

Book Review

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Francisco Alonso Almeida. *A Middle English Medical Remedy Book.* Edited from Glasgow University Library MS Hunter 185. Middle English Texts, vol. 50. Heidelberg: Winter, 2014. Pb. 143 pp. € 40.00. ISBN 978-3-8253-6412-0.

With *A Middle English Medical Remedy Book*, Francisco Alonso Almeida presents an edition of a so far unedited compilation of Middle English medical texts, copied (or compiled) by two scribes into the manuscript Glasgow, University Library, Hunter 185; the manuscript dates from around 1400 (10). According to the author, “the volume is part of a larger programme of research that aims to give an account of the codicological and linguistic features that characterize medieval medical recipe books” (6); the Hunter MS was given preference over other manuscripts because its text is in a deteriorating condition, due to fading ink.

The general design of the present volume is clear. After a brief introduction, it first gives insight into the manuscript (chapter 2) – its collation, binding, and handwriting, the punctuation, the decoration, the *ordinatio*, the content and its ownership. Chapter 3 discusses questions related to the language and the manuscript’s provenance. In chapter 4 (“Contents and Sources”), the author analyses the two parts of the edited text, titled “Flora Medica, Medical Notes in Latin and List of Simples” and “Medical Recipes.” Each of the four different sub-sections of the “Flora Medica, Medical Notes in Latin and List of Simples” are described in turn, and the author focusses in each section on a different aspect. In chapter 4.1., “List of plant names (1^{ra}-6^{vb}),” he describes the linguistic make-up of the Middle English botanical lexicon, and in chapter 4.2., “List of ingredients for medicinal purposes (6^{vb}-11^{ra}),” the content and the structure of the entries. In chapter 4.3., “Medical notes (11^{tb}-12^{tb}),” the author draws attention to the fact that the school of Salerno is mentioned in one of the notes, thus focusing briefly on the influence of this school on medieval medicine in Europe. Chapter 4.4., “Middle English Herbarium (12^{va}-12^{vb}),” provides a brief description of the content of this part of the text with a note on the origins of the Middle English terms. In the final, and most extensively discussed section, “Medical recipes, prognostic texts and charms (17^r-67^v)” (chapter 4.5.), the author analyses the recipes and prognostics among others with regard to the intended audience and the form and structure of the text types. The editorial principles are laid out in chapter 5. The edition of the

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text itself follows on pages 57–108, and is divided into the two (editorial) subsections mentioned above, the “Flora Medica, Medical Notes in Latin and List of Simples” (57–74), and the “Medical Recipes” (75–108). It is complemented by a critical apparatus (109–110), a commentary (111–120) and a glossary (121–136). The analytical section and the edition are preceded by a table of abbreviations (7–8) and concluded with a bibliography (137–143).

The edition of the text (57–108) is a semi-diplomatic one. The editor preserves the two scribes’ spelling conventions, indicates rubrics with bold typeface and attempts to reproduce the original’s textual structures, including marginal notes and later additions. Abbreviations are (silently) expanded and word-division follows modern practice. The use of modern punctuation marks is editorial, but it follows the original manuscript’s punctuation; the marks are used to separate sense units, or to provide grammatical information, such as to signal coordination (53–55). The lines are numbered throughout the edition and the medical recipes (75–108) are, additionally, numbered for ease of reference.

