

**THE MIDDLE ENGLISH GILBERTUS ANGLICUS:
AN ASSESSMENT OF DIALECTAL FEATURES
IN G.U.L. MS HUNTER 307 (ff. 13r-145v)**

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The Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus, a mediaeval treatise on general medicine based on the Latin work *Compendium medicinae* (written by Gilbertus Anglicus ca. 1240) and dating from around 1400, is preserved in quite a large number of manuscripts housed in different libraries. The extant copies amount to more than fifteen; in addition, there are also codices which contain parts of the treatise. The main objective of this paper is to establish the dialectal provenance or distribution of the language found in one of the extant copies of the Middle English Gilbertus, namely, Glasgow, University Library, Hunter MS 307. The methodology followed for the purpose is grounded in the model supplied by the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English* (McIntosh et al. 1986). Analysing the language of the different versions may provide clues about the exemplar by comparing their localisation, and thus allow establishing the original archetype, as well as evidence about the diffusion of the work.

Keywords: dialect, Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus, *LALME*, linguistic profile, East Anglian English.

1. Introduction

Gilbertus Anglicus' original treatise has long been recognised "among the literary monuments of early English medicine" and as deserving a distinguished place for two main reasons: first, it is the earliest complete treatise on general medicine by an English author that is extant; and second, it provides a full picture of the medical science of the period and nation (Handerson 1908 [2005]: 17).¹ The translations into different languages also bear witness to the impact and influence of the treatise. However, and despite its relevance to the history of medicine and the fact that it can supply invaluable insights into the process of vernacularisation of English as the language for science, the Middle English (ME) adaptation of the work has not been given enough attention and, as a consequence, most of the copies remain unexplored. Keiser (1998: 3834) has listed seventeen extant manuscripts containing the ME Gilbertus. Getz (1991: lxxviii-lxxxii) also discusses the transmission of the copies and furnishes complementary data about manuscripts containing parts of the work. Yet only two of the array of witnesses have been edited hitherto. One of them is London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library, MS 537, henceforth W537 (Getz 1991). The text of the ME Gilbertus, copied ca. 1460, is held in folios 48r-310v. The other one is Glasgow, University Library, Hunter MS 509, hereafter H509 (Esteban-Segura 2008; 2012), approximately from the same date and collecting the work in folios 14r-167v. As for their dialectal provenance, Getz (1991: lxiv) briefly comments on the dialect of W537 as "written throughout in the late transitional English of the southeast Midlands that can best be described as standard English". The language and dialect of H509, on the other hand, has been studied in

depth with a resulting localisation of the text in East Anglia, more specifically in the Norwich area (Esteban-Segura 2010).

The manuscript under consideration for the present study is Hunter 307 (H307), also housed in Glasgow University Library and dating from around 1425-1450. Several texts are contained in this codex: an anonymous ME treatise on humours, elements, uroscopy, complexions, etc. (ff. 1r-13r); the ME Gilbertus Anglicus (ff. 13r-145v); an anonymous ME treatise on buboes (ff. 145v-146v); a gynaecological and obstetrical text (ff. 149v-165v); a ME version of Guy de Chauliac's "On bloodletting" (ff. 165v-166v); and a pharmacopoeia (ff. 167r-172v). The text comprised within folios 1r and 166v has been labelled "System of Physic" (Young and Aitken 1908: 245-246; Cross 2004: 24-25).

The main purpose of this paper is to analyse a number of features (represented by specific forms or occurrences of words) of the language found in the version of the ME Gilbertus held in H307 (ff. 13r-145v), so as to localise the text geographically and determine the link with the language of the versions previously mentioned. The text on the diseases on women – although part of the Gilbertus' tradition – has not been taken into account, since it is not present in all the manuscripts and including it could therefore represent a problem for future dialectal comparison between different Gilbertus' witnesses. In fact, the dialect of the gynaecological text in H307 has been considered by Vega Déniz (2004), who assigns it to the East Midlands, and more precisely to the region of Huntingdon.

Concerning its organisation, the paper is structured into the following sections: first, an introduction to the text under study and several related copies is carried out and the objectives put forward; second, the methodology is explained; third, the analysis is presented and its results discussed; fourth, the findings drawn from the investigation are accounted for in the conclusions. Finally, the references and an appendix with the linguistic profile (LP) of H307 are supplied.

2. Methodology

The method of analysis is based on the model proposed in the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, henceforth *LALME* (McIntosh et al. 1986), which consists of several steps. The first of them has been the completion of a survey questionnaire, made up of items (which could be defined as headings or lemmas) and their different forms of realisation. The set of items has been selected from the list provided in *LALME* (vol. 3, pp. xviii-xix), taking into account those items that in principle may furnish salient written variants. H307 had been previously lemmatised and morphologically tagged,² and this has enabled the retrieval of all the occurrences (forms) of items with the aid of the software tool *Text Search Engine (TexSEN)* (Miranda-García and Garrido-Garrido, forthcoming). Some changes have been introduced to *LALME*'s bracketing system (see vol. 3: xiv) for the display of results. Thus, for each item all the corresponding forms have been provided with the number of occurrences in decreasing order of frequency. The completed questionnaire, offered in the appendix, has allowed devising the LP of the text.

