

Historical Linguistics and Palaeography, two inseparable tools to teach History of the English language

Lingüística histórica y paleografía, dos herramientas inseparables en la enseñanza de la historia de la lengua inglesa

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Abstract: *Palaeography is the study of ancient and medieval handwriting, and it focuses on the establishment of “patterns in the development of characteristic letter forms and abbreviations” (Lowe, 2006: 134). Historical Linguistics studies the diachronic evolution that languages endure. Hence, these two disciplines complement each other and provide the required tools and means to establish the date of different manuscripts. However, it is possible to state that Palaeography has been traditionally associated to History, whereas Historical Linguistics is related to Linguistics. Linguists tend to lack the skills that historians possess to transcribe and analyse ancient scripts, whereas historians usually do not have the knowledge required to study the graphemes and spellings that are relevant to date a manuscript. Therefore, this paper aims to narrow down the date of production of the Pseudo-Hippocrates’ Treatise on Zodiacal Influence (ff. 98r-104r) contained in GUL, MS Hunter 513. A transcription and detailed analysis of the main features of the handwriting of the text will be carried out and followed by a thorough inquiry of the chief characteristics of the Middle English language.*

Keywords: Palaeography, Historical Linguistics, teaching History of the English Language, Manuscript Studies

Resumen: *La Paleografía es el estudio de la escritura antigua y medieval, y su objetivo principal consiste en establecer patrones basados en el desarrollo de la forma de diferentes letras y abreviaturas (Lowe, 2006:134). La Lingüística Histórica estudia la evolución diacrónica de las lenguas. Así, estas dos disciplinas se complementan y proporcionan las herramientas y medios necesarios para establecer la datación de diferentes manuscritos. Sin embargo, la Paleografía se ha asociado tradicionalmente a la Historia, mientras que la Lingüística Histórica lo ha hecho a la Lingüística. Los lingüistas tienden a carecer de las habilidades que poseen los historiadores para transcribir y analizar escrituras antiguas; mientras que los historiadores no suelen tener el conocimiento necesario para estudiar los grafemas y la ortografía, que tan relevantes son para datar manuscritos. Por lo tanto, este artículo pretende establecer la fecha de producción del tratado Pseudo-Hipocrático titulado Sobre la Influencia Zodiacal, (ff. 998-104r), que se encuentra en la biblioteca de la Universidad de Glasgow y pertenece al manuscrito Hunter 513. Se transcribirá el tratado y se ofrecerá un análisis detallado de los principales rasgos de la escritura manuscrita, así como de las principales características lingüísticas de la lengua inglesa del mismo.*

Palabras clave: paleografía, lingüística histórica, enseñanza de historia de la lengua inglesa, estudio de manuscritos

1. Introduction

This article deals with the study of the fifteenth-century Treatise on Zodiacal Influence contained in Glasgow University Library, Hunter MS 513 (henceforth H513). My main aim is to demonstrate how palaeography and linguistic skills ought to be combined for the teaching of History of the English language due to the fact that they both complement each other when studying the evolution of the English language through manuscripts. The students of English Studies, who develop a wide linguistic knowledge during their degree, also need to be trained in palaeography, since the different kinds of handwriting, abbreviations and punctuation in manuscripts need to be taken into consideration to study the evolution of the English language and therefore, to be able to date the language of specific treatises.

However, the analysis of the language of any treatise first requires a detailed study of the manuscript that contains it. That is why the following section draws special attention to the history of the manuscript and it also provides a physical description of it. It will not offer an account of parallel copies to H513, as the dissemination of the tract under consideration has already been thoroughly study (De la Cruz-Cabanillas and Diego-Rodríguez, 2018a; Diego-Rodríguez, 2017). This is succeeded by the methodology sections, which concentrates on the palaeographical transcription and the editorial principles followed. Then, the analysis of the data is provided by studying the script and the language of the treatises, in order to demonstrate how Palaeography and Historical Linguistics stand for two inseparable tools as for dating medieval manuscripts.

