaeological, documentary, and literary evidence for jewellery in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, it asks why what seems to be a popular accessory was very rarely depicted on sculpted effigies and monumental brasses. Assumptions from just the visual evidence would conclude that brooches in particular were not a common piece of jewellery for noble women, but this does not correspond with the material evidence. The focus of this article therefore is on using an interdisciplinary approach to look at monuments as a source in their own right rather than as just a general mirror of contemporary fashion. By looking at three case studies, the article shows that deeper analysis of specific monuments can put them into religious, political, and historical context and provide information about the women depicted on them and the significance of accessories, such as brooches.

Introduction

Material evidence for clothing from the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries in England is scarce, although excavations over the past fifty years have increased the amount of textiles and clothing-related artefacts available to the dress historian. Generally, scholars have had to rely more heavily on other sources in order to build up a picture of what the medieval man or woman might have worn. These sources include documentary evidence, such as wills and household accounts, literary evidence, and art forms, such as monumental effigies, monumental brasses, manuscript illustrations, stained glass, and wall paintings. These sources continue to be used by dress historians and can be valuable pieces of evidence in the study of medieval costume, although their limitations have to be addressed.

The focus of this article is on funerary monuments, which are either three-dimensional and life-size sculpted recumbent effigies or two-dimensional engraved brasses. They depict men

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1 See Crowfoot et al. 2001, 1, for a list of recent works detailing material evidence found in England.
and women (and sometimes children), generally of noble families but also members of different professions or classes, such as mercantile, ecclesiastical, and military. Their purpose was as a memorial or *memento mori*, a reminder for others to pray for the deceased’s soul in purgatory. They were generally intended to be a likeness of the person depicted, but stylised versions were also produced, particularly with brasses, and more so after the Black Death in the second half of the fourteenth century as there were fewer workshops and skilled craftsmen. The significance of this is that variations, particularly on stylised brasses, are likely to indicate specific choices being made by those commissioning them, possibly to show wealth, identity, piety, or political allegiance.

This article addresses the issue of whether funerary monuments can reliably be used by dress historians as a visual source to show what women wore or did not wear in the 1300s and 1400s, or if they need to be analysed more carefully and in context to extract relevant information on dress, including choices regarding personal representation in death. Analysis of approximately 400 funerary monuments from around England showed that generalisations should not be made in this way as the conclusions can be unreliable. The data was analysed in a systematic way to reduce any subjectivity from the very beginning, thus enabling further qualitative research and discussion to be based on objective and replicative methodology.

Content analysis was used which involved establishing categories into which the data could be placed and then counting the frequency of instances in these categories. Categories included type of under- or over-garment, necklines, headwear, accessories such as buttons or belts, and jewellery. The results showed changes in types of garments or headdresses over time, and these could be sub-categorised. So, for example, headdresses fell under sub-categories of veil, circlet, cauled/cap, structured cauls, or horned. All of the monuments depicted an identifiable garment style, and all but a tiny minority had some type of headwear; however jewellery which was categorised into brooches, necklaces, and rings was present on a minority of monuments, with 22% showing a necklace, 7% with rings, and just 1% depicting a brooch. This demonstrates that jewellery was not commonly represented on funerary monuments from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; however, evidence such as wills, literary texts, and archaeological finds provide evidence that brooches were a popular item of jewellery during those centuries for both the nobility, who are those generally represented by funerary monuments, and also those lower down the social scale.

This article seeks to address why there are so few brooches depicted on funerary monuments when other evidence points to these being popular items of jewellery, and why certain funerary monuments have specific brooches depicted on them. This latter question can tell us more about the choices made by those who commissioned the monuments, therefore providing the dress historian with more detailed contextual information.

