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## *CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS: THE LEXIS OF PERSONAL HYGIENE AND BEAUTY IN OLD AND MIDDLE ENGLISH*

The present paper attempts at providing a lexical and semantic analysis of the lexical field referring to personal hygiene and cultivation of beauty. Particular attention will be paid to the examination of various uses of the key terms and their literal and metaphorical meaning. In addition, in the investigation conducted an attempt is made to classify the selected items into a number of subcategories such as cleansing substances, rooms, pieces of furniture, accessories and activities related to the cultivation of beauty in mediaeval times. The terms under discussion cover the period from OE till 1550.

### PERSONAL HYGIENE AND PURITY – A BRIEF HISTORY

The hygienic practices are as old as humanity. The process of cleansing is an integral part of every human being whose body has an in-built self-defensive, self-cleansing and physiological system that allows it to survive (Smith 2007: 9).

The archeological findings reveal that the traces of hygienic practice, or grooming habits— as it might be called, date back to Neolithic, or Late Stone Age (40 000 to c. 3000 BC). At that time human beings (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) developed various “technologies” and habits they used to keep their surroundings and themselves cleansed (Smith 2007: 25). Grooming practices involved also the celebration of the human body by decorating different body-parts and introducing clothing (of different styles) and jewellery. “The world’s earliest rock art and sculpsures (*sic* 40 000 – 30 000 BC) show figures with head ornaments, fringed armbands, beaded girdles, and braided hairstyling” (Smith 2007: 38).

Every social group, in any part of the world, has its own history of cleansing, purification and cultivation of beauty. In ancient India or Egypt cleanliness was a sign of religious status and an indicator of a respect towards deities. The ancient Greeks bathed to feel more comfortable, more attractive and healthy (as soaking in water was a major treatment prescribed by their physicians). For the Romans, on the other hand, soaking in water did not just mean spending hours in baths, scraping bodies with strigil and applying oils. Cleansing was regarded

as a social event. The Roman bath, equipped with pools, exercise yards, gardens, libraries or meeting rooms, was a perfect place to make connections, do business, talk politics or flirt (Ashenburg 2009: 18, 36). In the Early Middle Ages (200 – 1000) the attitude towards cleansing changed radically. At that time a clean body and clean clothes often indicated unclean soul, which corresponded with Christian teachings that prevailed in most European societies. This indifference towards physical cleanness was rooted in the belief that body is a temple of God. Grooming the body and cultivating beauty might “corrupt that temple” by potential temptations that might be provoked by a cleansed body. Therefore asceticism, and one of its forms, alousia ‘the state of being unwashed’, became standard behaviour among strong Christian believers. Many saints chose that way of living: St Agnes or St Anthony never washed, St Francis of Assisi revered dirt, St Godric (an English saint) on his pilgrimage to Jerusalem avoided washing or changing clothes. However, filthiness was not characteristic for all saints: St Augustine washed daily, St Olimpias, known for living in celibate, bathed frequently but covered with a robe; similarly did St Ambrose who wore loincloths or breeches (Ashenburg 2009 and Smith 2007). Thus Middle Ages are not characterised only by an unbearable stench of human bodies. In fact, the period from 1000 till about 1550 reflects a shift towards a more comfortable and cleaner life. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century work *Ancrene Wisse*, a guide for nuns, there is an advice to “wash yourself whenever there is need as often as you want, and your things, too – filth was never dear to God, though poverty and plainness are pleasing” (in Ashenburg 2009: 75). At that time, the long-forgotten public baths returned, which was due to the Crusaders, who came back from their campaigns with stories about Turkish baths (or the *hamam*), which was considered a wonderful custom (Ashenburg 2009: 78).

Although very popular in most European countries, the public baths had to disappear for another two centuries (from mid 16<sup>th</sup> till mid 18<sup>th</sup>c.). The Black Death and other recurring plagues that killed millions in Spain, Italy, France, England, Germany, Austria and Hungary struck fear into medieval minds who started to believe that bathing, in particular hot baths, “had a dangerously moistening and relaxing effect on the body. Once heat and water created openings through the skin the plague could easily invade the entire body” (Ashenburg 2009: 94). Hence, water became an enemy.

