

REVIEW

The Middle English ophthalmic treatise on the use of the eye in G.U.L. MS Hunter 513 (ff. 1r-37r): An annotated edition and study. By Teresa Marqués Aguado – Antonio Miranda García – Santiago González Fernández-Corugedo (eds.). Málaga: Servicio de Publicaciones de la Universidad de Málaga, 2008. Pp. xvi, 253.

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The Middle English ophthalmic treatise on the use of the eye in G.U.L. MS Hunter 513 (ff. 1r-37r): An annotated edition and study is the first published edition of a series devoted to the medical manuscripts written in late mediaeval English and housed in the Hunterian Collection at Glasgow University Library. This volume in particular takes into consideration G.U.L. MS Hunter 513 (V.8.16), *H* for short, which holds four different scientific treatises: a treatise on diseases of the eye (ff. 1r-37r), an Antidotary (ff. 37v-97v) and two pseudo-Hippocratic texts: one on zodiacal influence (ff. 98r-104v) and the other on the signs of death (ff. 105r-107v). The treatise under scrutiny is the first one (ff. 1r-37r) on ophthalmological matters, which contains a Middle English translation from the Latin work *De probatissima arte oculorum* dating from the mid-fifteenth century.

The Prologue to the book, signed by Professor Graham D. Caie, provides a general overview of William Hunter's life and of the works he left to the University of Glasgow, which form part of a collection bearing his name; the Hunter Collection is in fact one of the largest holdings of historical medical manuscripts in the world. Other medical texts which will be edited and published in the same series are also mentioned and briefly described. They include G.U.L. MSS 95, 328, 497 and 509. These manuscripts are the source material for a research project carried out by a team of scholars from the Universities of Málaga, Murcia, Glasgow and Oviedo. Some of their electronic editions can be consulted at the website <<http://hunter.filosofia.uma.es/manuscripts>>.

The first chapter looks at the author and the title of the ophthalmological text contained in *H*, as well as considering some witnesses and editions. The author of the original treatise (it is uncertain whether it was originally a Latin work or a translation from another language) seems to have been Benvenutus Grassus (or Grapheus), who probably lived at the end of the thirteenth century, although there is speculation about this since earlier dates have also been suggested. His origin remains uncertain too and three different geographical areas have been

proposed to locate him: Salerno, Jerusalem and Montpellier. He might have been born in Salerno, but it seems likely that he travelled extensively and practised in Italy as a medical practitioner specializing in diseases of the eye. He probably learned medicine in an academic context, and then reflected his practice as well as that of other colleagues in his *De usu oculorum*. The profuse number of extant manuscripts of the work and the number of medical authors (such as Chauliac or Yperman) who quote it attest its vast popularity. The biography of Benvenutus is unclear, but this new edition builds on the information already available, completing it. It also questions some theories and supplements new data.

As for editions of the text, the modern ones (in Latin and Provençal) date back to the 1880's. The main text in English for most of the twentieth century has been Doctor Casey Wood's translation (1929), now replaced by Laurence Eldredge's (1996) *Benvenutus Grassus: The wonderful art of the eye*. The work reviewed here adds something new to these previous editions since *De usu oculorum opus in linguam anglicam translatum* ('*Treatise on the use of the eyes*') in *H* has never been fully edited before as such.

In the second chapter, the manuscript is described from a physical point of view, considering both codicological and palaeographical elements. The description is thorough and comprehensive and provides an account of the most important external and internal aspects of the codex, such as binding, materials, sources, script, language and dialect, etc. The accompaniment of images backing the explanations seems appropriate, as it brings the reader closer to the manuscript.

The edition and the conventions that have been followed are supplied in the third chapter. Two different versions of *H* can be found: in odd pages the Middle English text and to its left, in even pages, its translation into Present-Day English. The transcription tries to be as faithful to the original as possible. For this reason, the layout has been maintained, as well as capitalisation and punctuation. Editorial intervention has been minimized, only to number every five lines and to insert the number of the folio. Abbreviations have been expanded, but this has been indicated by means of italics. Thus, the model presented follows the principles of the diplomatic edition. Broadly speaking, in this type of edition the work focuses on a single manuscript, which is transcribed and reproduced faithfully; therefore, scribal errors are usually retained and the suggested emendations may be included in the annotations, but not in the text as such. The punctuation system is not modernized and neither are the spelling variants, which are kept as they appear in the manuscript.

In the Present-Day English version, however, there is editorial interpretation since punctuation marks have been replaced with their modern counterparts and the text has been divided into coherent paragraphs. Nevertheless, words which

have been added for clarity's sake, such as auxiliaries or prepositions, are marked between square brackets. This translation is very helpful for a modern reader and its inclusion in even pages confronting the Middle English version, a very well-thought asset which provides quick reference and allows for a better understanding of the text.

Textual and explanatory notes, which have been carefully prepared, are found alongside the edition. They contain lexico-grammatical information, as well as misspellings and scribal errors, which are accordingly noted and discussed. References to Latin and comments on illnesses have also been included here. The arrangement of the notes is quite handy, since all the information for a page can be obtained there without compelling the reader to move backward and forward, thus easing consultation. As for the information, this is presented in a clear and concise way.

The fourth chapter offers a glossary in which every word-type is listed and cross-referenced to its lemma. In most editions of Middle English texts, the glossary only contains lexical words, as it is assumed that the prospective reader will know the language. However, in this case, the fact that function words, such as pronouns or conjunctions, are also recorded widens the prospective audience, aiming at those readers who do not have a command of Middle English as well. The volume is accompanied by a CD-ROM in which the full occurrences of each word-type and the corresponding concordances can be consulted. Several digitized images of folios of the manuscript are also supplied.

This edition goes a step further than other diplomatic editions of Middle English medical texts since it renders the translation of the mediaeval text into Present-Day English, which is not usual in this type of publications. Thus, it enables those which are not conversant with Middle English to access Benvenuto's work. The provision of the CD-ROM is also a novelty which makes available further information that can be useful for research purposes.

In short, this well-edited volume successfully presents a conscious edition of one of the four manuscripts preserving the Middle English version of Benvenuto Grassus' work on diseases of the eye and, since the edition tries to preserve the original text, it offers good source material for the study of vernacular prose in fifteenth-century England. The attempted readership not only comprises linguists and textual critics, but also historians of medicine and science. All in all, *The Middle English ophthalmic treatise on the use of the eye in G.U.L. MS Hunter 513 (ff. 1r-37r): An annotated edition and study* should be considered an important contribution to the field of Middle English technical and/or specialized languages.

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