

# Leeds Studies in English

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the same conclusion independently, cites from "The Proverbs of Alfred" (J. Hall, *Selections from Early ME.*, p. 19, 11.55-6) the striking parallel

þan knyhte bi houep.  
kenliche on to fone.  
for to werie þat lond.  
wiþ hunger and wiþ herivinge.

B.D.

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### SEYND BACOUN.

All previous commentators on the *Nonne Preestes Tale* have assumed that *seynd* in the phrase *seynd bacoun* (CT. B 4035) is the p.p. of *sengen* and have translated 'singed, broiled' (so F. N. Robinson), or 'smoked' (so G. H. Cowling in his *Selections from Chaucer* published last year). But neither sense is quite satisfactory and one is tempted to seek another etymology. I suggest that *seynd* is derived from OF. *saim*, *sain*, 'fat,' in Modern Standard French preserved only in *saindoux*, 'lard.' The *-m* forms alone are recorded in ME. (NED. *seam*, *sb*<sup>3</sup>), but, under EDD. *saim*, *-n* forms are noted from Lancashire and E. Kent. The p.p. of a derivative verb, *seym'd up* 'choked with fat,' is found in Northumberland, and it should be remembered that the adj. *fat* is participial in origin. 'Fat bacon' suits the context well. Thirty years ago when I was a boy in S. Lincolnshire the small-holders and farm labourers ate very little flesh-meat but fat bacon of their own feeding and curing. The fatter it was, the better they liked it. The *povre widwe's* pig would be fattened on acorns, beech-mast and the like (cf. *masty swyne* at HF. iii, 687) and slaughtered before winter.

If however the derivation from ME. *sengen* be preferred, the exact meaning is, I think, 'sooty.' NED. cites Dryden's *a sing'd Sow's Head*=*fissa fumosum sinciput aure* (Persius vi, 70), and *rashers of sindg'd bacon*, which is merely of course an

adaptation of *seynd bacoun* in the Nonne Preestes Tale. This may in its turn owe something to

sordida terga suis nigro pendentia tigno  
in Ovid's episode of Philemon and Baucis (*Met.* viii, 648).

Incidentally the reference to *broun breed* in the preceding line is a century earlier than the first in NED. It should be noted too that it was probably made of rye flour and a good deal darker than anything we understand by 'brown bread.'

B.D.

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### MN.E. COBLE

NED. (s.v. *Coble*<sup>1</sup>) plausibly suggests that Mn. E. *coble* 'kind of boat' is a British loan-word; cf. Welsh *ceubal*, Breton *caubal* 'kind of boat.' The Celtic word is itself in all probability a borrowing from Latin; cf. Lat. *caupulus*, *caupilus*, *caupillus* 'kind of little boat';<sup>2</sup> Provençal *caupol*, Spanish *copano*. The word must have been borrowed into Celtic at an early date, for Lat. *au* is represented by Mn. Welsh *eu* (< Pr. Brit. *ow*), as in Mn. Welsh *Meuric* O. Welsh *Mouric* from Lat.

<sup>1</sup> 'A short, flat-bottomed rowing-boat, used in salmon-fishing and for crossing ferries, etc. [Scotland]; an open or deckless fishing-boat used principally on the north-east coast, with sharp bows, flat, sloping stern and without a heel.' Scotland, Northumberland, Durham, Yorkshire and East Anglia (J. Wright, *English Dialect Dictionary* s.v. *coble* sb.<sup>1</sup>). This evidence and the quotations from NED. seem to indicate that the word has been confined to certain areas from the earliest times. Cobles are still to be seen in plenty at Holy Island.

<sup>2</sup> See *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* s.v. *caupulus*. The etymology of the Latin word is doubtful; see A. Walde, *Lateinisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* s.v. *caupulus*. Semitic origin for the word seems possible: Arabic *quff-at-un* 'panier (*espuerta*, *goja en que cogen las espigas*); grand panier rond enduit de bitume dont on se sert à Baçra en guise de barque' (Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes* ii, 382-3); see Niebuhr, *Reize naar Arabië* ii, 204; Ker Porter, *Travels in Georgia, Persia etc.* ii, 260. A picture of the modern *guffa* as used on the Tigris will be found in Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien* i, 251 and, at p. 179 of L. W. King's *History of Babylon*, a bas-relief in the British Museum showing its Assyrian prototype is depicted. Cf. also Ethiopic *qaffō* 'large basket between five and nine feet long used for beehives and storing grain.' In order to explain the Latin *caup-* we should have to assume (i) that the word reached Latin, not from Arabic direct, but *via* East Syriac which has a *ṣ* in such positions—hence \**qup-* (see Nöldeke, *Kurzgefasste syrische Grammatik* p. 15)—and (ii) that the Semitic *qu* (with back *q*) was heard as [kau] which is phonetically very probable. (From information kindly placed at my disposal by Dr. G. R. Driver and Mr. A. F. L. Beeston).