Edurne Garrido-Anes (ed.). 2020. *A Middle English Version of the Circa Instans. Edited from Cambridge, CUL, MS Ee.1.13.* Middle English Texts 59. Heidelberg: Winter, lvi + 212 pp., 2 illustr., € 70.00.

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This volume offers the first complete edition of the Middle English version of the medical treatise known as *Liber de simplicibus medicina* (or *Circa instans*, a name derived from its opening words). Building upon her previous studies on the theme, Edurne Garrido-Anes now provides a well-presented and informative edition that represents an important contribution to our collective knowledge of medicine in late Medieval England.

The *Circa instans* is a twelfth-century Latin work attributed to a Matthaeus Platearius, who assembled this compilation at the school of Salerno. It is a treatise on ‘simples’; herbs, animals or minerals were referred to as ‘simples’ if they were considered to possess healthy properties in and by themselves. ‘Simples’ therefore need no interaction with other elements in order to achieve their curative effect. The work also served as a source for subsequent herbaria (such as the *Tractatus de herbis* and the *Grand Herbier en François*, the latter translated in English as *The Grete Herball*; cf. Hunt 1990: 15), medical compendia, and even botanical glossaries. An example of the latter is the one quoted by Garrido-Anes (xxiii), which is preserved in San Marino, CA, Huntington Library, HM 64 and is

still unedited. The *Circa instans* was also translated into a number of European vernaculars, including English. The treatise remained immensely popular until at least the sixteenth century: as Garrido-Anes notes (xxviii), copies are known to have been held “in English academic, religious, professional, and domestic contexts, both in urban and rural areas”.

Aspects of the Latin *Circa instans*, of its sources, analogues, and of its tradition in medieval England are thoroughly discussed by Garrido-Anes in the introductory section to the edition. After having provided a brief overview of the project, the author introduces the Latin treatise and the tradition of its translations in European vernaculars. Predecessors of the Salernitan work are subsequently discussed, focusing on Dioscorides’s *De materia medica*, which served as a key source for Platearius. The influence of the *Circa instans* on later botanical treatises is then assessed, which leads to the question of the circulation of the *Circa instans* in England (on which see also Garrido-Anes 2005b). Particular attention is paid to the tradition of the English translations, which the author has investigated in previous publications (see Garrido-Anes 2004, 2005a, 2005/2006). Rather than attempting a reconstruction of a critical text based on all known versions, Garrido-Anes has identified four manuscripts belonging to a common recension which is deemed representative of the full Middle English translation of the *Circa instans* and has based her edition on the best version, the one in Cambridge, University Library, Ee.1.13 (s. xv), providing variants from the other manuscripts of the same recension. Apart from the copy of the Middle English *Circa instans*, CUL Ee.1.13 features a treaty on urines;¹ works related to agriculture, including the tract on planting and grafting of trees by Nicholas Bollard, of which at least ten other copies survive;² medical recipes, three of which are related to gynaecology;³ and recipes about dyeing. Most of these items are either unedited, or a modern edition is lacking.⁴ The contents of the codex are listed in the introductory section; dialectal features are minutely analysed. Interestingly, the author argues that the manuscript is an example of use of the *Circa instans* in a domestic context. The contents and marks of CUL Ee.1.13 suggest ownership by “landowners or ploughmen rather than university-trained physicians or professional practitioners” (xliv).

The encyclopaedic, loosely alphabetical organisation of the *Circa instans* differs somewhat from earlier medical collections recorded in medieval England,

¹ On which see Tavormina (2014: 47–49).

² On which see Braekman (1985).

³ See Green (1992: 82–83).

⁴ The manuscript is quoted by Robbins (1970) in his study of medical manuscripts in Middle English; he does not recognise the tract as a Middle English copy of the *Circa instans* but rather as an herbal “claiming relation to Macer [Floridus]” (Robbins 1970: 402).

which often list remedies by disease in head-to-toe order, an arrangement that harks back to Galen at least (Hunt 1990: 2). In the Middle English version of the *Circa instans*, the headwords are in Latin; lemmata are usually followed by an English translation, and then by the explanation of the curative properties of the given herb, animal or mineral. Garrido-Anes notes that “the translator’s techniques for rendering Latin words and concepts into English include trying to use a vernacular synonym, a self-explaining periphrasis [...], or an anglicized term” (104). I quote an entry by way of example:

Nenuphar. Water lylie. þe flour is vsid in medicinis, and schal be gedrud in September. þe flour þat is purple hew is better þan þe yolow. Of þe flowrus, make seripus for scharp feuers. And for oþer hote distemperings and for chafynge of þe liuer, seþe þe flowrus in water. And of þat water & sugre, make a sewryp. For headache þat comþ of hete, put þe flowrus all nyȝte in water and amorow, drynke þe water and smyl to þe flowris (p. 61, ll. 6–12). [**Nenu-phar.** Water lily. The flower is used in medicine and shall be collected in September. The flower that is of purple colour is better than the yellow one. Make a syrup of the flowers against acute fevers; and for other hot imbalances and for warming of the liver seethe the flowers in water and make a syrup of the water and sugar. For headache that is caused by heat put the flowers in water all night and, the morning after, drink the water and smell the flowers.] (Translation is my own.)

The edition itself is followed by a commentary on words of particular interest, parallels, and explanations of problematic passages. The commentary is not, however, merely a sum of explicative notes; it helps set the Middle English *Circa instans* in the context the Hippocratic and Galenic doctrines that inspire the treatise. The glossary at pp. 124–175 similarly offers guidance through the medicobotanical terminology of the Middle English *Circa instans*. For example, ME *distemperaunce* (which is found in the entry quoted above) is explained as “the imbalance of humours or qualities; a morbid condition due to this imbalance; excess of one quality” (137). This is clearly related to the concept of medicine of humours on which the medical approach of the tract is based, and which is discussed in various sections of the commentary.

The volume is closed by two appendices and a bibliography. Appendix 1 offers a useful comparative table of the entries in the Latin text compared to those in the vernacular versions used for this edition. Appendix 2 gives a transcript of marginal annotations in fifteenth and sixteenth-century hands found in the CUL Ee.1.13 copy of the Middle English *Circa instans*. Several of these marginal notes – which are in Latin and English – reveal which entries must have been considered of particular interest to the manuscript’s owners. It is interesting to see that some of these notes are also related to women’s diseases; according to Garrido-Anes (183), the abbreviation *fem.* for *femina* “always appears next to the sections dealing with women’s illnesses”.

To sum up, *A Middle English Version of the Circa Instans, edited from Cambridge, CUL, MS Ee.1.13* is a thorough study which adds a great deal to our understanding of medieval English medicine – not only because of the edition itself, but also thanks to the introductory and accompanying material provided by the author.

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