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Astrological questions as recipes for knowledge

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This chapter explores the idea of astrological questions as ‘recipes for knowledge’. Astrological questions, also known as interrogations or horary astrology, are prognostic texts focused on answering specific questions, for example “Will a sick patient live or die?” or “Where is the stolen thing hidden?”. Similarly to recipes, then, questions are instructional texts providing a set of directions to follow in order to achieve a desired outcome. However, while there is a considerable corpus of research on the function and form of early recipes, research on astrological texts still has much ground to cover in terms of surviving manuscript (and early printed) material.

In this chapter, I suggest that adopting models developed for examining recipes is helpful in understanding astrological questions. My methodology draws on previous work on recipe collections in the fields of manuscript studies and historical discourse linguistics. To illustrate the shared generic conventions between questions and recipes, I present examples from two English manuscripts with a shared provenance, copied ca. 1550: Yale University, Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library MS 558 (henceforth Beinecke 558) and Yale University, Medical Historical Library MS 45 (henceforth Medical 45).¹ I discuss the similarities between recipes and questions first on the macro level, looking at how text collections function in their manuscript context. I then move on to discuss the micro level, analysing the structural and linguistic features of questions. I suggest that the form of astrological questions may have evoked familiarity among those used to reading recipes and vice versa, and that the similarities between the two genres may have prompted similar strategies of text production.

Medieval and early modern astrological prognostications can be divided into various different categories based on their form and function. Means has outlined four major generic types of astrological prognostications: *electionary*, *lunary*, *destinary*, and *questionary*.² While the purpose of prognostic texts in general is to answer questions posed by the practitioner, the astrological *questionary* can be defined in a more restricted manner. As Means puts it, “a

¹ I wish to thank the staff at Yale University Medical Historical Library and the Beinecke Rare Book & Manuscript Library for their help with my work on these manuscripts. The shared provenance is discussed in Mari-Liisa Varila, ‘In search of textual boundaries: A case study on the transmission of scientific writing in 16th-century England’. Doctoral dissertation (Turku: University of Turku 2016).

² Laurel Means, ‘Electionary, lunary, destinary, and questionary: Toward defining categories of Middle English prognostic material’, *Studies in Philology* 89:4 (1992), pp. 367–403.

questionary is only concerned with specific questions, who and how they are asked, and the means by which they may be answered”.³ Individual questions cover various areas of life, from marriage to medicine and war to weather. A question can be answered by drawing an astrological chart representing the time of asking the question (or another moment relevant for the question) and inspecting the positions of planets and signs on the chart.

Questionaries consist of individual questions typically organised according to the order of the twelve houses.⁴ The system of the twelve houses, important for much of judicial astrology, is based on dividing the sky into twelve parts through which the stars and planets move.⁵ Every house governs specific areas of life. However, questions do not always form complete series covering all twelve houses. For example, a questionary sequence might focus on medical matters (governed by the sixth house) and ignore issues related to travel (governed by the eighth house). Since individual questions are often short, they could be copied selectively according to the scribe’s or user’s interests, and they could be interspersed with other types of texts. This textual behaviour resembles that of recipes, as will be discussed in more detail below.

Early English astrological questions are based on a long history of translation and transmission. Sources ultimately include authorities such as Abū Ma’shar (known in Latin works as Albumasar), Sahl b. Bishr (Zael), Māshā’ allāh ibn Athari (Messahalla), and Abraham ibn Ezra, and also compilations of (extracts of) their work, such as the compilation known as Kitab al-Bari by Abū al-Hasan (Haly Abenragel).⁶ Carey notes that judging from known translations and adaptations, new European vernacular, lay audiences for interrogations (and elections) may only have formed in the late fourteenth century.⁷ Carey finds that unlike in France, in England “the evidence from translation of the technical Latin astrological literature into the vernacular shows very little in the way of intelligent adaption to a new cultural context”, with Middle English translations being primarily very literal apart from some modifications reflecting the reworking of the texts for a medieval Christian readership.⁸

Alongside questionaries, evidence for asking and answering questions survives in practitioners’ notebooks. Page has analysed the horary charts in the notebook of Richard

³ Means, ‘Electionary, lunary, destinary, and questionary’, p. 395.