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3 Crossley 1933, 4; Saul 2009, 76-78. For a discussion of the effects of the Black Death on brass production, see Badham 2000, 207-247.
4 Silverman 2006, 400.
5 See Gardner 1950, 4-13; Cunnington, Cunnington 1952; Scott 1986; Druitt 1970.
Methodology

Funerary monuments cannot be studied in isolation to illustrate or explain the development of medieval fashion, and it is not realistic to separate the source from the costume depicted on it. The clothing on funerary monuments is connected intrinsically with the medium and the context of production, therefore these monuments cannot be ‘undressed,’ as many clothing historians seem to do. An interdisciplinary approach with reference to literary and documentary sources, archaeological findings, and additional visual sources places these funerary depictions in the political, economic, social, and religious attitudes of the contemporary population. As Ribeiro has stated, although not with specific reference to funerary monuments, ‘the visual arts are the reflection of human history’ and provide much more information than actual garments or written evidence alone.

The current research draws on Barthes’s ideas of ‘real clothing,’ ‘image clothing,’ and ‘written clothing.’ In terms of medieval dress, real clothing is just that and can be seen as archaeological evidence. Written (and verbal) clothing is represented by documentary or literary evidence, and image clothing is that depicted in art forms such as manuscripts, wall paintings, or funerary monuments. Barthes suggests that these sources are all different, and the links between them are discontinuous. These differences have not been taken into account as fully as they should have been, and dress historians have tended to equate both image and verbal clothing directly with real clothing, using the former as evidence for what existed, without questioning these sources or what the disjunctions between these three types of evidence may tell us. For example, Scott states that with artistic sources ‘the reader is given a clear idea of what was worn and how,’ while Houston talks of manuscript illustrations giving ‘a very complete idea of the varied silhouettes of the centuries and the proper wear for each class and section of society.’ However, artistic sources do not simply replicate real clothing. As this paper will show, brooches were more common in the medieval period than their artistic representations suggest.

Evidence for brooches in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries

Documentary and literary evidence

Documentary evidence provides details about brooches in everyday life, but terminology is often a problem. For example, the Middle English word broche could mean other types of jewellery as well as brooches, so it cannot always be determined what form is being referenced. Similarly, nouche, ouche, firmaculum, and monile were often used for a variety of

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7 Contra Scott 1986, who studied effigies as sources for medieval dress but without reference to their context as sculpture.
9 Barthes 1990, 3-6.
10 See for example, Cunnington, Cunnington 1952; Druitt 1970; Scott 1986; Houston 1996 (1939).
11 Houston 1996 (1939), vii.
different ornaments. The Latin term *fibula* and the French *fermail* also mean brooch and were used.

Wills extant from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries frequently refer to items of jewellery, including brooches. Elizabeth de Bohun, Countess of Northampton, for example, in her will of May 1356, bequeathed a *fimaile* to her sister Marjery Roos and a *nonce* to her other sister, the Countess of Oxford. In 1385, Hugh, Earl of Stafford, bequeathed ‘a *fermail* of knots’ to his daughter Katherine de la Pole and to Joane, another daughter, ‘a gold *fermail* with a heart.’ Thomas, Earl of Warwick, in 1369 bequeathed to his daughter ‘an *ouche* called the eagle, which the Prince gave me’ and to his other daughters, his next best *ouche*, and another *ouche*, again called the eagle. This may refer to a brooch in the shape of an eagle.

We also find evidence of brooches being left to male heirs. Edmond, Earl of March, for example, in his will of 1380 left his son a small nonce ‘in the form of the body of a stag and the head of an eagle,’ again hinting at some sort of animal badge. Similarly, in his will of 1361, Humphrey de Bohun, Earl of Hereford, left his nephew a *nouche* of gold surrounded with large pearls, with a ruby between four pearls.

That brooches were everyday objects is suggested by their inclusion in literary descriptions, such as Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* which includes a number of references to women wearing brooches. This is also supported by documentary evidence, such as the 1446 will of Matilda, Countess of Cambridge. In this record, it is stated that Matilda leaves ‘*unum broche, quo utor cotidie*’ or a brooch that she wore daily.

While literary evidence does not always provide a description of the brooches mentioned, documentary evidence (i.e. wills) refers to real objects that can be compared with the archaeological evidence, providing tangible proof of the type of brooches that did exist in the medieval period. The brooches mentioned in the documentary sources were those owned by the nobility in the medieval period, but there is no indication of how or where they were worn. In the absence of such evidence, the number extant examples can give an indication of how popular different brooches may have been, and their size and the presence of any inscriptions may provide information about how they were used.

