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THE VOCABULARY OF *THE METRICAL LIFE OF
ST ROBERT OF KNARESBOROUGH*

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British Museum MS Egerton 3143 is a collection of works in verse and prose dealing with the life and cult of St Robert of Knaresborough (d 1218), and no copies of these works are known from other sources. The most important items are three lives of the saint, one in Latin verse, one in Latin prose and the third in ME verse. This last, *The Metrical Life of St Robert of Knaresborough* (ff 39b-60b), was printed by Henry Drury for the Roxburghe Club in 1824, together with four other pieces in ME verse which are to be found in the same manuscript.

There is insufficient evidence for any precise date to be assigned to the composition of *The Metrical Life*: the upper limit can be determined by the date at which the manuscript itself was written, namely the late fifteenth century; but the lower limit may possibly be as much as a century earlier.

In the process of compiling a glossary to *The Metrical Life* it was found that some words and phrases, or meanings of words and phrases, occurred for which the first quotation in OED is dated later than the upper date-limit assigned to the poem; and that other words and phrases, or meanings of words and phrases, were unrecorded in OED. The words and phrases in question are listed below in these two groups as far as possible; quotations are transcribed from the manuscript itself as the Roxburghe Club edition is inaccurate, but the punctuation is modern.

1. *Words and phrases, or meanings of words and phrases, occurring at a date earlier than the first quotation in OED.*

kemmes (. . . *wyth hys cambe*) 'chastises'.

He *kemmes* the crowell wyth Hys cambe,

Off a lyon makys a lambe.

(f 49b, ll 23-4; OED *kemb* v 1c and *comb* v¹ 3)

Apart from their use in the phrase 'to comb with a three-legged stool', meaning 'to thrash or beat', neither *kemb* nor *comb* is recorded in OED in the sense 'to chastise' before 1600; even then the examples given have a humorous application only, and such an application is unlikely in the above context, where *He* refers to God.

kytte 'belly'.

Als a hounde þat kastes out of hys *kytte*
And ay turnes and takys eft hys vomytte.

(f 43a, ll 9-10; OED *kyte*)

The first quotation for the word is dated 1540; it is cited as belonging to the Northern and Scottish dialects, and is still to be found there. The etymology is uncertain, but forms cited in OED for comparison are Early Modern Dutch *kijte*, *kiete* 'the fleshy part of the body'.

repentt 'mourned, was sad (because of some happening)'.

Than Robertt rewed and sair *repentt*
And to Saynt Hylde chapell he wentt.

(f 44b, ll 18-19; OED *repent* v 3c)

The required sense is not given in OED before 1590 (in Spenser), and then only one example is given. The usual meaning when the verb is intransitive is 'to feel contrition or compunction for something done (usually something that one has done oneself)'; this meaning is possible in the above context, but the other seems preferable.

toyled 'annoyed, wearied'.

T[h]e persone tonge, þat *toyled* þis sayntt
And displeasd hym wyth hys playntt,
Was wyth vengiaunce and wyth wreke
Spoyled þat he myght neuer speke.

(f 56b, ll 19-22; OED *toil* v¹ II. 5)

The early transitive senses recorded in OED are 'to pull, drag about', literally and figuratively; the meaning found here is not recorded till 1549.

spoyled 'injured (in a physical sense)'.

(see quotation above; OED *spoil* v¹ III. 10b)

The required sense, 'to inflict bodily injury on a living creature',

is not given in OED till 1577, except in the sense 'to cut up a hen', which is found from 1440 (see OED *spoil* v¹ III.9) *trayle* 'sledge'.

Tway droghe a *trayle* wyth pykes sere.

(f 49a, l 5; OED *trail* sb¹ II.3)

Until the sixteenth century *trail* is recorded only with the meaning 'something that hangs or trails (such as trailing leaves or clothes)' — see OED *trail* sb¹ I — and the sense required here, 'something trailed', is not cited till 1570.

In addition there may be noted the following words, of which the first OED quotations are from the late fifteenth century, the same period as the upper date-limit for *The Metrical Life*:

begyled 'foiled'.

On theffes þan vengiaunce doune gun lyght

Þat robbed Sayntt Roberd on a nyght . . .

Sway sall robbers be *begyled*.

(f 51b, ll 11-12, 14; OED *beguile* v 3)

'foiled' is the best sense in this context, and the first example of this meaning in OED is dated 1483.

domicelle 'dwelling-place'.

Bott he sware he suld hym skathe

And doune gar dyng hys *domicelle*

Opon the morn, euerylkay dele.