⁴ Means, ‘Electionary, lunary, destinary, and questionary’, p. 395; Hilary M. Carey, ‘Judicial astrology in theory and practice in later medieval Europe’, *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 41 (2010), pp. 90–98, p. 92.

⁵ Seb Falk, *The Light Ages: A Medieval Journey of Discovery* (London: Allen Lane, 2020), pp. 186–91.

⁶ Carey, ‘Judicial astrology’, pp. 90–91; Falk, *The Light Ages*, p. 185.

⁷ Carey, ‘Judicial astrology’, p. 94.

⁸ Carey, ‘Judicial astrology’, p. 94.

Trewythian (b. 1393; London, British Library MS Sloane 428) who practiced astrology and medicine in fifteenth-century London.⁹ Carey notes that this notebook is the first known “fully worked collection of judicial interrogations” in England: although textbooks were available, surviving worked examples in English are rare before the fifteenth century.¹⁰ Based on Trewythian’s notes, questions related to marriage and pregnancy seem to have been common.¹¹ Trewythian also answered questions related to missing people, theft, hidden treasure, and legal and domestic arguments.¹² Similarly themed questions are also found in the material examined in this chapter.

In what follows, I will take a closer look at the textual and linguistic features of astrological questions and compare them to recipes. The purpose of this chapter is not to argue that questions *are* recipes. Rather, I hope to find parallels between how these texts function and to suggest that research on early recipes may also shed light on astrological questions. I begin by looking at how questions are organised in their manuscript context.

Similarly to recipe collections, questionnaires are modular in nature: they typically consist of several items that function independently of each other and can be rearranged in various ways. This characteristic can be fruitfully examined through the concept of *discourse colony*, borrowed from discourse linguistics. The term was established by Hoey in 1986 to describe texts such as dictionaries or telephone directories that consist of multiple *units*.¹³ Hoey establishes nine criteria for identifying discourse colonies, briefly summarised here. In a typical discourse colony, the single units do not consistently read as continuous prose, and reading the units in order is not essential for understanding their meaning.¹⁴ A discourse colony is typically anonymous or written by several authors, and it may have a framing context such as a title or preface.¹⁵ The colony may follow an alphabetical, numeric, or temporal organisation pattern,

⁹ Sophie Page, ‘Richard Trewythian and the uses of astrology in late medieval England’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 64 (2001), 193–228.

¹⁰ Carey, ‘Judicial astrology’, p. 97; for later examples, see e.g. Lauren Kassell, Michael Hawkins, Robert Ralley, John Young, Joanne Edge, Janet Yvonne Martin-Portugues, and Natalie Kaoukji (eds), ‘Casebooks’, *The casebooks of Simon Forman and Richard Napier, 1596–1634: a digital edition*, <https://casebooks.lib.cam.ac.uk>, accessed 31 August 2021.

¹¹ Page, ‘Richard Trewythian’, p. 204.

¹² Page, ‘Richard Trewythian’, pp. 205–08.

¹³ Michael Hoey, ‘The discourse colony: A preliminary study of a neglected discourse type’, in Malcolm Coulthard (ed.), *Talking About Text*. English Language Research Discourse Analysis Monographs 13 (Birmingham: Birmingham University Press 1986), 1–26.

¹⁴ Hoey, ‘The discourse colony’, p. 20.

¹⁵ Hoey, ‘The discourse colony’, p. 20.

but individual units can be added, omitted, reordered, altered, used, and reproduced independently.¹⁶

Although Hoey's criteria were devised for modern texts, they have successfully been applied to historical texts, especially recipe collections. Carroll has discussed culinary and lace-making recipe collections as discourse colonies, also suggesting that a recipe collection may itself function as part of a larger discourse colony in the context of multi-text manuscripts or commonplace books.¹⁷ Alonso-Almeida has applied the concept of discourse colony on medieval and early modern medical and culinary recipes.¹⁸ Marttila examines the Middle English *Potage Dyvers* recipe collections, while Totelin's study focuses on Hippocratic recipes.¹⁹ Carroll and Alonso-Almeida both find that recipe collections are prototypically 'miscellaneous' and that the concept of discourse colony allows us to examine such compilations as texts.²⁰ Indeed, part of the problem of studying collections of brief utilitarian texts is defining which manuscript versions represent the same work. The concept of discourse colony is helpful in analysing and perhaps also editing multi-unit works prone to considerable variation.

