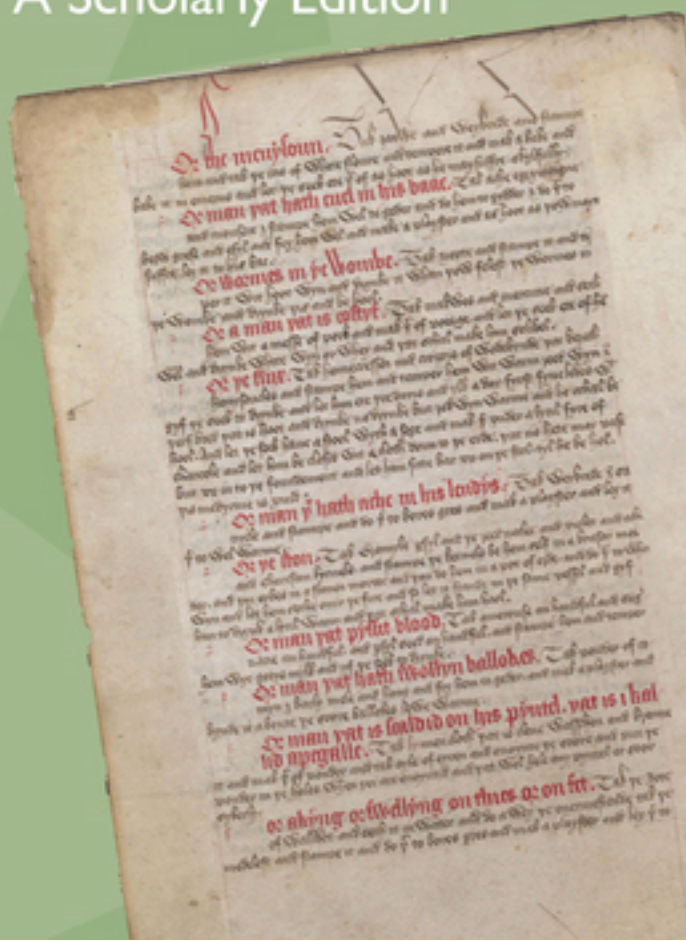Javier Calle-Martín and
Miguel Ángel Castaño-Gil

A Late Middle English Remedy-book

(MS Wellcome 542, ff. 1r-20v)

A Scholarly Edition

Preface

Recipes in Middle English Medical Literature

1. Introduction

Texts for everyday use were in the shadows of literary achievements for a long time, except for their curiosity value (see below). This has changed and non-literary texts are now being recognized in their own right as important witnesses of past cultures and past language practices. Medical recipes belong to utilitarian literature: they give instructions on how to prepare medicines to cure an illness, how to maintain health or prevent a harmful condition. Various other genres may be inserted, charms and prognostications being the most common additional items. In the course of time, approaches to Middle English recipes have also changed. With the pragmatic turn, the communicative needs and practices of common people have come centre stage (Traugott 2008), and a new awareness of texts as communication has gained ground within the last decades (see Jucker and Pahta 2011: 3-10). Texts provide the key to probing into these practices, but the further back in time we go the more difficult it is to learn about them. It is extremely valuable that new materials are made available to linguistic scholars, philologists and medieval historians. This preface will give a brief survey of the state of the art of editing Middle English medical recipes.