This led to the dirtiest two centuries in the history of humanity. The time of a clean linen, clouds of heavy perfume and dirty, sweaty bodies. For instance, Elisabeth I who bathed once a month, her successor, James I washed only his fingers; Henri IV of France, Louis XIII or Louis XIV offended by notorious body odour or halitosis (bad breath) (Smith 2007).

It was in the 18<sup>th</sup> century when a more scientific approach to cleanliness and better understanding of the body grooming started to promote hygienic practices as ways to a healthier life.

The changing, and often overlapping, attitudes to the notion of cleanliness might be represented by three words: *cleannes* ‘physical cleannes, grooming, orderliness, strive for beauty’, *purity* ‘more spiritual, religious, ideological strive for innate perfection’ and *hygiene* ‘wholesomeness and healthiness’ (Smith 2007; Ashenburg 2009). Since the aim of the present paper is to focus on the medieval notion of cleanliness what comes next is a brief analysis of the OE and ME terms that are included in the lexical field of cleanness. The term *hygiene* is a later borrowing (around 17<sup>th</sup> century) and hence it will not be included in the present study.

### OLD AND MIDDLE ENGLISH *CLEANNES* TERMS

Although the terms *cleanness* and *purity* were often used interchangeably in medieval English compilations, especially Late Middle English texts (cf. quotations under 1), the term *cleanness* is used here with reference to the lexical field under discussion.

- (1) (a) Ðis chastete, þis **clennesse**, þis **purte**, acseþ þet me loki þe herte uram euele þo<sup>3</sup>tes  
[1340 *Ayenbite* (1866) 202]  
(b) Whanne it is songe off good entente In **clennesse** and in **purete**.  
[c1475(?a1430) *LYDGATE* tr. G. Deguileville *Pilgrimage Life Man* (Tiber.) 22985]  
(c) Whan we be gyuen..to **clennesse** of vertue and **purite** of lyfe.  
[1526 W. BONDE *Pylgrimage of Perfection* III. sig. DDDv]

According to the OED *cleannes* is a derivative of OE *clean* whose primary meaning was ‘clear, free of dirt/filth’, cf.:

- (2) (a) **Clæne** oflete, and **clæne** win, and **clæne** wæter.  
[a1000 *Edgar’s Canons* §39 in Thorpe *Laws* II. 252 (Bosw.)]  
(b) Ðæt eal se lichoma sy **clanes** hiwes. [c1040 in *Sax. Leechd.* II. 296]  
(c) Ealle þa niht wæs seo lyft swiðe **clene** [a1123 *O.E. Chron.* an. 1110]

The earliest attestations reveal that *cleanness* started to be used in an extended, figurative sense ‘moral and ceremonial purity; chastity; innocence; undefiled quality’, cf.:

- (3) (a) Heo on **clænnesse** Gode þeowode. [c890 K. ÆLFRED *Bæda* IV. ix. (Bosw.)]  
(b) Ðat is **clennesse** on englisc. [c1175 *Lamb. Hom.* 105 *Castitas*]  
(c) Meidenhad..ouer all þing lueoð **clænnesse**. [c1230 *Hali Meid.* 11]

This reference to various aspects of human personality and spirituality is probably due to the influence of the early medieval beliefs that revered the purity of the soul rather than of the body (cf. the earlier discussion on medieval hygiene).