(f 48b, ll 20-2; OED *domicile* sb 1)

The first example cited in OED is dated c 1477. No form with *-celle* is given, the vowel always being *-i-*; but *-e-* is necessary here if a true rhyme is intended.

2. *Words and phrases, or meanings of words and phrases, unrecorded in OED.*

in hys dede 'indeed'.

[He] com to Knaresburgh, als I rede,

Robertt to vysett *in hys dede*.

(f 50a, ll 9-10; cf OED *deed* 5b & c)

OED gives no example of this phrase; probably it is simply a rhyming tag used to fill up the the line, and means no more than 'indeed'.

fytte 'incident' or 'exciting event'.

Forthirmare now wyll I flytte
 To enforme youe of a *fytte*,
 Kynge Johanne how Syr Bryane broght;
 Hys celle to se he him besoght.

(f 55a, ll 5-8; cf OED *fit* sb¹ 1 and *fit* sb² 1 and 2)

According to OED two distinct words are found in ME: (i) from OE *fitt*, strong fem., 'part or section of a poem or song; a canto' and (ii) from OE *fitt*, of uncertain gender and occurring only once, 'conflict, struggle; painful or exciting experience'. If the first of these words is the source of *fytte* in *The Metrical Life*, the meaning must be somewhat looser to fit the context and must refer to one episode of the 'part' or 'section', i.e. to the 'incident' itself. Possibly, however, *of a* can be interpreted 'in a'.

frenesyse 'phrenetics, epileptics'.

Lunatykes and *frenesyse*
 Thruh hys myght ware mayd full wyse.

(f 60a, ll 6-7; OED *frenzy* sb and adj B1)

The word appears to be a plural noun to balance *lunatykes*. The OED has an example, dated 1577, of *frenesie* used as an adjective, but there is no example of the word used as a noun meaning 'a phrenetic'.

to hys handes 'to hand'.

He hired and had *paim* *to hys handes*,
 Als scriptur says, four seruandes.

(f 45a, ll 21-2; cf OED *hand* sb 34a)

The sense appears to be the same as NE *to hand* 'nearby', but OED gives no example of this phrase in the plural or with a possessive intervening.

by the horne 'abundantly'.

Roberd sayd, 'In Gode ys grace,
 That godely gyffes vs kow and corne.'
 'Yha,' quod Yue, 'bott noght *by the horne*.'

(f 56a, ll 2-4; cf OED *horn* sb III.12b)

Apparently these words express the same idea as *cornu copia*, but no example is given in OED of a phrase used in this way.

modynesse 'greatness of spirit'.

'Se,' he sayd, 'all in this house,
Howe byrddys and bestys to Robert bouse;
Howe meke, how myld þat Roberd ys.'
All meruailed off hys *modynesse*.

(f 42a, ll 13-16; cf OED *moodiness*)

OE *modignes* had two different meanings (given by Bosworth-Toller): in a bad sense 'pride', in a good sense 'greatness of spirit, magnanimity'; and the latter is the one required here. But, according to OED, this meaning did not survive beyond the OE period, as the only meanings found after the OE period are 'pride, anger' (with the first quotation from c 1000) and 'the state of being moody, sulky' (from 1858).

tyfeld 'disarranged'.

All the vessell þat he fand
He *tyfeld* and touched þaim wyth hys hand.

(f 54a, ll 3-4; cf OED *tiffle* v¹ 1 and 2)

The meanings of this word given in OED are not appropriate in the above context; but NE *tiffle* (OED *tiffle*, *tifle* v²), which is not cited before 1811, has the meanings 'to disorder, disarrange', which fit the context.

type 'trick'.

The fend . . .
To Robertt had great inuy . . .
He thoghte to teyne hym wyth a *type*.

(f 53b, ll 18-19, 21)

The only noun recorded in OED that approaches the meaning required here is NE *tipe* (OED *tipe* sb² dial.), 'a kind of trap for catching mice, rabbits', but it does not occur till 1788. A ME verb, *type* (OED *tip* v² 1.1), is found from the fourteenth century meaning 'to overthrow, cause to fall'; there is possibly some connexion between this and the noun in the text, which may perhaps mean 'a plan to overthrow, a stratagem'.

waned 'grew pale'.

Bott he etchedewed ouer all thyng
Wordes to speke of vanite
Wyth freinde or fay; ay wald he fle.
Ay to hys mette when he suld flytte,
In sylence sadly wald he sytte;
Hys visage *waned* swa wald he wepe,
Opon a pamentt ly and slepe
A lytyll space . . .

(f 45a, ll 12-19; cf OED *wane* v 1.3)

This meaning, though found in OED, always refers to an inanimate object or to light.

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