

**UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINING MISCELLANIES
AS A MEANS OF TEXTUAL TRANSMISSION OF MEDIEVAL TEXTS
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO MS SLOANE 1315 AND
MS SLOANE 962 CONTAINING THE HERBAL AGNUS CASTUS**

COMPRENDER Y DEFINIR LAS MISCELÁNEAS COMO MEDIO DE
TRANSMISIÓN TEXTUAL DE TEXTOS MEDIEVALES,
CON ESPECIAL REFERENCIA A LOS MANUSCRITOS MS SLOANE 1315
Y MS SLOANE 962, QUE CONTIENEN EL HERBARIO AGNUS CASTUS

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Fecha de recepción: 26-09-2025
Fecha de aceptación: 10-11-2025

ABSTRACT

The study of miscellanies has sparked an ongoing interest in manuscript studies in the last decades (Corbellini, Murano and Signore, 2018), pouring new ideas about this multi-text volumes and their transmission, and challenging the way they were studied and understood earlier (Müller, 2013; Marchiori, 2025). In the light of these new proposals, this concept needs to be revisited. The main objectives of this article are twofold: on the one hand, to explore recent scholarship on the idea of the miscellaneous, and on the other hand, to apply these ideas to the study and understanding of two witnesses containing the herbal *Agnus Castus*, in order

to widen the scope on the transmission of this herbal. The arrangement of contents in both miscellaneous volumes supports the idea that – also in scientific contexts – there are underlying patterns and meanings in their design that need to be understood in a more organic way, and further analysis of more witnesses containing this herbal would support and enhance this line of research, contributing to a better understating of textual transmission in medieval times.

KEYWORDS: Agnus Castus; manuscripts; medieval medicine; Middle English; miscellanies

RESUMEN

El estudio de las misceláneas ha suscitado un interés constante en la investigación de manuscritos durante las últimas décadas (Corbellini, Murano y Signore, 2018), aportando nuevas ideas sobre estos volúmenes multitextuales y su transmisión, y cuestionando la forma en que se estudiaban y comprendían anteriormente (Müller, 2013; Marchiori, 2025). A la luz de estas nuevas propuestas, es necesario revisar este concepto. Los principales objetivos de este artículo son dos: por un lado, explorar la investigación reciente sobre la idea de lo misceláneo y, por otro, aplicar estas ideas al estudio y la comprensión de dos testimonios que contienen el herbario *Agnus Castus*, con el fin de ampliar el alcance del conocimiento sobre la transmisión de este herbario. La organización del contenido en ambos volúmenes misceláneos respalda la idea de que, incluso en contextos científicos, existen patrones y significados subyacentes en su diseño que deben comprenderse de forma más orgánica. Un análisis más profundo de otros testimonios que contengan este herbario apoyaría y enriquecería esta línea de investigación, contribuyendo a una mejor comprensión de la transmisión textual en la época medieval.

72

PALABRAS CLAVE: Agnus Castus; inglés medieval; manuscritos; medicina medieval; misceláneas

1. INTRODUCTION AND OBJECTIVES

The study of manuscript contexts has been a very popular line of inquiry in recent medieval studies (Putter, Pratt and Besamusca, eds.: 2017; Corbellini, Murano and Signore, eds.: 2018; Esteve-Ramos, 2020) and continues to be a trend within the community of scholars

investigating manuscripts (Marchiori 2025). Thus, in the light of recent scholarship, the very idea of the miscellaneous needs to be revisited, with a review of the most recent proposals that have engaged in conceptualising the concept.

Based on previous work on the arrangement and contents structure in other similar volumes, the present work attempts at exploring the very idea of the miscellaneous and of the patterns of textual internal dependency resulting from the close examination of the contents of MS Sloane 1315 and MS Sloane 962. The study of the said patterns and relations could reveal – as suggested in previous work – an intentionality, or a more conscious idea in the organisation of the material, demonstrating that it was conceived as a whole. Furthermore, can we propose a taxonomy in order to better understand the composition of these volumes? Can intentionality coexist with randomness in the resulting textual arrangement? Are there different levels of dependency among the texts in a miscellany? Considering recent proposals (Muller, 2013 and Marchiori, 2025) we seek to move forward to an understanding of how scientific material might have been organised by the identification of similar patterns or “intentionalities” (as Stemmler already called them in 1991), and how these arrangements may have been affecting different aspects within the composition, as the length of the texts, or the presence of more or less divergent topics. A more organic view (Marchiori, 2025) of these codices is needed to add an additional layer of understanding to its structure and its transmission.

