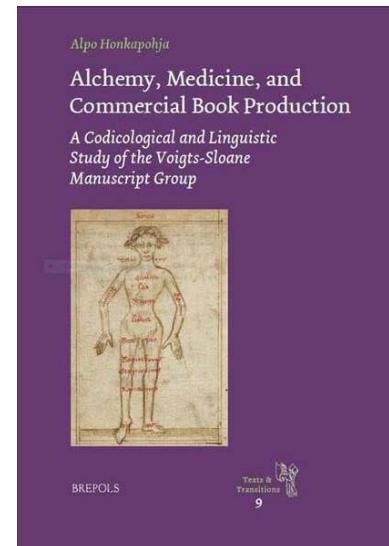


Alpo Honkapohja: *Alchemy, Medicine, and Commercial Book Production: A Codicological and Linguistic Study of the Voigts-Sloane Manuscript Group*. Texts and Transitions 9. Brepols: Turnhout, 2017. 248 pp. inc. appendix, bibliography and indices.

Recent decades have witnessed a growing interest in late medieval and early modern English scientific and utilitarian writing, but these genres are still relatively underresearched compared to the number of surviving manuscripts and texts. Alpo Honkapohja's detailed study of the Voigts-Sloane Group is a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarly literature on late medieval scientific and utilitarian literature. As its title suggests, the volume proceeds from two mutually complementary viewpoints: those of codicology and linguistics.

The Voigts-Sloane Group is one of the best-known groups of medieval English scientific manuscripts. Linda E. Voigts was the first to identify the group, finding textual, material, and visual similarities between these fifteenth-century manuscripts and referring to them as the Sloane Group.¹ She has since discussed the group in several other articles.² The original name of the manuscript group refers to Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753); several of the manuscripts were previously in his collection and are currently held by the British Library. The manuscripts contain medical, astrological, and alchemical texts in Latin and Middle English. Some of the manuscripts are linked by shared texts, while others display evidence of a shared production context such as similar scribal hands and watermarks.

Honkapohja seeks to find out how the Voigts-Sloane manuscripts were copied and whether they show signs of organised book trade. Chapter 1 sets the scene for this investigation by describing the processes of manuscript production and book trade in late medieval England. Honkapohja explores different scenarios of efficient book production, including collaborative efforts between scribes, speculative production of manuscripts (without a commission by a specific customer), and the production and sale of booklets.³ The term 'booklet' was defined by Pamela R. Robinson in 1980⁴ and reconsidered by Ralph Hanna in 1986.⁵ It refers to codicological units consisting of one or more quires. One codex may contain several booklets, produced in different contexts but bound



¹ Linda E. Voigts, 'The Sloane Group: Related Scientific and Medical Manuscripts from the Fifteenth Century in the Sloane Collection', *The British Library Journal* 16 (1990), 26–57.

² See e.g. Linda E. Voigts, 'What's the Word? Bilingualism in Late-Medieval England', *Speculum* 71 (1996), 813–826.

³ See e.g. Linne R. Mooney and Lister M. Matheson, 'The Beryn Scribe and his Texts: Evidence for Multiple-Copy Production of Manuscripts in Fifteenth-Century England', *The Library*, 7th ser., 4 (2003), 347–370.

⁴ Pamela R. Robinson, 'The 'Booklet': A Self-Contained Unit in Composite Manuscripts', *Codicologica* 3 (1980), 46–69.

⁵ Ralph Hanna III, 'Booklets in Medieval Manuscripts: Further Considerations', *Studies in Bibliography* 39 (1986), 100–11.

together as one volume. Robinson lists ten criteria for identifying booklets in composite codices, that is, manuscript books consisting of more than one production unit. Robinson's criteria include variation in the size of leaves, handwriting, or decoration, damaged or blank leaves (at booklet boundaries), and discontinuities in quire signatures or catchwords.⁶ The concept of 'booklet' is central for the codicological discussion that follows, as many of the Voigts-Sloane manuscripts are composite codices.

The Voigts-Sloane Group can be divided into three subgroups: the Core Group (manuscripts sharing material, visual, and palaeographical features), the Sibling Group (manuscripts containing a shared sequence of texts), and a 'Family Resemblance' group (manuscripts that share some of their features with the Core and Sibling groups and have thus been tentatively connected to them).⁷ Honkapohja discusses these three subgroups in Chapters 2–4 before moving on to the linguistically oriented Chapters 5 and 6 that focus on multilingualism and dialectology respectively.

