

# Hands and Script in Glasgow University Library MS Hunter 509<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The history behind the composition of a manuscript can help to shed light on different aspects of it, such as date, location, or the purpose for which the book was produced. Thus, this paper takes into consideration the handwriting of a selected scientific manuscript in Middle English, Glasgow University Library MS Hunter 509, in order to ascertain some of these aspects. First, the text under investigation will be briefly described and the methodology explained. Secondly, the hands which appear throughout the text will be provided and the identity of the copyist and owners traced. An account of the main aspects of their biography will be supplied. Then, the different types of script, mainly *anglicana* and *secretary*, will be put forward and discussed in relation to the manuscript under consideration. Finally, the conclusions are included.

## 1. Introduction

The objectives of this paper are to analyse the hands and script in Glasgow University Library MS Hunter 509 (hereafter *H*) and to establish (with the help of the analysis): (a) the date of composition; (b) the scribe or scribes who copied *H*; (c) the possible owners of the book; (d) the purpose for which it was produced.

The manuscript under study is housed at the Hunterian Collection in the Special Collections Department of Glasgow University Library. Its main content is the text *System of Physic* (ff. 1r-

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<sup>1</sup> The present research has been funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Education (grant number HUM2004-01075FILO) and by the Autonomous Government of Andalusia (grant number HUM-2609). These grants are hereby gratefully acknowledged.

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167v).<sup>2</sup> The first part comprises a treatise on the four humours (ff. 1r-3v), followed by a discussion on uroscopy and a further exposition of humours and complexions, as well as the preparations that the doctor should make, which include bodily and spiritual cleanliness, before visiting a patient (ff. 3v-14r). The contents of folios 14r-167v are based on the Middle English Gilbertus Anglicus, an adaptation written in prose around 1400 of the *Compendium medicinae*, which was compiled by Gilbertus Anglicus. It was one of the standard references for physicians until the seventeenth century and also an academic text. It covers disorders of the human body and the ordering of the text, or *ordinatio*, follows the usual method of the time, which is a *de capite ad pedem* structure (from head to foot). At the end of the manuscript, there is a remedy for migraine in a different hand (ff. 168v-169r), added notes (f. 171r), and mixed recipes in various hands (f. 171v).

As for the methodology, the first stage involved the transcription of the text. Part of this was done directly from the manuscript, but the microfilm was also employed for the process. The digitized images were available later on, and were used for revision. Once the text was transcribed, its provenance was investigated, the script studied and instances of letter-forms classified.

## 2. Provenance

The main text of *H*, a *System of Physic* (ff. 1r-167v), shows a uniform hand up to f. 120v, in which there is a slight change both in handwriting and in punctuation. In folios 120v and 121r the handwriting is more angular (a characteristic of the *secretary* script; see below). One possible explanation for this is that the scribe might have changed the quill or instrument of writing (as in fact the ink is darker than in previous folios).

In addition, it could be argued that it is a practised hand as it is skilled in keeping steady in a long line of script without ruled lines. It is

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<sup>2</sup> This follows the original foliation of the manuscript.

also a neat hand written in a small format. At the end of the manuscript, several different hands can be distinguished.<sup>3</sup>

Figure 1. Hand I (ff. 1r-120r)

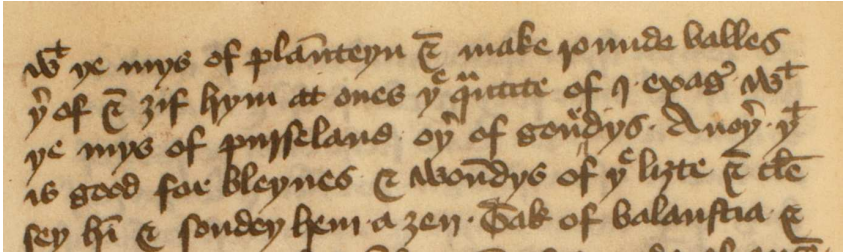


Figure 2. Hand I (f. 120v)