To this end, MS Sloane 962 and MS Sloane 1315, both of them containing a copy of the *Agnus Castus* herbal, will provide with the material for the analysis, based on the content, the language and the genre. This herbal became very popular in the late Middle Ages and is present in forty-two copies, a fact that could provide with a very interesting picture of the internal dynamics of miscellanea containing scientific and medical material, thus adding to our knowledge of how late medieval compilations of this kind were transmitted and understood.

2. ON THE IDEA OF THE MISCELLANEOUS

Current trends in material studies regarding manuscripts encompass the study of the so-called miscellaneous works. These collective volumes containing many texts is the natural context for textual transmission at the time. Miscellaneous works also receive the name of multi-text volumes or anthologies. These terms refer to compilations normally containing three or more texts and the nature of these objects is understood as work in process, fluid and dynamic entities that respond to the necessities of the user who may have compiled the materials in a certain

way. The arrangement of these contents becomes, in this article, a very central question. My first aim in this paper is attempting to revise the conceptualisation around the idea of the miscellaneous, and how this notion is named and understood from different perspectives and with different applications. The most extended names for these medieval volumes are miscellanies and anthologies, which have been used extensively and have referred to an array of themes. The next section will delve into the different definitions and proposals for categorising these works.

2.1. Defining a Miscellany

Miscellanies and anthologies are the most commonly used labels to define these texts; namely, anthology has been most widely used when it encompassed literary material, and miscellany has been a more general term, almost like an umbrella word, being used as well for all kinds of text collections. To this topic, Lerer (2003: 1255) emphasizes that the use of one name or the other is conditioned to the identification of what he calls the anthological impulse, which – according to his work – seems to be connected with the idea of anthology:

There is much debate on whether medieval manuscripts are anthologies or miscellanies – on whether they are volumes guided by a critical intelligence or largely haphazard or practical assemblies of material (or whether both can coexist in one volume). My claim is that the mark of the anthologistic – that is, the distinguished feature of manuscripts or sections of manuscripts guided by a controlling literary intelligence [...]

In a different manner, miscellanies are being defined by being more related to the idea of randomness, where the idea of the lack of structure or plan for these multi-text volumes conveys a proposal for their understanding that is currently being superseded. Other authors, such as Cook and Strakhov (2016: 241-242) refer to the complexity in defining these materials, given “the bewilderingly varied contents, idiosyncratic production methods, and complex afterlives of late medieval compilations”. They continue by pointing out that:

Their complexity is reflected in ongoing debate over their taxonomy: when is a compilation an anthology and when is it a miscellany? The term “anthology” suggests – following the word’s etymology (literally, “collection of flowers”) – an assortment of *like* things, thus pointing to an overarching organisational genius behind its production and arrangement.

The “miscellany” on the other hand, implied a collection of *disparate* items, brought together by idiosyncrasies of personal whim and/or vagaries of circulation.

In the same fashion, Cook and Strakhov continue to explain how other authors such as Julia Boffey and John J. Thomson used both denominations as well in their essay “Anthologies and Miscellanies: Production and Choice of Text”. These authors themselves saw of the complexity in using one name or the other, as a collective volume could have been initially created with a specific purpose, although they may have later been subject to modifications that may have altered the initial plan. As they state: “It is this fluidity of production that makes the compilation so difficult to taxonomize” (Cook and Strakhov, 2016: 242). To this matter, Muller (2013) proposes different levels of autonomy for the texts included in a miscellany. This approach is very useful for distinguishing and arranging this internal complexity of the volumes, as it provides six different levels of autonomy that may relate to this complexity and engages with both aspects of the miscellaneous volumes discussed in this section. This proposal will be used for the analysis of the manuscript contents in section 3.3 below.

In summary, it is clear that the terms miscellany and anthology should both refer to the same concept, and although traditionally there has been a prevalence of use for each of them depending on the above related aspects of study, it is clear that the meaning of the term miscellany as a random group of texts is already overcome in the light of some of the latest contributions in the field, as it will be seen below. Although the aspects of structure, transmission and function are all embedded when defining a miscellany in medieval times, the following subsections will focus on the specific approaches to these collective texts from these different angles.

