The Harleian Medical Manuscripts

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The Harleian Collection is one of the three foundation collections of the library of the British Museum together with those from Sir Hans Sloane and Sir Robert Cotton. Spanning from the Carolingian and Anglo-Saxon period to the early eighteenth century, the collection comprises 7,660 manuscripts and includes treasures such as the Harley Aratus, the Ramsey Psalter, the Worms Bible, the Psalter of Queen Philippa, the Breviary of John, Duke of Burgundy, the Harley Roman de la Rose, and Lady Jane Grey’s Prayerbook and no fewer than 2,200 illuminated manuscripts. The collection was created by Robert Harley (1661-1724), 1st Earl of Oxford and politician, and his son Edward (1689-1741), 2nd Earl of Oxford, who took over after Robert’s impeachment and imprisonment in July 1715. Their bibliophile enthusiasm was matched by the passion of their librarian, Humfrey Wanley (1672-1726), who guided their manuscript acquisitions until his death in July 1726. The present paper concerns a group of 153 medieval medical manuscripts that have been the subject of a cataloguing project funded by a grant from the Wellcome Trust and carried out in the Department of Western Manuscripts at the British Library by the author of this article. The paper and the three that follow were presented at a symposium organized by the British Library to celebrate the end of the project, entitled Healing and the Harleian Collection: Medieval Medical Manuscripts Revealed and held at the Warburg Institute in London on Friday, 6 July 2007.

Until March 2007 the only available source of access to any Harleian manuscript was the four-volume catalogue published between 1808 and 1812 and based on the ‘Catalogus brevior’, a manuscript inventory of the collection started in 1708 by Wanley. As a matter of fact, sixty of the manuscripts covered by the project were not listed as medical in its index and were only identified through the so-called Singer Index, a manuscript card-index of pre-1600 western scientific manuscripts in the British Isles compiled by Dorothea Waley Singer in the first half of the twentieth century, and the electronic versions of Thorndike and Kibre, Incipits of Medieval Scientific Writings in Latin, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA, 1963), and of L. Ehrens Voigtz and P. Deerry Kurtz, Scientific and Medical Writings in Old and Middle English: An Electronic Reference, CD (Ann Arbor, 2000). The descriptions of and relevant bibliography for the 153 illuminated manuscripts in the Harleian collection are found in the on-line British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts.

1 I wish to thank the external advisors to the Medieval Medical Manuscripts in the Harleian Collection Project, Klaus Dietrich Fischer, Peter Jones, Michael McVaugh and Linda Ehrens Voigtz, other eminent scholars such as Lois Badley, Debby Banham, Charles Burnett, Arsenio Ferraces Rodriguez, Florence Eliza Glaze, Monica Green, Danielle Maion, Aoibheann Nic Dhonnchadha, Dirk Schultze, and Teresa Tavormina, to name only a few, and my colleagues in the Department of Manuscripts in the British Library for the constant support and authoritative help that they provided me in the course of the project.

2 Harley Aratus (Harley MS. 647, Lotharingia, late 9th century), The Ramsey Psalter (Harley MS. 2904, Winchester, late 10th century), The Worms Bible (Harley MSS. 2803–2804, Frankenthal, mid-12th century), The Psalter of Queen Philippa (Harley MS. 2899, unknown origin, c. 1340), The Breviary of John, Duke of Burgundy (Harley MS. 2897, Paris, c. 1413-1419), the Harley Roman de la Rose (Harley MS. 4425, Flanders, c. 1500), and Lady Jane Grey’s Prayerbook (Harley MS. 2342, London(?), 16th century, first half). Descriptions of illuminated manuscripts in the Harleian collection are found in the on-line British Library Catalogue of Illuminated Manuscripts.

3 The ‘Catalogus brevior’ is now British Library, Additional MSS. 45701-45707. After Wanley’s death, the catalogue was continued by David Casley, Mr Hocker and others and can be found in British Library, Additional MSS. 45707-45711.

4 A microfilm of this index was made by and is available at the Library of Congress as well as in the Department of Manuscripts of the British Library (British Library microfilms M 2068/1-21).