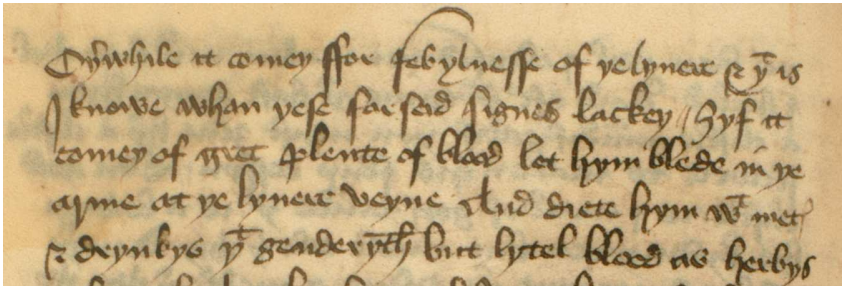
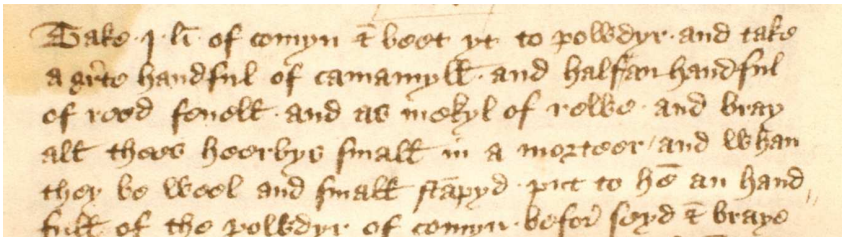


Figure 3. Hand II (ff. 168v-169r)



<sup>3</sup> Grateful acknowledgement is made to the Keeper of the Special Collections Department of Glasgow University Library for kindly permitting the reproduction of photographs of the manuscript.

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Figure 4. Hand III (f. 171r)

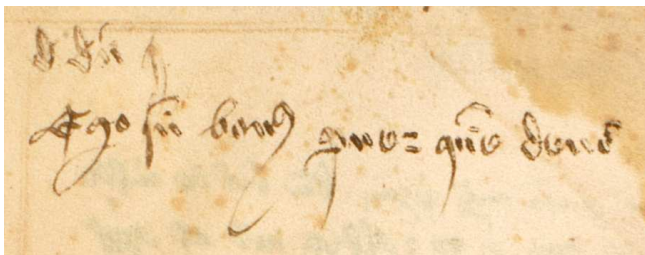
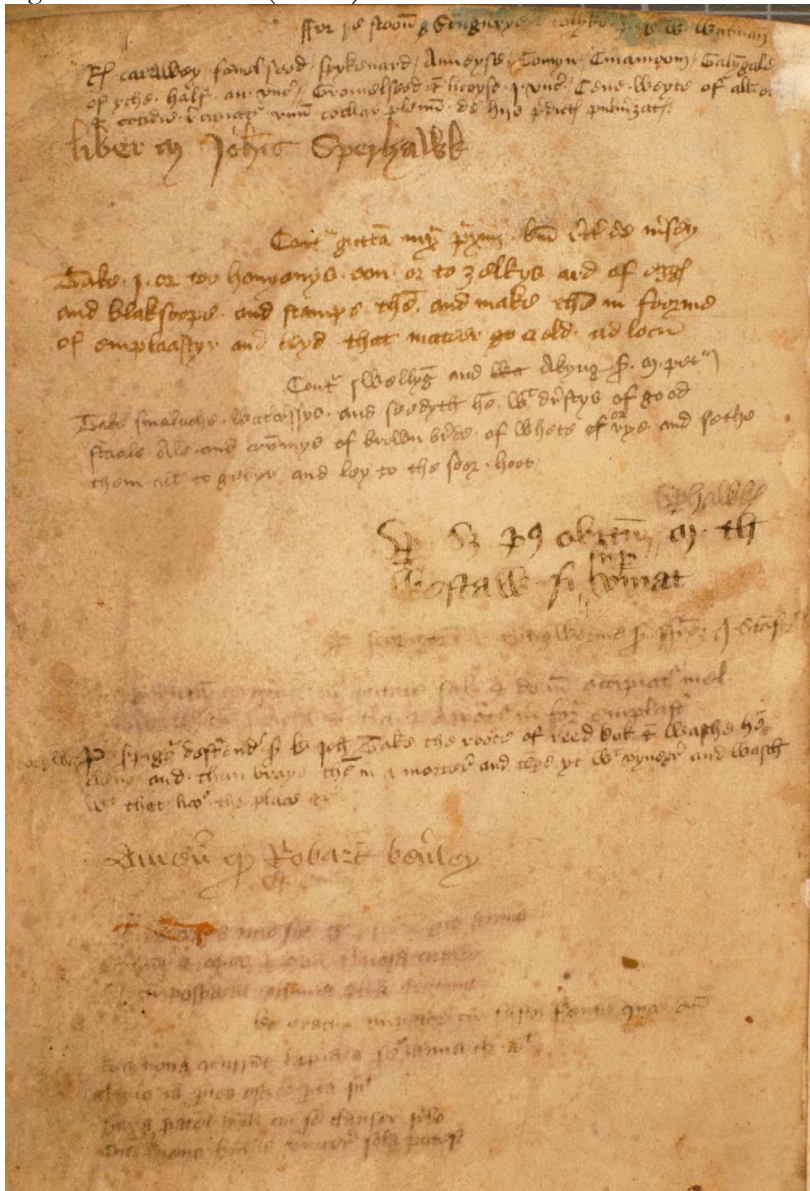


