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VICTORIAN GOTHIC FURNITURE AND PERSONAL HYGIENE: THE CASE OF WASHSTANDS

MUEBLES GÓTICOS VICTORIANOS E HIGIENE PERSONAL: EL CASO DE LOS LAVAMANOS

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Abstract

Old English proverbs such as *Cleanliness keeps away from diseases and mental sickness* or *Cleanliness is the way to be healthy, wealthy and wise* are indicative of the importance of the concept of cleanliness and especially of the personal hygiene in British culture and have their roots in the early decades of the nineteenth century. This article aims at an in-depth social analysis of the importance of personal hygiene during the multifaceted Victorian period in England and, by extension, the reappearance of the washstand stands since the medieval times in the form of washstands under the new ideological and aesthetic suggestions of the Neo Gothic, or else, Victorian Gothic style in furniture. At the same time, the upgraded social, moral and aesthetic significance of the washstands is sought in both the upcoming middle and high Victorian class, while the importance of the extraordinary washstands of the great architect and designer William Burges, obviously influenced by the medieval design principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement, is strongly highlighted.

Key words: Personal hygiene, washstands, middle and upper class, Victorian Gothic furniture, William Burges.

Resumen

Antiguos refranes ingleses como *La limpieza deja lejos las dolencias y la enfermedad mental* o *La limpieza es el modo de ser sano, rico y sensato* son indicativos de la importancia del concepto de limpieza y especialmente de higiene personal en la cultura británica y tiene sus raíces en las primeras décadas del siglo diecinueve. Este artículo quiere ahondar en el análisis social de la importancias de la higiene personal durante el polifacético periodo victoriano en Inglaterra y, por extensión, la reaparición de los lavamanos bajo las nuevas sugestiones del neogótico y o del mobiliario goticista victoriano. Al mismo tiempo,

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tanto la clase media como la clase alta victorianas buscaban esa renovada significación social, moral y estética de los lavabos. Se resalta la importancia de los lavabos extraordinarios del gran arquitecto y diseñador William Burges, obviamente influido por los principios del diseño medieval del movimiento Arts and Crafts Movement.

Palabras clave: Higiene personal, lavamanos, Clase media y alta, Mobiliario victoriano goticista, William Burges.

1. Cleanliness, sanitation and washstands in Victorian England

From the beginning of the nineteenth century, and especially during the Victorian period, the concept of cleanliness began to be an issue of social importance that was becoming increasingly topical. The new middle class in Great Britain, a figment of the Industrial Revolution, was not unaffected by the serious social, moral and cultural fermentations that heavy industrialization brought into the forefront, and which soon became synonymous with such values as the concepts of cleanliness and, in particular, of personal care and, consequently, grooming. Until then, the concept of dirt was indissolubly linked to the concept of death from contagious diseases, and it always constituted a complex and insurmountable problem for the large social masses, such as the working class.[1] Already in the 1840s and especially during the 1850s, the most convincing explanation for the phenomenon of the mass proliferation of diseases in proletariat class was not simply the lack of cleanliness and hygiene rules in general but also the importance of ugly smells and, by extension, the benefactory creation of ways of ventilating the areas or the locations where they emerged from[2]. In particular, bad smells were a common phenomenon of British everyday life and they usually acted as the 'infallible barometer' of the quality of public health and order. In addition to the dangerous and difficult to handle sewer and trash odors, environmental pollution in the big cities was only the result of intense industrialization. The intense smell of burning coal, the gasses that were emanated through the use of steam engines or even the use of fireplaces, combined with the waste of the factories along with the debris of the slaughterhouses which was washed off into the streets of the city, created an unbearable environment for people to live in decently[3]. It had been, ever since it began, a massive campaign, starting with women, chiefly of the middle and bourgeois class for cleanliness and hygiene, with the aim of informing mainly the lower social strata, as if such important and long-lasting issues had already been answered and solved by the upper social classes[4]. These aspiring reformers of the new world order, which advocated an improved model of life based on cleanliness, felt that this campaign would succeed by teaching the working class new habits and new ways of life in general as they considered that without them any reformation at the housing or education level would be futile[5]. Contrary to the

above, any attempt to present the importance of personal hygiene to middle and upper-class people was a rather voluntary process often accompanied by other recreational activities such as several types of entertainment and the sports.

