

Medieval Latrines and the Law¹

Dolly Jørgensen

“If the dog is tied to the chamber then he should not attack people that go to the chamber to sit on wood.” So says the *Grágás*, the Icelandic law code from the 1100s.² While “sitting on wood,” as using a latrine was called, people have always wanted to be left alone. But medieval government officials knew that people could not be left alone when making decisions about latrines because their decisions affected other city dwellers and the overall cleanliness of the city. Houses of waste could be troublesome to city residents and authorities alike.

This article will analyze two types of latrine regulation in far northern Europe during the medieval period: latrine placement and waste disposal. It will show that latrines in the later fourteenth through mid-sixteenth centuries were very much within the public sphere. Public regulation of latrine placement and waste disposal was required to control individual behavior for the larger public good. Making this private matter into a public concern was integral to good city government in the eyes of elite citizens.

The cities whose records are included in this study are shown in Map 1. All of these urban centers had similar population sizes of 5,000 to 10,000 in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. None of them had significant Roman sanitary infrastructure still in use in the later medieval period, unlike counterpart cities in France and Italy; therefore, their sanitary infrastructure had to be created anew in this time period. In addition, each city had a city council composed of a mayor and aldermen that legislated sanitation activities. The records of these councils and city expenditures books form the main source material of this article.³ Archeological evidence supplements our understanding of actual latrine placement and use.

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, 2006. Thanks to Richard Hoffmann of York University for organizing the session on “The Stench of the Middle Ages” in which it appeared.

² Quoted in Bård Gram and Knut Høiaas, *Bare boss? Håndtering av avfall i Bergen gjennom 1000 år* (Bergen: Bryggen Museum, 2000), 5.

³ In Coventry, *The Coventry Leet Book: or Mayor's Register, Containing the records of the City Court Leet or View of Frankpledge, A.D. 1420-1555, with Divers other matters*, transcribed and ed. Mary Dormer Harris, four parts (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co, Ltd., 1913) contains the semi-annual council proceedings. In York, a similar set of vol-



Map 1: Locations of cities included in this article

The sanitary condition of medieval cities has been much neglected in the historical literature. For England, only the metropolis of London has received significant treatments. Ernest L. Sabine's two articles on London written in the 1930s are admirable for their revelation of the concern for cleanliness in the medieval city and explication of the practical steps taken by the city government to sanitize London.⁴ There is limited scholarship on the condition of French cities,

umes recorded complaints brought before the council and legislation passed in the city, which have been published in several different sets: *York Memorandum Book*, Part I and II, ed. Maud Sellers (Durham, UK: Andrews & Co., 1912 and 1915); *York Memorandum Book (B/Y)*, ed. Joyce W. Percy (Gateshead, UK: Northumberland Press Ltd, 1973); and *York Civic Records*, vol. II-IV, ed. Angelo Raine (York: Yorkshire Archeological Society 1940, 1942, 1945). *The York Bridgemasters' Accounts*, trans. Philip M. Stell (York: York Archaeological Trust, 2003) recorded financial transactions related to the town bridges. For Norwich, two volumes of the city records have been printed with extracts from various city registers: *The Records of the City of Norwich*, 2 vols, ed. W. Hudson and J.C. Tingey (Norwich: Jarrold & Sons, Ltd, 1906 and 1910). Aberdeen's early medieval city records are collected in *Early Records of Aberdeen 1317, 1398-1407*, ed. William Croft Dickinson (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1957). The Scandinavian city laws are recorded in collections of royal transactions.

⁴ Ernst L. Sabine, "Latrines and Cesspools of Mediaeval London," *Speculum* 9.3 (Jul 1934): 303-321 and "City Cleaning in Mediaeval London," *Speculum* 12.1 (Jan 1937): 19-43. Sa-

the only work available in English being André Guillerme's *Age of Water*, and there have been two recent English-language books on the Italian city-states.⁵ Other than Sabine's work on London, none of these discuss in any detail how medieval city governments involved themselves in the regulation of latrines. This is an unfortunate oversight because latrine regulation gives modern scholars insight into material conditions of the medieval urban space, as well as the workings of practical city government.

