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## **The *Capsula eburnea* in several Middle English witnesses**

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### ABSTRACT

Medieval treatises containing predictions to recognise the signs of death were based on works written by Hippocrates or attributed to him. In the case of the *Capsula eburnea*, the original text was written in Greek and translated into Latin in the Middle Ages. The Latin translations circulated widely in different versions: a translation from Greek between the fifth and the seventh centuries and a later translation from Arabic in the late twelfth century. During the late Middle English period, they were translated into English, among other vernacular languages. The present article aims to compare and collate four fifteenth-century prognostic treatises in Middle English with their possible Latin exemplars. The analysis of the witnesses will shed light on the shadowy landscape of pseudo-Hippocratic prognostic texts in Middle English and will contribute to trace the Latin sources of these Middle English witnesses.

Keywords: *Capsula eburnea*, Middle English, Hunter 513, Additional 34111, Cambridge Dd VI 29.

### **1. Hippocratic prognostic treatises**

Medieval physicians and monks working with patients were instructed in the recognition of the signs of death (Arrizabalaga 1999: 243; Paxton 1993: 631). Their predictions were mainly based on several works allegedly written by classic physicians like Hippocrates or Galen. These treatises containing signs foretelling death are included in medical compilations during the Middle Ages and transmitted along with other medical works.

They were considered useful tools to let sick people know when death was near, because the physician would gain credit among their patients and professional prestige regardless of the result (Kuhne 1989a: 3). These reasons explain why a wide variety of Greek and Arabic sources dealing with the signs of death were firstly translated into Latin, and later, during the late medieval period, into different European vernaculars.

Most of these treatises were attributed to Hippocrates, even if they were written in the Middle Ages. The tradition of these pseudo-Hippocratic prognostic texts is obscure, since there is a series of related tracts known as *Letter of Ipcras*, *Capsula eburnea*, *Signa Vitae et Mortis*, *Treatise on Apostemes* and even *Analogium*, *Liber Praestantiae* and *Liber de Veritate* or *Liber Veritatis*. Sudhoff (1914: 81) illustrates the confusion surrounding the different denominations and includes even more titles to refer to these pseudo-Hippocratic prognostic treatises:

But what is “*Liber veritatis ypocratis tractatus unus*?” Perhaps the “*Capsula eburnea*”, perhaps the other prognostic treatise of the *Apostemes*: “*Prognosticorum liber, qui dicitur liber secretorum*” or the further pseudo-Hippocratic astrological treatise, “*Libellus divinus de esse aegrorum secundum lunam*”?<sup>1</sup>

In addition, at times, the information to determine the time of expected death is based on the features present on the patient’s face and this explains why in Latin it is also known as *Facies Hippocratica* (Kibre 1982: 177). The Latin manuscripts may even include other denominations, such as *Secreta Hippocratis* from the thirteenth century onwards (Sudhoff 1915/16: 82; Muschel 1932: 44; Kibre 1982: 178; Kuhne 1984/85: 32), *Analogum*, *Liber Praestantiae*, *Liber de Veritate* or *Liber Veritatis* (Kibre 1978: 194), *Prognostica*, *De Pustulis*, *Secreta*, *Signa Vitae et Mortis* (Kibre 1978: 194), *Prognostica Democriti* (Sudhoff 1915/16: 81; Sigerist 1921: 157). This terminological confusion, along with the fact that it is a short treatise inserted in bigger medical writings (Sigerist 1921: 157), makes it impossible to establish the real number of versions that have come down to us. For instance, Kibre (1978) includes one hundred and twenty-three extant copies in her list of Latin texts.

<sup>1</sup> Authors’ translation of the original: „Was aber ist „*Liber veritatis ypocratis tractatus unus*“? Vielleicht die „*Capsula eburnea*“, vielleicht der andere prognostische Traktat aus den *Apostemen*: “*Prognosticorum liber, qui dicitur liber secretorum*” oder der fernere pseudohippokratische astrologische Traktat “*Libellus divinus de esse aegrorum secundum lunam*?”.