2.2. Organization and Structure

The idea of miscellany is deeply connected to the idea of structure. However, structures can be heterogeneous and can involve the relation of one text to many texts, or several of them to many others; or it could be that we find texts that are not related at all, even if their presence will ultimately fulfil a function. Further, there can be groupings of texts interrelated in different ways to each other. Eldevik (2016: 238) talks about the textual interconnection we find in miscellanies and refers to what Albert Derolez called the “associative organization” of encyclopedic compilations, like the *Liber Floridus* of Lambert of St-Omer, where “mental

associations evoked by one chapter become the subject of the next”. These connections can sometimes look very vague and an association is difficult to establish. Johnson (2008: 23-24) refers to the idea of understanding the structure of a miscellanies as their syntactic order, evoking the etymological meaning of the word syntax:

Miscellanies and their parts have even been categorized and interpreted in terms of an explanatory metaphor of morphology and syntax: here, morphology concerns features such as sources used, hands, scripts, and decoration, whereas syntax accounts for the relations amongst them.

Further to this, he introduces the idea of what he calls a *heterarchy* (Johnson, 2018: 25) and refers to it as “a networked structure or set of structures, able to accommodate variable rankings of items and different logics of order and perspective, including hierarchy”. Miscellanies are structured, then – according to this idea – as heterarchies. It is very important to return to the idea that a miscellany is a dynamic entity, and therefore its structure will also reflect this capacity for constant adaptation, adding new topics or modifying the initial compilation in order to accommodate to new circumstances or audiences. In this sense, and connecting to the idea proposed by Stemmler (1991), the anthological impulse in literary texts will be reflected in the structure of the volume as to satisfy different functions:

Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet enjoins scholars to focus on this figure of the compiler, and identifies three dominant anthologizing impulses in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The first is the meticulous anthologization of one’s own collected works (e.g. Machaut, Christine de Pizan), where texts are recopied agglutinatively over time to foster literary self-preservation. The second impulse is that of a coterie of friends and peers, composing lyrics for and with one another, sharing incipits and refrains in friendly dialogue and genial competition. The third impulse Cerquiglini-Toulet defines as having an explicitly memorial function, where texts are being brought together in the service of literary canon-building. (Cook and Strakhov, 2016: 243)

As to scientific miscellanies, the idea of heterarchy could be easier to apply, as a more pragmatic urge is present in its design.

2.3. *Transmission and Function*

A new approach to understanding the transmission of miscellanies has been explored in recent years as interest in this topic became a trend. Following decades of editorial practices focusing on individual texts – a practice more similar to the printing era than to medieval understanding of gathering and keeping knowledge – it is clear that more recently scholarly practices are beginning to include manuscript contexts in their editions. Müller (2013: 84) refers to this and also to the idea that it is not just literary texts that are collectively transmitted but also “the numerous compendia, florilegia, exemplary books, encyclopedia and so forth, one should highlight as a main characteristic of medieval literature the ‘compilatory’ use of an immense, hardly classifiable heritage of traditions and conventions.” Johnson (2018: 24) also reinforces this aspect of the transmission of miscellanies; as he puts it: “In late medieval England textual and personal capital was transmitted on a colossal scale and in a bewildering rich variety of ways through the medium of multitextual books and works.” All these perspectives and definitions offer a basis for a better understanding of miscellanies, given that its structure not only explains, but also justifies the way in which texts were transmitted at the time. Miscellanies existed and were given shape due precisely to this *façon de faire*. This idea of the miscellaneous also has implications to better understand society, science and the ways in which users and/or readers received them. In the continuous process of adaptation of a miscellany, other factors may have intervened. The cost of binding for example was something to be considered: “book bindings were expensive. So if you were to bind a book it was convenient to collect whatever you had stored up and put it together” (Nyström, 2013: 78).

This aspect may account for the structure of some miscellanies and be one of the different motivations of the structure of the codex. However, it must also be kept in mind that each miscellany is a unique composition, and their structure functions as an internal network of social and thematic meaning. The degree of autonomy of each text and its relationship with the other in the codex is something investigated by Müller (2013: 84), who proposed – as it has already been referred to above – six categories for the degree of autonomy of the texts forming the codex, which in turn will be expressing a collective meaning: “Individual texts take on new meanings when they are transmitted in the company of related texts. And therefore a collection of related texts can produce a text in its own with its own individual meaning.” However, the uniqueness of each miscellany or anthology and its structure and contents is also a defining trait of each codex. Lerer (2003: 1253) refers to this idea:

Whatever the various reasons for their making, these anthologies are, more often than not, the material venues for the dissemination of medieval English vernacular poetry. As Hannah notes: “[M]iscellaneity breeds individuality, the unique volume”. Such assemblies represent “private, individual canons” rather than global ideas of canonicity or literariness, for, he goes on, “Middle English texts exist within a prenatal literary culture, one with no single canon (or very clearly developed series of canons).”