The first issue that medieval city governments attempted to control was latrine placement. The location of a latrine had a direct impact on neighbors and other city dwellers. Waste deposited in the latrine might seep onto others' properties or into the street. The stench might offend passers-by. Waste resisted being confined to its designated location; therefore, extra care had to be taken by the city officials to control it. Where were latrines actually constructed and what kinds of regulation did medieval city governments attempt to impose on them?

Archeological evidence gives us evidence about the locations of latrines in the Middle Ages. In Bergen's commercial area of Bryggen, located near the wharf on the bay named Vågen, it was customary to have an indoor latrine, usually in the corner of the residence through the twelfth century. These latrines generally allowed multiple individuals to use them at the same time. Two and three-seaters were common finds in Bergen, and even a four-seater was recovered. As the population grew in the later medieval period, rows of small latrines appear in the narrow lanes between buildings and warehouses. Latrines like these in alleys were simply constructed as a box with removable walls so that the waste could be emptied or run out into the alley.⁶ Several different latrine types have been found in archeological excavations in Bergen, including in the corner of a residence, in a separate attached room on ground floor, in a room on the second floor overhanging an alley, in between two buildings, and as a separate standing structure.⁷ What this indicates is that a large number of latrine configurations were possible within one city and latrines often abutted others' prop-

bine found that London had at least thirteen city latrines in the fourteenth century ("Latrines and Cesspools of Mediaeval London," 307-309).

⁵ For France see André Guillerme, *The Age of Water: The Urban Environment in the North of France, A.D. 300-1800* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1988) and Jean-Pierre Leguay, *La Pollution au Moyen Age* (Paris : Editions Jean-Paul Gisserot, 1999). On the Italian City-States, see Ronald E. Zupko and Robert A. Laures, *Straws in the Wind: Medieval Urban Environmental Law – The Case of Northern Italy* (Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1996) and Michael Kucher, *The Water Supply System of Siena, Italy: The Medieval Roots of the Modern Networked City* (London: Routledge, 2005). Lynn Thronthike had an early article proposing that the medieval city was not nearly as dirty as modern writers would make it out to be. He provides a cursory look at some of the city statutes about cleanliness in France, Germany, and Italy. "Sanitation, Baths, and Street-Cleaning in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," *Speculum* 3.2 (Apr 1928): 192-203.

⁶ Gram and Høiaas, *Bare boss?*, 7.

⁷ Bård Økland, "Det Ureine Avfallet? Ein arkeologisk analyse av avfallshandtering i Bergen 1150-1700" (PhD diss., Universitetet i Bergen, 1998), 29.

erties. In order to control the latrine placement, city governments instituted legal restrictions on it.

One type of regulation concerned the location of latrines in relation to the owner's property line. The earliest one I have found is a 1269 city law from Ribe, Denmark requiring that latrines be built at least 14 feet from cemeteries, at least 10 feet from the nearest street and at least 6 feet from the nearest neighbor.⁸ The Bergen city privileges from 1487 mandated that latrines could not be closer to the city street or their neighbor than a distance of 2 feet and were not permitted to discharge filth to the street or to the neighbor.⁹ By requiring a certain distance from the latrine to the property line, these medieval governments were making human waste management a public affair. Excrement belonged in the private sphere, not on the public streets or running onto another person's property. The medieval city governments took it as their prerogative to manage this potential conflict among residents.