5 The electronic versions of the works are forthcoming on the U.S. National Library of Medicine, History of Medicine website: http://www.nlm.nih.gov/hmd/.
medieval Harleian manuscripts containing medical texts are now available from the on-line British Library Manuscripts Catalogue: www.bl.uk/catalogues/manuscripts.

The manuscripts span from the eighth century to the early 1500s and offer therefore an interesting cross-section of the development and transmission of medical knowledge and practice in Western countries from late antiquity to the early modern era. The earliest manuscript to be found in the collection and containing medical texts is Harley 5792 (fig. 1), an eighth-century Greek and Latin glossary with medical recipes added in the late eighth century. The manuscript came from the library of Cardinal Nicholas of Cues (1401-1464), together with other manuscripts, including two medical books produced in a fourteenth-century university environment: Harley 3745, a collection of Latin translations of Arabic treatises, and Harley 3757 (fig. 2), a copy of the Third Book of the Canon by Avicenna. They had been acquired for Harley by the London bookseller Nathaniel Noel (fl. 1681 – c. 1753) and his agent George Suttie, the source of many other manuscripts from important continental private and monastic libraries. Particularly interesting among them are Harley 3849, a thirteenth-century composite miscellany from the library of the Benedictine Abbey of St Peter at Salzburg in Austria, comprising a collection of Quaestiones medicinae, which includes rare copies of works attributed to the Salernitan physician Urso of Calabria (d. 1225), the Liber de effectibus qualitatum, De saporibus et odoribus and the Nota de coloribus (ff. 72v-77v; imperfect); Harley 4982, a late thirteenth-early fourteenth-century French copy of the Theorica Pantegni or Pantechni by Constantinus Africanus (c. 1020-1098/9) unknown to the editors of the text until now; and Harley 3099 (fig. 3), a twelfth-century copy of Isidore’s Etymologiae, written and decorated with large initials in Romanesque style by eight Benedictine nuns in the Abbey of Munsterbilsen allegedly in 1134 for the Premonstratensian Abbey of A[r]nstein in the diocese of Trier. From Germany and the collections of eminent bibliophiles came two other important twelfth-century codices: Harley 4986 is a pharmacopeial corpus that belonged to the German humanist Konrad Peutinger (1465-1547): in 1513 he lent it to his colleague Michael Humelberg of Ravensburg (1487-1527), possibly for the use of the latter’s brother, the physician and botanist Gabriel Humelberg (1490-1544), who in 1537 published an edition of the first three texts included in the manuscript, De herba vetonica, De medicaminibus herbarum and De medicina animalium; to another eminent antiquary, Johann Georg Graevius (1632-1703), belonged Harley 4346, a copy of Macer Floridus and other medical texts, which came to the Harleian collection from the library of the Elector Palatine Johann Wilhelm (1658-1716) through the mediation of Giovanni Giacomo Zamboni, an Italian dealer of doubtful repute.

In 1720, Edward Harley acquired a set of eleven lavishly illuminated manuscripts from a French collection that had been put together by an equally distinguished aristocrat, the French chancellor Pierre Séguier (1588-1672), count of Gien. The set, now Harley 3799-3809, is the only extant copy of the entire Commentary on the Canon Medicinae of Avicenna composed by the Parisian professor Jacques Despars (c. 1380-1458). It was made in Paris in 1475 and decorated with miniatures in the style of the Master of Jacques de Besançon. In the sixteenth century it belonged to Gui II Arbaeleste (d. 1570), counsellor in the Parliament of Paris and bibliophile, who had his arms and motto ‘Ingenium superat vires’ added on the bas-de-page of the frontispieces. From the same sources came a single volume, Harley 4114. The manuscript contains Despar’s commentary of Book III, fen IV-VI, and belongs to another set of Despars’s work produced in Paris around 1486-87 for Jean Budé (d. 1502),

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4 The first of these recipes is discussed in Klaus-Dietrich Fischer, ‘The Acharistum in a Manuscript from the Library of Nicholas of Cues’, in Asklepios. Studies on Ancient Medicine, ed. by Louise Cilliers (Bloemfontein, 2008; Acta classica supplementum II), pp. 74-85.
Fig. 1. Harl. MS. 5792, f. 273.
Fig. 2. Harl. MS. 3757, f. 158v.
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Fig. 3. Harl. MS. 3099, f. 31.
secretary to the king of France and bibliophile, his arms and characteristic initials ‘V I’ still visible in two openings of the manuscript (Harley 4114, ff. 65v and 114). The scribe of this manuscript can be identified as Jean de Bailleul, and the manuscript bears traces of Budé’s usual ownership note dated December 1486 (f. 195).