Figure 5. Mixed hands (f. 171v)



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According to the catalogues in which the manuscript has been described (Young and Aitken, 1908: 416-417; Cross, 2004: 34), the author is unknown. As for the copyist, in the manuscript there are references which hint at several possibilities. Firstly, there is an indication of the scribe on f. 169r: “j Robart beuerley haþe wretten alle þis bocke” (*I Robert Beverley has written all this book*); and on f. 171v: “Amen quod Robart beuerley” (*Amen said Robert Beverley*). Doyle (in Young and Aitken, 1908) describes this claim as “patently untrue”.

There is also an indication on f. 171v that gives clues concerning the ownership of the book and a more plausible copyist: “liber magistri Johannis Sperhawk” (*Master John Sperhawke’s book*). John Sperhawke, born at the beginning of the fifteenth century, was a Fellow of Pembroke Hall (later Pembroke College), in Cambridge. He was Master of Arts and Doctor of Divinity by 1453. Throughout his life, he held positions as Rector, Vicar and Canon in several parts of Southern England. He died in 1474 (Emden, 1963: 545). In his will, he makes a book gift to Master Thomas Westhaugh of Syon, and the words he employs are revealing in order to establish who copied *H. Sperhawke* states that that was “the book of medicine that he wrote with his own hand” (referring to Westhaugh). Thomas Westhaugh was also a Fellow of Pembroke Hall, Master of Arts, Bachelor of Divinity by 1448, and later Doctor of Divinity (Emden, 1963: 630). Amongst other positions, he was Confessor General of Syon Monastery in Middlesex, a house of Bridgettine nuns founded by Henry V in 1415 and the last great monastery established in England. He probably died at the turn of the century.

It is very likely that Sperhawke and Westhaugh were friends from Cambridge. Sperhawke was very careful to return the book to Westhaugh since, apart from stating it in the will, he also wrote a note at the end of the manuscript (f. 171v): “liber magistri Johannis Sperhawk” (*Master John Sperhawke’s book*), and a little bit further down: “<Sperhawke’s> Semper Secundum post obitum Magistri thome westaw si <super>viuat” (*Sperhawke’s, but after his death Master Thomas Westhaugh’s if he outlives him*). Westhaugh did indeed outlive Sperhawke and got the book, which he apparently gave to Syon Monastery (in its catalogue it appears marked as B 40). Unfortunately, the later life of the manuscript there is not well documented.

At some point, the manuscript came into the hands of Robert Beverly, who wrote the note commented above on folio 169r. This name could make reference to at least three people: a surgeon who worked in London and was dead by 1525 (Talbot and Hammond, 1965: 292); another man who graduated from Cambridge as a Master of Arts or other high degree at the end of the fifteenth century (Emden, 1963: 60); and finally, a friar from Cambridge University who was Bachelor of Divinity and probably Doctor of Divinity by 1511-1512 (Venn and Venn, 1922: 147).