Miscellaneous compositions are ultimately designed for a purpose. Their inner intertextuality served as an organisation of messages to convey (literary texts with Christian materials adding morals to the core stories) but also textual communities:

During the Middle Ages one read and wrote, one could say, in textual communities. The motivations behind the specific selection of the texts for a codex and their arrangement can be aesthetic or pragmatic, thematic or liturgical. Often several of these factors come together and are joined by additional factors external to the text. (Müller, 2013: 85)

In summary, the revision of some conceptualisations for miscellanies broadens the idea that these works are a mere collection of texts, even when well established concepts such as variation and textual mouvance are fundamental to explain their transmission. New contributions (Johnson, 2018; Cook and Stratkhov, 2016; Müller, 2013; Marchiori 2025) revise the proposals as to whether patterns or connections can be established and theorized further, even though each of the volumes has its unique characteristics and history. The notion of heterarchy is interesting and helps explain the macrostructure of a miscellaneous volume. Further, the idea of the non-autonomy of texts adds a very valuable aspect to consider in the analysis of miscellanies in the broader medieval textual tradition.

The introduction of these ideas provides a more detailed context to start delving into the medical miscellanies in English and more specifically, the manuscripts object of this study.

3. EXAMPLES OF MEDICAL MISCELLANEA: AGNUS CASTUS IN MS SLOANE 1315 & MS SLOANE 962

In the 90s, medical medieval manuscripts started to receive a lot of attention, as many sources were still unexplored but accessible to researchers, even more after the digitalisation campaigns

undertaken by many libraries. Following the publication of Taavitsainen (1988), medical and scientific material in English – which was found mainly in miscellaneous volumes – started to be avidly edited and studied. Editions focused primarily on individual texts, featuring the most prominent and canonical ones. Amongst all these, herbals were thoroughly studied (Moreno, 2018; Garrido-Anes, 2020). I began taking an interest in a particular one, named *Agnus Castus* (AC from now on). This herbal had been edited in 1950 by Gösta Brodin. This excellent edition presented painstakingly detailed work, with a strong philological basis, providing a deep and exhaustive description of the text and its variants. My interest in this text went further, and I became curious about the other texts in the volumes in which it was found, how was the relationship and the function of this text in connection with the others. My first approach was to review the manuscript contents and apply some criteria in order to reveal underlying patterns, following Stemmler’s proposal (1991) and his idea of the *anthologistic impulse*. However, and embracing new scholarship on the matter, I am broadening the scope of analysis (see section 3.3) to attempt a better understanding of this material and the transmission of medieval herbals and scientific literature in general.

Focusing now on the AC, there are forty-two witnesses identified as containing a copy of this text. Following this idea, I have already analysed MS Sloane 3160, Ms Sloane 7 and MS Sloane 120 (Esteve-Ramos, 2019 and 2020) by reviewing the contents in the original manuscript catalogues and classifying them as to their location in the codex, their language and the topic. In these instances I had access to the primary sources, mostly in digital form. Ultimately, the final aim of the project¹ is to analyse all the witnesses so we can study and understand how this herbal was transmitted in all the different miscellanies that contained a copy, and more importantly, what was the effect of the manuscript contexts in its transmission. In this paper, I will include the proposal of the different degrees of non-autonomy to do this.

The name of the herbal, *Agnus Castus*, responds to the first entry in most manuscripts. This herb, named in Latin, has traditionally been praised for the power of “keeping women chaste” which “grew out of a Greek custom at the festival honouring Demeter” (Sonnedeker, 1954: 392). Brodin’s edition is based upon manuscript X90. This MS had previously been studied in the work by Gottfried Muller “Aus mittelenglischen Medizintexten. Die

¹ I would like to acknowledge my gratitude to Prof. Isabel de la Cruz Cabanillas for her suggestions and support in pursuing this line of research. Her knowledge of herbals and well-known scholarship was key in stablishing the basis and objectives for this project.

