

INTRODUCTION*

Laura Esteban-Segura
University of Málaga (Spain)

The twenty-first century, known as the digital age, has witnessed the unstoppable rise of information technologies as well as the advent of Digital Humanities, where traditional humanistic disciplines and the use of new technologies converge. Manuscript Studies as a discipline covers a broad spectrum of topics nowadays, ranging from the analytical handling of codices and the examination of texts and images contained in them to the digitisation of collections—which illustrate the turn from material to digital.¹ Manuscript Studies is the broader term which encompasses Philology, Palaeography, Codicology, among others; many are the areas related, as well: History, Theology, Philosophy, Ecdotics, to name but a few. This leads us to think of this complex field as essentially interdisciplinary and embracing different cultures and traditions (among which that of Europe is only one).² The present special issue sets out to be a reflection on the work which is currently being done in the arena of Early English manuscript research, particularly in Middle and Early Modern English. The topics covered by the authors in this collection include editing, dialectology, punctuation, etc. from different research traditions, but all of them ingrained in manuscript contexts.

The issue opens with María José Carrillo-Linares's paper, entitled "Outcomes of Editorial Intervention in Texts from National Library of Wales, Brogyntyn MS ii.1: Past, Present and Future." The focus is on the manuscript Brogyntyn ii.1, which is approached from the point of view of textual editing. The volume is a miscellany from the fifteenth century whose contents range from "science to history or poetry" (18), written by multiple scribes. Carrillo-Linares postulates that "editorial decisions distort the original text" (19) and this is corroborated in her well-rounded analysis of scribe O's production, which contains English verse and prose. Editions of this scribe's pieces have been produced since the first half of the nineteenth century and the author has meticulously collated each of them with her own transcription of the original texts, thus providing deep and fascinating insight into editorial intervention, mostly concerning abbreviations and spelling regularisation, across time. In addition, she assesses the dialectal features of the scribe's language by resorting to *eLALME* (Benskin et al. 2013), which allows her to accurately localise the texts. She concludes that "[s]ome degree of editorial intervention is unavoidable in every edition" (37) and advocates the advantages of digital editions to the detriment of paper printed editions.

MS Brogyntyn ii.1 is also pivotal to Edurne Garrido-Anes's paper, "A Dialectal Study of the First Quire in National Library of Wales, Brogyntyn MS ii.1." On this occasion, Garrido-Anes takes up the topic of historical dialectal

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25145/j.recaesin.2023.87.01>

REVISTA CANARIA DE ESTUDIOS INGLESES, 87; octubre 2023, pp. 9-13; ISSN: e-2530-8335



variation in Middle English texts, more specifically those housed in the first quire—a late addition—of the manuscript under consideration, which were written by five different scribes (A, C, E, F and G). In order to appraise the linguistic provenance of the texts, the author provides a meticulous and in-depth analysis of each of the scribes' language, employing for the purpose *LALME*'s (McIntosh, Samuels and Benskin 1986) methodology (also *eLALME*'s), which includes the creation of the Linguistic Profiles (LPs) of the texts and the application of the 'fit'-technique. This allows her to successfully eliminate "unlikely areas of linguistic provenance and [...] eventually narrow down the dialectal origin of the language analyzed" (49). Finally, she reaches the conclusion that the linguistic area "shared by the English texts in quire 1 turns out to be more central than Shropshire and slightly more southern than Derbyshire" (57), further establishing Warwickshire or nearby as the area common to all five scribes.

In "Contextualising Middle English Liturgical Commentaries," Jeremy Smith expertly considers Middle English texts on the liturgy, both in verse and prose, and their cultural mapping by looking at their codicological contexts, that is, by taking into account material and local features of the manuscripts in which the texts are housed. For the purpose, in a brilliant display of philological erudition, he examines a number of codices that "offer paratextual commentary on the Mass" (71), most of which are miscellanies. This type of work has received increasing interest lately since, as Smith contends, "[m]any scholars have noted that the correlation of individual text and individual codex is the exception rather than the rule in the production of books during the late medieval period across Europe" (74). The contents of manuscripts varied depending on their "codicological settings and cultural functions of each copy" (77), and the latter can be recreated by evaluating dialect, ownership marks and textual organisation, among other features. Smith further discusses and provides insightful data on several devotional miscellanies, including the Vernon and Beinecke manuscripts.

Irma Taavitsainen and Alpo Honkapohja's contribution, "The Five Wits in English Medical Literature, 1375-1600," skilfully investigates a relevant element of culture in the Middle Ages, the five wits or senses, in order to effectively demonstrate how they became a commonplace in vernacular medical writing and determine how texts were adapted depending on the targeted audience, for instance, male versus female. The approach is corpus-based, resorting to medical electronic corpora, but a more philological stance is also adopted. Thus, their qualitative discourse analysis is complemented with codicological and palaeographical data obtained from first-hand inspection of several manuscripts. The types of texts scrutinised encompass

* I am grateful to the University of Málaga for research support (project reference B3-2022_04).

¹ Edwards (2013, 2018) has addressed the limitations of digital technology for the scholarly study of manuscripts.

² For an overview of the major global traditions, see Keene (2020).



surgical ones, specialised treatises, compendia with miscellaneous materials, medieval encyclopaedia in rhyming couplets, health guides, remedies and *materia medica*, and practical verse. Taavitsainen and Honkapohja assert that at the end of the fifteenth century “the scope of vernacular medical literature was wide [...], probably reaching even illiterate or semi-literate audiences with oral delivery” (102). Their solid analysis adds a new dimension to our comprehension of the development of vernacular scientific writing.