The last owner of the manuscript was William Hunter, a British doctor, educator and medical writer of the eighteenth century, who handed over his private collection of books and manuscripts to the University of Glasgow. Currently, *H* is housed at the Hunterian Collection in the Special Collections Department of Glasgow University Library with the signature V.8.12.

### 3. Script

As far as the script is concerned, it is quite difficult to establish a distinctive and clear-cut system in *H*, as characteristics from various of them can be recognized. Thus, the script is mixed, showing features from the *anglicana* and the *secretary* one. Both of them belong to the Gothic system of scripts; for this reason, they share many letter-forms.

*Anglicana* emerged in England as a book hand that was not difficult to write on a small scale. It was used from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth century, and even into the eighteenth century for some specialized purposes (Roberts, 2005: 161). It is regarded as the traditional English cursive script of the later Middle Ages, developed chiefly from the current handwriting which originated in the course of preparing documents (Parkes, 1969: XIV). A cursive or *cursiva* script is written easily and quickly, as opposed to a text or *textura* script, which is more slowly and deliberately composed. When *anglicana* was at its height, it was challenged by another cursive script, also used as documentary: *secretary*. This arose in Italy, and came into England from France in the 1370s. It developed steadily and was widespread by the middle of the fifteenth century (Petti, 1977: 14). *Secretary* is a more angular hand than *anglicana* and more variable with respect to size, slope

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and range of graphs. However, they often borrowed from one another both in features of general style (*anglicana*, for example, adopted some of the angularity of *secretary* during the fifteenth century) and in the use of graphs (Petti, 1977: 15).

As it has been previously mentioned, the categorization of the script into *anglicana* or *secretary*, or their different grades, is hard to determine, as letter-forms from both scripts are used throughout the manuscript. However, it tends to be closer to *secretary*, as the ductus provides the characteristic “splayed” appearance of this type of script. Parkes (1969: XXIV) points out that during the fifteenth century university-trained scribes achieved a blend of *anglicana* and *secretary* which resulted in a virtually new kind of book hand which replaced *anglicana formata* as the main academic book hand in the fifteenth century, and remained in use until the advent of the printed text. This is the case of Hunter 509, where the hands are small, highly current, and compact. Despite this, it is a conscious style of writing, as the fluency is carefully controlled, and the letter-forms are consciously simplified and compressed. In the following sections, features from the *anglicana* hand will be discussed and then the main characteristics of the *secretary* script will be presented.

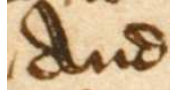
### 3.1. *The anglicana script*

The first *anglicana* graph which will be commented is the two-compartment or double-lobed *a* (figures 6, 7), which is usually employed in initial position within the word to indicate a capital letter. It normally extends above the level of the other linear letters.

Fig. 6



Fig. 7



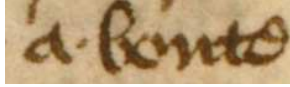
The *anglicana* cursive *e* (figures 8, 9) with reversed ductus tends to appear, on the other hand, at the end of the word, but it can be used interchangeably with the other type of *e* (figures 29-30) in other contexts.



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Another *anglicana* letter-form is the tight *g* (figures 10, 11), sometimes described as shaped like the numeral 8, and resembling a pair of spectacles seen sideways on.

Fig. 10

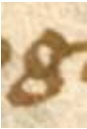
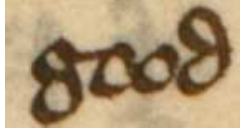


Fig. 11



The letter-form employed for *b* is typically *anglicana* (figures 12, 13).

Fig. 12

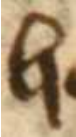
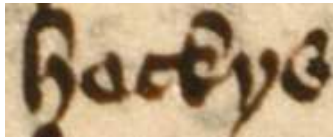


Fig. 13

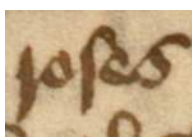


The long forked *r* (figure 14), descending below the line, can take initial (figure 15), medial (figure 16) or final (figure 17) position within the word. If the latter, it generally appears with a flourish or curling stroke which may be the indication of an omitted *e*.