13 *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (1330-1500)* http://atilf.atilf.fr/scripts/dmfAAA.exe?LEM=fermail;XMODE=STELLa;FERMER;;AFFICHAGE=0;MENU=menu_dm f;;ISIS=isis_dmf2015.txt;MENU=menu_recherche_dictionnaire;OUVRIR_MENU=1;ONGLET=dmf2015;OO1=2;OO2 =1;OO3=1;s=s122a34a0;LANGUE=FR; accessed 6/8/2020; The Anglo-Norman Dictionary http://www.anglo-norman.net/gate/ accessed 6.8.20; Morwood 1997, 106.
14 See Nicolas 1826; The Surtees Society 1865; Furnivall 1964, 116-119.
15 Nicolas 1826, 61. Cf. the 1444 will of Agnes Shirburn in which she bequeathed a ‘brooch of gold’ to her daughter; The Surtees Society 1855, XXX, 106.
16 Nicolas 1826, 119.
17 Nicolas 1826, 79.
18 Nicolas 1826, 110.
19 Nicolas 1826, 66.
20 E.g. ‘A brooch she baar upon hir lowe coler’ (*The Millers Tale*); ‘Brooches and rynges, for Grisildis sake’ (*The Clerk’s Tale*); ‘Or ells silver broches, spoones, rynges.’ (*The Pardoner’s Tale*); Benson 1988, 69, l. 3265; 140, l. 255; 201, l. 908.
21 The Surtees Society 1855, XXX, 122.
Archaeological evidence

The Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS), which records archaeological objects found by the public in England and Wales, and museum collections all have entries documenting various types of brooches. The Victoria and Albert Museum’s collection includes mainly ring brooches but also has a heart-shaped brooch, two in the shape of clasped hands, and one with a sexfoil shape. The British Museum’s collection of medieval brooches from 1250-1450 comprises more than 150 objects. The majority are ring brooches as with the Victoria and Albert Museum but also included are heart-shaped heraldic brooches, pilgrim badges, and octagonal brooches. A simple search for ‘medieval brooch’ in the Portable Antiquities Scheme database comes up with in excess of 1,800 entries. This includes brooches of all materials, both precious and non-precious metals, in contrast to the majority of items in museums that are composed of precious metals. A search in the Portable Antiquities Scheme database for medieval brooches in gold brings up 65 results and for silver, 189 results.

The presence of less expensive brooches, potentially for lower sections of society, is also suggested by the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century brooches analysed by Egan and Pritchard. Of the 56 brooches that they analysed, the majority were composed of lead, tin, or copper alloy, with just one made of silver. Moreover, three of the brooches had engraved lines, which have been suggested as a representation for the illiterate of inscriptions found on brooches in more precious materials. The phrase Jesus Nazarenus, for example, is found on brooches of precious metals in collections at the British Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum. This suggests that the design of less expensive brooches was likely based on those worn by higher levels of society. Therefore, it seems that brooches were a popular item of jewellery for all classes of society.

Unfortunately, when authors use artistic material to illustrate brooch types, they often include references to funerary monuments, either in text or illustration, to show the presence of jewellery. However, the examples that they use, even though they may show a visual representation of the type of jewellery being discussed, are the exception to the rule in terms of monuments depicting jewellery. For example, Cherry states that the ring brooch – a pin attached to an open circle that can be plain or have gems or inscriptions – was one of the most common types of medieval jewel. Despite this, out of the 416 funerary monuments surveyed, only five were depicted with a distinct brooch, and just two of these were ring brooches (e.g., Figs. 1-5).

Brooches on funerary monuments

The five brooches that form the core of this study are clearly visible on the funerary monuments. The three circular brooches, which appear to have the function of a garment fastening, are at least 5 cm in diameter, and the Tau cross worn by Lady Margaret de Bois looks to be of similar size (Fig. 2). However, when the size of extant brooches is compared to these representations, the difference is palpable. From the collection of brooches at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the average size is 2.8 cm in diameter, with six brooches less than 2 cm in diameter. The same is true for the British Museum collection and entries on the Portable Antiquities Scheme database, where brooches with a diameter of more than 3 cm are the exception rather than the rule.