The next phase involved the application of the 'fit-technique' (McIntosh et al. 1986, vol. 1: 10-12; Benskin 1991), whose mechanics include the use of dot maps, in which forms are plotted in successive transparent overlays in order to restrict the area of origin, and of item maps for a closer dialectal localisation. The county dictionary may also be employed for variants not gathered in maps.

Well-attested forms from the LP were chosen (see Benskin 1991: 17) and checked against the dot maps (*LALME*, vol. 1). Then, to narrow down the likely area of

provenance and find the exact location of items' variants, a set of them was selected and scrutinised against the corresponding item maps by means of an overlay of tracing paper in which dominant and minor variants were registered.

3. Dialectal analysis

Among the features surveyed in the dot maps, the primary variants for items MUCH, ADDER and FLESH,³ alongside the only variants for ASK, THOUGH and LIFE reduced the geographical location of H307 to the Midlands and South. Other items such as THE, IT, WHICH, IS, WAS, WILL, WOULD, FROM, THAN, YET, WORK, THERE or WHERE have been of little help, as forms found for them in H307 are common throughout the whole territory.

The general absence of prefixal marking for past participles (only 22 instances out of 1,638 past-participle forms are prefixed) and the use of prefix *y-* (16×; i.e., 'yfallen', 'ymedlid') are also peculiar to the Midlands (Mossé 1952: 86).⁴

Personal pronouns have also proved useful for broad localisation; thus, the dominant forms for the subject and object case ('*pei*' (313×) and '*hem*' (445×) respectively) of the third person plural pronouns represent a mixed type (Scandinavian subject form; native object form), which is typical of the Midlands (Mossé 1952: 55, 58) and, according to Smith (1999: 123), distinctive of the East Midlands.

Several items from the LP have been considered in detail and attention has been paid to the range of variants (both dominant and minor) in order to record their occurrence in *LALME*'s item maps (vol. 2). The first that will be discussed is the third person singular feminine pronoun SHE. Although the dominant form for this item, '*sche*', appears throughout the Midlands and South, its occurrence together with the rare variant '*ʒ he*' is only attested in the Isle of Ely (Ely), in East Anglia, in particular in a place adjacent to Norfolk (Nfk). The forms for SUCH ('*siche*', '*sich*', '*suche*') are also found in Ely but, on this occasion, the region in which the variants are registered borders Huntingdonshire (Hu). However, when compared to H509, which displays a highly dialectal colouration, H307 lacks one of the most distinctive features of the spelling system of East Anglia, namely, the use of <x> to represent the initial consonantal sound in the forms for the verb *shulen* (rarely in other words spelt with initial <sh->). In the case of H307, the forms found for SHALL ('*schal*' (119×), etc.) and SHOULD ('*schulde*' (26×), etc.) are widespread and therefore irrelevant for precise localisation.

The distribution of FIRE includes the western parts of Nfk and Hu, and the north of Cambridgeshire (Cam). Of all these areas, Hu is the county in which main and secondary variants of more items conflate: AFTER ('*aftir*', '*after*')⁵, AGAINST ('*aʒ enus*', '*aʒ en*'), EYES ('*iʒ en*')⁶, FIRST ('*firste*', '*first*')⁷, HIGH ('*hiʒ*', '*hiʒ e*')⁸, LITTLE ('*litil*', '*litle*'). According to Benskin (1991: 13), "particular combinations – co-occurrences – specify particular areas, sectors in a continuum of regional dialect".

The forms for ANY ('*ony*', '*eny*') are attested in Nfk and Cam, and those for THROUGH ('*þorouʒ*', '*þorou*') in the south-western part of Ex, locations which, as has just been discussed, share the occurrence of other items with Hu.⁹

4. Conclusions

The high number of general features, which are extended throughout the country, evinces that the language of H307 is quite standardised, displaying few localisms. Nevertheless, the results obtained from linguistic profiling and dialectal fitting suggest that it was written in the Midland variety and could be circumscribed in East Anglia, where there was in fact an extensive production and circulation of medical texts during

the Middle Ages (see Jones 2000). The conflation of forms in the county of Huntingdonshire has allowed arriving at a more precise localisation, representing that region an eligible place of origin for H307. This ascription does not exclude the possibility of encountering different dialectal layers in the text, since the scribe might have translated the language of the exemplar into his own dialect. It is worth mentioning the influence of neighbouring areas (as has become patent in the analysis of the LP tackled in the previous section) as well.

As for the dissemination of the ME Gilbertus, the other two copies (W537 and H509) for which information on dialectal evidence is available also point to the Southeast Midlands and East Anglia as the places of origin. Consequently, at this stage (but only with three witnesses studied), we can tentatively conclude that the diffusion of the work is widespread in eastern areas, but limited or not far-reaching outside them. It would be necessary to carry out further research on the rest of extant copies to confirm this hypothesis.