To illustrate how a discourse colony consisting of astrological questions might work in a manuscript context, I examine a sequence of items found in both Medical 45 and Beinecke 558.²¹ This sequence mostly consists of astrological questions, although some other brief astrological texts (such as technical instructions for resolving questions) are also copied in the same context. In both manuscripts, the beginning of the sequence is flagged with a rubric. In

¹⁶ Hoey, 'The discourse colony', p. 20.

¹⁷ Ruth Carroll, 'Assessing palaeographic evidence for discourse structuring in Middle English recipes', *Boletín Millares Carlo* 24-25 (2005-06), 305-25; Ruth Carroll, 'Recipes for laces: An example of a Middle English discourse colony', in Risto Hiltunen and Janne Skaffari (eds), *Discourse Perspectives on English: Medieval to Modern* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins 2003), 137-65.

¹⁸ Francisco Alonso-Almeida, 'All gathered together: on the construction of scientific and technical books in 15th-century England', *International Journal of English Studies*, 5:2 (2005), 1-25; Francisco Alonso-Almeida, 'Middle English medical books as examples of discourse colonies: G.U.L. Hunter 307', in Isabel Moskowich-Fandiño and Begoña Crespo (eds), *Bells Chiming from the Past. Cultural and Linguistic Studies on Early English* (Amsterdam: Rodopi 2007), 55-80; Francisco Alonso-Almeida, 'Genre conventions in English recipes, 1600-1800', in Michelle DiMeo and Sara Pennell (eds), *Reading & Writing Recipe Books 1500-1800* (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2013), 68-90.

¹⁹ Ville Marttila, *Creating Digital Editions for Corpus Linguistics: The Case of Potage Dyvers, a Family of Six Middle English Recipe Collections*. Unpublished PhD dissertation (Helsinki: University of Helsinki 2014). Available at: <http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-51-0060-3>; Laurence M. V. Totelin, *Hippocratic Recipes: Oral and Written Transmission of Pharmacological Knowledge in Fifth- and Fourth-Century Greece* (Leiden: Brill 2009).

²⁰ Carroll, 'Assessing palaeographic evidence', p. 314; Alonso-Almeida, 'Genre conventions', p. 85.

²¹ I have previously discussed this sequence in Varila, 'In search of textual boundaries', pp. 252-59. Table 1 is a modified version of pp. 255-56. The internal foliation of Medical/Historical Library 45 is problematic due to missing and misnumbered leaves; the foliation used here corresponds to the current state of the manuscript.

Medical 45 the series is titled “The Judgementes Off Massahala” (f. 138r) and in Beinecke 558 “Judgementes of Massahala & Hala Abenragell” (f. 9r). The layout follows a clear pattern in both manuscripts. In Beinecke 558, the individual questions are given a rubric in red ink in a larger, more elaborate script (textualis with secretary influence) than the body of the text (secretary). The rubrication script and ink are also used for the first word of each question. The first question follows the rubric for the whole sequence and is therefore not given a separate rubric. In Medical 45, the questions are set apart by a blank line, and the first word of each question is in red ink. There are no rubrics; the titles or topics are given at the beginning of the questions. They are sometimes separated from the body text by a virgule or colon, but often they read as continuous prose with the rest of the text. In both manuscripts, the last line of each question ends in line-fillers, either red (Beinecke 558) or black (Medical 45). Astrological symbols and numerals within the text are written in red ink in both manuscripts. The sequence ends in both manuscripts in a textually nearly identical explicit. In Beinecke 558 it is in black ink with the first and last words in red (f. 14v); in Medical 45 in a larger script and alternating red and black ink (f. 146r).

Table 1 shows the items in this sequence, organised according to the order in Medical 45. Rubrics in Beinecke 558 are transcribed in bold; for the rest, I have given the title of the question in Medical 45. Table 1 also shows the folio and line numbers. In Medical 45, the 38 items are found on ff. 138r–146r. In Beinecke 558, there are only 31 items, most of which are on ff. 9r–14v between the rubric and explicit. The folio references of items copied out of sequence in Beinecke 558 are in bold.