Medieval illustrations show that latrines were often placed to allow direct disposal of excrement into water bodies. For example, in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *Netherlandish Proverbs*, the patron of an overhanging latrine is shown prominently depositing his waste in the water below.¹⁰ In Bergen, where many of the residences were located close to the bay, this was a convenient solution. An overhanging latrine from the sixteenth century Rosencrantz Tower in Bergen was drawn in the city plan of Bergen in the *Civitates orbis terrarum* and remnants of the structure still exist as shown in Figure 1. Yet this was not a good location for latrines if the water body did not have enough flow to wash away the deposits. Such was the case in Coventry's Red Ditch. The Red Ditch began at Greyfriar Lane and terminated at the Jordan Well within the center of the city. The ditch was not connected directly to the River Sherbourne which was located significantly further north within town; therefore, the Red Ditch had no outflow. In 1421, the Coventry city council required that "all the previes vpon the same Red-dychbe remouyd, & done away."¹¹ Two years later, the council reiterated that owners must remove all privies, as well as pig sties, on the Red Ditch. As of 1429, individuals were still making latrines on the Red Ditch. The council instituted a half mark penalty for anyone who constructed a new privy on the ditch. The council ordered the removal of latrines over and over again until 1470.¹² So why did the council have to reissue this order? The habitual placement of la-

⁸ Gram and Høiaas, *Bare boss?*, 9.

⁹ *Ibidem*, 10. In the mid-sixteenth century, King Christian of Norway issued a general requirement for city dwellers that "Noone must have a Hyskende near the street or streets, so that it floods to another's property, but shall have it on their own soil and not [subject] their neighbor to any uncleanness."

¹⁰ Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *Netherlandish Proverbs*, 1559. Oil on oak panels. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Berlin.

¹¹ *Coventry Leet Book*, 31.

¹² The issue comes up in 1440, 1443, 1446, and 1470. Each time, the council requires the removal of all latrines on the Red Ditch by Whitsunday or a fine will be levied.

trines on the Red Ditch was likely a function of necessity. Inhabitants of the southern section of the city had no access to the flowing water of the Sherbourne in which to put their wastes. They had to build latrines somewhere, and many likely thought that the Red Ditch was better than placing waste on the streets. Yet, the Coventry authorities did not see it this way. Through these regulatory acts, the Coventry city council was attempting to create a cleaner urban space by specifying that latrines could not be built on a ditch with no outflow. But laws alone did not necessarily make a clean city.



Fig. 1: The remains of the overhanging latrine on Rosenkrantz Tower in Bergen are still visible

The creation of human waste was, and is, a biological necessity, so medieval cities may have found it difficult to regulate without alternatives. One way to control latrine placement was to provide permanent public facilities. The York city council, for example, supported a public latrine house. The York council financially supported a large bridge over the River Ouse, so latrines were installed in an arch of the Ouse Bridge below the *maison dieu* in 1367.¹³ By the early

¹³ Barbara Wilson and Frances Mee, *'The Fairest Arch in England', Old Ouse Bridge, York, and its Buildings: The Pictorial Evidence* (York: York Archeological Trust, 2002), 54. Medieval bridges like Ouse Bridge were large stone structures that supported shops and resi-

modern period, the in-arch latrine had been replaced by the overhanging type from a building. In 1400, the Ouse Bridge financial records attest to the city paying 13s 8d for its yearly maintenance.¹⁴ The city continued to support the latrine financially. In 1440, repairs at the entrance of the latrine house cost 12d and in 1445 a laborer charged 8d for his work on the latrine and another tene-ment on the bridge.¹⁵ Several entries indicate that the city paid 6s 4d annually for oil to light the latrines at night.¹⁶ In the days before wide-spread ambient lighting, a horn lamp with even a small flame would have made using the damp and dingy public latrine at night less difficult. In addition, the city paid for latrine cleaning, as evidenced in a 1544 entry in the York Civic records. The council paid 2s annually to a widow, Agnes Grethede “for keping cleyn the place of Owsbrige callyd the pyssing howes.” Agnes appears to have com-plained that latrine patrons were piling wood and other nuisances in the latrine house; the council agreed to remind citizens that the casting of construction waste or other filth in the house and directly in the river was prohibited.¹⁷

A similar tactic was taken in Bergen, but there the Hanse merchant association built a public latrine house on the Vågen in the central Bryggen dis-trict. These dedicated sheds with latrines were built away from the shipping docks so that waste could go straight into the sea. These simple sheds served as combination storehouses and latrines until 1898 and a replica of one has been constructed in the Bryggen district of Bergen. The later law books and court proceedings include prohibitions against defecating on other places except at the sheds on the wharf, even on cold winter days.¹⁸

dences on the bridge itself, much like the Ponte Vecchio in Florence still does. London had a similar large public latrine house on London Bridge by 1306 which served both the mer-chant and resident community of the bridge as well as visitors to the area (Sabine, “Latrines and Cesspools of Mediaeval London,” 307).