It has already been known that for the Victorian middle class the concepts of respect and solemnity, modesty and sobriety, as well as good manners, constituted the moral framework within which the utmost importance of the home and family was embraced[6]. Already since the mid nineteenth century the house had been considered to be the most important nucleus of fashioning the personal and social values of middle class people and, at the same time, their natural shelter that protected them from any exogenous degrading effects. Warmth, snugness, care and affection were qualities inherently connected with the concept of home, which also constituted a completely separate place from the harsh work environment of the husbands or older male children, that is the only working family members[7]. Soon the concepts of cleanliness of space and personal hygiene would contribute to these important values and would be an integral part of the middle class Victorian house culture as well as personal health, self-esteem and dignity. In Victorian homes, a continuing war against dust and dirt began to evolve, as heavy, luxurious wood-carved furniture, thick carpets, sofas and heavily embroidered upholstered armchairs would become a pole of attraction for them. On a personal level, the importance of smell would still play an important role, but diametrically opposed to what we knew before: the pleasant smells of soap, perfumes, essential oils, light body powder would be synonymous with good health, the high social class and would be as important as good manners and flawless morality. On the contrary, the bad smells of the inferior social strata were not just equated with the concepts of sickness, immorality and poverty, but they were also an important element in shaping the social hierarchy of the time[8].

The rather prophetic, at the time, saying of John Wesley, priest and founder of the Methodist Church of England at the end of the eighteenth-century, *cleanliness is next to godliness*, seemed to be adopted during the Victorian period by the middle-class homemakers[9]. Perhaps the most significant association of the concept of personal hygiene was that with the religious issues which were extremely important at the time. One could not be a proper Christian if they were unable to implement the rules of personal hygiene. Only clean people could be godly, virtuous, beautiful and have a domestic harmony. Dirt could not match with religion, but only with ugliness, sins and an immoral lifestyle. It was not accidental that the way these messages were transmitted to the consumer mass of the time was not only from Sunday's preaches from the chambers of churches, but also through the advertisements on the back of the labels of packaged soaps that were beginning to flood the market since the mid 1850s, affecting in a catalytic way the Victorian lifestyle[10]. (Fig. 1)

Within this new climate of spreading the ideal of personal hygiene and household cleanliness in the Victorian society, the importance of the use of washstands was radically upgraded. Having already made their massive appearance in the British households since the first decades of the eighteenth

century, these types of personal hygiene items were originally small size basin stands or basin frames often described as washhand stands, as they derived from the monastic *lavabo,* a simple in shape ecclesiastical device of the Middle Ages used to provide water for the washing of hands[11]. The evolution of their form until the end of the eighteenth century was spectacular as it was then that they acquired their ultimate substance as washstands, i.e. their purely functional part. In particular, the circular orifice where the basin was installed, but also other smaller surfaces where the soap and the pitcher were placed, began to be supported by a strong, wooden tripod (corner washstand), without, of course, missing the four legged washstands[12]. Most of them were quite larger in size than before and were made of mahogany or rosewood while smaller varieties were used for rose-water ablutions or even for hair-powdering. Having already begun to play an important role in the very conservative British society until then, washstands just before the early nineteenth century had already attracted the interest of famous designers and furniture makers such as Thomas Chippendale and Thomas Sheraton, who among the plethora of their works, produced wonderful classic washstands or even a complicated combination of these with dressing tables sometimes in simple designs and some other times in the elaborate, intensely decorative Rococo style[13]. (Fig. 2)

Fig. 1. A Pears Soap advertisement in daily press, showing the need for personal hygiene, c. 1880.

Fig. 2. This tripod mahogany washstand with circular top and porcelain basin was particularly popular among the late eighteenth century English upper class individuals, c. 1795.