Two specific medical texts are tackled in the following two articles. Laura Esteban-Segura and Carlos Soriano-Jiménez’s proposal, “Guy de Chauliac’s *On Bloodletting* in Glasgow, University Library, MS Hunter 307 (ff. 165v-166v),” offers a semi-diplomatic edition and a study of a Middle English treatise on phlebotomy, which remained unedited so far, by Guy de Chauliac. He was one of the leading medical scholars of the Middle Ages and a physician to several popes, whose influence has endured to the present day. The witness of his treatise on bloodletting in MS Hunter 307 forms part of a medical compendium including copies of other important medieval works such as the Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus and the anonymous *Circa instans*. Esteban-Segura and Soriano-Jiménez discuss the transmission of treatises on the topic and identify another witness of the one under consideration, held in London, British Library, MS Sloane 3486 (f. 147v). More copies may be extant and further research is encouraged. A brief physical analysis follows: this shows that the production of the codex was careful, with no marginalia, which questions a practical use of it. The edition pursues a faithful rendering of the original with a view to keeping its flavour. A linguistic analysis based on *eLALME*’s model is also carried out in order to localise the text geographically, assigning it to the area of Huntingdonshire. The authors succeed in providing socio-cultural, codicological, palaeographical and linguistic evidence of a thus far neglected Middle English piece.

In “Domestic Medicine in an Early Eighteenth-Century Manuscript, GUL, Ferguson MS 43,” Isabel de la Cruz-Cabanillas brings to the fore an Early Modern English recipe collection attributed to a woman, Lady Stanhope. The proliferation of such household manuscripts points to the important role of women “in the transmission and dissemination of knowledge within families and their social networks” (133). De la Cruz-Cabanillas’s perspicuous and well-articulated analysis is threefold. Firstly, she describes the manuscript from a physical standpoint; secondly, she assesses the degree of orthographic standardisation of the text; and thirdly, she explores the content and textual organisation of the recipes. By examining aspects such as the ingredients appearing in the recipes, the author concludes that this particular collection “was compiled for a prosperous home” (144). Studies of this type are essential to grasp socio-cultural practices in early modern England as well as linguistic usages, as De la Cruz-Cabanillas knowledgeably manages to do in her contribution.

Alpo Honkapohja’s solo paper, “The Extent of Fire Damage to Middle English Prose in the Cotton Library,” takes into consideration the Cotton collection in order to analyse the damage caused by a fire that took place in 1731—before the collection was actually housed in the British Library—to manuscripts containing Middle English. The author gives an exhaustive account of the situation of the



collection before and after the fire and provides a thorough list of damaged manuscripts, which details the extent of the havoc wreaked by the fire, among other aspects, thus illuminating our understanding of these works. The manuscripts surveyed include monastic registers, religious treatises, historical chronicles, documents relating to diplomatic matters, etc., and, to a lesser extent, literary and scientific prose. These contents bear witness to the political interests of Sir Robert Bruce Cotton, who, apart from an antiquarian, was also a politician as well as to his dexterity in acquiring manuscripts, as Honkapohja points out (161-162).

Javier Calle-Martín and Jacob Thaisen's article, "General Patterns of Punctuation in the *Paston Letters*," close the special issue with a well-documented analysis of punctuation marks and their uses in this collection of Late Middle English correspondence. The letters are an important primary source for (socio-) linguistic and historical research, since they comprise texts written by a number of members of the Paston family, who belonged to the Norfolk gentry, from different generations. The authors have selected 171 letters and provided an inventory of marks of punctuation found in them, which includes the paraph, the single virgule, the double virgule, the punctus and the punctus elevatus. They discuss the functions of each mark, which sometimes overlap, and refer as well to formulaic expressions that accompany punctuation marks. It is worth noting that punctuation in this work, according to Calle-Martín and Thaisen, "is closely related to the letters' *mise-en-page*" (174). They also argue that the functions of marks in the *Paston Letters* are "invariably rhetorical, especially designed to aid the correct reading aloud and to ensure the correct parsing of the text" (180). Their piece of research leaves the door open for much needed further work on historical punctuation, particularly regarding medieval correspondence.

The articles in this special issue reveal the many possibilities that the study of manuscripts offers across different subject areas and fully demonstrate the significance and impact of manuscripts on all realms of medieval and modern life, i.e., medical, political, private, etc. I hope that the issue will be helpful for readers to envision some of the lines of research carried out within the label of Manuscript Studies and that it contributes to advancing and enriching our knowledge of a discipline which will always look to the distant past, well aided (now more than ever) by contemporary tools, and with a blossoming future ahead. Last but not least, I would like to thank the scholars whose expertise is reflected in the following pages and the generous peer reviewers, all of whom have made this issue possible.



WORKS CITED

- BENSKIN, Michael, Margaret LAING, Vasilios KARAIKOS and Keith WILLIAMSON. 2013. *An Electronic Version of A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English (eLALME)*. Edinburgh: The University of Edinburgh. <http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/ihd/elalme/elalme.html>.
- EDWARDS, A. S. G. 2013. "Back to the Real?" *TSL. Times Literary Supplement* 5749, 7 June 2013: 15.
- EDWARDS, A. S. G. 2018. "The Digital Archive, Scholarly Enquiry, and the Study of Medieval English Manuscripts." *Archive Journal*. Available at <https://www.archivejournal.net/essays/digital-archive-scholarly-enquiry-and-the-study-of-medieval-english-manuscripts/>.
- KEENE, Bryan C., ed. 2020. *Towards a Global Middle Ages: Encountering the World through Illuminated Manuscripts*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum.
- MCINTOSH, Angus, Michael L. SAMUELS and Michael BENSKIN. 1986. *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English (LALME)*. 4 vols. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.



ARTICLES