¹⁴ *York Bridgemasters’ Accounts*, 122.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*, 208, 257.

¹⁶ *Ibidem*. The years 1445, 1454, 1459, 1462, 1464, 1468, and 1488 all contain entries of the annual payment for the light in the latrine house. Although the expense is not noted in all years, the city’s payment would appear to have been “the custom” as noted in 1459. Several records name keepers of the latrine house light: the glover John Bukler in 1462 and 1464 and John Burell in 1468.

¹⁷ *York Civic Records*, vol. IV, 122. The public latrines were eventually closed. In March 1579/80 it was decided that all privies on the Ouse should be removed (YCHB27, fo.228v) as cited in Wilson and Mee. One drawing from the 18th century shows latrines in the build-ing above the bridge.

¹⁸ Gram and Høiaas, *Bare boss?*, 10.



Figure 2: The reconstructed public latrine house in the Bryggen district of Bergen

As these examples demonstrate, where an individual constructed a latrine was not a private decision. Because of the potential for latrines to disturb others and create a dirty city, government officials regulated their placement, including restricting how close they were to the property line and forbidding specific locations. To compensate for these restrictions, some cities turned to publicly financed facilities. Even after a latrine had been properly constructed, the city still faced the problem of human waste disposal.

Although one might be at peace during the act of creating waste, once the waste was generated, city governments needed to regulate its disposal. Archaeological evidence indicates that cesspits containing latrine waste were regularly emptied. Norwich excavations show that waste disposal patterns changed in the thirteenth century from in-place disposal to temporary storage onsite followed by offsite disposal.¹⁹ Evidence from York indicates a similar shift by the beginning of the fourteenth century from unlined pits that remained filled to stone-

¹⁹ Malcolm Atkin and D.H. Evans, "Excavations in Northern Conesford, in and around the Cathedral Close," in *Excavations in Norwich 1971-1978 Part III*, ed. Malcolm Atkin and D. H. Evans (Norwich: Norwich Survey and Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, 2002), East Anglian Archaeology Report No. 100, 12.

lined cesspits that could be cleaned out.²⁰ This means that citizens regularly disposed of latrine waste and city governments needed to monitor this activity.

The question of where waste should be disposed of was first and foremost on the minds of city elites in dealing with waste. Dunghills and waste pits generally sprang up around the perimeter of the town. In Aberdeen, Scotland, the council forbade the creation of muckhills within the city several times.²¹ Some city councils went to great pains to name permissible disposal sites. By 1427, Coventry had five designated waste disposal locations: a dunghill outside of the city limit beyond Greyfriar Gate, a pit in the Little Park Street Gate, a muckhill near the cross beyond New Gate, at Derne Gate, and a pit at Poodycroft.²² All of these locations were just beyond a city gate as shown in Map 2. In Stockholm, a 1482 proclamation lists all of the places where waste disposal was forbidden and requires individuals to “take it where the marks stand above the sand hills.” Specific waste sites were established at the sand hills and people later called the area “flugmöten” which means “fly-meeting.”²³ The creation of designated waste disposal spaces helped order the city.

Although city government’s actively regulated waste disposal within the city, particularly forbidding waste disposal in rivers and ditches, they saw the value of flowing water for ridding the city of waste. Norwich used river disposal via a barge taken below the chains on the city bridge where the waste was then dumped into the river. The council restricted the carrying of “muck” on the river to one person who was given a monopoly on waste disposal. When the council gave Richard Hert this privilege in 1453, Richard swore that “he shall carry the said muck into and out of his boat by a barrow, and he shall not cast any muck within the chain.”²⁴ As this case demonstrates, the city elites were concerned with where latrine waste would end up and attempted to regulate its disposal.