The Sibling Group, investigated in Chapter 2, consists of six manuscripts that contain a selection of shared texts – the so-called 'Sibling Set Texts'. The group includes three smaller, earlier manuscripts (Boston, Countway Library of Medicine, MS Ballard 19; London, British Library, MS Sloane 3566; and Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.1.77) and two larger, more decorative late fifteenth-century manuscripts (Cambridge, Gonville and Caius College, MS 336/725, and Takamiya Collection MS 33, currently in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library in New Haven). Each of these five manuscripts is described in terms of codicological structure and textual contents. The last manuscript, London, British Library MS Sloane 2320, merits a more detailed discussion, as Honkapohja considers this quarto-sized manuscript the key to the Voigts-Sloane group. In Sloane 2320, the shared Sibling Set Texts are copied in the layout and hand typical of the Core Group, and it thus forms a link between these groups and Chapters 2 and 3 in this volume. Honkapohja employs the concept of 'booklet' in his analysis of MS Sloane 2320, examining the palaeographical and codicological features of each one of the seven booklets in this manuscript. He ends the chapter by pointing out that the codicological evidence found in the Sibling Group does not lend very much support to the idea of speculative production of the Sibling Set Texts sequence.

Chapter 3 focuses on the five Core Group manuscripts. These manuscripts, similar in terms of their material, palaeographical, and generic features, are London, British Library, MSS Sloane 1118, 1313, 2567, 2948, and MS Additional 19674. Honkapohja describes each manuscript in turn, starting with a detailed analysis of the codicologically complex MS Sloane 1118 (the full collation of which is included in the volume as an appendix). Honkapohja's detailed codicological discussion is made very accessible to the reader by the inclusion of several quire diagrams. The author assesses the codicological evidence to determine whether the manuscripts display evidence of booklet production. The use of watermark evidence to analyse the codicological structures of paper quires is commendable. This evidence is also helpfully included in the quire diagrams. In the latter half of Chapter 3, Honkapohja assesses the evidence related to the production and ownership of the Core Group. He addresses the question of whether the Core Group manuscripts were commissioned by a single private or institutional owner compiling a library of scientific, medical,

⁶ Robinson 1980, 47–48.

⁷ See e.g. Voigts 1990, 26–27.

and magical materials, and if so, who that owner might have been on the basis of the available evidence. Honkapohja finds that while it seems likely that the manuscripts reflect the interests of a single owner, more work is needed to determine their identity.

Chapter 4 is an investigation of the Family Resemblance manuscripts that have been connected to the Voigts-Sloane group in a more tentative fashion. Honkapohja examines Voigts's criteria for identifying the Voigts-Sloane Group manuscripts, reasonably pointing out that some of these criteria are more efficient than others in distinguishing the Voigts-Sloane manuscripts from other coeval productions. The author evaluates the connection between the Voigts-Sloane group and five manuscripts tentatively linked to it: London, British Library, MSS Additional 5467 and Harley 1735; London, Wellcome Library, MS 784; and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS e Musaeo 155 and Rawlinson C.815. Of these five manuscripts, Honkapohja only finds plausible evidence for family resemblance in the two-leaf fragment contained in MS Rawlinson C.815. This finding provides new directions for future studies on the Voigts-Sloane Group and its subgroups.

The codicological chapters offer a detailed view of the three subgroups of the Voigts-Sloane group: the Sibling Group, the Core Group, and the 'Family Resemblance' manuscripts. For a reader well versed in late medieval scientific writing and codicological analysis, this part of the volume provides valuable information on the structure and contents of the manuscripts. Some of the codicological descriptions would have benefitted from another round of proofreading, but the transparent manner in which Honkapohja presents the complex evidence is worth highlighting here. For a reader unfamiliar with the Voigts-Sloane group, it would probably be helpful to start from Voigts's 1990 article before engaging with Honkapohja's detailed work. The codicological chapters provide the reader with many methodological insights into working on composite manuscripts consisting of booklets and offer a helpful model for analysing and visualising quire structures in paper manuscripts. They also shed more light on the production context(s) of the Voigts-Sloane Group and the relationships between the manuscripts.