Very small brooches of just 1-1.5 cm seem to be very common in the archaeological evidence (e.g., Fig. 7). Their size could account for the lack of this type of brooch being represented on funerary monuments, because they could have worn away or are no longer visible. However, this seems unlikely, as small details on good quality monuments are quite clearly still visible. Alternatively, those commissioning or producing such monuments may not have thought it worthwhile to add such a small detail.

A more credible reason for the lack of brooches on funerary monuments relates to how brooches were worn. Jewellery historians suggest that the ring brooch, for example, was commonly used to fasten the dress at the neck. However, the visual evidence does not support this with only two, or possibly three, funerary monuments showing this clearly. The disjunction between the physical evidence and the visual evidence could be explained by the fact that brooches worn at the neck may not have been visible and therefore were not being represented on monuments.

The content analysis of different necklines and the number of garments depicted on funerary monuments showed that 20% had their neckline covered by a wimple, which in contemporary real clothing would hide anything worn underneath, and 60% of monuments were represented with at least two garments. Brooches may have been worn on the undergarments and therefore would not have been visible. Moreover, towards the end of the fourteenth and into the fifteenth centuries large collars, both turned up to cover the neck and folded flat against the garment, were represented on funerary monuments, with 9% and 8% of monuments, respectively, showing these. These styles may have concealed a brooch in everyday life, either on a garment underneath or under the collar. The Miller’s Tale, for example, referred to a brooch worn on a collar. In addition, brooches could have been worn pinned to hats or attached to beads, as referenced in the General Prologue of the Canterbury Tales, which describes the Prioress as carrying, ‘A pere of bedes, gauded al with grene/ And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene.’

There is also the possibility that brooches were deliberately concealed in everyday life and therefore not displayed on funerary monuments. Jewellery was often exchanged between lovers, and inscriptions on brooches sometimes hint at secret or forbidden love. Figure 8

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33 Cf. fn. 20.
34 Scarisbrick 1994, 36.
35 Benson 1988, 26, l. 159-60.
shows a gold ring brooch, c. AD 1200-1300, with a diameter of 1.4 cm. It is inscribed with ‘IESVI: CI: ENLIV: DAMI:’ which could be translated as ‘I am here in place of a friend’ or ‘I am here in a friendly place.’

Robinson has suggested that the size and inscriptions on brooches such as this meant that they were personal symbols of affection, and even forbidden love, and therefore would have been worn discreetly. Other similar inscriptions include ‘All my love is yours;’ ‘Think of a friend who loves you;’ and ‘I am here in the place of the friend I love.’ In addition, brooches with inscriptions with protective qualities, either Christian or generally against danger of various sorts, also may have been worn concealed.

An example from the Victoria and Albert Museum is inscribed ‘Hail Mary, full of grace, give us peace.’

The idea that small brooches were worn concealed, either because of the structure of the costume or the meaning of the brooch to the individual, could explain why there are very few instances of brooches depicted on funerary monuments. If the depiction of brooches on these monuments is an exception to the rule, a more detailed analysis of the brooches shown on such monuments and the women represented is warranted to put them into context. Out of the five monuments depicting brooches, four are of named women. Recent scholarship has cast doubt on the authenticity and dating of the monument to Lady Constantia de Frecheville, so this case study has not been used in the current study. The remaining three examples will be discussed more fully here.

Funerary monument of Joan Perient

The brass to Joan Perient (née Risain) and her husband John (FIG. 4) is in St John’s Church, Digswell, in Hertfordshire, and dates to 1415, the year John died. Joan Perient is depicted wearing a brooch in the shape of a swan. This brooch would likely have held a specific meaning, which Joan or the individual who commissioned the brass wanted to present.

There is some archaeological evidence for animal heraldry brooches with the rare Dunstable Swan, now in the British Museum, giving some indication of what the real brooch of Joan Perient may have actually looked like. The Dunstable Swan is made from opaque white enamel fused over gold and is 3.3 cm high. It dates to around AD 1400 and is thought to have belonged to a prominent supporter of an important political family like the Bohuns. Other evidence includes a 4.4-cm silver-gilt livery badge in the shape of an eagle or hawk found in Lincolnshire.