From the 1820s to the first decades of the twentieth century, washstands evolved spectacularly as not only their size but also their importance grew. As modern indoor plumbing was inexistent at the time, they sufficed as places to wash yourself. Soon they acquired the shape of an elongated wooden table, with also wooden shelves and occasionally marble surfaces that left plenty of space for the use of pitcher and soap dishes. The orifices for the basins, where appropriate, grew larger and by the end of the century, they became the predecessors of the stable dry sink, lined with lead or zinc[14]. This type of washstands was single or double, for the use of one or two people. In some cases, they became so bulky with

many levels, shelves and drawers that they were installed exceptionally in the kitchen rather than in the bedroom, where they were usually placed.

2. The ideal of Victorian Gothic furniture and the washstands

The highest time for the Gothic Revival, also known as Victorian Gothic or Neo-Gothic Style, was between 1840 and 1900. It was then that many Victorian designers and architects disgusted by both the dead-end in aesthetics, art but mainly the moral, social and personal issues destroyed by the Industrial Revolution's exploitation of human beings, started looking up to older classical styles not only for design inspirations but also for the re-introduction to the Victorian society of the old, undisputable, Christian moral principles. Soon England became the center of this new style which soon fledged to the U.S., as that renewed interest started mainly in the Church and Christianity. It was obvious that this style was directly influenced by the medieval Gothic architecture which created a sublime, transcendent ambiance that aimed to enhance the humbleness of the humans who entered the church, reminding them of their mortality in front of the power of God[15].

In the field of art and design, the architect and designer August Welby Pugin and the theorist John Ruskin acted as two of the strongest proponents of reverting back to medievalism in a broader sense. They both strongly believed that there existed a 'moral superiority' in the Gothic spirit as opposed to the industrial taste and the urban culture that were being developed at the time. Their ideas were followed by many architects, designers and artists who started applying the ideals of medievalism – that is, the re-imagining and re-invention of the Middle Ages but under the Christian ideology– into their works, many of which were unique handmade pieces of art and design[16]. During that time and especially after the second half of the nineteenth century, raw materials of high quality, responding to the principle of 'truth to materials', seemed to be bound conclusively with fine medieval shapes and symbols in an effort to produce unique architectural buildings or artifacts, which above all would aim at recapturing the high standards and energy of the medieval craftsman.

As far as Victorian Gothic furniture is concerned its design was based on historical models that gave birth to eclectic, new interpretations which however were also strongly reminiscent of medieval times. Inventive, bold inspirations derived from that era**,** were widely applied and consequently endowed Victorian culture with a large part of the British Gothic history. Even before the middle of the nineteenth century, the magic from the recently established Gothic Revival, affected those who reacted against the harshness of the mass-produced objects through severe industrialization and favoured traditional craftsmanship[17]. More precisely, Victorian Gothic furniture was almost entirely based on the style of Cathedral architecture which was popular between the second half of the twelfth century and the beginning of the sixteenth century in Britain as it borrowed its design and even structural elements in order to reflect not only its unparalleled beauty and skill, but mainly its strong moral, religious and metaphysical

symbolisms[18]. That is, characteristic naodomic elements such as the impressive pointed arches, rosettes, gargoyles, human figures or even animals, linen folds, strong themes of verticality, vine leafs and heraldic symbols, trefoil, quatrefoil as well as cinquefoil[19] shapes were heavily employed in order to form the furniture ideal which should be reminiscent of the precious Christian architecture heritage. Especially the use of the pointed arch as a main element of decoration on a piece of furniture signified the authentic origin of the artifact as it was meant to be the most characteristic structural and decorative element in the development of Gothic style, in general. All these were expressed in a rather dramatic way with the use of heavy, elaborate carvings on specific pieces of furniture such as tables, chairs, armchairs and beds. The type of wood mainly used was oak, walnut and rosewood that would give a rather dark finish to the overall artifact and the types of fabric used as upholstery, where needed, were mainly velvet and the richly adorned brocade; however, leather was extensively used[20]. After the 1860s, Victorian Gothic furniture in general, under the new ideological and aesthetic trends of the Arts and Crafts Movement seemed to leave its sculptural decorative character in favor of the painted decoration inspired from medieval myths and legends[21]. Generally speaking though, Victorian Gothic was in general a rather heavy and uncomfortable furniture style, strongly ornamented and pretentious. As it was almost totally handmade and therefore particularly expensive, it was addressed mainly to the high class clientele ignoring the poor, contradicting in a way with its high medieval Christian ideals.