The second half of Honkapohja's volume provides the reader with a linguistic analysis of the Voigts-Sloane Group. Chapter 5 investigates the group from the point of view of multilingual practices. The framework for this chapter consists of an overview of multilingualism in medieval England and the vernacularisation of scientific writing.⁸ Honkapohja also addresses the different domains, genres, and text types discernible in the Voigts-Sloane manuscripts. He offers some new observations on the relationship between Latin and English in the Voigts-Sloane Group. Earlier research on these manuscripts, including Honkapohja's own previous work, has indicated that the choice of language alone is not a reliable indicator for distinguishing between learned and popular scientific texts.⁹ However, Honkapohja's results suggest that there may nevertheless be a functional difference between the use of English and Latin within the Voigts-Sloane Group, related to the

⁸ See e.g. Päivi Pahta and Irma Taavitsainen, 'Vernacularisation of Scientific and Medical Writing in Its Sociohistorical Context', in Irma Taavitsainen and Päivi Pahta eds, *Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2004, 1–18 and the chapters in David Trotter, ed., *Multilingualism in Later Medieval Britain*, Brewer: Cambridge 2000.

⁹ Alpo Honkapohja, 'Multilingualism in Trinity College Cambridge Manuscript O.1.77', in Jacek Fisiak and Magdalena Bator eds., *Foreign Influences on Medieval English*, Lang: Frankfurt am Main 2011, 25–45.

degree of technicality of the contents. For example, Latin recipes typically contain more specific information on measurements than their English counterparts.

In Chapter 5, Honkapohja also provides a comprehensive account of various multilingual practices in the Voigts-Sloane group. His nuanced method of addressing instances where Latin and English appear in the same context (for example code-switching) offers a useful model for scholars discussing early multilingualism and manuscript culture. Several manuscript images are provided in order to demonstrate the visual treatment of languages and switches. Examples from texts are selected carefully to elucidate different types of situations, for example switches into another language for terminology, abbreviations, or words and passages used for text-organising purposes (such as incipits). Honkapohja finds that the Sibling Group and Core Group are different in terms of multilingual practices: the Sibling manuscripts mainly combine monolingual texts and only switch languages for text-organisational purposes, while the Core manuscripts contain a wider variety of multilingual events. Honkapohja identifies the domain of alchemy and the recipe text type as the most prone contexts for switches.

The final chapter in the volume deals with dialectology. Honkapohja's aim here is threefold: to compare the language of the Voigts-Sloane group manuscripts to the descriptions of the emerging standard(s) of English in the fifteenth century, to detect any local dialectal features in the manuscripts, and to compare the Core and Sibling manuscripts from a dialectal viewpoint. In his analysis, he utilises the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English (LALME)* and adapts its 'fit' technique for localising texts.¹⁰ Although the *LALME* only covers the years 1350–1450, Honkapohja argues on the basis of previous studies that the framework can be usefully applied to later materials as well.¹¹ General knowledge of the *LALME* framework and its fit technique will be helpful for following the discussion in this chapter.

Honkapohja first compares the Sibling and Core Groups to Samuels's Types I-IV, the incipient written standards of English characterised by M. L. Samuels in 1963.¹² The status of Samuels's Types has since been often challenged.¹³ Standardisation, and, conversely, the persistence of orthographic variation, are still topical issues in research into late medieval and early modern English. Honkapohja seeks to find out whether the language of the Voigts-Sloane manuscripts shows traces of an emerging standard of English. He then searches for markedly dialectal features in the manuscripts. Tables are provided for the standard and dialectal forms analysed. The first part of Honkapohja's investigation shows that for the most part, the language of the Sibling texts

¹⁰ Angus McIntosh, M. L. Samuels and Michael Benskin, *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, Aberdeen University Press: Aberdeen, 1986, and its revised electronic version, Michael Benskin, Margaret Laing, Vasilis Karaiskos and Keith Williamson, *An Electronic Version of A Linguistic Atlas of Late Mediaeval English*, Edinburgh 2013, available at <http://www.lel.ed.ac.uk/ihd/elalme/elalme.html>. For the fit technique, see also Michael Benskin, 'The "Fit"-Technique Explained', in Felicity Riddy ed. *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts*, Brewer: Cambridge 1991, 9–26.

¹¹ E.g. Lister M. Matheson, 'The Dialect of the Hammond Scribe', in M. Teresa Tavormina ed., *Sex, Aging, & Death in a Medieval Medical Compendium: Trinity College Cambridge MS R. 14.52. Its Texts, Language and Scribe*, Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies: Tempe 2006, 65–93.