Table 1. The *Judgements of Massahala* sequence in Medical 45 and Beinecke 558.

Item	Medical 45	Beinecke 558
1. To knowe the sygnificatour of the ascendent or of the querent	138r: 2–19	9r: 2–19
2. To go to finde A man at Home	138r: 20–26	9r: 20–27
3. For the querentes thought	138r: 27–30	9r: 28–32
4. To knowe when A person commith to the, whether he beare thee good will or no	138r: 31–36, 138v: 1–5	20v: 24–33
5. Whether suspicion be true or no	138v: 6–9	9r: 33–37
6. For opteining of Substaunce	138v: 10–16	9v: 1–8
7. For ones brother howe he doth	138v: 17–30	9v: 9–23
8. Off Any House Or Heritage	138v: 31–36, 139r: 1–9	14v: 20–35
9. To knowe Off Treasure	139r: 10–17	9v: 24–32
10. Whether A woman be with child or no	139r: 18–23	9v: 33–38
11. A woman with child of one or two	139r: 24–27	10r: 1–4
12. A woman with child of man or woman	139r: 28–33	10r: 5–11

13. Iff A Messenger Comith	139r: 34–35, 139v: 1–10	10r: 12–24
14. What A Messenger bringith	139v: 11–17	10r: 25–32
15. Yff Gestes bidden shall come	139v: 18–22	10r: 33–37
16. To knowe whether the syckman shalbe hole or not	139v: 23–29	–
17. Iff A Prisoner Shalbe delyuered	139v: 30–36, 140r: 1–5	10v: 1–12
18. Iff Mariage shalbe or not	140r: 6–27	10v: 13–32
19. To knowe concord & dyscord betwixt man & wife	140r: 28–43, 140v: 1–4	–
20. Whether a yong woman be a maid or no	140v: 5–14	10v: 33–40
21. A woman Gone From Her Husband	140v: 15–26	14r: 35–39, 14v: 1–8
22. Yff a man shall haue to do <i>with</i> a certaine woman such a nyght or not	140v: 27–42	–
23. How Many Husbandes	141r: 1–6	11r: 1–6
24. A woman haue a child or not	141r: 7–14	11r: 7–15
25. Yff a woman be true to her husband	141r: 15–23	11r: 16–25
26. For beastes strayed Away &c.	141r: 24–42, 141v: 1–28	11r: 26–38, 11v: 1–38
27. Iff A Man be dead Or a lyue	141v: 29–44, 142r: 1–4	14r: 1–20
28. If A Sick man shalbe healid	142r: 5–17	14r: 21–34
29. To knowe the thefe that hath stolen	142r: 18–43; 142v: 1–5	2v: 1–35
30. To knowe how thou shalt spede in thy Iourney	142v: 6–44	2v: 36–38, 3r: 1–41
31. Off the Thefe & of theft	143r: 1–45, 143v: 1–29	12r: 1–41, 12v: 1–34
32. Whether a thing stolen be one or mo	143v: 30–35	12v: 35–40
33. To knowe in what part of the body the infirmitie ys after haly abenragell	143v: 36–43, 144r: 1–32	–
34. To knowe in what part of a mans body a signe ys	144r: 33–44, 144v: 1–4	–
35. Off remouing from place to place	144v: 5–12	14v: 9–19
36. These be the thre partitions of houres	144v: 13–41	–
37. Whether the thefe be A straunger or No	145r: 1–40, 145v: 1–38	13r: 1–41, 13v: 1–41
38. How thou shalt knowe <i>which</i> planet ys dominatour	145v: 39, 146r: 1–27	–

As shown in Table 1, most items are copied in the same order in both manuscripts. However, some items in Beinecke 558 have been copied outside the sequence, elsewhere in the same quire (ff. 1–20) and some are not found in the manuscript at all.²² The contents and order of the series in Beinecke 558 nevertheless suggest that items were selectively copied, possibly with at least two separate rounds of selection. For example, Item 8 was not copied as part of the sequence, but perhaps due to available space remaining in the quire, it was included at a later stage of copying on f. 14. The same is true for Item 21, which thematically fits in its place in