Prosarezepte des Stockholmer Miszellankodex X90”² published in *Kolner Anglistische Arbeiten X*, Leipzig (Sonnendecker, 1954: 393). This herbal seems to have been a well-known text, and survived well into the 16th century, with many afterlives printed and distributed. Its sixty-two copies attest to its popularity, which Keiser (2008:300) mentions: “More popular and long-lived than the Macer herbal was the *Agnus Castus* herbal. [...] This evidence of its popularity is even more impressive when we consider that the *Agnus Castus* herbal was repeatedly printed between 1525 and 1567”. One of the reasons for this can be connected to its internal arrangement, following what we could call an alphabetical order. This easier way of signalling and finding information surely made things easier for the users of the herbal. Despite the arrangements do not follow the A-Z sequence, it would have given enough indications as to navigate the contents more effectively:

What, we may ask, explains the immense popularity of the *Agnus Castus* herbal and its displacement of Macer? [...] Another reason is the structure of the *Agnus Castus* herbal. The common form of the Latin Macer herbal is a verse treatise, with its seventy-seven items in no clear order. [...] As the use of finding devices was developed by scribes and editors in the last centuries of the Middle Ages, we see that they began to include or add such devices, in particular, lists of herbs, in the order in which they appear in the body of the work, sometimes with chapter numbering added. (Keiser, 2008: 301)

80

Different manuscript copies give a different number and ordering of the material, although the majority begin with the herb *Agnus Castus*, as the copy used by Brodin as the basis for his edition, which stands as the reference work concerning this text. The last entry of a plant that we encounter is *Solatrurn nigrum*. However, in some other parallel copies there are examples included after the letter S. In these cases, Brodin suggests that they may be later additions (Sonnedecker: 1954: 392).

3.1 Manuscript Description and Contents MS Sloane 962

In this section a brief description of the manuscript and a list of contents is provided. The detail is carried out based on a digital copy, as it has not been possible to check these materials “in

² An English translation is as follows: Middle English Medieval Texts. The prose descriptions of the Stockholm Miscelany Codex X90.

vivo”. According to the Catalogue of the British Library,³ the volume contains the following information. The volume is entitled “Medical miscellany, including treatises on diet and bloodletting (f. 72v); a leechbook; Agnus castus (ff. 249-251); Gallen’s dietary (ff. 72v-73); Liber medicinarum (ff. 123v-248v)”. The herbal AC is in the title as it figures prominently in the collection. Its origin is in England, dated between the 2nd half of the 14th century and the 15th century, the most relevant period of production for vernacular medicine. The dimensions are 210x140 and it has a total of 261 folios, made in parchment and paper codex. It is housed in the British Library and it belongs to the Western Manuscripts Collection. A description of its contents, together with their location and the language of the text is detailed in Table 1:

ITEMS	LOCATION	LANGUAGE
1.Catalogues of Plants	2r-4v	English
2.Nomina medicinarum et orationum et materiarum	5r-72v	English
3.Magic: Charms against elves, serpents, malignant spirits and the toothache: 15th cent	9v-10r	English/Latin
4.Botany: Synonyma herbarum	10v-252-259r	
5.Magic: The charm of St. William that Gabriel brought from Our Lord	72r	English
6.Medicine: Tracts on blood-letting	72v	English/Latin & French
7.Medicine: Charms and Receipts. Orationes et receptæ medica	73v-78v, 82v-85v	
8.Medicine. Botanical: De virtutibus rosæ marinæ	79v-82r	
9.Hippocrates: Ypocras de erbis colligendis	85v-89v	
10.Æmilius Macer: De viribus herbarum	90r-123v	
11.Receipts: Miscellaneous receipts	123v-248v	Dutch, French and Latin
12.Johannes Arderne, de Newark: Liber Medicinarum	123v-248v	
13.Medicine. Botanical: De virtutibus herbarum. AGNUS CASTUS	249r-251v	English
14.Pulvis excellens pro visu conservando	251v	

Table 1. Description of the contents, location and languages contained in MS Sloane 962

³ Due to a cyber-attack, the catalogue is not yet offering access to this information: <https://bl.libguides.com/currently-available>

Brodin (1950:13) refers to this witness a “one of the shortest instances of *Agnus Castus* I have found”. It also identifies its location in the codex as in ff 249r-251. More details given include that it comprises 18 plants, 16 under A and 2 under B. As an example, the entries for *Anyso* and *Allium* are shown as follows:

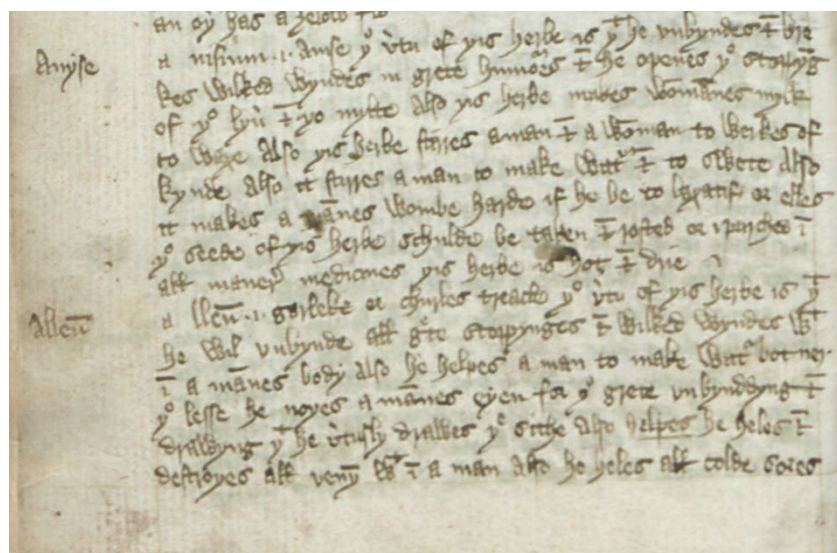


Figure 1: MS Sloane 962, folio 249v.⁴

The entry for Anyso reads (my transcription): “*The virtue of pis herbe is that he unwyndis and breked wickes wyndis in gretes humores and he opens the stoppyng of the liver*”. These properties are still attached to this herb to this day.

This manuscript contains a list of materials related to medicine and its everyday practice, but above all, it contains an abundance of texts related to herbs, five no less. It accompanies two texts on charms and magic against elves and demons, like this one in folio 9v, which reads: “*Coniuro vos elves et omnia gravamina demoniorum nocturna sive diuturna per patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum*” (transcription by Mitchell, 2025).

⁴ All the images reproduced in this article have been granted the corresponding permission by the British Library, which I would like to acknowledge.

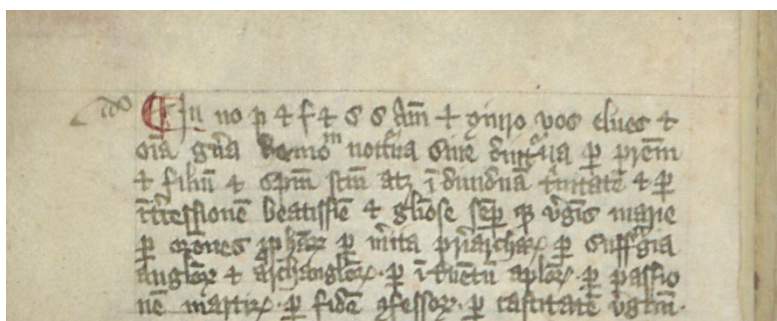


Figure 2: Extract from folio 9v MS SLoane 962

A healing charm – the charm of St William that Gabriel brought from Our Lord-completes the codex. It is essentially a compilation for everyday use, in which the main purpose is healing. All the text interacts providing a sort of vademecum for curing all types of sickness and ailments, and in terms of how this copy of the AC might be the shortest, the answer lied clearly in its co-texts, and in the observation of the miscellany as a whole.

3.2. *Manuscript contents of MS Sloane 1315*

The second manuscript selected is MS Sloane 1315, a miscellany dated on the second half of the 15th century. The title in the Catalogue reads “Medical compilation, including a calendar (ff. 17-22v); The Seven Planets (ff. 3-36v); Homo signorum (ff. 68-69); a leechbook, ‘The Thyrty Days of the Mone’, in verse (ff. 49-64v); a dietary (ff. 30v-32)”. It measures 220 x 145 and is made of paper. It contains 152 folios. The contents are detailed as follows:

ITEMS	LOCATION	LANGUAGE
1. Book of Nurture. On the duties of servants.	ff. 2r-15r	English
2. A kalendar, with the lucky and unlucky days marked, instructions for bloodletting. Mixed astrological material with rotas, lunaries and an unfinished homo signorum.	ff. 17r-36v	English
3. The destiny of Man, Woman and Child learnt from the stars.	ff. 36v-48v	English
4. Astrology, on tokens of good or of evil for every day in the month and week.	49r-67v	English