But how was it ever possible under the new social and moral conditions and under the guise of this style, new furniture that would relate to Victorian personal hygiene be designed and manufactured? How could the ever-growing need for personal cleanliness be combined, through the great demand of washstands, with the Christian morals, as well as, with the reputableness and respectability of medieval times? And how was it possible for such a strongly personal object to bypass the basic rules of Victorian Gothic furniture and claim a position among its main types such as tables, seats and beds that bore its key features? It is true that the combination of this particular style of furniture with the extended functionality of the washstands was not a design attempt that had extensive and wide-ranging continuity, nor had it enjoyed such an unprecedented buying acceptance. This was the reason why, at least between 1840 and 1860, the number of Victorian Gothic washstands designed was not too high so as washstands be distinguished for their design innovability. On the contrary, the most popular washstand style of the time was the Neo Rococo[22], which had prevailed in other furniture styles of the past, before the appearance of the Neo Gothic style. The reasons, of course, were obvious: originally, the washstands themselves had a great design but above all constituted a social innovation as they were already contracted with the class hierarchy. This means that they could be found in the homes of the middle, petit-bourgeois or bourgeois class, thus defining in some sense the distance between these classes and the lower social strata. It was not necessary, therefore, for them to borrow elements from a new design mainstream which was directly contracted by medieval ideals to enshrine their class as it was the case with other types of furniture. However, we

consider that there is a significant relationship with the wider concept of *catharsis* between Victorian washstands and medieval Christian ideology as they symbolized, inter alia, soul and mind purification[23]. (Fig. 3 & 4)

The design and manufacture of this type of washstands were usually undertaken by furniture workshops such as the well-known Tame workshops, furniture manufacturers and dealers such as the Grace & Co. Furniture and architects-designers such as the Audsley Brothers[24].

Fig. 3. & Fig. 4. Left: a rather simple Victorian Gothic washstand with polished marble top, c. 1850s and right: a Victorian Gothic Revival pine washstand, with mirrored shelved back and a quite large cabinet below, c. 1860.

Until the early 1860s we noticed that their designs were rather modest, with no exaggeration and pretentiousness in decoration, but perhaps with some excess in size. The elements usually borrowed from Gothic naodomic art were mainly the characteristic pointed arches, which were symbolically carved on the door of the object, but also the heraldic symbols or rosettes in the form of wooden or metal hinges. The paneled sides of each piece of furniture were usually graced with gothic arch details. Few of them had a white marble top surface, a material which besides being symbolic of the Gothic cathedrals was particularly useful for the safer use of water in wooden furniture tops. In some cases, there was a mirror in the upper part of the furniture which made it a vanity washstand as its use began to widen and involve the grooming of users, especially of women. Although they were purely utilitarian objects - unlike chairs, armchairs or beds that were so vividly decorated to partially lose their functional value - the washstands of that period seemed to dominate the space with their solid structure and their balanced decoration. This was also their grandiose structural design, as some of them looked like small, gothic temples. (Fig. 5)

Fig. 5. This Victorian Gothic washstand was made by Crace and Co, and bears a charming, white marble top and characteristic print ceramic tiles, c.1870s.

After the mid 1860s, that is, during the Arts and Crafts Movement period, we notice that the way of designing this type of washstands gradually began to change. The changes in both form and decoration were related to the creation of an extended range of bulkier and bigger in size washstands. The furniture of this type, which retained its wood-carved, distinctive decorative style, was made of dark polished oak or walnut wood, had drawers or small cabinets at the bottom, distinguished for the more intense medieval architecture features in its form, such as arches, deep-carved rosettes and pillars, and most of them looked like writing desks or commodes rather than classic Victorian washstands. Their white marble tops, usually polished and sealed to resist stains, remained stable while the bold effort of lining their backsplash with a set of glazed ceramic tiles decorated with painting medieval motifs was both successful and enchanting[25].