²² Some items outside the sequence in Beinecke 558 might come from the same source, for example a question titled “Off the tokens of lyfe & death” on f. 2r, not found in Medical 45. However, I have not included here items that do not occur within the main sequence in either manuscript. The relationship between these manuscripts is complex; whether the items in Beinecke 558 and Medical 45 were copied from a shared exemplar remains an open question (see further Varila, ‘In search of textual boundaries’, p. 259). The sequence of questions in the ultimate source(s) may have been considerably longer. For example, several Latin editions exist of *De iudiciis astrorum*, a translation of the work of Ibn al-Rijāl Abū al-Ḥasan al-Shaybānī al-Maghribī al-Qayrawānī (Haly Abenragel). The 1551 edition of Henricus Petrus (USTC 600067), contemporary with the two manuscripts, is an extensive volume of over 400 pages. The questions in this work are similar to those in Medical 45 and Beinecke 558.

the sequence in Medical 45 but is inserted at another position in Beinecke 558. Such selective copying of items was affected by text producers'/users' interests and the spatial/material constraints on manuscript production.

This sequence matches Hoey's criteria for discourse colonies rather well. Understanding the meaning of a single question does not depend on the order of the items, and the units do not form continuous prose. There is a framing context consisting of the rubric and explicit and a relatively systematic layout. There is no single author; the explicit reads "Thus endith the Judgmenes off astronomy taken out of haly abenragell, zahell de interrogationibus & other notable Auctours Finis".²³ A question may be used independently, and there is evidence of questions having been added and omitted during copying.²⁴ Most units share their function as astrological prognostications intended to help answer various questions. While there is no alphabetic, numeric, or temporal sequencing, the questions roughly follow the traditional order of the twelve houses and their related themes. Astrological questions may thus act as discourse colonies, similarly to recipe collections. Questions may form sequences flagged with a rubric and an explicit, but the order and contents of the sequence may vary. Individual questions may circulate independently, and spatial constraints play a role in determining where such items are copied in a manuscript. I will next turn to looking at how questions work on the level of language.

The structure and typical components of medieval recipes have been charted in the field of historical discourse linguistics. Irma Taavitsainen has called recipes "a well-defined procedural genre with a clear writing purpose", that is, to instruct the user in preparing a medical, culinary, or other utilitarian substance.²⁵ Depending on the domain, the typical function of a recipe is to give instructions on how to make or prepare something.²⁶ With astrological questions, the emphasis is not as much on *making* or *preparing* (although a chart may be drawn) as on *knowing* something. The function of an astrological question, then, would be to give instructions on how to find out something.

²³ Medical 45, f. 146r.

²⁴ Hoey's criteria related to the adding, removing, altering, and reuse originally refer to the publication of printed discourse colonies. With regard to manuscript production, these can be interpreted in the context of new instances of scribal copying.

²⁵ Irma Taavitsainen, 'Middle English recipes: Genre characteristics, text type features and underlying traditions of writing', *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* 2:1 (2001), pp. 85–113, p. 86.

²⁶ Carroll, 'Recipes for Laces', p. 145–46.

Alonso-Almeida notes that on a general level, recipes are dialogic: “[t]he title constitutes the question, and this is answered in the remainder of the text”.²⁷ Carroll finds that medieval scribes copying recipes only typically differentiated between the title and the body of a recipe; lower-level structural units were generally not visually distinguished on the page.²⁸ However, recipes do not always have titles, and thus more nuanced analytical tools are needed to evaluate recipes in terms of genre and text-type features.²⁹ There is some variation in how researchers describe the typical components of recipes. Taavitsainen notes that the structure is usually rather regular, consisting of “the title or rubric, indications of use, ingredients, preparation and dosage, application, and the efficacy may be assured at the end” – although some of these elements may be missing.³⁰ Alonso-Almeida’s list, based on medieval and early modern recipes, contains the following elements: title, ingredients, preparation, application, storage, efficacy, number of servings, reference to source, and further additional information. Of these, only the ingredients need to be mentioned in order for a text to count as a recipe.³¹ Astrological questions also follow a dialogic structure where the question asked in the title is answered in (or with the help of) the text. Structural patterns established for recipes may therefore be helpful in analysing the language of astrological questions. Using research on recipes as a starting point, I will next examine the structure and components of questions in my material.