Moreover, the wills of Edmond, Earl of March, and Thomas, Earl of Warwick, discussed above, also clearly describe brooches with animal motifs.
Egan and Pritchard note a number of bird and animal badges, which were found in London and mainly made from lead alloy. This indicates that these types of badges/brooches were not just worn by the upper classes.\(^46\) In addition, two copper alloy badges/brooches listed in the Portable Antiquities Scheme database were in the form of birds.\(^47\) Such brooches in less expensive materials were often distributed to servants or members of a lower social class who were supporters of important families or individuals.

John and Joan Perient were of high status and had important political connections. John Perient was standard-bearer to Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V.\(^48\) Joan Perient served the queens of both Richard II and Henry IV and was chief lady-in-waiting to Joan Navarre, the second wife of Henry IV.\(^49\) The swan emblem was particularly relevant to the court of Henry IV. The Lancastrian swan badge was used in the fourteenth century by important English families, including the Tonys, Bohuns, Beauchamps, and Courtenays. The Bohuns in particular believed that they were descended from the Swan Knight of medieval romance.\(^50\) In 1380, when Henry of Lancaster, son of John of Gaunt, married his first wife Mary de Bohun, one of two co-heiresses of Humphrey de Bohun, he used the swan as a badge. After Henry became king, the swan badge was used as a livery badge of the Prince of Wales.\(^51\) Additionally, Mary’s sister, Eleanor, who married Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, has a swan emblem on her brass in Westminster Abbey.\(^52\)

Goodall has suggested that the swan emblem was only given to ladies at court during the reign of Henry IV. Therefore it seems very likely that Joan would have been given the original badge/brooch on which her brass engraving was based in this manner.\(^53\)

**Funerary monument of Lady Margaret de Bois**

The tomb of Sir Roger and Lady Margaret de Bois is in Holy Trinity Church, Ingham, in Norfolk. According to the inscription on the tomb, Roger de Bois died in 1300, and Margaret died in 1315. However, it is likely that the monument was not made until later in the fourteenth century by subsequent members of the de Bois or Boys family.\(^54\) Both Sir Roger and Lady de Bois are wearing circular badges or brooches on the right sides of their cloaks (FIG. 2). These brooches depicted a Tau cross – the Greek letter ‘T’ - with the inscription ‘Anthon,’ which was the symbol of St Anthony the Hermit.\(^55\) While the Tau cross was also connected to St Francis\(^56\) and the Boys family had donated land to a community of Franciscan nuns at


\(^{47}\) PAS record id 220759 and 392099.

\(^{48}\) Page 1912, 81-85.

\(^{49}\) Cherry 2006, 138.

\(^{50}\) Cherry 2006, 140.


\(^{53}\) Goodall 1996, 51.


\(^{55}\) Lightbown 1992, 188.

\(^{56}\) Fennessy 1993, 38.
Bruisyard in Suffolk in the fourteenth century, the inclusion of the inscription points towards a focus on St. Anthony or to the possibility that the cross served to represent both saints simultaneously.

A conscious decision must have been made to include these Tau brooches on the effigies of the couple. The Tau cross was a general symbol of salvation: in the prophecy of Ezekiel those who were marked with the Tau cross on their foreheads in Jerusalem would be saved from God’s destruction, and it was also the sign painted in blood by Aaron on the houses of the Israelites on the night of the Passover. Therefore, the positioning of a Tau cross on the cloaks of Sir Roger and Lady de Bois could be a symbol of salvation.

Lightburn suggests that the de Bois family may have been members of a confraternity of St Anthony, which was popular in the fifteenth century. Alternatively, it is possible that the Tau cross of St Anthony was a pilgrimage badge. The Hospitaller Order of St Anthony was founded in La Motte in the Dauphiné area of France in 1095 by Gaston du Dauphiné after his son became ill with ergotism. The Order became synonymous with the treatment of both this disease and the Black Death, with almost 400 connected hospitals established across Western Europe by the fourteenth century. One of the subsidiary houses of the Order was in London, and while pilgrimages to the hospital were encouraged in the fourteenth century, it is possible that the de Bois couple could have gone there earlier. Equally, the brooches may have been badges of a pilgrimage to the church of St Antoine de Viennois in Dauphiné, where the saint’s relics were held. While Dauphiné was a popular pilgrimage destination for people suffering from ergotism, there is no evidence that there was an outbreak in Norfolk during the lifetime of the de Bois couple.