Several ownership notes of Lady Elizabeth Hopton, one of them dated 1610, can be found in Harley 4977, an early twelfth-century compendium including an imperfect copy of the so-called Epistula peri hereeson and Practica Petrocelli followed by a collection of pharmacological recipes and medical texts, mostly relating to gynaecology. The manuscript was later in the collection of the clergyman and antiquary John Batteley (1647-1708) and was bought by Edward Harley from Batteley’s nephew John on 5 November 1723. Other important twelfth-century codices were donated to Robert Harley in 1712 by the English diplomat Henry Worsley (1675-1741), scholar and manuscript collector: Harley 1685, a late twelfth-century copy of the Passionarius, a medical compendium compiled by Gariopontus or Guarimpotus, one of the first texts to be commented upon at the medical school at Salerno, and Harley 1585 (fig. 4), a famous illustrated pharmacopoeial compilation in Latin that was possibly produced in the Mosan region. Other manuscripts are somehow connected to English royalties such as an important anonymous Dietary for King Henry V (reigned 1413-1422) in Middle English, found in Harley 5086 (fig. 5), and medical recipes and drug prescriptions for Kings Edward IV (reigned 1461–70 and 1471–83) and Richard III (r. 1483–1485) and members of their court, such as the Duke of Clarence and the Duke of Buckingham, scribbled by different hands on the blanks of an unusually oblong volume, Harley 1628, a dispensatory put together by or for the use of an English apothecary possibly around 1483.

The Harleian collection is particularly rich, in fact, in manuscripts produced in Britain, perhaps as a result of Robert and Edward Harley’s interest in British history and their librarian Wanley’s specialization in Old English texts and manuscripts. Therefore, at least a third of the Harleian medieval medical collection consists of manuscripts produced in Britain and containing texts in Old and Middle English. They tend to be less ornate but of no lesser historical importance or textual interest than their continental companions. Among them we find composite miscellanies and commonplace books assembled in the fifteenth century for the use of English doctors and practitioners, such as a medical miscellany including the surgical treatise Philomena composed before 1412 by the royal surgeon John Bradmore (d. 1412) now Harley 1736, and in the Middle English translation by another royal surgeon, Thomas Morstede (d. 1450), dateable to around 1446, the commonplace books of the English physicians John Crophill (d. in or after 1485), medical practitioner and bailiff of Wix Priory in Essex, Harley 1735, and Thomas Fayreford (fl. 1400-1450), Harley 2558. Many such miscellanies consist of small booklets or fragments from manuscripts of different origin, provenance and date which were arranged together in composite volumes. They often look untidy and unattractive, are frequently worn and rather soiled through use and almost invariably imperfect. After entering the Harleian collection they were mostly bound in mottled brown calf leather with gilt tooling only on the spine compartments, as they were not considered worthy of the expensive gilt-tooled red morocco bindings produced by Jane Steel, Christopher Chapman and Thomas Elliott in the style that has come to be known as the Harleian style. One of such miscellanies is Harley 2390.

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7 Four other surviving volumes from the set are held in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris (lat. 6926-6928, 6937), one of which (lat. 6937) contains the commentary on fen II-III of Book III, which immediately precedes the text of the present manuscript: see D. Jacquart, ‘Le regard d’un médecin sur son temps: Jacques Despars (1380?–1458)’, Bibliothèque de l’Ecole des Chartes, cxxxviii (1980), pp. 35-86 (pp. 40-42). I am grateful for the identification of the arms in Harley 4114 as those of Jean Budé and Gui II Arbaleste by Philippe Palasi.

8 For details on the contents of the dispensatory, see Peter Jones’s article ‘Witnesses to Medieval Medical Practice in the Harley Collection’, in the present issue of The Electronic British Library Journal 2008, art. 8.