According to the sources it was the late 14<sup>th</sup> century when the term started to be used with the meaning of ‘freedom of dirt or filth, cleanness, cf.:

- (4) (a) It nedyth **clennesse** of water. [1398 TREVISA *Barth. De P.R.* XIII. xiv. (1495) 447]  
 (b) The holsomnes & helthe of that londe & the **clennes** out of venyme [*carentia veneni*].  
 [1480 CAXTON *Descr. Brit.* 47]  
 (c) Offycerys to be appoyntyd to have regard of the bewty of the towne and cuntrey, and  
 of the **clennes** of the same. [1538 STARKEY *England* 177]

Once again the shift in the meaning seems to have been dictated by the changing attitudes in the medieval minds. The sense ‘free of dirt or filth’ correlates with the reintroduction of public baths and hence the return of the need for physical comfort, cleansing practices and healthiness (it is worth mentioning here that the Late Middle Ages in England observed the sevenfold rise in the number of medical manuscripts – when compared with the earlier centuries (Singer 1919 in Robbins 1970: 393); this provides yet another evidence for the growing interest in staying clean and healthy).

The next term, *purity*, being a borrowing of Romance origin, entered the English lexicon in the first half of the 13th century with the sense ‘the state or quality of being morally or spiritually pure; innocence, chastity’, cf.:

- (5) Alle mahen & ahen halden a riwle onont **purte** [*a1400 Pepys clennesse*] of heorte.  
 [c1230(?a1200) *Ancrene Riwle* (Corpus Cambr.) (1962) 7]

Interestingly, the occurrence of the Romance item overlaps with the sense shift of *cleanness* from spiritual to physical purity. It is quite possible that the new term started to replace the Anglo Saxon term in the contexts referring to moral aspects of human behaviour. The use of the foreign element instead of the already well known form was a common practice among Middle English compilers. One of the explanations of such a replacement is that compilers used borrowed elements (usually of French or Latin origin) for reasons of style or prestige (cf. studies by Pahta 2004, Sylwanowicz 2007, 2009). In the mind of the medieval man the state of spiritual perfection was ranked higher rather than the state of being well groomed. Hence, the foreign term *purity* might have been preferred in contexts referring to innate cleanness whereas the native term tended to be used to talk about body cleansing.

In time, however, as its Anglo-Saxon equivalent, the term *purity* extended its meaning to ‘the state of being physically pure or unmixed’ (cf. 6) and the two terms started to be used interchangeably (cf. also examples in 1)

- (6) (a) Seuen curnels of a pynappul do In oon sester of wyn that is impure..Anoon hit wol res-  
 seyue a **puryte** [*v.r.* *puritee*; L. *puritatem*]. [?1440tr. Palladius *De Re Rustica*  
 (Fitzw.) XI. 405]  
 (b) Al swete smylling thing hath more **purite** And is more spiritual then stynking may be.  
 [a1500(c1477) T. NORTON *Ordinal of Alchemy* (BL Add.) 1967]

Apart from these two key terms the Old and Middle English lexical field abounds in terms referring to personal hygiene (the discussion to follow is based

on the material found in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Historical Thesaurus of English* and *Thesaurus of Old English* and – for practical reasons - is limited to nouns only; the dates in brackets indicate the first or last recorded occurrence of the item; lack of the date means that a given item was recorded only in OE; no date after the arrow means that a given item is still in use).

The first group includes items that are synonyms (or part-synonyms) of the nouns *cleanness/purity*. These can be subdivided into:

(a) nouns whose primary meaning refers to physical cleanness:

OE: *clænsung*, *syferlicnes*, *unwemnes*, *unwemnedness*, *cleannes/clæennes* (->1721)

ME: *cleanness* (1398->), *shireness* (1225-1340), *purity* (1225->), *cleanship* (1230), *uncorruption* (1382-1824), *pureness* (1398->), *clearness* (1526-1701), *purgation* (1382-1838).

(b) nouns denoting moral, spiritual purity; innocence and chastity:

OE: *clæennes*, *gehealdsumnes*, *geþungennes*, *bilewitnes*, *orceasness*, *þeorfnes*, *unbealu*, *ungescæþfulnes*, *unscæþfulnes*, *unscylld*, *unscylldgung*, *unscylldignes*, *unshathigness*.