¹² M. L. Samuels, 'Some Applications of Middle English Dialectology', *English Studies* 44 (1963), 81–94.

¹³ See e.g. Irma Taavitsainen, 'Scientific Language and Spelling Standardisation', in Laura Wright ed., *The Development of Standard English 1300–1800*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2000, 131–154.

contains forms characteristic of Samuels Types III and IV. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the forms closest to modern English are mainly found in the three manuscripts with the latest dating. For the Core Group, Honkapohja notes that the dialect used in the manuscripts mostly corresponds to Samuels Types III and IV, but also contains some consistent, potentially dialectal, deviations from these types. Honkapohja concludes that the language of the Voigts-Sloane manuscripts either shows evidence of London production or indicates that London forms had already spread elsewhere at this stage, making it difficult to find local colour in the English used.

In analysing the dialectal features, Honkapohja finds some forms atypical of the London area in the Sibling Group. However, he is understandably cautious in drawing any strong conclusions based on these data, as the Sibling Group text corpus is relatively small, and the manuscripts are dated later than the suggested diagnostic watershed of *LALME* for localising southern texts (up to 1425).¹⁴ For the Core Group, Honkapohja finds that the manuscripts are copied in a consistent dialect, containing spellings generally corresponding to Samuels's Types III and IV London English forms, to modern English forms, and forms that suggest counties in the Central Midlands. Contrary to Honkapohja's expectations, the dialect used does not vary between different booklets. He characterises the language as "partly standardised late Middle English with a Central Midlands colouring" (p. 209), tentatively considering the possibility that the Core Group, or at least the Middle English texts in it, might actually have been copied by one scribe only. Given that the author is very familiar with the Core Group manuscripts, it would have been interesting to hear more about his take on this issue, but he realistically notes that further palaeographical work is needed on this front. It is thus to be hoped that the question of scribal hand(s) shall be revisited in the future.

The combination of codicological analysis with linguistic methods is a definite strength of Honkapohja's study. In adopting this philological approach, Honkapohja connects physical and material evidence with textual and linguistic patterns in the manuscripts, which results in a comprehensive view of the Voigts-Sloane manuscripts. One of Honkapohja's major conclusions is that the Core Group and the Sibling Group are different in terms of their production context and character, and researchers should thus be careful in distinguishing between the two groups when discussing the Voigts-Sloane manuscripts. He also points out that the Family Resemblance manuscripts should be treated with caution, as very little evidence connects them to the Core and Sibling Groups.

Honkapohja maintains that although the 'Sibling Set Texts' appear to have formed a "standard anthology" (p. 212) of scientific writing, copied by several scribes, there is no evidence of speculative production of copies of it, let alone 'mass production' comparable to continental books of hours. The Core Group shows definite evidence of booklet production, potentially for the use of a single individual or institution collecting a library of alchemical and medical texts. The idea of a shared production context of the Core Group manuscripts is further supported by the results of the *LALME* analysis, which shows evidence of a consistent dialect across the group and potentially supports the attribution of (at least) the Middle English texts to a single scribe. Honkapohja adds the dialect

¹⁴ See e.g. Irma Taavitsainen, 'Scientific Language and Spelling Standardisation', in Laura Wright ed., *The Development of Standard English 1300–1800*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 2000, 131–154.

into Voigts's criteria for identifying the Core Group manuscripts, calling for further dialectal and palaeographical work on the texts and the scribal hand(s), and on other manuscript materials from a comparable period and domain. Both the Sibling and Core Groups show evidence for either London production or partly standardised language use. The somewhat contradictory results of the dialectal analysis suggest that applying the *LALME* methodology to mid- and late-fifteenth-century scientific material is not straightforward, and that the linguistic variation in English in this period merits further investigation and description.

Honkapohja's study contributes not only to further work on the Voigts-Sloane group(s) of manuscripts, but also to codicological and linguistic research on late medieval scientific manuscripts and texts in general. It offers new directions for scholars of late medieval scientific writing, especially those already familiar with the Voigts-Sloane manuscript group. Furthermore, it provides the reader with methodological viewpoints for the codicological analysis of late medieval composite manuscripts, for research into early multilingual practices, and for analysing linguistic variation in late medieval English.

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