9 The original Latin text of the surgical treatise Philomena survives in Sloane 2272.

10 Harley 1735 and 2558 are discussed in Peter Jones’s article in this journal.

Fig. 5. Harl. MS. 5086, f. 91.
a fifteenth-century composite manuscript comprising the ‘manifesto’ of an anonymous itinerant doctor promising cures for a number of ailments, Harley 2390.\textsuperscript{12} The volume also contains a copy of the \textit{Speculum medicina}, a medical compendium of Salernitan origin discussed by Klaus-Dietrich Fischer in his article presented in this journal.\textsuperscript{13} As illustrated by Fischer, two excerpts from the same text, dating to the late twelfth century, can also be found in Harley 5228, ff. 68-72v and 94v-101v, another composite miscellany, including treatises by Johannes de Sancto Paulo, Nicolas of Salerno, Galen and William of Poitiers, dating to the late twelfth and early thirteenth century and possibly identifiable with a manuscript owned in the seventeenth century by the Benedictine Cathedral Priory at Worcester. The manuscript came to Edward Harley in February 1715/6 from the library of a well-known collector, John Covel (1638-1722), Chaplain to the Levant Company at Constantinople and later Master of Christ’s College, Cambridge, whose main interests were Greek culture and the history of the Greek Orthodox church. Nevertheless he was the source of four other Harleian manuscripts containing medical texts, and in particular of an illustrated physician’s almanac, Harley 2332 (fig. 6). The almanac, which is datable to around 1411-1412, is a beautiful example of the portable collections of calendrical texts, tables and diagrams that were produced around that time in England for the use of medical doctors and practitioners. They represent a quintessentially English product, as no examples from continental Europe are known. This calendrical material was often produced as folding almanacs and the Harleian collection also holds three exemplars of this kind, such as Harley 5311 (fig. 7).\textsuperscript{14}

The first medical manuscripts came to Robert Harley with the purchase in October 1705 of more than 660 manuscripts from the library of the antiquary Sir Simonds d’Ewes (1602-1650). Among them Harley 3, a rare copy of the \textit{Breviarium Bartholomei}, a medical compilation composed between 1380 and 1395 by John Mirfield (d. 1407), chaplain of the hospital of St Bartholomew in Smithfield, London, of which only one other manuscript survives in Pembroke College, Oxford (MS. 2). The Harleian volume has an interesting provenance as it was previously owned by the mathematician, astrologer and antiquary John Dee (1527-1609), who glossed Mirfield’s text and added two medical recipes on the endleaves.

Among other codices of monastic provenance that came into the Harleian library from collections put together by clergymen and antiquaries at the time of the Dissolution of the Monasteries is Harley 978, the famous thirteenth-century miscellany or ‘manual’ from Reading Abbey including the song ‘Sumer is icumen in’, alongside medical texts such as Pseudo-Aristotle’s \textit{Epistula ad Alexandrum Magnum}, a treatise referring to Avicenna, verses on the signs of death and a glossary of herbs. Robert Harley bought this manuscript in 1707 from the son of Edward Stillingfleet (1635-1699), bishop of Worcester and theologian.

So far we have seen manuscripts coming from the usual suspects: monastic houses, wealthy secular or religious patrons, fifteenth-century doctors and practitioners, Renaissance scholars and, from the seventeenth century onwards, antiquaries and dealers. While the manuscripts were clearly treated as a source of professional knowledge and practical information by their medieval and Renaissance owners, there is little evidence that

\textsuperscript{12} The manifesto of the itinerant doctor in Harley 2390 will be amply illustrated in Linda E. Voigts, ‘Fifteenth-Century English Banns Advertising the Services of an Itinerant Doctor’, in \textit{Between Text and Patient: the Medical Enterprise in Medieval and Early Modern Europe}, ed. by F. E. Glaze and B. Nance (Firenze, forthcoming; Micrologus Library).


\textsuperscript{14} On the physician’s folding almanac, see H. M. Carey, ‘What is the Folded Almanac? The Form and Function of a Key Manuscript Source for Astro-medical Practice in Later Medieval England’, \textit{Social History of Medicine}, xvi.3 (2003), 483-509.
Fig. 6. Harl. MS. 2332, f. 3v.
the later antiquaries actually read the texts of the manuscripts that they were so keen to collect.