ME: *undefouligness* (1400), *purity* (1225 ->), *cleanliness* (1430-1489), *chasthede* (1250-1340), *virginity* (1300->), *chastity* (1305->), *temperance* (1340-1576), *continence* (1380-1868), *chasteness* (1386-1718), *kaste* (a1400), *castimony* (1490), *unlothness* (1200-1225), *loathlessness* (1200), *innoyandness* (1340), *innocence* (1340->), *innocency* (1357-1634; 1800->).

The subdivision reflects the archetypal link between cleanness and innocence, which is probably rooted in our psyche and hence in the language.

The second group comprises items referring to acts of cleaning and grooming:

OE: *feormung*, *fyrn*, *fyrmp*, *clænsung*, *onþwægennes*, *þweal*, *wæsc*, *swilling* (->1430), *ofþweal*.

ME: *cleansing* (1398-1673), *cleaning* (1475->), *mundification* (1543-1810), *abstersion* (1543->), *washing* (1225->), *laundry* (1530-1626), *rinsing* (1440->), *glazing* (1440->), *furbishing* (1463->), *polishing* (1530->), *brushing* (1460), *sweeping* (1480->).

The third group includes purgatives. The key term in this subgroup is obviously *water* (OE *wæter*), necessary in the process of cleansing the body, removing impurities from other liquids or materials, or used in various ceremonial ablutions whose main aim was to (symbolically) wash away the sins or imperfections of the soul.

To other purgative terms belong:

(a) those referring to what is being used in washing the body, eg.: soaps (OE *sape*, *þweal* and ME *sope*, *frensh sope*, *grei sope*, *hard sope*, *neshe sope*, *spanish sope*) or bathing salves (OE *bæþsealf*, *heafodbæþ* and ME *salve*) and,

(b) those used in recovery:

Old English

SALVES/OINMENTS: *læcesealf, sealf, smeorusealf, smerenes, smirung, swæ-sung, balsamum, spaldur, dolgsealf, heafodsealf, sceadesealf, eagsealf, earsealf, muþsealf, topsealf, bansealf, lungensealf, wennsealf*;

LIQUIDS: *dolhdrenc, clænsungdrenc, spiwdrenc, wecedrenc*;

HERBS (purgative or having medicinal properties): *lybcorn, læcewyr, wyrt-drenc, dustdrenc*.

Middle English (from: Sylwanowicz 2009: 355-356)

SALVES: *benedicta, oyntment, emplastre, extractif, grese, unguentum, lectuarie, liniment, apostolicon, electuarie, colliri, paste, salve*.

POCIOUNS/LIQUIDS:

OILS: *oile of roses, ~ of violetes, ~ of almandes, ~ of lupine*, etc. (usually oils are recognised by the second element, being a major ingredient of this liquid).

DRINKS: *potages (stew/soup), lectuarie, licour, oximel (simple and compound), sirup, colagoge, drynk, stew of herbs* – these were medicinal liquids that can be administered internally.

POWDERS/POWDERLIKE SUBSTANCES: *powder, colliri, vitriol, alum*.

In addition we find media for administering medications, such as: *pills, fumigations, enemas, suppositories* that also had purgative properties, cf.:

- (7) Suppositories ben conuenient fore þis sekenesse and þey schal beput in hire priuey membre as men put suppositories yn a mans fundament **to purge** hys wombe, but suppositories ordeynd fore wymmen schal be bounden with a threde a bouthe hire thyes lest þey werun ydrawen all yn to þe moder... [*Sekenesse of Wymmen* 1, MEMT p. 35]

The inclusion of remedies in the lexical field under discussion is dictated by the fact that in medieval times pharmaceutical practices were focusing on purging (cleansing) the body of an excess of any humour (phlegm, choler, melancholy and blood – hence common practice of phlebotomy ‘blood-letting’). The basic premise of the humoral therapy was to keep the perfect balance of the four humours – otherwise, illness would result (for more on purgative properties of medicines in Middle English medical compilations see Sylwanowicz 2009: 349-362).