Fig. 14



Fig. 15



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Fig. 16

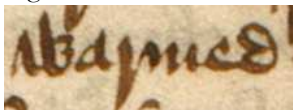
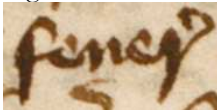


Fig. 17



The sigma-shaped or round *s* (figure 18) that looks similar to the numeral 6 is a distinctive *anglicana* form. It is made with a single pen stroke and therefore it involves little effort. It is generally written at the beginning (figure 19) or end (figures 19, 20) of the word.

Fig. 18



Fig. 19

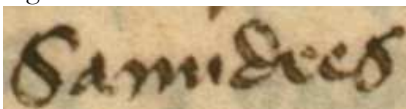
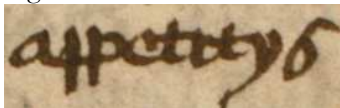


Fig. 20



Another *anglicana* letter-form which is present throughout the manuscript is *w* (figures 21, 22) with its two initial strokes completed by bows.

Fig. 21

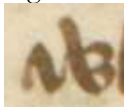
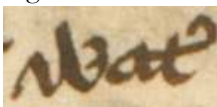


Fig. 22

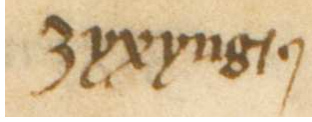


The last of the *anglicana* features to be pointed out is the graph for *x* (figures 23, 24), made with two separate strokes. In the manuscript, it is used to represent numerals (figure 23) and it can also be found in words in the headings at the top of folios (figure 24). For words within the text, the *secretary* form is preferred (see figures 45, 46).

Fig. 23



Fig. 24



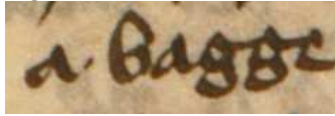
### 3.2. *The secretary script*

The typical letter-forms that distinguish the *secretary* script from the *anglicana* one and found in the manuscript are rendered next. The first is the neat single-compartment or single-lobed *a* (figures 25, 26) with a pointed head, which is the most frequently employed form for *a* in *H*.

Fig. 25



Fig. 26

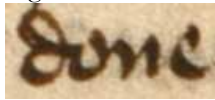


The looped ascenders of *d* are typical of *secretary* hands (figures 27, 28).

Fig. 27



Fig. 28

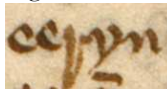


An alternative to the *anglicana* *e* is the simple two-stroke *e* (figures 29, 30); both of them are used consistently throughout the manuscript (figure 31).

Fig. 29

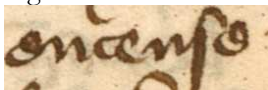


Fig. 30



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Fig. 31

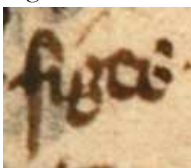


The tapering descenders of *f* (figures 32, 33) and long *r* (see figures 43, 44) are also distinctively *secretary*.

Fig. 32



Fig. 33



Another *secretary* letter-form is the single-compartment *g* (figure 34) with a pointed head (figure 35) or a head closed by a separate line (figure 36) and its open tail curling to the left.

Fig. 34



Fig. 35

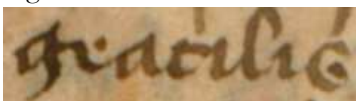
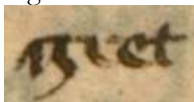


Fig. 36



The *secretary* form of *r* (figure 37), short and sitting on the script line, is commonly found in any position within the word (figures 38-40). It is sometimes described as the “v”-shaped *r*.

Fig. 37

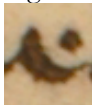


Fig. 38

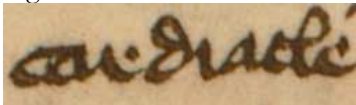
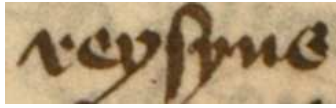


Fig. 39



Fig. 40



The use of the distinctive tight kidney-shaped form of *s* (figure 41) at the end of words (figure 42) is also a typical feature of the *secretary* script.

Fig. 41



Fig. 42



Initial *s* is mainly long (figure 43), as good calligraphic practice would require, although other types of *s* may also be employed (see figure 19). Long *s* is also frequent within words (figure 44). This letter-form is common and shared by both the *anglicana* and the *secretary* script.