Firstly, similarly to recipes, individual questions may have titles. Alonso-Almeida identifies some typical formulaic titles in medieval and early modern English recipes. Common constructions include, for example, the *to*+infinitive structure, sometimes preceded by *for* or *how*, and followed by a noun phrase ([*For/How*] *to make good bread*); a simple noun phrase sometimes preceded by *for* ([*For*] *good bread*); *for* followed by a progressive verb (*For curing of the plague*); and structures with two noun phrases (*A drink for the plague*).³²

Based on an analysis of the sequence of questions in Medical 45 and Beinecke 558 discussed above, question titles resemble recipe titles in many ways. The *to*+infinitive structure, typical of recipes, is also common in question titles. Instead of the verb *make*, however, questions employ the verb *know*, as in “To knowe whether a mariage shalbe or not” (Item #18 in Table 1).³³ For example, of the 38-item sequence in Medical 45 discussed above, 16 items begin with

²⁷ Alonso-Almeida, ‘Genre conventions’, p. 71.

²⁸ Carroll, ‘Assessing palaeographic evidence’, pp. 310–14.

²⁹ Alonso-Almeida, ‘Genre conventions’, p. 71.

³⁰ Taavitsainen, ‘Middle English recipes’, p. 86.

³¹ Alonso-Almeida, ‘Genre conventions’, p. 71.

³² Alonso-Almeida, ‘Genre conventions’, p. 73.

³³ I refer to the titles by their number in Table 1 where folio and line numbers are given.

“To knowe”. The shorter rubrics in Beinecke 558 tend to elide this, probably in order to fit the rubric on one line. Only five of the 31 items begin with “To knowe”. For example, the rubric for Item #18 in Beinecke 558 is simply “Iff Mariage shalbe or not”.³⁴

Some titles begin with the preposition *for*, followed by a noun phrase or a progressive verb: “For the querentes thought” (#3); “For opteining of Substaunce” (#6).³⁵ The preposition *of* starts some titles (“Off remouing from place to place” #35).³⁶ Sometimes the title is simply a noun phrase (“A woman Gone From Her Husband”, #21).³⁷ In contrast to recipes, clauses starting with *if* or *whether* form a common title type for questions in my material (“Whether suspicion be true or no”, #5; “Iff A Prisoner Shalbe delyuered”, #17).³⁸ There are ten items starting with *if* in Medical 45 and seven in Beinecke 558. In addition, five rubrics in Beinecke 558 start with *whether*, one with *what* and one with *how*, and four items in Medical 45 begin: “Whan yt ys askyd of the[e]”. As astrological questions are indeed questions, it is not surprising that the titles commonly reflect this.

Although most individual questions in my material are not attributed to a specific author, some items in Medical 45 include such a reference (“To knowe in what part of the body the infirmitie ys after haly abenragell”, #33). This resembles source references occasionally given in recipe titles that have been suggested to signal efficacy and evaluation.³⁹ Hence, perhaps at least part of the function of these mentions in astrological questions is to lend credibility to the instructions.

In recipes, what follows after the title is often a list of ingredients and a description of the preparation of the substance, separately or intertwined. Similarly to recipes, the structure of questions reflects the procedure to be undertaken by the practitioner. There may be some preparatory stages described before the instructions for answering the question. For example, in a question related to theft (#29), the practitioner is instructed to find out whether the stolen item belongs to the querent (the person asking the question) or someone else, because that influences the procedure of answering the question. In some cases in Beinecke 558, the first

³⁴ Similar title structures are also found in other manuscripts. A search in the eVK2 database yields similar incipits at least in Cambridge, Fitzwilliam Museum MS 17; London, Royal College of Physicians MS 384; and Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Ashmole 210. See eVK2 (2019). An expanded and revised version of Linda Ehlers Voigts and Patricia Deery Kurtz, *Scientific and Medical Writings in Old and Middle English: An Electronic Reference* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), accessed 31 August 2021.

³⁵ Beinecke MS 558, f. 9v.

³⁶ Beinecke MS 558, f. 14v.

³⁷ Beinecke MS 558, f. 14r.

³⁸ Beinecke MS 558, f. 9r, f. 10v.