#### WORDS DESIGNATING PLACES AND ACCESSORIES OF PERSONAL HYGIENE IN MEDIEVAL ENGLISH

In the area of names for places of personal hygiene, two subcategories can be distinguished, that of the synonyms of *privy, toilet* and the synonyms of *bathroom*.

According to the *Historical Thesaurus of English*, Old English had fourteen words denoting a privy, cf.:

*adel(a), earsgang, feltun, forþgang, gangern, gangpytt, gangtun, genge, grep/grype, grof, heolstor, niedhus, utgang, gong < gang* (OE – 1576)

The cursory analysis of the list above shows that it included mainly derivatives of the noun *gang / gong* ‘a privy’, the key word for a toilet, and a few other words (*adel, feltun, grep, grof, heolstor* and *niedhus*), whose status and the meaning ‘toilet’ is scarcely documented.

The main Old English word for a privy, a latrine was **gang**, related to ON. *gang-r*, OHG. *feld-gang* and MDu. *ganc*. Some examples of *gang* and its derivatives are provided under (8):

- (8) (a) Ðaða he to **gange** com. [c1000 Ælfric Hom. I. 290.]  
 (b) hwilum þurh þa nosa hym yrnþ þæt blod, hwilum þane on **arsganga** sitt, hyt hym fram yrnþ. [Peri Didaxeon 64.49.1]  
 (c) on þære nyðemestan fleringe wæs heora **gangpytt**. (...) on þære oðre fleringe wæs heora nytena foda gelogod. [Ælfric *Interrogationes Sigeuulfi in Genesin* 49.328]  
 (d) *sponsoromum* digle **gangern** ‘hidden privy’. [AntGl 6 590]

The nouns under (8) contain the element *gang*, whose primary meaning, according to Bosworth — Toller, was that of ‘going, journey, step, way, path, passage’. The meaning ‘a privy’ is provided together with the senses ‘a passage’ and ‘a drain’. The development of the meaning ‘a privy’ in the case of the word *gang* seems to be related to the shape and character of such places in Middle Ages, of which we know mainly from the surviving medieval castles and monasteries. Early latrines were built in to the outer wall with a long drop below to the moat or a river. Another word referring to a toilet, *grep*, also highlighted its functioning as it meant ‘a ditch, a drain’. In the *DOE*, a compound *feltungrep* is also listed (only 1 occurrence). Cf.:

- (9) (a) [On] gengan **grép** in *latrinae cuniculum* [Wrt. Voc. ii. 80, 66]  
 (b) wyrse is, þæt mon ðæs ofer riht bruce, þonne hine mon on **feltungrepe** wiorpe; on þære **grepe** he wiorðeð to meoxe. [HomU 11 (Verc 7) 88]

The word *fel-tūn* was also used with reference to a toilet (7 occurrences in the *DOE Corpus*), e.g.:

- (10) (...) ða gewearð hine ðæt he [Saul] gecierde inn to ðæm scræfe, & wolde him ðær gan to **feltune** [Saul quippe persecutor, cum ad purgandum uentrem speluncam fuisset ingressus]  
 [Gregory the Great, *Pastoral Care* 28.197.14]

*An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* informs us that *fel-tūn* possessed the meanings ‘an enclosed place, garden, privy, dunghill’, glossing L *secessus, latrīna, sterquilinium*.

The primary meaning of *adel* was that of ‘filth, a filthy place’, but the specific sense of ‘a sewer, a privy’ is also found in the *DOE*, e.g.:

- (11) (...) þa cwelleras ... behyddon his halgan lichaman on anum adelseaðe ... þa æteowde  
 Sebastianus on swæfne anre wudewan, Lucina geciged, swiðe æwfæst man, and sæde  
 hwær his lichama læg on þam **adelan** [*Ælfric's Life of a Saints* (Sebastian) 456]

Another important issue concerning the semantic area discussed is that it has always been unmentionable, a taboo. As a result, a number of euphemisms designating ‘a toilet’ can be found in English at all stages of its development. In Old English the following euphemisms can be enumerated: *grof*, *heolstor* ‘a hidden, secret place’, *utgang* ‘an exit’, *niedhus* ‘a needed house’.