5. Some rules etc. as to the taking of medicine according to the influence of the planets. f. 68.	68r-69r	English
6. Recipes	69r-69v	English
7. An anonymous treatise upon the virtue of different herbs with their rinds. ff. 70-87. It is intituled “Here shall you know al manner of herbis and the vertewus also growyng yn her rynde.” AGNUS CASTUS	70-87r	English
8. A collection of charms, medical receipts, etc.	88v-152v	Latin/English

Table 2: Contents of MS Sloane 1315

I have found, by examining the digital copy of the mss, that the second text begins in folio 17r, and not in 16v, as it appeared in the Catalogue. Griffin (2019a) suggests that “the layout and page placements suggest regular consultation” and that “the manuscript, originating in the south-east of England, is likely to have served an individual practicing astrological and herbal medicine, collating a series of texts and tables that would have been useful to that individual”. It is clear that astrology is the predominant feature, and there is only in this case one herbal, the AC, which shows a much longer extension than in MS Sloane 962, as it was the only section of the miscellany to go to when searching for herbal remedies.

Brodin (1950: 90) identifies this witness in ff 70r-88r and he says it has 80 plants, and that the letters A through Q can be hereby found. It also identifies the heading: “Here shall you know al maner of herbis and per vertewus Also Growyng yn her kynde.”, as you can see in the following figure:

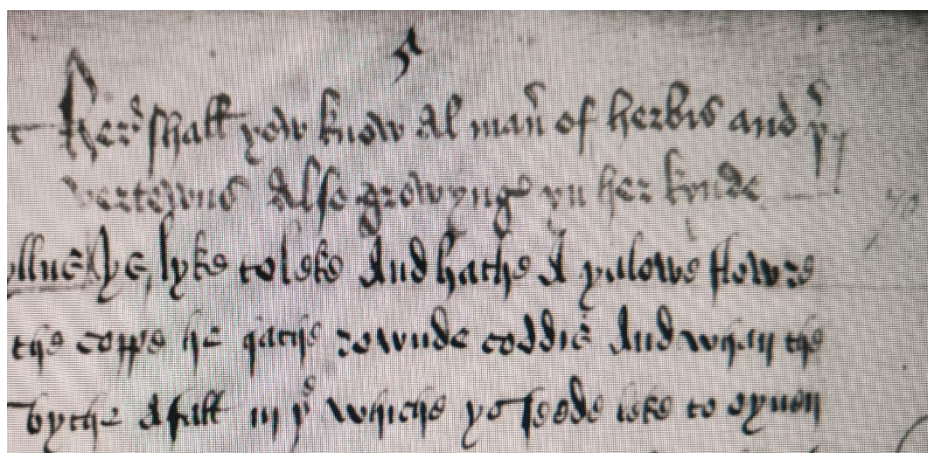


Figure 3: MS Sloane 1315 folio 70v

3.3. *Comparison and Analysis*

The two selected manuscripts contain a copy of the herbal AC, which is the object of study. Our first interest is assessing what is the meaning and purpose of each volume and how the relationship among the texts is working. In order to do so, Müller's proposal is relevant in order to complement the analysis. In her investigation, the interaction of the different co-texts is a pivotal element:

I would like to deal with the phenomenon of a text whose meaning is affected by the texts with which is transmitted. And I would like to show which factors allow the individual texts to become dependent parts and the miscellany to become a coherent whole. (Müller, 2013:85)

She proposed a categorisation (Muller, 2013: 100) based on the idea of autonomy and, providing different levels of understanding the concept, to adapt this idea to the reality of medieval practices. Based on the Constance manuscript she is analysing, Müller (2023: 100) proposes six categories which can be summarised in the concept of "non-autonomy". This is defined as:

The individual texts of a miscellany may be understood as separate units and be independently received; however, an important dimension of meaning – and exactly that which sheds light on the "circumstances in which transmission educates, maintains and changes" – reveals itself through the reception of the individual texts as dependent parts of an (intended) collection.

In MS 962, we find a total of fourteen texts, out of which five are related to herbs, as it has been above specified; another two are dedicated to healing charms and the three remaining are medical tracts. Macer's herbal and AC conflated in several miscellanies so it is quite predictable to find them together with the AC in this copy. As it has already been suggested, this is a codex in which tracts dealing with herbs are a majority. Macer's *Viribum Verbarum* takes a prominent place, with no less than thirty-three folios and probably fulfils most of the necessities of the user/compiler. On the other hand, the AC only occupies two folios, probably complementing Macer's tract. The rest of the material also has a complementary meaning, given that the two first texts deal with naming herbs, and the rest of related material is about

how to use them. Healing charms were very frequently present in medieval medical miscellanies, and magic was a part of medical treatments that manifested itself through these texts. Keiser talks about the relationship between spiritual and physical healing and how, in diverse compilations, ownership relates to clergymen as well as physicians or practitioners. This very fact might have been one of the causes why we can find a combination of herbals in many miscellanies: “If so, we have in these three manuscripts evidence of the great desire for information concerning herbs among laity and clergy, professional and non-professional, which led to conflation of herbals or at least to the presence of two or more herbals in a single manuscript” (Keiser, 2008: 298).