Important is also the series that began to emerge around the same period, which was formed according to the way that the concept of the medieval ideal

began then to be perceived both by William Morris himself and his associates. With obvious influence from John Ruskin's theoretical conceptions and the aesthetic proposals of the Pre-Raphaelite painters, Morris developed a particular attraction for the British medieval mythology, ignoring the previously negotiable medieval Christian culture that existed mainly in designing objects. This new type of washstands was recognized for the simplicity of its form, the purity of the wooden, polished surfaces, but mainly for its narrative, decorative approach that included hand-painted motifs or even scenes from the British medieval heritage depicted on handmade ceramic tiles placed symmetrically on the backsplash of each artifact[26].

3. The handcrafted washstands of William Burges

"I have been brought up in the 13th century belief, and in that belief I intend to die"[27].

With these highly distinctive words, one of the greatest architects and furniture designers in Great Britain and around the world, with deep knowledge of metalworking and jewelry making, totally committed to the spirit, art and history of the medieval times of not only England, but also of France, William Burges (1827-1881), designed objects that marked the history of Victorian Gothic furniture of the second half of the nineteenth century. Although he does not constitute the only case of a famous furniture designer, his involvement with washstands makes him the most innovative designer of his era due to their extremely imaginative design and making.

Serving as much as no one else the increased Victorian urban class needs for elegance, beauty and harmony at home, Burges produced design work of outstanding decorative value, portraying medieval aesthetics through William Morris's ideology of which he was a fanatical admirer, arguing that medieval art is not primarily ecclesiastical, as it also served other forms of cultural needs[28].

The pieces of furniture he designed were usually painted with scenes from well known medieval legends, but often their decoration and form were directly related to both the painted interiors in which they were housed and their own functional value. Thus, unlike the symbolic, modest form of the respective washstands designed and made before 1860, we will find out that Burges' works had a classic, almost narrative approach to their overall design conception, which, despite their non-negotiable functional value, made them be ranked in the decorative, rather than in the applied arts of that period. Of course, most of them were designed and manufactured in the framework of an integrated commission which included the architectural design of a space and, by extension, pieces of furniture, but also in many cases, metalwork and stained glass objects. It should be noted, however, that although the main element of his inspiration was the mythical Middle Ages, his work contains combinations of elements of other historical periods, which makes it considerably eclectic as it was the case in the new Victorian style[29].

Within the plethora of furniture he has designed, two washstands are easily distinguishable, which demonstrates not only his versatile design capability but also his ability to enrich his work collection with popular items of social and commercial value. These works, which seem to balance the aesthetic exaggeration with the ideals of medievalism, but also the satisfactory functionality, constitute a milestone in the history of washstands and are considered by many historians of art as objects representing in a particular way the medieval supremacy of aesthetic perception of the Victorians. More like works of art, since they are unique objects with a title, rather than impersonal artifacts of an industrial or handcraft procedure of mass or even limited production, they were designed for places directly contracted with their own creator. Burges himself was considered an emblematic personality of the Victorian bourgeoisie, as not just his ideology but also the way he lived showed the basic features of the upper level of the mid and high Victorian era social stratification, one of which was the high responsibility for personal hygiene. (Fig. 6)

Fig. 6. William Burges's *Narcissus* washstand, c. 1867.

The famous *Narcissus* washstand, the making of which was completed in 1867, was an exquisite piece of handcrafted, painted and curved furniture and was originally designed for Burges' set of rooms at Buckingham Street, off the Strand, London, while later was taken to the Tower House, the gothic residence he built for himself in Holland Park[30]. So, we can see that it was his own house the place which first accepted his heavenly experimentation with the medieval spirit as it was, like William Morris's Red House, the cradle of a new aesthetic and design ideology. Having the overall design responsibility of the medieval style of Tower House's interior, Burges produced some of the most magnificent furniture of the Victorian era among which was the Great Bookcase and, of course, the washstand of our interest[31]. This piece of work has several elements borrowed from the medieval architecture and aesthetics. Pillars, arches, large, heavy wooden castle gates with metal hinges and heraldic symbols are evident at first glance. In terms of materials it is made of red painted and gilded solid, mahogany wood, with a basin of expensive marble, backboard lined with velvet, wonderful bronze details and ornamented with slips of vellum and pieces of mother of pearl. The three skillfully painted panels on its upper part depict the theme of the famous Chaucer's work *Romaunt of the Rose*[32]. This washstand dominates the space creating a unique sense of glamour that reflects the taste and the social class of its owner. (Fig. 7)

Fig. 7. William Burges's *Vita Nova* washstand, c. 1880.