Let me now introduce you to a seventeenth-century collector who not only possessed medieval medical manuscripts but carefully read and annotated their texts. In May 1715 Robert Harley bought a group of 136 manuscripts from the widow of Robert Burscough (1650/51-1709), prebendary of Exeter Cathedral in 1701, archdeacon of Barnstaple in 1703 and rector of Cheriton Bishop in Devon in 1705. Author of a couple of treatises on theological and ecclesiastical matters, Burscough does not seem to have ever engaged in medical studies. However from his library came no fewer than twenty-one medieval medical manuscripts covered by the present project, the most substantial Harleian acquisition with respect to medieval medicine followed by that from the collection of Sir Simon d’Ewes which supplied Harley with eighteen such manuscripts. Four of Burscough’s medical manuscripts bear the name of a former owner, who signed himself as ‘S. Kanuto’, or ‘Samuel Canutus’ or ‘Sam. Kanutus’ as we see at the foot of a late fourteenth-early fifteenth-century copy of the Trotula ensemble in Harley 3407 (fig. 8).

From other Burscough manuscripts bearing Kanutus’s ownership inscription Cyril E. Wright identified ‘Kanutus’ with the seventeenth-century vicar Samuel Knott, son of Thomas a priest from Bridport in Dorset. Samuel obtained his B.A. at Trinity College in Oxford on 16 May 1632 when he was nineteen. He became vicar of Broadhembury in Devon in 1634 and in 1635 he was nominated rector of Combe Raleigh, also in Devon. Ejected from the church in 1647, he was restored to his capacity in 1660, only to be suspended again by the bishop in 1663 and definitely prohibited from preaching in 1664, as he did not conform to the Act of Uniformity. He died aged 74 in 1687. His hand is quite distinctive and so are his notes. Dr Wright was therefore able to recognize them in the marginal apparatus of forty-six manuscripts from Burscough, mostly of liturgical or theological contents. Eleven of them contained medieval medical texts. However, during the course of the project, I identified nine more codices with Knott’s annotations and I believe that Knott was the previous owner of almost all the Harleian medical manuscripts that came from Burscough, with the only exception of Harley 585, the famous Anglo-Saxon compendium, which in the early seventeenth century belonged to Barbara Crokker, identified by Ker as Barbara Crocker (d. 1655), of Lyneham, near Yealmpton. In fact no Old English text is present in this small collection, which is otherwise rather sophisticated and selected in its contents.

Harley 3407 is a composite miscellany consisting of ten codicological units of different origin datable from the late twelfth to the fifteenth century. Besides the Liber de synthomatibus mulierum, and De curis mulierum, the first two texts of the so-called Trotula ensemble, the volume includes an early fifteenth-century copy of extracts from the Regimen sanitatis salernitanum, Constantinus’s Viaticum and Avicenna’s Canon in Latin, and the Middle English translation of the Compendium Medicinae by Gilbertus Anglicus. Despite a fairly dismissive comment added by Knott at the end of De curis mulierum, his manuscripts are the only ones in the Harleian collection to contain Trotula texts. One of the units in the volume belonged in the fifteenth century to an unidentified ‘Ferrant de Peyhimbury’, possibly Payhembury in Devon.

Also based in Devon, and more precisely in Exeter, were two apothecaries, ‘Magister Hooper’ and ‘Magister Carpenter’, from whom Knott acquired two booklets now bound in Harley 3388, another composite volume that comprises a copy of Rogerius de Parme’s Chirurgia and the fragment of an anonymous Practica medicinae, a portion of which I found astray in another of Knott’s manuscripts, Harley 3372. I suspect that some confusion occurred with the booklets when the volumes were rebound after entering the Harleian collection.

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Fig. 8. Harl. MS. 3407, f. 19.
From Thomas Byaed, a sixteenth-century vicar of Bockerill, possibly Buckerell in Devon, a village not far from Combe Raleigh, came a booklet containing alchemical works by John Pauper, John Dastin and John Sawtry. This is now bound in Harley 3542, with another manuscript including Walter Agilon, *Treatise on pulses*, excerpts from works by Roger de Baron and Roger of Parma, and the third treatise of the Trotula ensemble, *De ornatu mulierum*. More importantly this miscellany preserves a rare copy of a treatise relating to medicine and astronomy by Ralph Hoby, a Franciscan friar of Hereford and Oxford, discussed in detail by Linda Voigts in her article in this journal. Other no text by Hoby seemingly survives in manuscripts and appropriately Knott underlined his name in red.