The only Old English word surviving in Middle English was *gang*. Its last attestation in the *OED Online* dates back to 1576. *Adel* is also found in the *OED Online*, but the meaning ‘a privy’ is absent, which shows that it was transient or doubtful beyond Old English.

In the thirteenth century’s towns, the toilet is usually a privy in the stable yard or the so-called “garderobe”. Joseph and Frances Gies (1981: 44 - 45) describe such a Medieval “garderobe” as located “(...) off the sleeping room, over a chute to a pit in the cellar that is emptied at intervals. Ideally such a convenience is built out over the water, an arrangement enjoyed by the count’s palace on the canal. Next best is a drainpipe to a neighbouring ditch or stream.”

As regards the Middle English words for a toilet, the following items, which appeared in English by 1500, are listed in the *HTE*:

*privy* (a1225->), *room-house* (c1250), *chamber foreign* (1297), *foreign* (1303-1570), *wardrobe* (1382-c1450), *siege* (c1400-1555), *kocay* (c1440), *siege-house* (1440-1647), *privy-house* (c1460-1697), *siege-hole* (1477, 1479), *withdraught* (1493, 1494), *draught* (c1500-1681), *stool of ease* (1501)

The words provided above highlight a number of different features of a toilet as it was perceived in Middle Ages. First, the list includes nouns emphasizing the concept of privacy and intimacy of a toilet (*privy*, *privy-house*, *withdraught*, *draught*). Second, there are nouns referring to the location of a toilet outside a house (*a chamber foreign*, *foreign*, *wardrobe*). Third, there are items describing the shape of a toilet (*siege*, *siege-house*, *siege-hole*, *stool of ease*). The last two items in the list are *kocay* meaning ‘a stream, drain, gutter’ and *room-house* ‘a clear house’.

The consulted sources inform us that the first occurrence of the noun *privy* meaning ‘a toilet’ probably dates back to the first half of the thirteenth century. It derives from the OF adjective *privé*, which originally meant ‘intimate or familiar’ and later developed the senses ‘belonging to or reserved for the exclusive use of a particular person or group of people’ (c1140), ‘secret, confidential’ (1174), ‘having or sharing in knowledge of (something secret and private)’ (a1321 or earlier

in Anglo-Norman), ‘isolated (of a place)’ (c1341). Consider the first attestations of the noun *privy* in Middle English:

- (12) (a) A mid ðe menske of ði neb ðis ðe fe□ereste del bitwene mudes smeçh & nases smel  
ne berest ðu as twa **priuées** ðurles.  
[?c1225 (?a1200) *Ancrene Riwe* (Cleo. C. 6) (1972) 202]
- (b) Tarquinus Priscus..made walles and vices and opere strong places and **priuēþ** [?read:  
pruieis; vr. pryvey; *Higd.*(2) necessary thynges; L cloacas].  
[(a1387) *Trev. Higd.*(StJ-C H.1) 3.87]
- (c) A foul thyng is it..That of his throte he maketh his **pryuee**.  
[(c1390) Chaucer *CT.Pard.*(Manly-Rickert) C.527]

Containing the element *draught* of OE *dragan* ‘to draw’, the nouns *withdraught*, *draught* meant ‘a place of retreat in a house’, which could also comprise the sense ‘a toilet’, cf.:

- (13) (a) For borde & tymbre for the **wedraught**.  
[1493-4 *Leicester Borough Rec.* (1901) II. 344]
- (b) Christ sayde all thynges that a man eatethe..is sent downe into the **draughte** awaye.  
[?a1500 *Wycket* (1828) 7]

The meaning of the nouns *a chambre forein* (c1300), *foreign* (c1300), *wardrobe* (a1325) highlight the concept of an outhouse, a toilet as a place located outside a house. One of the senses of ME *forein* was ‘what is outside’, which proved useful in naming a toilet. As regards *wardrobe*, its primary meaning was ‘a room for the storage of clothing, a dressing room’, but the *OED* and the *MED* also provide the meaning ‘an outhouse, a privy, a latrine’, probably deriving from the sense ‘a private chamber’. Consider the examples:

- (14) (a) In to an **chaumbre forein** [vr. forene] þe gadeling gan wende, Pat king edmond com  
ofte to, & in þe dunge þar Hudde him bineþe.  
[c1325(c1300) *Glo.Chron.A* (Clg A.11) 6335]
- (b) Ful foule ys **þ**at **forreyne** **þ**at ys comoun for al certeyne.  
[1303 R. Brunne *Handl. Synne* 7436]
- (c) Þei destroo3eden þe hous of baal, & þey madyn for it **wardrobis** [vr. wardropis;  
*WB*(2): priuyes; L latrinās] vn to þys day.  
[(a1382) *WBible*(1) (Bod 959) 4 Kings 10.27]

The items *siege*, *siege-house*, *siege-hole*, *stool* (*of ease*) refer to the shape and functioning of a toilet which resembles a chair. The nouns containing the element *siege* (ME *segge*), deriving from OF *siege* ‘a seat, chair, stool’, appeared in English in the early fifteenth century (15ab). As regards the noun *stool* (<OE *stōl*), its meaning ‘a privy seat, chamber pot; a stool used in a privy’ developed in the late fourteenth century. The *MED* also enumerates words such as *prive stol*, *clos stol*, *holed stol*, which meant ‘an enclosed seat with a chamber pot’ (15cd). Consider the examples:

- (15) (a) A man schulde not, as soone as he hadde ete, anoon ri3t go to **sege** [L sellam] as doiþ  
a beest. [a1400 *Lanfranc* (Ashm 1396) 168/31]
- (b) In hys last days he turnyd childisch..& lakkyd reson þat he cowd not don hys owyn  
esement to gon to a **sege**. [(a1438) *MKempe A* (Add 61823) 181/3]
- (c) When þe medecyne is soden in a potte, putte it vnder a **persed stole** [\**Ch.(I)*: sege; L  
sella] þat he may sitte..and take þe vapour..by tho lowe parties.  
[?c1425 *Chauliac(2)* (Paris angl.25) 326/30]
- (d) In tyme of pees they bring it up and sette it down and brusshe it and clense it and  
safely keepe it, and the **stoole** is here kept.  
[(c1475) *Ordin.Househ.Edw.IV* (Hrl 642) 40]

The item *kocay* is scarcely documented in Middle English. According to the *MED*, it was first recorded in the late thirteenth century and the meaning ‘a privy’ is found only in one text of the fifteenth century, cf.:

- (16) **Kocay** [vr. koley], priuy: Cloaca. [(1440) *PParv.*(Hrl 221) 281]

The element *room* of *room-house* (ME *rum-hous*) seems to be the dialectal form containing the unrounded [ü] deriving from OE *ryman* ‘to clear’. The meaning ‘a privy’ is recorded only in one text, *The Owl and the Nightingale*, cf.:

- (17) Men habbed among odre iwende  
A **rum-hus** at heore bures ende. [c1250 *Owl & Night*. 652]

Bathing occupied an important position in medieval life. “Bathrooms” were mainly public bath-houses for both men and women. As Smith (2007: 178) writes, the medieval municipal bath-houses, especially hot baths, the so-called *stews*, were very often associated with brothels. Medieval rulers and aristocracy, e.g. Charlemagne, were particularly fond of thermal baths where they organized bath feasts, very often for political purposes.

