Concealed Leather and Fur Finds from Kempten/ Allgäu (Germany)

1. The find situation in the “Mühlberg-Ensemble” in Kempten
In the centre of the former Reichstadt Kempten (Allgäu) the so-called “Mühlberg-Ensemble” is located. This group of three citizen’s houses (Mühlberg No. 8, 10 and 12) was built between 1295 (c) and 1324 (c). In 1996, during reconstruction works the urban office for archaeology screened walls, but no finds were collected. In 1999, in the house no. 8 of the complex, a number of finds were discovered. They were mainly leather objects. In total, 248 finds were collected. About 60 % of the leather finds are shoes or parts of them. The Kempten assemblage contains eleven different shoe types, defined by their fastening method only showing cobbler’s work. The shoe lengths (in French sizes) reveal additional information: Evidently, the Kempten shoes were mainly worn by women and children - any shrinking of a jack of plate.

3.1 Shoes
![Shoe Types](image)

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Since autumn 2000, the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) has granted a common research project of the Stadthistorische Kempten (Dr. G. Weber), the chair for medieval history, University of Constance (Prof. Dr. H. Maurer) and the chair for medieval and postmedieval archaeology, University of Bamberg (Prof. Dr. I. Ericsson) in order to inquire into these unique finds.

2. The phenomenon of finds concealed in buildings
Finds have been concealed in buildings throughout the whole of Central Europe (cf. map) for different reasons. Some complexes seem to be planned as temporary deposits, but evidently sunk into oblivion. Also magical practices could be involved: On the British Isles, it was usual to bury shoes or other spiritual necessities in order to protect the house and its inhabitants against witchcraft. On the continent, auspicious rituals might play a role in a few cases as well. Petra Schad is recording intentionally immured inhabitants against witchcraft. On the continent, spiritual middens might have been their neighbours or successors. Probably, the beguines’ remains were only the “substrate”, which was mixed on occasion of rebuilding activities with other inhabitants’ objects, who might have been their neighbours or successors.

3.2 Fur clothing and accessories
Parts of clothing are the second largest group of objects - made of animal tanned sheep fur. Their hair was almost completely eaten by moths – only roots are still visible under a microscope. About 70 parts of fur hoods (below) were identified. They are sewn up to 50 patches and lined or quilted in up to eight layers. All about 1500 AD, hoods were out of fashion and only worn by women, peasants, nuns or as part of the mourning dress.

3.3 Sewing techniques
In any case, the concealed finds - not only from Kempten - are a new source type for organic and other everydays objects. The systematical research of this barely known source will open a new window to more coloured and more differentiated Middle Ages than the mere interpretation of written sources or conventional excavations could ever provide.

Further information:
R. Altschuh, Die Leder- und Pelzfunde aus dem “Mühlberg-Ensemble” in Kempten. Promotionsvorschau am Lehrstuhl für Archäologie, Universität Bamberg; http://www.uni-bamberg.de/lai/app/19518.html
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