³⁹ Alonso-Almeida, ‘Genre conventions’, p. 74.

sentence of the question repeats or clarifies the purpose of the question. For example, the question titled “To go to finde A man at Home” (#2) begins: “For him that will go to any man whether he shall finde him or not”. In such cases, the rubric thus highlights the topic of the questions but is redundant in terms of information content. In Medical 45, where items are not given separate rubrics, the first sentence acts as the title: “For hym that will go to any man whether shall he finde hym or not” (#2).

The individual questions occasionally instruct the reader to draw the astrological chart for the question: “Iff thou wylt knowe whether that ther be treasure in the place that the question is or not, **make your figure**, & take true ascendent” (#9; emphasis added). However, this is rare in my material; perhaps it is assumed that the practitioner knows that a chart is needed. Furthermore, the logic of drawing the chart is similar independent of the specific question, and thus the instructions for this procedure do not need to be repeated for every individual question. Instead, they can be given separately elsewhere. A practitioner could also consult ready-made tables of houses.⁴⁰

The text of the question typically informs the reader on the house or houses relevant to the question at hand. For example, in Item #30, “To knowe how thou shalt spede in thy Iourney”, the instructions begin:

Diuers auctours haue dyvers opynyons but I Saye thou mvst note the ascendent, and hys lorde, note also the **.10.** house, for ther is sygnified the chaunces & caselyes that you haue by the way, you mvst note also the **.7.** house for that betokenyth the place that thou goest to, thou mvst also note the **.4.** house, for that betokeneth the ende of the Iourney, whether thou shalt spede or not⁴¹

There is variation in how this stage is formulated in individual questions depending on the manner of answering the question. For example, some questions do not explicitly mention the number of the house to be considered, perhaps assuming that the practitioner knows what to do based on the domain of the question (and possibly the placement of the question within the sequence).

The length of the instructions for answering a question varies, and sometimes the procedure of obtaining the answer can be described very briefly. In Item #15, for example, the practitioner only needs to consider the relationship between Mars and other planets:

⁴⁰ Falk, *The Light Ages*, p. 191.

⁴¹ Beinecke 558, ff. 2v–3r; text in red ink is in bold. The numbers and astrological symbols are preceded and followed by black or red dots; these are transcribed as full stops.

To knowe yf they shall come *which* thou hast byden to dynner or no: when thou sendest for dyvers men to dyner how many shall come of them, Behold how many planettes be Ioined *with* mars corporally, or how many be in aspect *with* hym, so many shall come to dyner *with* the[e]⁴²

Although the instructions are short, some knowledge of astrological practice is still required to determine the answer. For example, technical terms such as *aspect* are not explained in the text of the question (but there are figures explaining the aspects elsewhere in the manuscripts, on f. 125r of Medical 45 and f. 21r of Beinecke 558). In other instances, the instructions may be more complex, as in Item #17:

Iff a man be atachyd or put in prison whether shall he be delyvered or noo: Behold .{**Moon**}. & .{**Mercury**}. & yf they be in movable signes in fortunate aspect, he shalbe delyvered from prison, And yff .{**Mercury**}. be alone in fortunate aspect he shall be delyveryd: And yff .{**Jupiter**}. be in the ascendent in the houre of his taking, or corporally Ioynd *with* .{**Moon**}. or els in .{**Trine**}. or .{**Sextile**}. aspect, he shalbe delyvered / And yf .{**Venus**}. be in the ascendent, *with* .{**Moon**}. / or .{**Mercury**}. *with* .{**Jupiter**}. beholding .{**Moon**}. he shalbe delyuered, or if .{**Moon**}. be aplyeng to any off the two fortunes, he shalbe delyverid, And yf fortune be in aspect *with* the Lorde of the house off .{**Moon**}. or yff the Lorde of the house off .{**Moon**}. be in aspect *with* Luna he shalbe delyvered⁴³

In this case, the instructions require examining several planets and their aspects, and the time of imprisonment is also significant in calculating the various outcomes.