The wide variety of denominations will give the reader an idea of how arduous the task of tracing the transmission of the text under study is. Our interest is in the *Capsula eburnea*, but very often it can be found in catalogues under one of the above-mentioned names. The localisation of the treatise is complicated not only because of the different titles used, but also because it is a very short tract (one thousand words approximately) and therefore, some manuscripts fail in the distinction of one work from another, as they appear one after another in such a way that there is no clear division between texts. These reasons make the tract invisible in catalogues at times, either not mentioning its presence or acknowledging it with a vague label like “Medicina Mortis et Vite; Ex Ipocrate | et Galieno, ut videtur |” (Glasgow University Library Catalogue, Hunter 323).

The Latin tradition of the text has been widely explored by Sudhoff (1915/16) and Kibre (1978), sources of all other pieces of research after them. Their contribution to the establishment of the Latin stemma is valuable, even if it is not without minor problems. For instance, Kibre (1978: 204) claims Escorial L.III.30 is a fifteenth-century copy, even if our examination of the manuscript shows that it is a seventeenth-century witness, which reads “MANVSCRIPTVS MEDICVS. ANNO M.DC.LXX.VI. Para la R' Cassa dl S. Lorenzo; Scorial” on the first page.<sup>2</sup> Dealing with such a vast number of sources may have hindered Kibre from consulting all the manuscripts and she must have relied on the information provided by the catalogues available to her at the time, which did not always offer an accurate date.

Several scholars include the vernacular copies produced in the different European languages. Thus, Beaujouan (1972: 187) and Alvar Ezquerro (2001: 46) mention the translation into Spanish. Similarly, whereas Meyer (1903) analyses one of the French versions, Benati (2013) and Di Clemente (2011) deal with the Middle Low German copies of the treatise and, in turn, Kibre (1945: 391 and 1978: 195) provides information on French, German, Italian and English translations. Finally, Voigts and Kurtz (2000) refer to English versions exclusively. This source is the only one which uses the denomination *Tokens of Ipocras* for the treatise. Our aim is to draw special attention to this specific Middle English treatise, which has passed unnoticed in the eyes of academia, and whose existing copies are grouped under the common designation of *Signa Vitae et Mortis*, *Tokens of Ipocras* or *Capsula eburnea*.

<sup>2</sup> Our special thanks to José Luis del Valle Merino from the Royal Library of the Monastery of El Escorial, who made the photographs of the manuscript available to us.

## 2. The transmission of the *Capsula eburnea*

Before concentrating on the Middle English manuscript copies analysed in this article, a summary of the transmission of the text is needed to clarify the origin of the English version. Sudhoff (1915/16) and other scholars following him (Muschel 1932; Kibre 1978; Benati 2013) trace back the origin of this treatise to the fourth or fifth century, when it was composed in Greek in the Eastern Mediterranean area. Later, between the fifth and the seventh centuries, it reached the South of Italy in a Latin translation. In the seventh century it was also translated from Greek into Arabic. This translation reached the Iberian Peninsula during the early Middle Ages and it was retranslated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona shortly after 1170 (Sudhoff 1915/16: 111). Gerard of Cremona used the denomination *Capsula eburnea* for his Latin translation of the Arabic version of the text and, for this reason, this title became standard only after the second half of the twelfth century. Both Latin translations spread around Europe, and “from the thirteenth century onwards, the *Capsula eburnea* is also witnessed in Old French, Middle English and Middle Dutch” (Benati 2013: 6). Apart from these two main recensions, Sudhoff also identified a third version from Greek and a fourth one that relied heavily on the Arabic one (1915/16). Sudhoff (1915/16) and Kibre (1978) identified manuscripts belonging to both traditions: the early anonymous Latin version from Greek and Cremona’s Latin version from Arabic.<sup>3</sup>