As regards the Medieval synonyms of *bathroom*, a place for bathing, a bath-house, the following items can be enumerated:

PLACE FOR BATHING: *bæpstede*, *bæpstow*, *burnstow*  
 BATH-HOUSE: *bæp* (OE->), *bæpern*, *bæphus*, *burnsele*, *wash-house* (OE-1704), *bain* (1494-1693)  
 HOT BATHROOM: *stofa/stofu* (OE), *stew* (c1390-1865), *stove* (1456-1756), *balne* (1471-1605)

The Old English nouns designating a bathroom or a bath-house listed above are not well-documented in the surviving texts. According to the *DOE*, *bæpstede* occurred 3 times, *bæpstow* 1 time, *bæpern* 1 time, *bæphus* 3 times, *burnsele* 1 time and *burnstow* 17 times (only in charters). Only the noun *bæp* ‘a public bath’ reveals a higher frequency of occurrence. Yet, its meaning ‘a public bath’ is secondary with regard to the meaning ‘a bath, the action of bathing’.

In Middle English the list of synonyms of *a bathroom* was not extended. In fact, the *HTE* provides only one word, *bain*, which appeared in the late fifteenth century. The OE noun *bath* must have occupied a relatively strong position, thus blocking any further development at least until the sixteenth century.

The last category of words to be discussed includes nouns referring to the accessories used while bathing, which, for practical reasons is here limited to the most basic terms:

VESSEL FOR BATHING: *bæþfæt* (OE), *wæscels* (OE), *washel* (1303), *laver* (1340), *lavatory* (1447-a1633), *bain* (1491-1543)

VESSEL FOR WASHING THE HANDS (AND FACE): *mundleow* (OE), *washel* (a1375), *lavatory* (a1375-1866), *laver* (a1386), *washing-bowl* (a1500)

TOWEL: *lin* (OE), *waterclap* (OE), *wætersceat* (OE), *wæterscyte* (OE), *towel* (a1300), *twell* (1422/1423)

HAND-TOWEL: *handhrægl* (OE), *handclap* > *handcloth* (OE - c1475), *sur-nap* (1381-a1548)

The medieval bedroom was sparsely furnished, but it had “(...) a fixed stone washbasin, a *laver*, with a can of water hanging above it and a cloth hanging by (...) along with a portable washstand.” (Smith 2007: 156). J. and F. Gies (1981: 44) add that “perhaps once a week a wooded tub for bathing” was set up. Such a bathtub was “made from a sawn half-cask, lined with linen cloth, possibly with a richer fabric draped over an iron above, making a draught-free private enclosure.” (Smith 2007: 156-157).

Separate subcategories of vessels for washing the hands and hand-towels indicate that it was a relevant part of the cultivation of beauty in Middle Ages. Smith (2007: 147) points out that “Guest honour rituals like handwashing at all meals were scrupulously observed (...)”. An expansion of vocabulary naming the vessels for handwashing seems to have started in the fourteenth century when words such as *washel*, *lavatory*, *laver* occurred.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

The discussion of the lexis of personal hygiene in Old and Middle English presented above is only a pilot study, which definitely deserves a more thorough investigation. Even a cursory analysis of the selected portion of vocabulary has highlighted its variation and complexity.

The following tentative conclusions can be drawn on the basis of what was said:

- (1) The study of terms referring to cleanness field allows one to observe clearly the changing attitudes towards the notion of hygiene and beauty – from physical to spiritual beauty/purity.
- (2) The examples under study (e.g. *cleanness* and *purity*) show that the use of Latin/French forms was not often necessary to fill the gaps in English lexicon, as there were terms in vernacular that accompanied the foreign element. The question is what motivated the compilers to use Latin instead of already known forms. One possible explanation is that the compilers may have used the foreign elements for reasons of style or prestige (cf. also Pahta 2004).
- (3) The stock of synonyms of *a toilet* in Old and Middle English was relatively rich and divergent, especially as regards the incorporation of euphemisms. In fact, it showed a greater variation when compared to the synonyms of *a bathroom*. It shows that in the Middle Ages a privy was a taboo and thus it required deliberately imprecise and indirect names. On the other hand, the nouns designating places and instruments related to bathing and washing are less numerous and varied. What can be observed is the lexical expansion of such words in the fourteenth century, which extends well beyond the sixteenth century.
- (4) The Old and Middle English cleanness terms laid solid foundations for the formation of later, more scientific vocabularies referring to the notion of hygiene and purity.

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