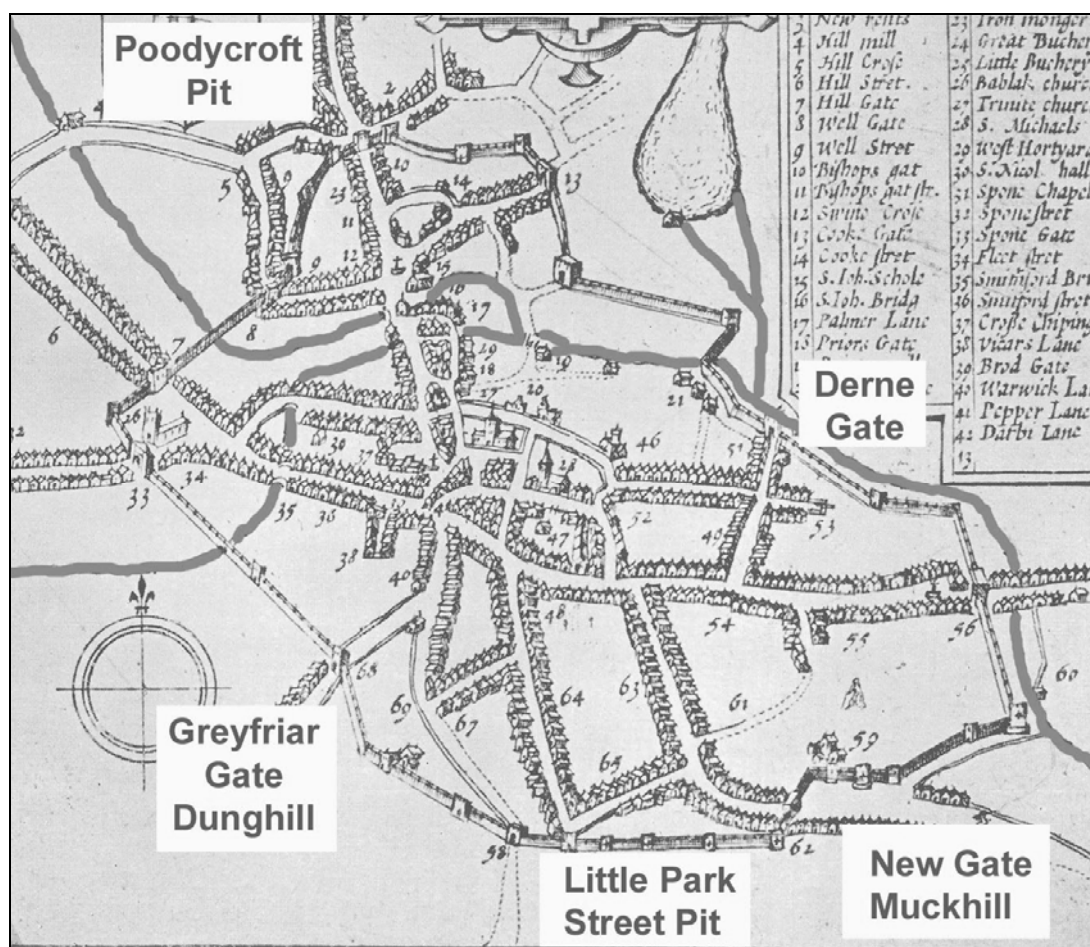
²⁰ P.V. Addyman, “The Archaeology of Public Health,” *World Archaeology* 21.2 (Oct 1989), 257-258.

²¹ *Early Records of Aberdeen 1317, 1398-1407*, 81-2, 109, 154.