All these copies, which probably derive from the authentic *Liber Pronosticorum* (Kibre 1978: 194), show differences regarding their title, verbal content or as far as the attribution of the prognostic treatise to Hippocrates is concerned. In some manuscripts, the text appears under the names of other learned physicians: Democritus, Soranus or Galen (Sudhoff 1915/16: 86; Kibre 1978: 194). The structure of the *Capsula eburnea* also varies significantly in the tradition, although the general nature of their content is very similar: “They all deal with cutaneous eruptions as prognostic signs” (Benati 2013: 6), which

<sup>3</sup> Another revealing lead to be followed is the Hebrew transmission of the text through Arabic. In this respect, Muschel concludes that “the author of the Hebrew *Capsula eburnea* may have used an Arabic and not a Latin model” (1932: 59). [Authors’ translation of the original: “der Verfasser der hebräischen *Capsula eburnea* wahrscheinlich eine arabische und nicht eine lateinische Vorlage benutzt hatte”]. Likewise, Kuhne (1989a, 1989b and 1990) has shown that the Arabic tradition was not made up of a single exemplar, but probably there was more than one source in the Arabic textual tradition. In fact, she claims that Sudhoff’s third recension is not from Greek as he contends, but from Arabic as well (1984/85: 37, 1986: 254 and 1989a: 5). Kuhne also concludes that the fourth recension is a summary of the second one but inspired by the Latin translation, not the original Arabic text (1984/85: 37).

means physicians would be able to identify these signs in their patients and, thus, foretell their death (Arrizabalaga 1999: 245). Some sources consist of “a title and a list of prognostic remarks” (Benati 2013: 7), whereas in other manuscripts an anecdotic introduction is found. In these cases, as explained by Kibre (1978: 194-195), the treatise includes

A brief account in which Hippocrates is purported, when he was nearing death, to have ordered his retainers to place at his head in the tomb with him a small ivory box (*Capsula eburnea*) into which he had placed on an ‘*Epistle*’ or receptacle containing the secrets of the medical art, and particularly those relating to the signs of life and death. At a later time, Caesar is said to have come upon the tomb and to have ordered that it be opened secretly. He thus found the receptacle resting under Hippocrates’ head and requested that it be given to his own physicians. Henceforth, from the contents of this receptacle, the account concludes, physicians were able to learn and recognize the signs of life and death.

### 3. The Middle English tradition of the *Capsula eburnea*

The Middle English translations of the text have never been ascribed to any specific tradition. According to Robbins (1970: 287), a detailed inspection and continued search among Middle English medical manuscripts would no doubt uncover further texts. It is our aim to trace the original versions from which the English translations derive as well as to continue searching for more unveiled English texts.

#### 3.1 Selection of the texts under study

Thus far no complete list of manuscripts containing the Middle English *Capsula eburnea* has been elaborated. Subsequently, localising the English manuscript copies of the *Capsula eburnea* is troublesome. By consulting all the different catalogues and critical works available to us (Young – Aitken 1908; Kibre 1977, 1978; Keiser 1998; Voigts – Kurtz 2000; online catalogue of the *Sloane Manuscripts* in the British Library), we have been able to establish a rough distinction between the different pseudo-Hippocratic treatises in prognostic matters. The information provided by Kibre (1978: 195)

includes the following Middle English witnesses of the *Capsula eburnea*: BL Additional 34111, BL Sloane 405, BL Sloane 706 and BL Sloane 715. The first of the manuscripts containing two versions of the tract will be the subject of study here, along with two others. We have not had the chance to examine the Sloane 405 yet, but we have analysed the contents of Sloane 715 and Sloane 706. The inspection of Sloane 715 reveals that it is an alchemical text of only seven folios while the rest are blank. As for Sloane 706, the catalogue of the British Library provides the following information: folio 95 “Hippocrates: Le liures que io Ypocras enoiai a Cesar: 14th-15th cent.: Engl.”. Our examination of the text beginning with “This book ypocras sente vn to kyng Cesar” allows for the conclusion that it does not include the *Capsula eburnea*. What is found in this manuscript is another medical text known as the *Letter of Ipocras*, which is often confused with the *Capsula eburnea*.