Fig. 43

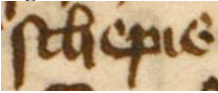
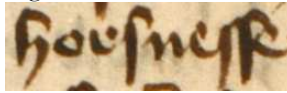


Fig. 44

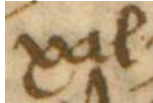


Finally, the letter *x* (figures 45, 46), written in a single stroke, is the last graph belonging to the *secretary* script which will be supplied. It is used both in words and numerals.

Fig. 45



Fig. 46



### 3.3. Further considerations

The script employed in *H* could be graded, following the terminology provided by Roberts (2005), a clear and steady *cursiva media* for several reasons. One of them is that the scribe wrote quickly and, as

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a result, the minims are not separately made (i.e. the pen is not lifted between strokes). As a consequence, *n* and *u* are indistinguishable, and special attention has to be paid to context to avoid ambiguity in cases where several minims appear together (figure 47: “euene”; figure 48: “peupleumonye”).

Fig. 47

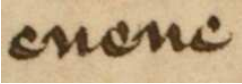
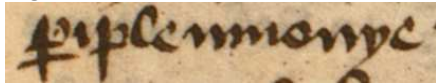


Fig. 48



Another reason is the heavy use of abbreviations (figure 49: “and”; figure 50: “persilie”; figure 51: “eueryche”), which is in accord with this grade and indicates that this is not a very formal hand.

Fig. 49



Fig. 50

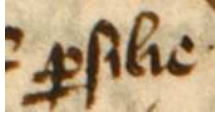
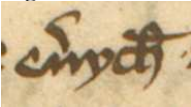


Fig. 51



Moreover, the formal layout is well planned but it has not been totally executed as a two-line-deep space for the opening initial (especially when a new section starts) has been left empty. The explanation for this may be lack of time or money (figures 52-53).

Fig. 52

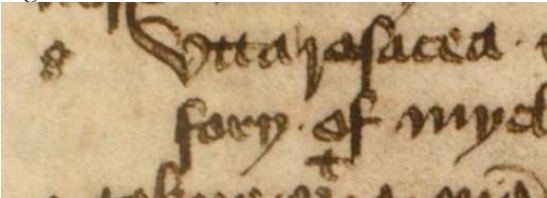
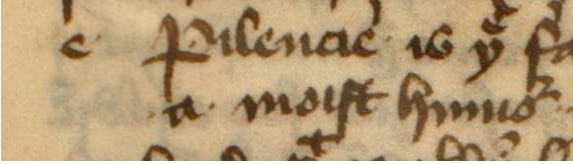


Fig. 53



However, features of *hybrid anglicana f* (figures 54) and of *hybrid secretary r* (figures 55-57), which belong to a more formal script, can also be found in *H*. They are not very frequent and *hybrid secretary r* usually appears in medial (figure 56) or in final position (figure 57).

Fig. 54



Fig. 55



Fig. 56

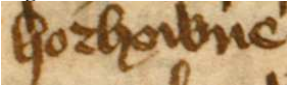
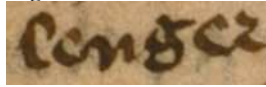


Fig. 57



#### 4. Conclusions

The main objective of this paper was to provide an account of the hands and script found in a particular scientific text in Middle English. The evidence gathered from the background of the hands present in the manuscript helps to date it in the middle of the fifteenth century. The script employed, which is mixed, also points in this direction. These data, along with other details provided by research on language and sources,<sup>4</sup> suggest that the book was composed approximately in 1460. The dialect of the text is East Anglian English. Thus the manuscript could have been copied in Wymondham, where a link is possible since a network of medical texts is localized in this

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<sup>4</sup>This research has been carried out in my doctoral thesis: *G.U.L. MS Hunter 509 (ff. 1r-167v): An Edition and Philological Study* (Universidad de Málaga, 2008).

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Norfolk area. Thomas Westhaugh was in all probability the scribe of the manuscript and John Sperhawke its first owner.

As for the purpose of the book, it can be argued that its main use was monastic. Therefore it would represent a practical guide of medicine for those living in the monastery who may have needed access to the information it contained.

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