²² First three listed in *Coventry Leet Book*, 29-30. “Allso that they Carry a-way ther offall of ther beestys in-to the pitt vndur the Poody Crooft.” (*Coventry Leet Book*, 43). The New Gate location is described as a muckhill on the right hand side of the cross beyond New Gate. (*Coventry Leet Book*, 113)

²³ Göran Dahlbäck, *I mideltidens Stockholm* (Stockholm: Stockholms mideltidsmuseum, 1987), 114. The named places where waste was forbidden are “the Strömmen, the big market, Fiskestrand, Kogghamn or Slottsbacken [hill by the castle] or Gråbrödra bridge or Kornhamn.”

²⁴ *The Records of the City of Norwich*, vol. 2, 91. It is interesting to note that Norwich did not consider the damage that its waste might have on downstream neighbors. Yet this does not appear to be unusual. A search of the Parliamentary Rolls for England from 1272 to 1504 yielded no cases where one city complained about another’s upstream waste. All instances of bothersome waste recorded in the rolls were confined to one city.



Map 2: The locations of Coventry's waste disposal sites superimposed on John Speed's c.1610 map of the city

Several English cities were quite proactive in managing waste disposal by providing for city-run cart services. In York, the council mandated that a dung cart be placed in every ward so that dung could be collected there and taken away by farmers.²⁵ In Norwich, the council provided two weekly muck carts to serve nine parishes.²⁶ In Coventry, the council gave the right for William Oteley to collect 1d from every resident and shop on a quarterly basis for his weekly street cleansing and waste removal services in 1420.²⁷ In 1452, every person who owned a shop was reminded of their requirement to pay the 1d tax.²⁸ The constable of each ward was specifically tasked with ensuring that the weekly cart service was provided. Anyone refusing to pay would be referred to the ward's alderman and required to pay double.²⁹ Coventry's council forbade the disposal of stones, construction material or other filth at the Greyfriar location and specified that only dung or muck was to be placed there, so that it could be

²⁵ *York Civic Records*, vol. II, 165.

²⁶ *The Records of the City of Norwich*, vol. 2, 110.

²⁷ *Coventry Leet Book*, 21.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 273.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, 552-553.

used by local farmers as manure.³⁰ Mixed waste, i.e. human waste lumped in with household garbage and animal dung, could cause problems because it made it unusable. The institution of city services funded by the city councils attempted to remedy the problem. As these examples reveal, waste disposal was a highly regulated activity. City councils found that they could not leave waste disposal practices solely within the hands of their citizens.

As we have seen, although the act of creating waste was generally a private affair in the late Middle Ages, the infrastructure around it certainly was not. City governments attempted to control latrine placement and waste disposal, as the above cases illustrate. The question we are left with is why: Why did the city governments care about latrines?

Previous scholarship tends toward understanding latrine regulation in terms of civility. In *The Civilizing Process*, Norbert Elias identified the mid-sixteenth century as a turning point in manners and privacy. Through examples such as Erasmus' statement that "it is impolite to greet someone who is urinating or defecating" and Della Casa's admonition of men who "relieve nature in the presence of other people," Elias argues that bodily functions became more secret and charged with negative emotions.³¹ Georges Duby and collaborators argued in *A History of Private Life* that privatization, that is the creation of personal space within the home and the movement of activities from outside to inside, should be seen as the prevailing development from the thirteenth century. Privacy and shame became associated with biological functions, thus the development of words for latrines such as privies, necessities, and secret houses.³² In *A History of Shit*, Dominique LaPorte noted that in 1539 the French King required Parisians to install household latrines. He argued that this development caused the privatization and domestication of human waste. Each person was made responsible for handling his own excrement and keeping it away from neighbors.³³ However, instead of removing waste from public discourse and purview, as the previous discussion has shown, sixteenth-century regulations served to reiterate

³⁰ "[Enacted] that noon inhabitaunte of thys Citie shall from hencefurthe caste any stoones, Raymell, or other fylthe or purpresture, vppon the Grey-freer dunghyll or neere vnto the same, Excepte good mucke or dunge or cleane yearthe" (*Coventry Leet Book*, 804). We know that this "pure" dung was used by Coventry-area farmers because of a complaint recorded in 1480. The Prior of the cathedral church complained that the residents of Coventry were disposing of waste improperly on church property: "Where of late tyme they leyde ther nothyng but swepyng of their houses, which was carryed a-wey be men of the Contrey to donge their londe; and now be-cause they ley there her Ramell ther will no man Carry a-wey there as they were wont to doo, and so hit encreseth dayly more & more to the hyndraunce & grete hurt of the seid Priour" (*Coventry Leet Book*, 447).