Based on his eternal abhorrence of the late eighteenth century Georgian furniture and the Neo Rococo style introduced to the British society by George IV, but also on his love for the aesthetics of the Middle Ages, he designed thirteen years later and one year before his death in 1880, the second washstand. This particular piece of furniture was designed along with a bed to meet the needs of his guests' room at the Tower House[33]. This is an equally impressive artifact, totally handmade, based on the same design logic as the previous one. The title attributed to it was *Vita Nova*, that is New Life, as his whole design was inspired, as in the case of *Narcissus* washstand, from literature, a practice often used by the Arts and Crafts Movement designers. More specifically, Dante's (1265-1321) poem *Vita Nova* (1292-5), a combination of both prose and verse which exalts the innocent and courteous love, is denatured on the washstand surface in painted and carved motifs and scenes hinting at a garden full of life and joy. Flowers, climbing plants, birds, graceful reptiles intertwine with the repetitive decorative authenticity of small mirrors, medieval motifs and architectural elements, creating compositions of unparalleled beauty and harmony. The washstand is entirely made of carved, painted and gilt wood in warm golden tones, while its inset basin is made of richly decorated marble with silver fishes and an elegant butterfly. Its main tap is a small, impressive bronze sculpture depicting a human-headed goat drinking water, whereas the second tap as well as the rest of its fittings are equally elaborate and made of bronze. A particularly interesting element thereof is the inscription of short phrases in Latin on its surfaces such as *WILLIAM BURGES ME FIERI FECIT MDCCCLXXX* (*William Burges made me in 1880*) or *VENEZ LAVER* (*Come and Wash*), a habit which was also widespread among the artists and designers of the Arts and Crafts Movement. What is worth noting is that despite its intense decoration and strong symbolisms, it remained a fully functional object[34].

The two key washstands for the bedrooms of the wealthy owners Lord and Lady Bute of the Castell Coch, probably Burges' most dazzling architectural work in Wales[35], were designed and made after he died by his associates and specifically his office manager John Starling Chapple (1840-1922) who relied on his design methodology. Therefore, the design of these two objects cannot be attributed entirely to Burges, and this is easily visible as they present serious deviations from its overall design logic. However, despite their uniqueness, none of them is titled, as they seem to have been simply parts of an overall architectural commission which included, inter alia, furniture design.

More specifically, the washstand designed for Lord Bute's bedroom has borrowed enough of the *Narcissus* washstand, but it is still very simple in its design; it has deep green color, metal hinges, small mirrors in various sizes on the top part, a simple, white porcelain basin, as well as a smart pitcher. (Fig. 8)

Fig. 8. Castell Coch, Lady Bute's bedroom washstand designed and constructed by William Burges's partner John Chapple, c. 1888.

More interesting is however the Lady Bute's washstand designed for her round bedroom with the domed roof, the colorful furniture and the creative amenities. This rather large, fitted object has two impressive porcelain towers with a strong Gothic façade on either side which used to act as small tanks for hot and cold water[36]. Its quite large inset porcelain basin painted with 'floating' gold fishes and decorated with a repetitive geometrical pattern contrasts harmonically with the large, polished marble surface of the top. The peculiar cast bronze tap in the shape of a dragon head is reminiscent of the old medieval tales, whereas the four front cabinets, nicely ornamented with chess-like patterns in blue, red and white are distinct from the round, button-like openings in their centers. This gilt wood piece of furniture has not been inspired by any kind of medieval literature and constitutes a merely flamboyant type of washstand which, however, does not reflect neither the imagination and flair of William Burges, nor his profound love and admiration for the medieval spirit. It is though

another example of the Victorian society culture for personal hygiene which would remain strongly associated with the British social class ranking until the first decades of the twentieth century.