Harley 2347, a small compendium of recipes in Latin, Anglo-Norman and Middle English including a botanical glossary, bears the note ‘Medicin liber magistri Johannis Lane’ written by a late fifteenth-century owner, while in the seventeenth century an unidentified ‘John Molland’ scribbled his name in Harley 2269, an early sixteenth-century astronomical compendium in Latin including a treatise on uroscopy by Guilhemus Anglicus, a pharmacological text relating to astrology and a few horoscopes.

Equally unidentified is the sixteenth-century English owner who signed as ‘Robeart Croff’ or ‘Croff’ in Harley 3594, ff. 124v-125 (fig. 9), a late fifteenth-century collection of texts by authorities such as Galen, Bartholomaeus de Montagnana, Avicenna and Pseudo-Mesue, Arnau de Villanova and Johannes de Tornamira, which also comprises a recipe for an elixir of youth. The volume is composite and made up of manuscripts of continental origin; some among them were produced in Northern France. It was assembled by an early sixteenth-century continental compiler who added his own comments and notes, mostly in the form of diagrams and figures of divisions. At the beginning of a commentary to Arnau’s collection of aphorisms known as *Medicationis parabole*, Knott added a note referring to the edition of the *Opera omnia* of Arnau de Villanova published in Lyon in 1532. He also noted the unusual prologue to the text, and added a title and a marginal note in his characteristic red crayon.

While Knott seems to have acquired the small and unassuming booklets of English origin that form the bulk of his composite miscellanies from single individuals in the West country, it is less clear how he obtained the manuscripts of continental origin also found in his collection, which tend to be more elegant and ornate. One of them is an elegant Parisian copy of the *Articella*, Harley 3140 (fig. 10), which incidentally is the only one among the Harleian manuscripts to contain this famous medical compilation. Perhaps out of respect for the beauty of the manuscript or more simply because its text had already been quite heavily annotated by a medieval reader, Knott limited his marginalia to sparse notes here and there, such as a correction to the explicit of Philaretus’s treatise on pulses on f. 39, amending the scribe’s words ‘Et haec vobis sufficiant ad presencia’ with the marginal note ‘et haec vobis de pulsu sufficiant ad praesens. Articell[l]a’ (figs. 10, 11). He also corrected the list of contents on f. 68, added a title on f. 96 and the number of a chapter here and there in red. For this reason, while an erased ownership inscription on the flyleaf prompted Ker’s and Watson’s identification of the important provenance of this manuscript from Malmesbury Abbey, the less prominent provenance from the obscure Devon vicar was overlooked, not only by Dr Wright but also by myself when I first catalogued the volume four years ago.

Equally scarce and therefore unnoticed was Knott’s presence in the margins of Harley 3747, a copy of the *Practica medicinae secundum modum Avicennae* by the physician and humanist Giovanni Garzoni of Bologna (1419–1505). The manuscript, written for a certain Roland Cornelius, is signed and dated 1477 on f. 206v by Henricus de Bergis (d. 1502), who


Fig. 11. Harl. MS. 3140, f. 39 (detail).
was then abbot of St Denis en Broqueroy in the diocese of Cambrai and was later elected bishop of Cambrai in 1480. The volume also includes short treatises by other Italian physicians: two by Niccolò Falcucci, respectively on fevers and the plague, one on diet by Bernardo Garzoni, father to Giovanni, and two on medical baths traditionally attributed to Gentile da Foligno and, tentatively, Pietro d’Abano. In the early seventeenth century the volume belonged to Brugelius, a professor of Medicine at Louvain, his ownership note on f. 1* ‘Sum Brugelii’, followed by a later inscription recording the acquisition of the manuscript after Brugelius’s death by Johannes Valla, called here Montpellirus, a medical doctor of Liège.