In fact, Tavormina (2007: 633) mentions Sloane 706 in his study of the *Letter of Ipocras*. The similarities in the contents of these two pieces lie in the fact that both writings are in a letter format written under Hippocrates’ name and addressed to Caesar. As accounted by Hunt (1990: 100), the *Letter of Ipocras* was assembled in the Middle Ages. It usually begins with an introduction followed by the treatment of urines and concluding with a collection of medical recipes. The fact that it is entitled *Letter* makes it likely to be confused with the *Capsula eburnea*, since according to the introduction to the treatise in many extant copies, it is an epistle written by Hippocrates when he was about to die and who ordered to have it placed under his head in his tomb. Caesar found this letter in an ivory casket and sent it to his own physician, who is named Panodosius, Poamonodonosis, Proamodosio, Monodorus, Misdos or other alternating names depending on the manuscript. The contents of both are clearly differentiated, since the *Capsula eburnea* contains signs of death based on skin wounds or apostemes, which explains why this tract is sometimes referred to as *Treatise on Apostemes*.

We have also made use of Voigts – Kurtz (2000) for the selection of the texts. Several searches were launched and no results were obtained under *Capsula eburnea*, *Letter of Ipocras*, *Tokens of Ipocras*, *Signs of life and death*, *Signis mortis* and several others. The search under Hippocrates as an author retrieved forty-six items. Several of them are not related to the *Capsula eburnea*, but even those which are connected to it are not easily recognisable, since, for instance, BL Additional 34111 is referred to as *Secreta Ipocratis*. With the *incipit* “Whoso hath dolor” and *Tokens of Ipocras* as title, Voigts – Kurtz list three other items: Magdalen College Oxford 221, BL Sloane 405 and

Huntington, HM 64. Finally, with no title but also under the incipit “who so hath dolor”, CUL Dd VI 29 is found. Likewise, our research on another pseudo-Hippocratic treatise, *De Booke of Ypocras* (De la Cruz – Diego 2018), led to the discovery of the *Treatise on the Signs of Death* in Glasgow University Library, Hunter 513, which contains the *Capsula eburnea* (Young – Aitken 1908: 421).

Additionally, other sources were consulted, such as the British Library Sloane Collection, where several manuscripts seem to be related to this specific piece. Apart from the above-mentioned Sloane 405, Sloane 706, and Sloane 715, under *(De) Signis Mortis*, other manuscripts are found; namely, Sloane 282, Sloane 284, Sloane 2320, Sloane 3531 and Sloane 3550. The fact that the title is in Latin is misleading, since it can correspond to texts written in Latin or in English. In fact, in the case of Sloane 3550 the British Library catalogue states the main language is English, but our examination of this specific piece shows it is in Latin. Likewise, even if the catalogue claims that Sloane 284, Sloane 2320 and Sloane 3531 include *De Signis Mortis* in fourteenth- fifteenth-century English versions, our examination reveals the texts are in Latin, as well. Finally, Sloane 282 also contains the *Capsula eburnea* in Latin.

Therefore, a complete list of English versions of the *Capsula eburnea* is still wanting. From a hypothetical collection containing seven versions (British Library Sloane 405, Oxford Magdalen College 221, Huntington HM 64, Glasgow University Library Hunter 513, BL Additional 34111 – including two versions of the treatise – and Cambridge University Library Cambridge Dd VI 29), for the present article we have concentrated on the last four fifteenth-century witnesses, some of which are unexplored thus-far:<sup>4</sup> GUL Hunter 513 (ff. 107r-109v), BL Additional 34111, which contains two versions of the treatise – version 1 (ff. 231r-233v) and version 2 (ff. 235v-238v) – and CUL Cambridge Dd VI 29 (ff. 30r-32r).