Conclusion

The general concept of cleanliness in the Victorian times referred not only to the way people tended to take care of their personal hygiene which was so much neglected the previous centuries, but also to the care they used to take in order to maintain and cherish all aspects of the house. During that era cleanliness became also a daily ritual of the middle and upper class people's bodies, but also souls and minds. On the other hand the ever-expanding reappearance of the Gothic ideal in architecture and design in parallel with the new ideological, moral and aesthetic parameters of the Victorian society was another measure of social value which soon became strongly associated with the use of washstands. We therefore consider that the time when these highly personal objects were formed was the starting point of a new social, ethical and aesthetic culture that would shape the cultural map of the rest of Europe, but mainly the U.S.[37] This is why the washstands that bore the aesthetic and religious characteristics of the Neo Gothic style, would also symbolize the broader concept of *catharsis*. Burges' unique washstands profoundly influenced by the aesthetic principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement would contribute in their own way to the spread of a new order in the design of utilitarian objects and would create new ways for urban aesthetics and personal hygiene, as many American, mainly designers, would follow his principles and ideology. These washstands would signify the social order of the rich, but would also remain some extraordinary, beautiful and functional objects without any hidden moral symbolisms. Their elegance and functionality would be defined by a different kind of medievalism, which was deprived of moral or even transcendental, religious symbolisms, but was abundant in cultural references and decorative exaggerations, which is what we find in the taste of the higher social classes.

However, in the early decades of the twentieth century, especially during the interwar period, when modern indoor plumbing would become less rare, the demand for washstands of any form and style would gradually go out of favor.

NOTES

[1] In addition to the particularly poor social conditions, there were non-viable installations of the drainage system and in general of water supply. At the same time the existence of a large number of slums in vast areas of large cities such as the eastern part of London, Manchester or Birmingham's poor neighborhoods, which, along with the growing and profoundly mischievous bigotry, responsible for the negligent personal hygiene, which had its roots in the Middle Ages, created an extremely difficult situation in terms of the working class people dignified living.

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[4] Of course, important social innovations such as the opening of the first publicly funded baths and wash houses as well as the definite abolition of the soap tax in 1852 contributed to this.

[5] This effort began through school education in the mid-1850s and became even more pronounced during the 1880s when a lesson on domestic subjects was introduced. For example, since 1882 the London Board School girls, along with the instructions they were given about cookery and housework issues, were also taught basic cleanliness and personal hygiene rules.

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[9] MARSH, Madeleine, *Compacts and Cosmetics: Beauty from Victorian Times to the Present Day*, Barnsley, Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 2009, p. 33.

[10] The soap production that had already begun since the late 1780s with the appearance of the famous Pears Soap, seemed to be activated much more from the 1840s onwards. But it was not until the 1880s that the largest increase in soap production, but also the greater variety in scents, sizes and types depending on sex, were observed. In 1885, the famous soap maker William Hesketh Lever made the most of the market innovation by suggesting a type of soap containing tallow and animal fats. The famous Sunlight Soap became the most successful commercial product in personal hygiene of the era and laid the foundation for the very successful course of the business, known as Unilever Corporation in the 1930s.

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[18] Genuine Gothic furniture, especially after the twelfth century, included intense decorative elements from the architecture of the great cathedrals, either in embossed or painted form. However, two centuries later, mainly towards the end of the fourteenth century, the decorative sculptural elements prevailed, while the painted ones began to disappear.

[19] Three, four or five subsequently shapes of circles, floral shapes or arcs overlapping each other.

[20] BACHHAWAT, Amitabh, 'The Age of Revivals: Gothic Revival Furniture',

http://www.artnewsnviews.com/view-article.php?article=the-age-of-revivals-gothic-revival-furniture&iid=6&articleid=40. Assessed 24-07-2017.

[21] COOPER, Jeremy, *Victorian and Edwardian Furniture and interiors: from Gothic Revival to Art Nouveau*, London, Thames & Hudson Ltd., London, 1987, p. 155.