2. Editing Middle English Recipes

Editing medieval texts is one of the oldest activities in the field of philology. The earliest scholarly editions of recipes date from the 19th century, the very beginning of philological interests in English Studies. Culinary recipes were edited even earlier, e.g. the "Forme of Curry" (14th c.) by Samuel Pegge (1780), available in *Eighteenth-Century Collections Online* (ECCO). The first edition of recipes and other remedybook materials was a miscellany of eclectic passages in two volumes entitled *Reliquae antiquae* by T. Wright and J. O. Halliwell (1841- 43). The extracts were selected for their curiosity value. Other early recipe collections comprise George Stephens's publication in 1844 and *Ein Mittelenglisches Medizinbuch* by F. Heinrich (1896), a collection of *Medical Works of the Fourteenth Century* by G. Henslow (1899; see p. 24 below), and activities continued steadily thereafter (see Taavitsainen and Pahta 2004: 4). Editorial practices have undergone several changes in recent years, and it is no exaggeration to say that editing has entered a dynamic phase. The digital turn in linguistics and philology has opened up new possibilities. One significant development is the ability to encode visual and structural features of the original document into an edition. For example, it has become possible to add digital images of letterforms to illustrate the hands (see pp. 31 and 34 below). This makes a big difference to the reader of the description. Several libraries have extensive picture galleries and they are adding digital images of their manuscripts to their webpages. Editorial practices in general have undergone a shift in their goals abandoning the reconstruction of hypothetical "originals" of literary texts and focusing on versions that reached real audiences and were used by real people. The editorial practices of utilitarian texts have been different from the beginning because the remedybook tradition exhibits a great deal of variation in textual transmission and processes of adaptation, expansion, abbreviation, or omission, can frequently be encountered on manuscript pages of everyday texts.

3. Recipes and manuscript reality

The grand literary works of the medieval period are well known, but utilitarian texts offer opportunities for original work with manuscript materials. We have new catalogues and other research resources at our disposal. Manuscript reality can be checked with these tools to verify whether additional copies are extant and where they are housed. One of the first digital tools for studying Middle English manuscript reality of medical and scientific writing was offered by the electronic reference of *Scientific and Medical Writings in Old and Middle English* by Voigts and Kurtz (2000), and George Keiser's (1998) *Works of Science and Information*, volume 10 of *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English 1050-1500* is also invaluable. A careful study with the help of these tools can reveal new connections between manuscripts, as is the case with Wellcome MS 542 (see p. 22 below).

4. Recipes in Middle English medical literature

Middle English medical texts can be grouped according to their underlying traditions of writing into three main kinds: surgical texts, specialized treatises and remedies and *materia medica.* Surgical texts and specialized treatises belong to the learned traditions of medical writing, going back to academic origins, with emerging vernacular adaptations and translations from the last quarter of the fourteenth century onwards. The remedybook tradition and *materia medica* consist of recipes, and health advice in prose and verse in various regimen texts as well as prognostications and charms, which verge on the occult. In this respect the present collection is a typical representative of this tradition. Texts have mixed origins, including both learned texts from classical sources and medical lore with some traits going back to Old English (Rubin 1974, Voigts 1984: 322-324). But the overall picture of Middle

English recipes is not simple as they also occur in surgical treatises and specialized texts. Recipes are different in these texts as they are used as illustrations of healing methods and in general they show more variation (Taavitsainen 2001). The borderline between medical and culinary recipes was also somewhat unclear, and some recipes, e.g. for tonics, occur in both contexts, as "culinary recipes and cooking instructions form part of *regimen sanitatis* literature in Europe from the earliest pre-Arabist text to the end of the Middle Ages" (Weiss-Adamson 1995: 204).[1] In remedybooks recipes have acquired a fairly standardized form that serves a practical purpose. Quick consultation is made possible by some principles and set conventions: the items often follow the order from head to foot, the titles specify the ailment which the medicine helps combat, and the ingredients follow a formula beginning with "Take …". At the end, efficacy phrases like "probatum est" may assure the user of the utility of the advice.

5. Electronic resources and the digital turn in manuscript studies

To follow up the connections of manuscript transmission as revealed by Voigts and Kurtz (2000) and Keiser (1998), electronic corpora can be used to detect intertextual passages. The most comprehensive electronic database of Middle English recipes for public use to date is provided by *Middle English Medical Texts* (*MEMT*; Taavitsainen, Pahta and Mäkinen 2005). It is based on editions of medical treatises from c. 1375 to c. 1500 and an appendix of texts written c. 1330. It includes everything that was available in edited form at the time, and thus it gives a good picture of the state of the art of edited recipe texts up to 2005. In the years that have passed since its publication new editions

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1   I am grateful to Ville Marttila for pertinent notes on culinary recipes.