### 3.2 Analysis of the structure of the text

The texts have been transcribed and compared with the two recensions in Sudhoff (1915/16): (1) the anonymous Greek-Latin version and (2) the Arabic-Latin version by Gerard of Cremona. As Sudhoff’s texts cover up to twenty-one signs in the first recension and twenty-four in the second

<sup>4</sup> Di Clemente has kindly sent us her work on the versions of Additional 34111 yet to be published.



one, we have also supplemented the collation with some extracts from Arabic sources in Kuhne (1990: 56), which completed the twenty-four signs present in Sudhoff's second recension and enlarged it up to thirty tokens. However, the comparison made it clear that the prognostications from signs twenty-five to thirty had nothing to do with the ones present in the Middle English texts. Finally, we have consulted Sigerist's transcription of Glasgow University Library Hunter 96. This witness, despite the similarities it shares with Sudhoff's first recension, cannot be considered a direct copy of it. Hunter 96 seems to be one of the earliest Latin translations that has come down to us, since the Glasgow University Library catalogue dates it to the eighth and ninth centuries and Kibre to the ninth and tenth centuries (1978: 196).

In the Middle English *Capsula eburnea* tradition, several parts in the witnesses are clearly distinguished: First of all, the beginning of the text. In Hunter 513 the text begins with the usual introduction: "Here begynnethe þe tokenys þat ypocras þe leche wrote to knowe the seke yf he myghte be hole thorighe medycyne", who ordered this document to be placed in his tomb.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, in the two copies extant in Additional 34111, it is attributed to Hippocrates who had it buried in his tomb. The versions in Hunter 513 and Additional 34111 are entitled *Secreta ypocratis*, a name that, according to Kuhne (1987/88: 432), corresponds to Sudhoff's third recension, while the *Capsula eburnea* should be used to refer to Sudhoff's second recension. Thus, a similar introduction to the *Capsula eburnea* in Hunter 513 is found in the first version of Additional 34111 (fol. 231r):

Here begynneþ þe priuetes of þe gode man. and. a wyse þat was yclepid ypocras þe whiche man whan he drew to deþe yclosed were þes priuetes in a case of euore and leyde þis case in his sepulcre wiþ him þat þes same priuetes ne shulde beo descouered among no man

and in Additional 34111, version 2 the beginning reads (fol. 235v):

Now here bigynneþ ypocras his priuetes in a noþer maner þe whiche priuetes were ydo in a case of euore and leyde vnder his heued in his tounge.

Likewise, Cambridge Dd VI 29 refers to the tokens written by Hippocrates, but no ubication of the document is provided (fol. 30r):

<sup>5</sup> For clarity sake, in the transcriptions all abbreviations have been silently expanded.

Her begyns þe takyns. þat ypocras þe leche wrot. for to know þe seke.  
 zif he miȝth be hool thorgh medicyn or noon.

Sometime later Caesar<sup>6</sup> found it in a *case of euore* (Additional 34111) or a *scrippe* (Hunter 513) under his head and had it taken to his own physician, named Amadas in the Hunter 513 copy. According to the *Middle English Dictionary*, the term *scrippe* was adopted from Old French *escharpe*, *escherpe*, *eskerpe*, *eschrepepe*, *escrepepe*, *escrip(p)e* and it translates as “bag or satchel”. Both the *Middle English Dictionary* and the *Oxford English Dictionary* remark that it was used especially for the bag carried by pilgrims for alms, but it is not exactly a *box* or *casket of ivory*, as in the Additional 34111 versions. After this, the signs of death start with the sentence “Here begynnethe the tokens” in Hunter 513, which includes twenty-seven prognostic texts. The two versions in Additional 34111 also claimed the text to have been found by *Cesare the Emperoure* and, in the second version, even states this Caesar is *Julius Cesar*. This text was sent to other friends in the first version and no person is mentioned in the second one. The number of predictions differs from those in Hunter 513, being twenty-five predictions in the first version of Additional 34111 and twenty-six in the second version, which are followed by several recipes. In turn, the Cambridge Dd VI 29 lacks this part and, subsequently there is no mention of any addressee and some predictions are missing.