³¹ Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process: The History of Manners*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Urizen Books, 1978), 129-142.

³² Georges Duby, ed., *A History of Private Life: Revelations of the Medieval World*, trans. Arthur Goldhammer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988).

³³ Dominique LaPorte, *The History of Shit*, trans. Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000), Chapter 2.

the place of waste in the public forum. Privacy may have been valued during the actual waste production process, but beforehand, when the latrine was set up, and afterward, when accumulated waste required disposal, human wastes were a public matter.

So if city governments were not, in fact, making waste more secret and shameful through regulation, what were their motivations? To answer this, we must look at the physicality of city living. The two most common concerns were obstruction and nuisance.³⁴

Waste obstructed routes of commerce, both roads and rivers. Aberdeen's council, for example, frequently bemoaned muckhills that blocked street traffic. In Norwich, the Leet court in 1390 found John de Shouldham guilty of throwing much muck and other refuse from the repairing of his houses into the king's river, to the obstruction and straitening of the river, so that no boat can pass by.³⁵ Waterway blockage not only restricted traffic, but could also result in flooding. The 1421 Coventry mayor's proclamation lamented that the river had been "stoppyd of his course" by "filthe, dong, and stonys" causing "dyuers perels...by floodys."³⁶ Waste piles, from latrines or other sources, disrupted commerce, the life-blood of the city.

Waste was also termed a nuisance. For example, in 1418, the York city council issued the stipulation along with a property lease that "should the tenants of the houses above the said piece of land throw any urine or other filth or dirt

³⁴ By the mid-1500s, waste disposal appears to be associated in some cases with disease. In 1544, the inhabitants of Coventry's Cross Cheaping district commonly deposited dung and other waste at the cross in the market. The council forbade the continuation of this practice because the waste was a "great incommoditie of the marketh-place" and caused "great daunger of infection of the plague" (*Coventry Leet Book*, 775). The Norwich council in 1579 heard a complaint about foreigners who kept untidy "necessaries" and dumped their wash water into the gutter, which bred "greate infeccion" in the river and street gutters: "that at this assemblye was greate complayntes made agaynste the straungers for the corrupte kepinge of their howses and necessaries, and also for the great anoyance of the river by skowring their bayes and wasshinge them all alongeste the ryver to the greate infeccion of the same. And also for keaminge of woole in open shoppes and carriege chambrewashe throughe the citey in the daye tyme, and for pouringe oute wasshe in theyr gutters, and not pouringe water after yt, wherebye it reasteth in the gutters and breadethe greate infeccions, and of manye other enormities lyke therunto" (*Norwich Records*, vol. 2, 335). This linkage of disease and waste does not appear in earlier records even though both concerns appear separately.

³⁵ *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich during the XIIIth and XIVth Centuries*, ed. William Hudson (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1892), Seldon Society vol. 5, Leet Roll of 14 Richard II (Roll 11), 73.

³⁶ *Coventry Leet Book*, 31. Other things including the dyers' waterlades (1421) and stakes placed in the river (1429) were also prohibited because of the fear of flooding because of decreased water carrying capacity of the river. Weirs and encroachments along with wastes are blamed for stopping the course of the Sherbourne in 1469. The prior of the monastery complained in 1480 that waste was stopping up the floodgates and channels of the monastery's mill causing it to not run.

onto the land to the detriment or annoyance of the said Roger and Robert, their heirs and assigns, they would be punished accordingly.”³⁷ Unfortunately, the records are not clear about the reason waste was considered a nuisance or annoyance. Smell, sight, and fouling of the water are the most likely candidates. Smell and sight may have been the primary complaints about a piece of property in Norwich which was “soore accombred and replenysshed by divers persons with muk and such other vile mater to the grette noysaunce of all the Kynges liege people passing by the same.”³⁸ The odor obviously drifted from the property to the street.