MS Sloane 1315 presents nine texts, one is related to household matters, more specifically to the duties of servants. Four of them relate to astrological medicine, about different types of material related to this topic: calendars for the lucky and unlucky days and bloodletting instructions, the presence of rotas and an unfinished *homo signorum*, destiny learnt from the stars, and even rules for medicines to be taken according to the influence of the planets.

If we compare both manuscripts, I think it can safely be said that both represent an example of what Muller calls *non-autonomy* in her description of medical miscellanies and their internal intertextual interaction. In both cases, miscellanies present texts which can be understood as separate units, although their dependence is revealed when considering the text as a whole and “reveals itself through the reception of the individual texts as dependent parts of an (intended) collection” (Muller, 2013: 85). However, in MS 962 this dependency is stronger because the copy of the AC is complementing the main herbal in the miscellany. In this way, there is higher degree of dependency than the AC has in 1315, where the texts related to astrology are showing a stronger dependency. The AC and the charms are also part of the whole although depending on the other texts in a lesser meaningful way. Having reached this point, the idea of *heterarchy* proposed by Johnson could be adapted to define these relationships of gradating dependency. The question of the so called *anthologistic impulse* could also benefit from these considerations. If miscellanies show these different levels of non-autonomy, it can only mean that there was a design that made this possible, by one or many users/compilers. This impulse can also be traced in what Keiser (2008: 304) has called *designer herbals*:

I shall borrow a contemporary usage and call it a designer herbal. On a scale smaller than MS Sloane 5, we find both Macer and *Agnus Castus* texts into which portions of the other

have been incorporated. *Agnus castus* originally ended with the letter S, thus omitting common herbs that were of interest to those using the treatise.

In reference to MS Sloane 5, Keiser (2008: 306) continues referring to this impulse of design: “It is a particularly fine example of the relative ease with which people assembling books in the fifteenth century were able to draw upon a rich array of resources to create herbals that suited their needs and interests.”

Further studies, as the one by Marchiori (2025: 25) reflect on the consideration of miscellanies as a more cohesive interrelated unit and challenges the pre-existing views on this idea: “The organic reading of Codex Parisinus as a cohesive textual unit designed by one compiler over an unknown amount of time challenges previous understandings of early medieval medical miscellanies.” The examples of the two manuscripts under consideration in this work aim at contributing to this idea. The transmission of the AC and the study of its manuscript contexts show that more comprehensive and meaningful interpretations of this material can be explored. As Lerer (2003: 1253) puts it: “The volumes compel the reader to make new narratives out of their assemblies.”

4. CONCLUSION AND FURTHER RESEARCH

It is clear that the interest of the academic community on material philology has developed a strong interest for the study of miscellanies. Different categorisations and perceptions of these objects have proved the complexity they show, almost vanishing the previous conception of miscellanies as random associations of material, especially in scientific manuscripts. This work, by introducing these approaches, intends to show and emphasize the interest in studying medical miscellanies as a whole. By focusing on one of the most important herbals used in the Middle Ages, it is possible to see how transmission and internal patterns in medical miscellanea work. In the case of the AC, further analysis of witnesses and further development of the ideas hereby introduced would result in a stronger proposal for the analysis and assessment of this and other projects.

These volumes are a collective force of knowledge transmission, which acquire their own identity in the shape of their particular and peculiar compilations, establishing a dialogue with the audience, and integrating all the elements as part of the interpretation of each of their components. Their co-existence gives them a multiple unity which has a status of their own, a

peculiar identity, a way of being in that particular moment of time. It is clearly different from being one among many, this is a way of belonging which activates specific audiences and fulfils very specific functions, although sometimes diverse, within the society of late Middle Ages.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This work has benefited from the financial support of the grant CIBEST (2024/195). awarded by the *Conselleria d'Educació, Cultura, Universitats i Ocupació* of the Generalitat Valenciana. This grant is hereby acknowledged.

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