Archaeological evidence shows that the Tau cross was a popular symbol, with numerous examples cast in latten or lead alloy, including a Tau cross pilgrim badge in lead alloy now in the British Museum. Husband suggests that these may have been acquired by pilgrims as souvenirs showing support for the order. However the Tau cross was not related solely to pilgrimage. Tau crosses were also popular on medieval rings, which may have been worn to protect the wearer. There seems to have been a connection between the healing properties of the cross and St Anthony, as he was believed to protect people from poison and pestilence, including the Black Death. This reading may be relevant for the de Bois brooches, as the monument was erected in the later fourteenth century.

The presence of precious jewellery depicting the Tau cross also suggests that these items could have been individual objects of personal adornment rather than generic pilgrim badg-
es. Moreover, the symbol may have had particular significance in East Anglia and Essex, where they are mentioned in wills. A search of the Portable Antiquities Scheme database for objects linked to the word ‘tau’ results in 28 records including rings, pendants, and purse bars, and a quarter of these examples (7) come from East Anglia and Essex. In 2018 a metal detectorist discovered a fifteenth-century Tau cross pendant in Wramplingham, about 35 miles from Ingham and the de Bois funerary monument, and a gold reliquary pendant in the shape of a Tau cross was discovered in Matlaske, Norfolk, about 20 miles from Ingham. While much of the evidence comes from the fifteenth century, it is possible that a local tradition of wearing Tau crosses may have been popular in East Anglia from an earlier period, either in the lifetime of Sir Roger and Lady de Bois or their descendants.

Funerary monument of Philippa Roet Chaucer

The effigy in St. Mary the Virgin Church at East Woldham, Hampshire, is believed to be that of Philippa Roet Chaucer, the wife of the author of The Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer. She likely died in 1387. On her tomb, she is represented wearing a large circular brooch with a centre of a cross or a flower (Fig. 3). This brooch appears to act as a clasp to hold together the top of her outer garment.

The large size of Philippa Chaucer’s brooch – larger than most extant archaeological examples – may be related to her status. Philippa was part of a privileged family. She was the daughter of a Flemish knight, Sir Payn Roelt, from Hainault, who travelled to England in the service of Philippa, queen of Edward III. Her sister, Katherine Swynford, eventually married John of Gaunt, and became the Duchess of Lancaster. Philippa, herself, became part of the royal household as the domicella of Queen Philippa in 1366. It is possible that the large brooch was linked to her status in the royal household.

Although the majority of extant examples are smaller in size, such large brooches are known. An ornate brooch of 8.5 cm was found in Billingsgate and is comparable to a large brooch depicted on the mid-fourteenth-century effigy of Queen Eufemia of Denmark. While literary and documentary evidence does not usually indicate the size of jewellery items, there is a reference in Chaucer’s The Miller’s Tale to Alison, the young wife of a carpenter, who is wearing ‘A brooch she baar upon hir lowe coler/ As brood as is the boos of a bokeler’. A bokeler was a small shield, and the boos was the raised centre or boss, so Chaucer is compar-

69 Lightbown 1992, 204.
76 Davis 2002, 129-144.
77 Egan, Pritchard 2002, 258.
78 Benson 1988, 69, l. 3265-6.
ing this brooch to something much larger than the average brooch.\(^\text{79}\) A medieval shield boss found in Kent, for example, has a diameter of 5.25 cm.\(^\text{80}\) While this can be seen as an exaggeration with the large brooch associated with the wealth of the carpenter and his wife’s liking for showy items, the reference indicates that Chaucer was aware of such large brooches in everyday life as a sign of status.\(^\text{81}\) It is not inconceivable that his own wife might have worn something like this to show her status, particularly as her own marriage was to someone of a lower class.\(^\text{82}\) It is possible then that that the brooch on Philippa’s funerary monument was a copy of something that she actually wore or it was a status symbol to show her rank and importance.