The analytical part of the volume follows, in general, established categories and classification principles. The dialectal localisation of the manuscript (chapter 3) is based on the LALME categories (14–20), the linguistic analysis suggesting a southern provenance of the manuscript, with the first hand probably from Gloucestershire and the second from Kent. The linguistic analysis of the plant names in the “List of plant names (1^{ra}-6^{vb})” (chapter 4.1.) follows Sauer’s classifications (Sauer 1996) and the assignment to the text type ‘popular remedy book’ in contrast to ‘academic treatise’ is developed on the basis of Voigts’ (1982) classification of medical texts.¹ Görlach’s (1992) approach to cooking recipes is used in the descriptions of the structure of the medical recipes as a text type. It shows that the elements present in cooking recipes (ingredients, preparation, dosage, etc.) feature in medical recipes, too. Interestingly, quantities are often given with quite precise specifications, such as *half a penywight* of (ME *penīweght* ‘a unit of measure equal to the weight of one penny, one third of a dragme;’ MED, s.v. *penī-weght*), or *a pynte* ‘a liquid measure equalling one half a quart, a pint’ (MED, s.v. *pīnte*) and also the utensils used are often specified clearly (46; e.g. *erþen pot* ‘earthen pot’, *basyn of metal* ‘basin/kettle of metal’). The charms are discussed in terms of incorporation of religious and magical elements (such as verbal formulae or acronyms), and the author also attempts to decipher some of the unclear, ‘magical’ expressions (e.g. *ancorea* and *pan-toren*, 51–52). The analyses certainly represent good first approaches to the individual issues, but as the author refrains from offering any critical discussion of

¹ Unfortunately, the term *receptaria*, which is understood in contrast to *antidotaria*, is used *passim* but the two terms are never explained (for a brief definition cf., e.g. Hunt 1990, 8–9).

either the categories or the proposed classifications and does not go into any more detailed analyses, he does at times not achieve more than to confirm the results of previous research.

The often sketchy nature of the analyses sometimes leads to conflicting claims and lapses, of which a few from the linguistic analysis will be addressed in the following. For instance, the decision whether to consider the terms of French origin in the “List of plant names” on fols. 1^{ra}-6^{vb} as either loan or foreign words is based on Sauer’s (1996, 138) argument that “the presence of a French word not immediately followed by its English equivalent or an anglicized form implies that a word has been borrowed; however, in those cases where an English form is given together with a French rendering, the French word should be considered a foreign word” (22). Based on this argument, e.g. *viuez chauz* ‘quicklime’ and *lange de cheyne* ‘bugloss’ are considered loan words from French, while *bran de ferment* ‘bran for sourdough’ is considered a foreign word (23). Were e.g. *lange de cheyne* followed by its native, Middle English synonym *houndestonge* (OE *hūdestunge*; MED, s.v. *hōundes-tōnge*, OED, s.v. *hound’s tongue*), it would probably automatically have been classified as a foreign word, too. This shows that different, additional criteria for distinguishing loan words from foreign words, such as the presence or absence of morphological and/or phonological integration, must also be taken into account. The reasoning also ignores the fact that the trilingual Harley Vocabulary, to which Sauer refers, dates from c. 1230–1260 (Sauer 1996, 135), i.e. is much earlier than MS Hunter 185. In fact, with MS Hunter 185, we are concerned with the turn of the 14th to the 15th century, when the majority of the French loan words had already been incorporated into Middle English. This means that, as far as this glossary is concerned, we simply cannot tell from the number and the order of the entries alone whether the ‘French’ term keeping company with an English term is not ‘simply’ an English synonym of French origin. Apart from that, the author marked *lange de cheyne* on page 21 as ‘French’,² which, of course, contradicts his analysis of *lange de cheyne* as a ‘loan word’ on page 23.

Further slips are, e.g. to classify *couslippe* ‘cowslip, paigle’ as an example of the word-formation type “genitive + noun” (24): the category is better labelled ‘noun in the genitive + noun,’ and the first element in *couslippe* is not in the genitive but the *-s* is part of the second element, ME *slippe* ‘mud, slime’ (MED, s.v. *slip(pe)*; OE *cūslippe*, cf. Kruschke 2013, 277); i.e. *couslippe* is a noun + noun compound. The plant name *netele* ‘nettle’ is classified as a native “simplex” on page 23, while on page 24, it is given as an example of the complex word formation

² This means it is considered ‘foreign’; compare for instance, *laureole*, also a French loan word, from F *laureole* (OED, s.v. *laureole*), which is considered ‘English,’ i.e. a loan word (21).

type “lexical item + suffix”. In addition, the term ‘lexical item’ is problematic in itself, and especially here since *net-* is not a free lexical morpheme in Middle English (Sauer 1996, 144). Further, “denoun” in “denoun adjective” (24) should be changed into “denominal.”