Notes

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2. Both H307 and H509 are included in the annotated *Corpus of Late Middle English Scientific Prose*, currently being compiled at the University of Málaga in collaboration with the Universities of Murcia, Jaén and Glasgow. It can be consulted at <http://hunter.uma.es>
3. Following *LALME*'s conventions, items are rendered in small capitals.
4. See for instance the item SAY (*ppl.*) in the Appendix.
5. Variants also attested to the south of Hu, in the nearby county of Bedfordshire (Bed), and in Essex (Ex).
6. However, the minor variant 'iʒ en' is not documented in Hu (it does occur in Bed, but as a dominant form).
7. Variants also attested in Bed.
8. Variants also witnessed to the east, in Cam, and to the south, in Buckinghamshire (Bck).
9. The forms for items ANY and THROUGH are recorded in Hu, although there is no combination or co-occurrence of dominant and minor forms, that is, variants occur on their own, with a different distribution of frequency or one of them may not be present.
10. It does not appear in the list of items supplied by *LALME*.

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APPENDIX: LP H307

| | |
|---|--|
| THE: þe (4882×), the (13×), ðe (5×), þee (2×), þo (1×) | SHALL: schal (119×), schalt (62×), schulen (37×), schulen (5×), schule (3×), schullen (2×) |
| THESE: þese (186×), þes (6×), Þese (2×) | SHOULD: schulde (26×), schulden (2×), schuld (1×), schuldist (1×) |
| SHE: sche (4×), ʒhe (1×) | WILL: wole (98×), wolen (16×), wolen (11×), willip (2×), wil (1×), wol (1×), wolle (1×), wollen (1×) |
| IT: it (1407×), Jt (1×), ʒit (1×) | WOULD: wolt (19×), wolde (10×), wolden (3×), wolden (1×) |
| THEY: þei (313×), þey (18×) | FROM: fro (155×), from (26×), ffro (5×), from (5×) |
| THEM: hem (445×), hem (57×) | AFTER: aftir (115×), after (5×), after (3×) |
| SUCH: siche (95×), sich (72×), suche (33×), such (4×), swich (3×), siche (1×) | THAN: þan (28×), þan (28×) |
| WHICH: þe whiche (12×), whiche (4×), which (3×) | THOUGH: þouȝ (43×) |
| MANY: many (39×), Manye (2×), mony (1×) | IF: if (770×), Jf (52×), ʒif (2×) |
| ANY: ony (43×), eny (7×), enye (1×) | AGAINST: aʒenus (6×), aʒen (3×), aʒeyn (1×) |
| MUCH: moche (268×), muche (4×), moch (1×), moche (1×) | AGAIN: aʒen (9×), aʒenus (1×) |
| ARE: ben (445×), ben (234×), be (1×), bee (1×), been (1×), beþ (1×), is (1×) | YET: ʒit (3×) |
| WERE: were (19×), weren (15×), weren (7×), were (6×) | STRENGTH: strengþe (2×), strengþe (1×) |
| IS: is (1510×), be (2×) | THINK: þinke (1×), þinken (1×) |
| WAS: was (68×), was (2×) | WORK <i>n.</i> : werk (1×) |
| | v.: worche (11×), worchen (2×) |

THERE: þer (114×), þer (39×), þere (34×), þere (9×), Ther (1×), Þer (1×), þere (1×)
 WHERE: wher (1×), where (1×)
 THROUGH: þorouȝ (36×), þoruȝ (32×), þorou (12×), þoru (2×)
 WHEN: whan (132×), whan (53×), whanne (24×), whanne (2×), w[h]an (1×), whanne (1×)
 ADDER: eddir (2×), eddre (1×), eddre (1×)
 ASK: axiþ (2×)
 BOTH: boþe (99×)
 EITHER: eiþer (108×), eiþer (33×), eþer (1×)
 EYES: iȝen (114×), iȝen (3×)
 FIRE: fier (37×), fer (1×), feyeren (1×), fire (1×), firis (1×), fyer (1×), fyre (1×)
 FIRST: firste (25×), first (21×), ferste (3×), ffirst (1×), ffirste (1×)
 FLESH: fleisch (21×), fleische (10×), fleische (2×), flesche (1×)

GIVE: ȝiue (201×), ȝyue (42×), ȝif (6×), ȝeue (4×), ȝiuest (3×), ȝyuest (2×), if (1×), ȝeuen (1×), ȝeuiſt (1×), ȝyf (1×), ȝyuen (1×)
ppl.: ȝoue (2×), ȝouen (1×), ȝyuen (1×)
 HIGH: hiȝ (12×), hiȝe (1×), hiȝer (1×)
 LIFE: liyf (1×)
 LITTLE: litil (123×), litel (4×), litle (1×), little (1×)
 LIVE: lyueþ (2×)
 OWN: owne (5×)
*Past-participle prefix:*¹⁰ y- (16×), a- (4×), j- (2×)
 SAY: seie (22×), seyn (6×), seide (5×), seiden (1×), seiþ (1×)
ppl.: seid (17×), yseide (1×)
 SOME: sum (106×), summe (50×), summen (3×), summen (1×)
 SORROW: sorwe (4×), sorewe (3×)
 YEAR: ȝeer (10×)



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