Of Italian origin is Harley 1914, an early fourteenth-century copy of the Breviarium medicinae or Practica Serapionis, which is the Latin translation by Gerardus de Cremona (circa 1114-1187) of a small Compendium originally written in Syriac by a ninth-century author, Yūhannā ibn Sarābiyūn or, as he was known in the West, Serapion the Elder.18 The volume was sparsely annotated by Italian or Southern French readers in the fourteenth and fifteenth century and preserves a medieval indication of the price as ‘precius xx x’ (f. 132v) and a fourteenth-century note of instructions (f. 133v) addressed to ‘Magistro Aldrovando miniatore de Bononia’. On the verso of the front flyleaf Knott wrote and signed a long note in which he annotated the presence of another manuscript copy of the Practica Serapionis in the Bodleian Library (signed ‘A.2.4’, now probably Bodley 433), and mentioned a printed edition published in Venice by Giunti in 1550 containing a different Latin translation from the Arabic version of the text made by Andrea Alpago of Belluno. Another manuscript also in the Bodleian library, ‘supra A.7.1.4’, now Bodley 761, ff. 71v-83v, was mentioned by Knott in Harley 3334 in relation to a fourteenth-century copy of De chirurgia by Roland of Parma or Rolandina. In his note, Knott specified that in the Bodleian exemplar the Rolandina appeared alongside the Thesaurus pauperum.

But Knott was not only learned in texts pertaining to the traditional curriculum for the training of doctors in medieval continental universities. John of Arderne (b. 1307/8, d. in or after 1377), the doctor who established himself as one of the leading physicians in late medieval England with his treatise on the fistula in ano, also figures as one of the authorities often cited by Samuel in his marginalia. And indeed Knott owned the well-known copy of Arderne’s works, now Harley 3371 (fig. 12), which I suspect was used as the exemplar for the Middle English translation of the Fistula in ano in Sloane 76.

Finally, also from Knott came the well-known composite manuscript Harley 3719 which includes a well-known representation of a bloodletting-Zodiac man with captions in Middle English.

Knott’s manuscripts can be singled out as a small collection within the Harleian collection, ranging as they are from the imposing copies of the fundamental medical texts in Latin to the more humble and often composite miscellanies assembled by fifteenth-century practitioners, which include medical compendia and recipes in Latin and Middle English beside alchemical, astrological and calendrical material.

As demonstrated by his annotations, Knott was certainly a discerning if not original reader of medical literature. In his notes, all in Latin, Knott mostly concerned himself with textual mistakes or variant readings to the texts, disputed the identity of cited authorities, or gave references to other manuscripts or printed editions of the same text or passage. Occasionally he would write them in red and he would often use the same red crayon to supply a title at the beginning of texts. However, we are not sure whether, following an old medieval custom, Knott was a medical doctor or a practitioner as well as an ecclesiastic thus

18 For the author and his work, see P. E. Pormann, ‘Yūhannā ibn Sarābiyūn: Further Studies into the Transmission of his Works’, Arabic Sciences and Philosophy, xiv.2 (2004), pp233-62, with further bibliography.
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combining the care of the soul with the cure of the body. It is therefore difficult to ascertain whether he collected medieval medical manuscripts for a professional and practical purpose or simply to satisfy a purely academic interest. Many other questions remain unsolved and would require further investigation. It would be interesting to know, for instance, whether the Harley manuscripts are the only ones he possessed or others survive in the British Library, and in the Sloane collection in particular, or in other libraries elsewhere. It would be equally interesting to discover whether he also owned and similarly annotated incunables and post-medieval manuscripts and books. His name does not figure in the index of owners in the recently published catalogue of incunables in the Bodleian Library, but it is not unconceivable that books from his library may survive in the British Library or in other British or international institutions.

On the question whether Knott was or was not a physician, I found a positive answer in a book published in 1714 by John Walker, who described him as follows: ‘He was Restored in 1660; and living a sort of Retired and Melancholy Life, was lookt upon by the Generality of the Common People, as a Conjurer. He pretended likewise to, and Practised Physick. I have been informed, that he was in truth an Excellent Scholar; but was certainly altogether unfit for any Ecclesiastical Cure’.19

19 John Walker, Attempt towards Recovering an Account of the Numbers and Sufferings of the Clergy of the Church of England ... who were Sequester’d, Harrassi’d etc. in the late Times of the Grand Rebellion. (London, 1714), p. 287, letter K in Devonshire.