While the book is, in general, easy to read, the fact that none of the Latin, French or Middle English quotes, or the botanical and non-botanical terms in the analytical part of the volume have translations makes it a bit more difficult to work with than necessary. Thus, the identification of the botanical terms is not always easy, even when the reader is accustomed to medieval plant names. In chapter 4.1., on the “List of plant names (1^{ra}-6^{vb}),” for example, the reader is informed that this “herbal”³ includes not only plant names, but also “names referring to medical preparations, such as *diameron*, *dialthea* and *diaquilon*,” all “herbal compounds” (20). The attempt to identify the meaning of these three terms proves to be a difficult task. They do not appear in the glossary as only the vocabulary of the “Medical Remedies” has been included, and checking the “Commentary,” as is recommended in the footnote, helps with the last two items while the first, *diameron*, is not explained;⁴ instead, the reader is presented with a quote in Latin. It would have contributed to the reader-friendliness of the volume to have also included all Latin, French and Middle English terms from the “Flora Medica, Medical Notes in Latin and List of Simples” in the same or a separate glossary. As it is, the reader must refer to the standard dictionaries for these terms, and this also may be hampered by the fact that the edition reproduces the scribes’ spellings, thus making it more difficult for the reader to identify the lemmas with the relevant dictionary entries.⁵

At times the text lacks information or examples which could have supported the author’s arguments, e.g. when he claims that the loan formations *leones toop* ‘dandelion’, *maidenhere* ‘maidenhair fern’, *erpe note* ‘sowbread, pignut’ and *hertistonge* follow the Latin or French morphology (23), or when he states that “the purpose of the scribe was not to group the various names that a given plant had, but to group plants that belong to the same family and share similar therapeutic properties” (21). The exemplary analysis of some of the lemmas would have been good to illustrate the first point. With regard to the second claim, a

³ A check against the MED, the AND and the OED revealed that the terms in the list are by no means all herbs or “herbal compounds” (20): *antimonium* ‘antimony’, *albeston*, *calx viua*: *viuez chaux* ‘quicklime’ and *cicada grisillum* ‘grasshopper’, for instance, are not.

⁴ According to the MED (s.v. *dia-*), *diameron* was ‘a drug made of mulberries’, *dialthea* an ‘ointment made of marshmallow’, and *diaquilon* a ‘drug made of vegetable juices, litharge, and oil or wax’.

⁵ None of the relevant dictionaries appear in the bibliography (though they are mentioned, e.g. on page 121); the bibliographical entry for LALME (referred to in chapter 3) is missing as well.

close look at the entries would also have revealed that, in a number of entries, the terms following the Latin lemma are simply translations or synonyms and do not necessarily denote different species of the same super-ordinated taxon (e.g. *consolida minor*, *pety consoude*: *boonwort* (57/27), all ‘comfrey’). Here, a brief discussion of the nature of folk taxonomies in contrast to scientific taxonomies would have been useful.

A Middle English Medical Remedy Book provides a good first edition of the compilation present in MS Glasgow, University Library, Hunter 185. In its introductory part, the author addresses a broad range of linguistic and manuscript-related issues and offers first valuable insights into these topics. The author’s claim that “the text of H will confirm the conclusions of previous studies on this genre [...]” (10) has been met, and apart from the difficulties mentioned above, the book is accessible and easy to read. Graduate students and researchers will not necessarily find new original research. But the basis for further research has been laid – be it codicological, linguistic or related to text type – or to “code-switching, medical terminology, the medical tradition, and social aspect[s] of language” (10).

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⁶ In his bibliography, Alonso Almeida wrongly gives Jan Svartvik and Herman Wekker as the editors of this volume (139).

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