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978-0-521-11041-9 - Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English

Edited by Irma Taavitsainen and Paivi Pahta

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Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English

Medical and scientific writing in English has evolved over more than a millennium, from its genesis in the Anglo-Saxon era to its present-day position as the *lingua franca* of science. This volume focuses on its development as a register in late medieval English. During this period it emerged in the vernacular, as its Graeco-Roman conventions were modified in a new sociohistorical context. Seven experts discuss the various linguistic and textual processes involved in vernacularising science, and how they related to communicative practices and to the writers and readers of medical and scientific texts. Referring to authentic medieval texts, they show how discourse communities adopted scriptorial ‘house-styles’, how vocabulary and code-switching patterns reflect the multilingual context of the period, and how intertextuality featured between shared materials. Bringing together several perspectives on this new research area for the first time, this book will be welcomed by linguists and historians of science alike.

The idea of this book comes from the work done by the Scientific thought-styles project team in the Research Unit for Variation and Change in English at the University of Helsinki. Three of the contributors are members of the team and compilers of the electronic *Corpus of Middle English Medical Texts* (Taavitsainen, Pahta, and Mäkinen).

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Frontmatter

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Edited by

IRMA TAAVITSAINEN

University of Helsinki

and

PÄIVI PAHTA

University of Helsinki



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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	page ix
<i>List of illustrations</i>	xi
<i>List of tables</i>	xiii
<i>Preface</i>	xv
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	xvii
1 Vernacularisation of scientific and medical writing in its sociohistorical context	1
<i>Päivi Pahta and Irma Taavitsainen</i>	
2 Discourse communities and medical texts	23
<i>Claire Jones</i>	
3 Transferring classical discourse conventions into the vernacular	37
<i>Irma Taavitsainen</i>	
4 Code-switching in medieval medical writing	73
<i>Päivi Pahta</i>	
5 Entrances and exits in English medical vocabulary, 1400–1550	100
<i>Juhani Norri</i>	
6 Herbal recipes and recipes in herbals – intertextuality in early English medical writing	144
<i>Martti Mäkinen</i>	
7 Middle English recipes: Vernacularisation of a text-type	174
<i>Ruth Carroll</i>	
8 The <i>Declaraciones</i> of Richard of Wallingford: A case study of a Middle English astrological treatise	197
<i>Linda Ehlsam Voigts</i>	
	vii

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11041-9 - Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English

Edited by Irma Taavitsainen and Paivi Pahta

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii Contents

9	Scriptorial ‘house-styles’ and discourse communities	209
	<i>Irma Taavitsainen</i>	
	<i>Bibliography</i>	241
	<i>Index of manuscripts</i>	268
	<i>General index</i>	271

Cambridge University Press

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[More information](#)

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RUTH CARROLL is a Senior Lecturer (Associate Professor) in linguistics in the Department of English Philology at the University of Turku, and was also a visiting scholar at the University of Helsinki when she began the work published here. Her previous publications include work on the lexical semantics of Middle English, as well as historical discourse linguistics.

CLAIRE JONES is Research Fellow at the Centre for Medieval Studies at the University of York. She has published in the fields of vernacular medical manuscripts and medieval literacy and is currently working on a large-scale database of medieval English urban manuscripts.

MARTTI MÄKINEN is a doctoral student at the Department of English, University of Helsinki. His research interests are manuscript and genre studies, corpus linguistics and historical pragmatics. His dissertation topic is intertextuality in medieval herbals.

JUHANI NORRI is Lecturer in English at the University of Tampere. He is the author of *Names of Sicknesses In English, 1400–1550* (1992) and *Names of Body Parts In English, 1400–1550* (1998). He is currently compiling a dictionary of medical vocabulary in English during the period 1375–1550.

PÄIVI PAHTA is Research Fellow in the multidisciplinary Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies and a member of the Research Unit for Variation and Change in English, both at the University of Helsinki. She is the author of *Medieval Embryology in the Vernacular: The Case of 'De spermate'* (Société Néophilologique, 1998) and a co-editor of *Writing in Nonstandard English* (Benjamins, 1999) and *Placing Middle English in Context* (Mouton de Gruyter, 2000).