2. Glasgow University Library, Hunter MS 513

H513 is part of a collection of 250 medieval manuscripts (Ker, 1983: 7) compiled by William Hunter during his lifetime. At the beginning of the manuscript, it is possible to find Hunter's handwriting and the main contents of the manuscript (Figure 1).¹

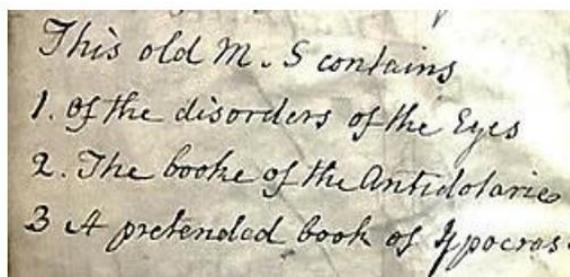


Fig. 1: *This old M.S contains | Of the disorders of the Eyes |
The Booke of the Antidotarie | A pretended book of Ypocras.*
Source: H513 (f. iiv)

¹ I am grateful to University of Glasgow Library, Special Collections for their permission to reproduce all the images.

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Nevertheless, it is difficult to trace the ownership of this manuscript before and after William Hunter. Neil Ripley Ker offered a detailed list of “Hunterian medieval manuscripts in catalogues of sales by auction and booksellers’ catalogues and listing” (Ker, 1983: 13-25). Nonetheless, this account does not include any references to H513. It is, however, possible to identify some marks of ownership by looking at the manuscript itself. It contains some signatures of the different people who acquired it. Then, throughout the manuscript the following signatures George Blagrave (f. iir), Francis Sleighe (f. 25r), Jhon Garnett (f. 37v) and Charles Chancy (f. 98v) can be recognised throughout the manuscript².

2.1. Contents

H513 contains four different scientific treatises from the fifteenth century and some brief tracts at the end of the volume, dating from the seventeenth century. Its contents have been itemised in detail below:

- Benvenutus Grassus’s Treatise on Diseases of the Eye (ff. 1r – 37r) opens with a table of contents preceding the text. Rubric: Of tonicles of the eyzen and the humours and cataractus. *Incipit*: Oculus anglice an eyze is hard holowe rounde full. *Explicit*: he wolde vouchesauf to ende your Cures Amen (Eldredge, 1996: 26).
- Unknown author’s Antidotary (ff. 37v- 97v). Rubric: Here begynneth þe book of þe antitodarie. *Incipit*: In the name of god. Amen. There shall be vij chapter. *Explicit*: he regnith withouten ende. Amen (Eldredge, 1996: 26).
- Pseudo-Hippocrates’ *Treatise on Zodiacal Influence* (ff. 98r – 104r). *Incipit*: This is the boke of ypocras in this boke he techith for to. *Explicit*: þe best þat euer were founde (De la Cruz-Cabanillas and Diego-Rodríguez, 2018a: 89)
- Pseudo-Hippocrates’ Treatise on the Signs of Death (ff. 105r – 107v). *Incipit*: Here begynnethe þe tokenys þat ypocras þe leche. *Explicit*: Explicit signa mortis secundum ypocras (Young and Aitken, 1908: 421)
- Medical recipes subsequently added, probably dating from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in f. 97v, f. 98r f. 100v, f. 101v, f. 103v, f. 104v, f. 111v, f. 112r, f. 112v (Young and Aitken, 1908: 422). Astrological tables dating from the seventeenth century in f. 108v and f. 109v (Young and Aitken, 1908: 422).

² For detailed information about the people who have signed the manuscript see *Dictionary of National Biography* (1972-1974). Edited by S.P. Sen, 4 Vols. Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies.

2.2. Material

The writing surface of this manuscript is vellum. However, since parchments are greyish, yellowy and semi-transparent, it is possible to talk about poor-quality parchments in H513 (Hector, 1988: 16). A difference in colour and texture is perceptible regarding the two sides. Therefore, the flesh side is less rough and whiter than the fur side. Despite these facts and although the manuscript has experienced some damage and became deteriorated with the passing of time, fortunately it does not affect the writing and the manuscript is currently well preserved and in good conditions to work with it.

2.3. Collation & Biding

H513 comprises 107 folios and some flyleaves at the front and at the back. The collation appears described in detail in Young and Aitken's catalogue: "two original vellum flyleaves (i²). || I8(0), 28-68, 710, 87, 98, 1016, 1110, 1214" (Young and Aitken, 1908: 421). Its binding is also detailed in Young and Aitken's catalogue as "original, millboards, covered calf, blind-tooled lines and stamped panels, recently re-backed, formerly tied" (Young and Aitken, 1908: 421).

2.4. Ordinatio

H513 consists of 107 folios, which contain the four main texts previously mentioned. It also presents two additional folios at the front and six more at the back. The collation suggests that they are not subsequent additions. In these folios, it is possible to find illuminations, medical recipes, astrological tables and some of the folios are blank.