[22] CROWLEY, David, *Introduction to Victorian Style*, London, Apple Press Ltd., 1990, p. 15.

[23] All of this is mainly about washstands design in the UK that particular period, as the Victorian Gothic style washstands in the U.S. and Australia were not only different in form and decoration but also abundant in number. However, the British medieval spirit and ideology could not be fully adopted by the colonial designers, traders and customers who faced it in a rather swallow way, keeping only its exceptionally decorative qualities.

[24] Born in Scotland William James Audsley (1833-1907) and his brother George Ashdown Audsley (1838-1925) were famous architects and furniture designers in the City of Liverpool where they produced together an exquisite Victorian Gothic style work in both fields. Later in their careers, they moved to London and some years later to the U.S. Today they are mainly remembered not only for their architectural achievements but also for their publications on architecture and decorative arts, mainly furniture.

[25] The fast development in the field of ceramics and especially in the production of ceramic tiles during the 1850s in British industry led to the creation of an extensive series of ceramic tiles which were used for surface coating both in house areas such as the bathroom and the kitchen and furniture. Companies like Mintons and Wedgwood pioneered in the mass production of such tiles, while the oppositional ideology of William Morris and his associates to industrialization within the framework of the Arts and Crafts Movement, led to the creation of autonomous workshops which produced handmade ceramic tiles of very high quality.

[26] PARRY, Linda, *William Morris*, London, V & A Publications, 1996, p. 15.

[27] GALLOWAY, Peter, *The cathedrals of Ireland*, Belfast, The Institute of Irish Studies, 1992, p. 62.

[28] *Architect-Designers from Pugin to Mackintosh*, Exhibition catalogue, London, The Fine Art Society with Haslam & Whiteway Ltd., 1981, p. 37.

[29] CROOK, J. Mordaunt, *William Burges and the High Victorian Dream*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 43.

[30] The Tower House was one of his most ambitious projects designed and constructed in almost seven years time, that is between 1875 and 1881, in Victorian Gothic style, inspired mainly from a typical red brick thirteenth century French townhouse. Though it was not large, its fortified construction was on a rather big scale which made it suitable 'even for a fortress'. As far as the interiors concern, there was heavy ornamentation almost everywhere such as heavy carvings in richly upholstered furniture, a flood of colors, especially on the walls, velvet curtains embroidered in gold and thick, expensive carpets. Burges used to drink from highly handcrafted, jeweled chalices and dine on spectacular, medieval style tables, all designed by himself.

[31] HANDLEY-READ, Charles, *Notes on William Burges's Painted Furniture*, The Burlington Magazine, 1963, p. 504.

[32] Initially, there was a general perception that the work belonged to Chaucer himself, and this caused many reactions among the intellectuals of the time, as many parts of the text seemed to be inconsistent with his own writing style. Later on, it became known that Chaucer did translate the original work in French Le Roman de la Rose under the title The Romaunt of the Rose.

[33] https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O8362/burges-washstand-washstand-burges-william-ara. Assessed 31-07-2017.

[34] TSCHUDI-MADSEN, Stephan, *The Art Nouveau Style: A Comprehensive Guide with 264 Illustrations*, Translated by Ragnar Christophersen, New York, Dover Publications, Inc., 2002, p. 260.

[35] The famous Castell Coch, or Red Castle in English, designed and reconstructed by William Burges in Gothic Revival style, was a real, thirteenth century castle north of Cardiff, Wales. With a remarkably striking medieval appearance and correspondingly elaborate interiors, this castle was completed by Burges's partners in 1891, and today constitutes the epitome of the High Victorian Architecture.

[36] CASTLEDEN, Rodney, *The Castles of Britain and Ireland*, London, Quercus, 2012, p. 156.

[37] It was widely expected that England, the country from which the US were created and despite their intense political differences, to continue to greatly influence the cultural, social, and ideological developments in that country. So many of the major achievements in the nineteenth-century art and architecture of Great Britain, such as the New Gothic Style, and the Arts and Crafts Movement were ideologically conveyed to the other side of the Atlantic, creating a new, perhaps more sophisticated, type of art.

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