Cambridge University Press

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Edited by Irma Taavitsainen and Paivi Pahta

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x List of contributors

IRMA TAAVITSAINEN is Professor of English Philology, Head of the Department of English and Deputy Director of the Research Unit of Variation and Change in English at the University of Helsinki. She has authored and co-edited several books, including *Diachronic Perspectives on Address Term Systems* (Benjamins, 2003), *Placing Middle English in Context* (Mouton de Gruyter, 2000), *Writing in Nonstandard English* (Benjamins, 1999) and *Index of Middle English Prose: A Handlist of Scandinavian Collections* (Boydell and Brewer, 1994). She is the co-editor of the *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* (Benjamins).

LINDA EHRSAM VOIGTS, Curators' Professor Emerita at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, publishes on Old and Middle English scientific and medical texts and is responsible, with Patricia Deery Kurtz, for the searchable database on more than 8,000 such texts: *Scientific and Medical Writings in Old and Middle English: An Electronic Reference*, CD-ROM (University of Michigan Press, 2000).

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11041-9 - Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English

Edited by Irma Taavitsainen and Paivi Pahta

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Illustrations

Plates

- 1 The relations of the macrocosm of universe to the microcosm of man. From a German manuscript, *Apocalypsis S. Johannis* from c. 1420. Wellcome MS 49, f. 41r. By permission of the Wellcome Library, London. 19
- 2 Scenes of medical practice in a learned Latin manuscript, with women and a learned doctor performing a Caesarean section. From a German manuscript, *Apocalypsis S. Johannis* from c. 1420. Wellcome MS 49, f. 38v. By permission of the Wellcome Library, London. 20
- 3 Early fifteenth-century manuscript page from the Middle English translation of Henry Daniel's *Liber uricrisiarum* in Wellcome MS 225, f. 24r. By permission of the Wellcome Library, London. 21
- 4 Pen drawing of a human head and torso, with text, illustrating the sense organs. Late fifteenth century, Aristotle, *Analytica priora*. Wellcome MS 55, f. 93r. By permission of the Wellcome Library, London. 22
- 5 Two pages from a Middle English leechbook, early fifteenth century. Wellcome MS 405, f. 17r. By permission of the Wellcome Library, London. 192
- 6 A manuscript page from a surgical text from 1392 in Wellcome MS 564, f. 117r. By permission of the Wellcome Library, London. 194
- 7 Middle English version W of the *Declaracions* of Richard of Wallingford. Wellcome MS 8004, f. 33v, with table of correspondences. By permission of the Wellcome Library, London. 195
- 8 Middle English version W of the *Declaracions* of Richard of Wallingford. Wellcome MS 8004, f. 34v, diagram following the text showing relationships of signs of the zodiac to planets. By permission of the Wellcome Library, London. 196

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11041-9 - Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English

Edited by Irma Taavitsainen and Paivi Pahta

Frontmatter

[More information](#)**xii List of illustrations****Figures and map**

3.1 Latin and vernacular: chronological development	50
6.1 Herbal transmission in the Middle Ages	150
6.2 English medical recipes: intertextual relationships	164
8.1 <i>Declaracions</i> : incipits	200
8.2 <i>Declaracions</i> : on the effects of azamena	201
8.3 <i>Declaracions</i> : on planetary houses	202
8.4 <i>Declaracions</i> : on triplicities	203
9.1 P-paradigm area (after McIntosh 1983)	223

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11041-9 - Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English