The zodiacal treatise is set out in seven folios. The first folio consists of an introduction in twenty-two lines and thereupon the signs of the Zodiac follow. In most of the cases, each zodiacal sign opens "with a blue, two-line initial, begins a separate section" (Means, 1993: 49). However, this is not the case with Aries, which appears in the first folio after the introduction. Then they are addressed in the following order: Aries, Taurus (15 lines), Gemini (14 lines), Cancer (12 lines), Leo (12 lines), Virgo (10 lines), Libra (10 lines), Scorpio (8 lines), Sagittarius (12 lines), Capricorn (10 lines), Aquarius (8 lines) and Pisces (9 lines). The zodiac signs only occupy half of the folio, which implies that probably this space has been left blank for later insertions. Three prescriptions have been incorporated to these blank spaces after Virgo (f. 100v), Libra (f. 101r) and Pisces (f. 103v) later on. The treatise closes with a text relating to apostemes or abscesses set out in twenty-three lines.

2.5. Decoration

The treatise does not include any drawings illustrating the movement and position of the signs of the Zodiac and the planets in order to complement and support the writing. Decoration was always added subsequent to the

writing and that is why it is possible to think that there was an intention of adding some illustrations in the blank spaces left beneath the text in the great majority of the folios (De Hamel, 1992: 48). This hypothesis is supported by the fact that some of the parallel manuscripts that I have consulted contain an illustration of the rotation of the planets at the end of each sign of the Zodiac. Each folio opens with a two-line initial inserted within the text. These *litterae notabiliores* are always written in blue ink. However, the final part of the treatise also shows one-line capital letters inserted within the text. These letters alternate blue and red inks, and their main aim is to indicate textual division.

2.6. Punctuation

The text of the treatise has little by way of punctuation. This is due to the fact that it was common in manuscripts to organise the text on the page in a way that the layout indicates different sections or major divisions (Parkes, 1992: 10). This is what happens in this text, although the following punctuation marks are also deployed:

- The *positura*, sometimes described as a '7'-shaped mark, appears nine times in the treatise. It is found at the end of each zodiac sign, as a way of denoting the end of a division within the same text (Parkes, 1992: 203)
- The *virgula*, represented as </>, frequently occurring punctuation mark in the treatise. It appears eighteen times and it is mainly used in order to indicate a medial pause (Hector, 1988: 47)
- The *punctus* only appears three times in the treatise. Its chief role is to show the end of section within the text.

There are more punctuation marks in the zodiacal treatise. It is possible to find three hyphens whose main role is to split a word at the end of the line. Although their shape differs from Present-Day English, they are easily recognisable <=>. Moreover, the treatise also contains *litterae notabiliores* at the beginning of each section, and sometimes at the beginning of a sentence in order to clarify the syntax of the text.

3. Methodology

The treatise under consideration has been first transcribed according to the following editorial principles:

1. The representation of letters and numbers
 - In addition to the letters of Roman alphabet, the treatise contains one grapheme that the current English alphabet does not have, but which existed in Old English and was long used during Middle English, namely thorn <þ>, which has been directly transcribed.
 - The Tironian note has been transcribed as &.
 - The coloured initials are signalled by an asterisk before each. A blank line has been inserted into the edited text at the point at which they appear, as they signal a major textual division.

- The treatise contains some numbers which have been transcribed retaining the Roman numerals or Arabic numerals.
- 2. Capital letters and lower-case letters
 - The capitalization has been preserved as in the original text.
- 3. Abbreviations and contractions
 - Abbreviations have been expanded and all superscripts lowered. They appear underlined in the transcription.
 - The lines above final nasal consonants have not been considered abbreviation signs but otiose.
- 4. Layout
 - The transcription follows the layout of the original text. The line separation of the original text has been retained.
 - Blank lines have been inserted before enlarged coloured initials in order to indicate textual division.
- 5. Word-spacing
 - Word separation has been normalized except at the end of the line.
- 6. Punctuation
 - Modern punctuation has not been added. The treatise shows three different types of punctuation marks that have been respected in the transcription. The *punctus* (.) has been transcribed as a full stop; the *positura* ('7'-shaped mark) has been transcribed as a semicolon; and finally, the *virgula suspensiva* (/) has been transcribed as a comma.
 - The hyphen used to indicate that a word at the end of a line continues in the following line has been retained in the transcription.