Similarly to recipes, the language of astrological questions is instructive. Imperative verb forms, described by Carroll as a defining feature of English recipes,⁴⁴ are common in questions, too: “**Take** good hede to hym that movyd the question”⁴⁵; “**Behold** the ascendent”⁴⁶. Another similarity between recipes and questions is their temporal structuring, for example the repeated use of *and* and *also*.⁴⁷ Second person pronouns are commonly used to address recipe readers. In my materials, both singular and plural forms occur, sometimes within the same question: “**thou** must loke after the planet that sygnifieth the thefe”; “if that **you** se that the lorde off the

⁴² Medical 45, f. 139v. The question is transcribed in its entirety.

⁴³ Medical 45, ff. 139v–40r. The symbols of planets and aspects in the manuscript are expanded within curly brackets. The question is transcribed in its entirety.

⁴⁴ Carroll, ‘Recipes for laces’, p. 147.

⁴⁵ Beinecke 558, f. 2v; emphasis added.

⁴⁶ Beinecke 558, f. 10v; emphasis added.

⁴⁷ Carroll, ‘Recipes for laces’, p. 147–48.

ascendent drawith to [...]”.⁴⁸ This kind of mixed usage also shows in some Middle English culinary recipes.⁴⁹

Finally, whereas Middle English culinary recipes often end in a formulaic phrase such as “and serve it forth”, astrological questions in my material often end in the potential answer(s) to the question being asked. *Shall* constructions are typically used when referring to the potential future outcomes of the question being answered (“so many shall come to dyner *with* the[e], #15; “he shalbe delyverid”, #17). These *shall* constructions resemble statements of the result in alchemical recipes as described by Grund, for example “& 3e schalle fynde a whyte callsse”.⁵⁰ Carroll finds *shall* constructions rare in prototypical English recipes but relatively common in lace-making recipes.⁵¹ Some questions in my material end in what might count as a closing formula, but a larger sample would be needed to determine how common these were in general. The practitioner might be asked to repeat something, for example “& so tyll all the questions be knowen” (#3), “as you dyd before” (#23), “and so folowing by every house as ys aforesayd” (#33). Such phrases function as linguistic markers signalling the end of the instructions. One item ends: “the querent shall never haue hys purpose, **without god will**” (#22; emphasis added). This brings to mind invocations of God found for example in alchemical recipes.⁵² Such disclaimers, presenting God as the ultimate authority, are also found in other astrological texts. Their function may be to mitigate the potential dangers of copying and using prognostic texts.

In the present chapter, I have discussed astrological questions in the light of research on medieval and early modern recipes. I have looked at how questions, similarly to recipes, may be examined through the concept of discourse colony, and how this concept can be used to analyse the treatment of question sequences in their manuscript context. I have also discussed the micro level linguistic features of astrological questions. Whereas questions are not strictly recipes, the two categories of instructional writing share many of their textual and linguistic features.

⁴⁸ Beinecke 558, f. 2v; emphasis added.

⁴⁹ Ruth Carroll, ‘The Middle English recipe as a text-type’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 100:1 (1999), pp. 27–42, p. 30.

⁵⁰ Peter Grund, ‘The golden formulas: Genre conventions of alchemical recipes’, *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 104:4 (2003), pp. 455–75, p. 471. The example is from Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS 226.

⁵¹ Carroll, ‘Recipes for laces’, p. 148.

⁵² Grund, ‘The golden formulas’, p. 472.

The similarities between early English recipes and questions suggest that the research methods developed for studying recipes can fruitfully be applied on astrological questions. On the level of manuscript context, research on recipe collections provides useful guidelines for the study of questionnaires. On the linguistic level, work conducted on the language of recipes can be used to inform future work on the structure and language of astrological questions. Other types of astrological prognostications, for example elections, could also be examined from a similar angle. The approach adopted in this chapter could in the future be applied on a wider selection of material to conduct a more thorough linguistic analysis of astrological questions and to find out which of the tendencies observed here hold true for questions in general.

Finally, I would like to tentatively suggest that the similarities between astrological questions and recipes might have influenced strategies of text production and use. For example, a practitioner diagnosing a patient with the help of astrological questions may also have consulted medical recipes in order to cure the illness. A reader might have selectively copied both recipes and questions from larger collections into their own utilitarian manuscript for future reference. Our understanding of textual and visual scribal practices associated with brief utilitarian texts might thus benefit from further comparison between textual categories serving different functions but employing similar linguistic and visual strategies of text production.

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