Edited by Irma Taavitsainen and Paivi Pahta

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Tables

3.1	Transferring classical conventions into the vernacular: some parameters	page 46
3.2	Texts given as commentaries in <i>eVK</i>	51
5.1	Chronological layers of medical terms	108
5.2	Chronological layers of medical terms (dating according to the date of the original)	110
5.3	Some examples of semantic borrowing among Middle English medical terms	118
5.4	Chronological layers of lexical loss in medical terminology	130
5.5	Chronological layers of lexical loss in medical terminology (dating according to the date of the original)	132
6.1	Simple recipes in herbals	154
6.2	<i>Composita</i> in herbals I	155
6.3	<i>Composita</i> in herbals II	156
6.4	<i>Composita</i> in herbals III	157
6.5	<i>Composita</i> in other medical writing	159
6.6	Complex <i>composita</i> in other medical writing	160
6.7	Variation in <i>composita</i> in other medical writing	161
6.8	<i>Composita</i> from remedybooks and an encyclopaedia	162
6.9	<i>Composita</i> with one corrupt copy	162
6.10	Simple recipes shared by herbals and other medical writing	165
6.11	<i>Composita</i> shared by herbals and other medical writing I	166
6.12	<i>Composita</i> shared by herbals and other medical writing II	167
6.13	Partial recipe parallels in herbals and other medical writing	168
9.1	Variation in Samuels's core list of CMS items in LPs of medical texts from the Midlands	219
9.2	Potentially diagnostic features of the Chauliac/ <i>Rosarium</i> type of language	220
9.3	Variation in other pertinent features	221

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11041-9 - Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English

Edited by Irma Taavitsainen and Paivi Pahta

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

To understand the characteristics of present-day scientific writing, we need to know about the earlier stages of language use. This book deals with the early phases of the development that was to lead to the present situation where English has a global position as the *lingua franca* of science. The first steps of writing about medical and scientific matters in English were taken more than a millennium ago in the Anglo-Saxon era, and from the later Middle Ages there is an unbroken chain of texts covering more than six hundred years. Vernacular scientific writing in the late medieval and early modern periods is still an understudied area, though more attention has been attached to it recently. New data have been discovered, and new methods of linguistic research make new insights possible and enable researchers to pose questions that would have seemed unanswerable a generation ago. The evolution of scientific writing shows interesting shifts from more detached to more involved style and back again, and from an abundant use of foreign phrases and Latinate vocabulary to more native and plain style. Surprisingly, late medieval scientific writing has several features in common with characteristics of present-day scientific writing.

This book is an outcome of the research project ‘Scientific thought-styles: The evolution of English medical writing’ in the Research Unit for Variation and Change at the University of Helsinki, with invited chapters by international scholars working in the field. We wanted to contribute to the discussion on vernacularisation processes, and transfer and establishment of genre conventions and special languages; our future work will focus on developments in a diachronic perspective.

We wish to thank the Academy of Finland for granting us research funding for a three-year period 1999–2001 (project number 37930). Most of the work for this book has been carried out at the Research Unit for Variation and Change in English at the University of Helsinki, and our corpus work has partly been funded by the Research Unit. We are grateful for this support. We would like to thank our research assistants Carla Suhr and Turo Hiltunen for their unfailing spirit and help in editing this book. We are also grateful to the other members of our project team Alpo Honkapohja, Martti Mäkinen and Maura Ratia, and our former project

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-11041-9 - Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English

Edited by Irma Taavitsainen and Paivi Pahta

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

xvi Preface

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Abbreviations

AN	Anglo-Norman
BL	British Library
CEEM	<i>Corpus of Early English Medical Writing</i>
CL	Classical Latin
DML	Latham and Howlett, <i>Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources</i>
EModE	Early Modern English
eVK	Voigts and Kurtz, <i>Scientific and Medical Writings in Old and Middle English: An Electronic Reference</i>
Gr	Greek
IMEP	<i>The Index of Middle English Prose</i>
L	Latin
LALME	McIntosh <i>et al.</i> , <i>A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English</i>
MDu	Middle Dutch
ME	Middle English
MED	Kurath and Kuhn, <i>Middle English Dictionary</i>
MEMT	<i>Corpus of Middle English Medical Texts</i>
MF	Middle French
ML	Medieval Latin
MNW	Verwijs and Verdam, <i>Middernederlandsch woordenboek</i>
MS(S)	manuscript(s)
OE	Old English
OED	Murray <i>et al.</i> , <i>Oxford English Dictionary</i>
OF	Old French
OLD	Glare, <i>Oxford Latin Dictionary</i>
RMLW	Latham, <i>Revised Medieval Latin Word-List</i>
STC	Pollard and Redgrave, <i>A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland and of English Books Printed Abroad 1475–1640</i>
TK	Thorndike and Kibre, <i>A Catalogue of Incipits of Mediaeval Scientific Writings in Latin</i>