The transcription makes the contents of the treatise under consideration readable and accessible to the target reader. This task establishes a first contact with the characteristic the Middle English dialect of this particular text³, and it also helps the editor to become familiar with the handwriting. Therefore, in the following section, attention will be drawn to the script, analysing and studying the most distinctive letter forms for dating the treatise. Then, those spellings and linguistic characteristics that constitute a valuable trait to narrow down the date of the treatise shall be considered.

4. Analysis and discussion

4.1. Script

As far as handwriting is concerned, the late Middle Ages epitomise a turning point and a breakdown with the preceding scriptural tradition, primarily due to two factors: an increase in the size of the works to be copied and the proliferating demand for books. As a result, the necessity of increasing the simplicity and the speed of writing arose, a requirement supplied with the

³ See Diego- Rodríguez (2018) for a detailed study of the Middle English dialect of the treatise under study.

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emergence of new scripts (Parkes, 1979: xiii). In general terms, it can be asserted that the late Middle Ages were governed by a script called Anglicana and its different varieties. Between the third quarter of the fourteenth century and 1450, a new kind of handwriting emerged (Parkes, 1979: xxii), the Secretary script. The most distinctive letter forms of these two different types will be presented below in order to prove that the handwriting of the treatise shares features of both script varieties and may be regarded as characteristic of texts produced during the late Middle Ages. Therefore, some of the most recognisable letter forms of Anglicana can be found in the treatise. First of all, the two-compartment **a** showing an upper lobe. However, this upper lobe does no longer extend above the usual level compared to the other letters, a fact that automatically points to the beginning of the fifteenth century (*Figure 2*).

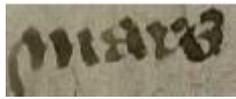


Fig. 2: Anglicana a. Source: H513 (line 91)

Another distinctive letter form of Anglicana script is the right-side flourish **w**. Nevertheless, this letter started to undergo a simplification process throughout the late Middle Ages (*Figure 3*).

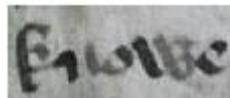


Fig.3: Anglicana w. Source: H513 (line 2)

It is also relevant to draw attention to the distinctive forms of **s**, both long and short (*Figure 4*). The short consonant resembles the shape of the Arabic numeral 6, which is representative of Anglicana script. The long **s** is characterised by a long descender; however, since its strokes are no longer angular and they have become rounded, it is characteristic of Secretary script and as a result, of the late Middle Ages.

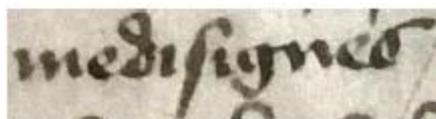


Fig.4: Anglicana s. Source: H513 (line 46)

It is also pertinent to focus on **r** which shows two different forms throughout the treatise. Firstly, two strokes descending below the line of writing and secondly, the representative form of this letter in Secretary script, one minim and its notable connecting stroke (*Figures 5 and 6*).

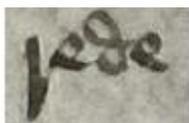


Fig.5: Anglicana r. Source: H513
(line 147)



Fig.6: Secretary r. Source: H513
(line 1)

Finally, **g** shows a “diamond-shaped lobe” (Parkes, 1979: 11) which points to the Secretary script, compared to the 8-shaped Anglicana **g** (Figure 7).

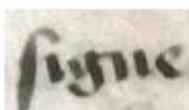


Fig.7: Secretary g. Source: H513 (line 9)

This coexistence of different handwritings is mainly due to the fact that until 1450 “the features of the handwriting underwent a series of rapid changes which reflect the uncertainty of scribes who were forced to master the forms and idiom of a new script” (Parkes, 1979: xx). That is why it is not surprising that some of the most distinctive graphs of Anglicana, such as the ones previously described, appear merged into Secretary script. Nevertheless, the great majority of letter forms point to the new calligraphic style that emerged in the last century of the Middle Ages.

Therefore, palaeography is able to provide a solid scientific basis by analysing the most significant letter forms of Anglicana and Secretary scripts, which allows narrowing down the date of the treatise to the first decades of the fifteenth century. However, not only the shape but also the restriction of some letters to specific positions within the word can be a determining factor as far as dating is concerned. " During the Middle English period the characters <i> and <j> were interchangeable. Similarly, both <u> and <v> were used to designate the vowel sound /u(:)/ as well as the voiced fricative consonant /v/. Nevertheless, at the end of the period a specialisation process took place regarding the position of these graphemes—There was an increasing tendency to use <v> as initial (Figure 8) and <u> in medial or final position (Figure 9).