The brooch depicted on Philippa Chaucer’s funerary monument may also represent the coat of arms for her family, the Roets. Roet is the old French word for the wheel of a water mill, and the brooch could be a representation of this, with what appears to be a cross or petals as the spokes of the wheel.\(^\text{83}\) When Philippa’s sister Katherine married John of Gaunt in 1396, she adopted a coat of arms showing three gold wheels on a red background.\(^\text{84}\) Although this was nine years after the death of her sister, the Roet coat of arms with three wheels was clearly in existence before Katherine married.\(^\text{85}\)

It is also possible that this symbol had a religious association. The wheel was often linked with St. Catherine of Alexandria, whose symbol was the spiked wheel on which she was to be tortured until it was miraculously destroyed. She was then beheaded by the Roman emperor Maxentius.\(^\text{86}\) St. Catherine was a popular saint with women,\(^\text{87}\) and badges depicting the spiked Catherine wheel have been found in London, Coventry, Bristol, and Canterbury. In his work on pilgrim badges, Spencer suggests that these would have been tokens of allegiance to St. Catherine rather than linked to a particular cult or souvenirs from pilgrimage to her shrine on Mount Sinai.\(^\text{88}\)

### Conclusions

The three funerary monuments discussed above all show that the brooches depicted had specific personal meaning to the women represented. This may be to show allegiance and status, as with Joan Perient, to show personal links to the royal family as Joan Perient and Philippa Chaucer, or to show piety and support of religious orders, as with the de Bois family. The women depicted or their families who commissioned these monuments wanted viewers to be reminded of these aspects of the women’s lives, and the symbolism of these specific brooches would most likely have been evident to contemporary viewers.

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80 PAS record id. 73547.
81 Chaucer, James 1979, 63.
82 Davis 2002, 129.
84 Lamborn 1940, 4.
85 https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=27269786
86 Ryan 1993, 334-341.
88 Spencer 2010, 179.
This study demonstrates that dress historians should be aware of the context of the sources that they use for the study of medieval costume. These sources had a function in society and were not just a mirror of contemporary fashion. As Ribeiro noted with regard to painted sources, ‘the painting or other art object is a text to be de-coded; the image becomes a central fact, and no longer just an illustration to a text, but the text itself.’89 It is important therefore to look at the social context of funerary monuments and the dress that they depict.

The argument put forward by jewellery experts that brooches were a popular form of jewellery in everyday life is not substantiated with the evidence on funerary monuments. The five brooches identified on funerary monuments from England represent specific choices made by the monuments’ commissioners for a specific purpose. Unfortunately no contracts exist which show the choices of dress on monuments; however, the fact that each of the brooches in the examples discussed above was distinct does suggest that they had a personal meaning or relevance.90 The low incidence of jewellery, particularly brooches, on funerary monuments should lead scholars of medieval dress and art historians to focus on each monument as a text to be read in its own right rather than using them collectively as general visual sources for medieval clothing and accessories.

Pam Walker
Independent Scholar
pamwalker1@live.co.uk

89 Ribeiro1998, 315-326, 323.
90 Badham, Oosterwijk 2010, 217-224.
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Fig. 1 – Ring brooch on Constantina de Frecheville, c. 1260, Scarcliffe, Derbyshire.

Fig. 2 – Tau Cross on Lady Margaret de Bois, c. 1365. Ingham, Norfolk.

Fig. 3 – Possible ring brooch on Philippa Roet Chaucer, c. 1387, East Worldham, Hampshire.
Fig. 4 – Swan brooch. Joan Perient, c. 1417. Digswell, Herfordshire.

Fig. 5 – Brooch. Lady, c. 1440. Brympton d’Ercy, Somerset.

Fig. 6 – Example of a silver engraved ring brooch c. 1300-1350. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Fig. 7 – A tiny brooch of approximately 1cm. © The Portable Antiquities Scheme/ The Trustees of the British Museum.

Fig. 8 – Gold ring brooch, c. 1200-1300, engraved with + IESVI : CI : ENLIV : DAMI: ’(I am here in place of a friend’). © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Fig. 9 – The Roet Coat of Arms. © By Sodacan - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=27269786.