Fouling of water was probably why John de Gissing of Norwich was fined in 1374 for dumping 100 cartloads of muck on the bitmay (small island in the middle of the river). John had been paid by various individuals to take away their muck and dispose it in this location. This act was considered a “nuisance of the river.”³⁹ This was an example of free enterprise taking too many liberties with waste. Because water bodies like the River Wensum in Norwich provided drinking water and water for textile production and other crafts, river disposal of wastes created physical problems.

The public regulation of latrines was an integral part of well-run medieval cities. Good rule of the city required the ensuring a clean town and minimized conflict over waste disposal. As this article has shown, the primary concerns of the councils were physical: traffic hindrance, smell, and contamination of water or property. Waste handling thus helped define what a good city should be aesthetically and physically. Trade, tax-financed city services, and a growing city administration were important elements in these increasingly modern cities. City councils, like Coventry’s, considered the casting of muck or filth into improper locations as an offense of “yll-disposid persons, contrarie to all good rule of the Citee” thus a threat to the orderly city.⁴⁰ The late medieval city placed other sanitation issues in addition to latrines. Disposal of animal dung, handling of trade waste, and supply of fresh water all appear prominently in city council records of this time. Further investigation into these issues will help put latrine regulations into the context of larger urban sanitation programs. By initiating latrine regulations covering both their location and their wastes’ final disposal, medieval city governments not only managed their urban environment – they also redefined the role of city government.

³⁷ *York Civic Records*, vol. IV, 57.

³⁸ *The Records of the City of Norwich*, vol. 2, 122-123.

³⁹ *Leet Jurisdiction in the City of Norwich*, 65.

⁴⁰ *Coventry Leet Book*, 631.

MEDIUM AEVUM
QUOTIDIANUM

53

KREMS 2006

HERAUSGEGEBEN
VON GERHARD JARITZ

GEDRUCKT MIT UNTERSTÜTZUNG DER KULTURABTEILUNG
DES AMTES DER NIEDERÖSTERREICHISCHEN LANDESREGIERUNG

niederösterreich kultur

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Vorwort

Das vorliegende Heft von *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* enthält drei wichtige Beiträge, die sich mit sehr unterschiedlichen Bereichen von Alltag und materieller Kultur des Mittelalters auseinandersetzen. Dolly Jørgensen beschäftigt sich mit Latrinen in Nordeuropa und den darauf bezogenen rechtlichen Komponenten und Bestimmungen im städtischen Raum.

Gertrud Blaschitz widmet sich in ihrem Beitrag zum Pferd in der mittelhochdeutschen Literatur erneut einem Interessensschwerpunkt, der bereits im Jahre 2005 in Heft 52 und Sonderband XVI (*Animal Diversities*) unserer Reihe Berücksichtigung fand. Ihr Aufsatz führt weiter in die relevante Sphäre interdisziplinärer Ansätze zur mittelalterlichen „Zoologie“.

Schließlich untersucht Aleksandr Evgenevich Makhov das ikonografische Motiv des zungezeigenden Teufels und gelangt dabei zu wichtigen neuen Ergebnissen bezüglich spätmittelalterlicher visueller Kultur. Wir freuen uns hier im besonderen darüber, dass unsere guten Kontakte zum bedeutenden russischen Jahrbuch *Одиссей. Человек в истории* die Übernahme des Artikels möglich gemacht haben. Wir möchten uns wieder vor allem bei Svetlana Luchitskaya (Moskau) sehr herzlich dafür bedanken, dass sie die Übersetzung und Aufnahme von Beiträgen aus dem Jahrbuch unterstützt und zu verwirklichen hilft. Das nächste Heft von *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* wird neuerlich drei Beiträge aus der russischen Forschung enthalten, die sich vor allem der mittelalterlichen Festkultur widmen werden.

Gerhard Jaritz
Herausgeber