Fig.8: <vse> Source: H513 (line 21)

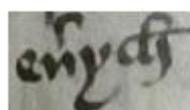


Fig.9: <euerych> Source: H513 (line 10)

4.2. Middle English language

There are some letter forms that became obsolete during the Middle Ages. At the beginning of the era, the letters eth <ð> and thorn <þ> occurred simultaneously until the thirteenth century, when eth vanished, and it was replaced by <þ> (Burrow and Turville-Petre, 2005: 13). During the fourteenth century a different spelling possibility emerged, and the thorn coexisted with <th>. This is reflected in the treatise where it is possible to find the same demonstrative written with these two different spellings: <þis> (line 77) and <this> (line 1). During the fourteenth century this consonant cluster was usually restricted to initial position within the word. However, in the fifteenth century its employment enlarged, and it can also be found in medial position as in <other> (line 42), or in final position in verbs such as <techith> (line 1) or <seyth> (line 3).

During the late Middle ages there was also an attempt to establish a distinction between short and long vowels in spelling. In the course of the fourteenth century a tendency to reduplicate some vowels in a close syllable appeared in London and its surroundings. This trend started as a local feature, but this spelling habit became a national one at the end of the Middle Ages. That is why in the treatise it is possible to see how OE <fet> changed to ME <feete> (line 137). Notice the final unstressed <e> that appears not only at the end of <feete>, but also in a wide range of words taken from the text such as <mone> (line 59). This final <e> stands for a diacritic mark whose main aim was to indicate that the sound value of the previous vowel was long and it was pronounced /ə/. Throughout the Middle Ages it was lost in pronunciation, although it continued to be present in writing.

However, the most relevant process that the Middle English language experienced during this period was a morphological simplification that entailed the disappearance of the declension system. Old English was a more fully inflected language, but there were some circumstances that encouraged the breakup of this ancient system. In order to carry out a detailed examination of the main reasons that lie behind this unprecedented linguistic simplification, and also to explain and illustrate how it took place, the word <boke> (line 1) has been selected as a point of departure. ME <boke> belongs to a minor declension of nouns, and according to its gender, it is feminine. All the declensions regardless the gender underwent a process of analogical extension from the strong declension of masculine nouns.

From Old English to Middle English there was an ongoing phonological reduction which affected inflectional morphology. The levelling process, which consisted of the relaxation of any final unstressed vowel, is responsible for the fact that many plural forms simplified to <-es> in spelling and the singular ones remained as they were in Old English.

The result of this weakening was that many case endings fell together and merged in Middle English. In general, it firstly affected northern dialects which change faster due to the Scandinavian settlements, whereas southern ones tend to proceed much more slowly. This is what happens to the noun selected as an example whose declension imitates this pattern (*Figure 10*).

		OE	ME
Singular	Nominative	boc	bok
	Accusative	boc	bok
	Genitive	bec	bokes
	Dative	bec	boke
Plural	Nominative	bec	bokes
	Accusative	bec	bokes
	Genitive	boca	bokes
	Dative	bocum	bokes

Fig.10: Simplification process in the declension of PDE <book>

5. Conclusion

Hence, the zodiacal treatise contains the main characteristics of a late Middle English text, both from a palaeographical and linguistic point of view. Its script as well as the selection of particular graphemes for specific positions within the word point to the last century of the Middle Ages. Moreover, the linguistic simplification that the English language endured during this period has reached a very high point of development in the text. The appearance of new spellings and the simplification of the declension system are responsible for the emergence of a more fixed syntactic order and also for the replacement of grammatical gender for natural gender.

To conclude, this study has proved how two different disciplines complement each other and are necessary to narrow down the date of a medieval manuscript as much as possible. Therefore, when training students in Medieval Manuscript Studies it is essential to provide them with knowledge from both disciplines, regardless their linguistic or historical background. Future research is needed in order to analyze how Palaeography and Historical Linguistics can also be used together in order to study the abbreviations of medieval manuscripts and see how they can also be used as tools to date a localize the dialectal provenance of medieval manuscripts⁴.

⁴ A first approach to the topic can be found in De la Cruz-Cabanillas and Diego-Rodríguez (2018b).

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