The number of tokens correlates with the length of the treatises: Hunter 513, being the longest, has 1,285 words, the second version in Additional 34111 has 1,232 words and Additional 34111 first version shows 1,143 words. Finally, the shortest tract is Cambridge Dd VI 29, which contains 824 words and follows the text in Hunter 513 very closely. As will be seen, it is not a *literatim* copy, as the wording is not alike. The Cambridge Dd VI 29 scribe may have had access to different exemplars, since part of the information provided in this text is not present in Hunter 513, but both manuscripts might have shared the same exemplars at some point.

### 3.3 Analysis of the contents of the tokens

Before proceeding to the examination of the tokens, it is worth highlighting other aspects present in the text. Firstly, the structure of the predictions

<sup>6</sup> “Seser þe Emperowre” in the Hunter 513 text and in other versions has usually been identified with Julius Caesar, although Kuhne (1989a: 7, note 15) notes that the Arabic version is *Qaysar*, a word that could mean any Roman Caesar.

follows a recurrent pattern that is found in all the versions, as described by Kuhne (1989a: 9-10), when referring to the Arabic tradition:

1. The first part of a conditional or temporal sentence beginning with *if* or *whan*
  - a. Apart from the first sign in Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29 and three of them in Additional 34111 version 2 that begin with *whoso*, the remaining tokens include the *if* clause, whereas all Additional 34111 version 2 signs start with *whan*, with one exception beginning “Now þat it is vpon þe veyn”. This is relevant when having a look at Sudhoff’s versions, since the second one starts its sentences with *quando* (*when*), whereas the first one employs *si* (*if*) instead.
  - b. The part of the body that is affected is mentioned.
  - c. A skin affection where the word *pustule* is pervasive and its description according to its details regarding size, colour, whether it is painful, etc. Apart from these, Hunter 513 offers other symptoms not related to the skin.
2. The second part of the conditional sentence. This clause includes details on the time of death, usually specified in the number of days that will go by before the death takes place.
3. The confirmatory sign. Here physiological symptoms like thirst, hunger, transpiration, elimination of urine or tools, yawn, sneeze, vomit or more skin affections can be found.

Secondly, in terms of the layout, only Hunter 513 presents their signs numbered in the outer margin from sign number six onwards, whereas the other Middle English versions mark the beginning of the tokens with a paragraph mark. There is some mismatch in the sequence of the signs, since the four Middle English witnesses contain a different number of tokens. The first sign clearly coincides in all the manuscripts under study with some slight variation, as can be seen in Table 1. Here the patient has some sort of swelling, tumour or aposteme in the face and picks his nose constantly. In all copies but Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29, he also rests his left hand upon his breast. However, these two manuscripts coincide with Hunter 96 in adding the headache, while the other versions start directly with symptoms in the face.

Table 1. Comparison of sign number one in the ME witnesses of *Capsula eburnea*

Hunter 513	Add. 34111 Version 1	Add. 34111 Version 2	Cambridge Dd VI 29
Here begynne the tokens fyrste of þe hede who so haþe doloure or ache in his hede or swellynge in his vesage with owten redde and with the lyft and allway pykud his nose thrylles þe xxiiijti day he schall dye	¶ Whan in þe face of þe Sekeman ariseþ a posteme and nys noȝt y.found no touche and þe left honde yleyd vpon þe brest he shalle die at 13 dai and nameliche whan in þe bygynnyng of his sekenes he gropeþ hys nose þrilles	Now ȝif a man haue ache or swellyng in þe face wiþ outen cogh and legeþ his left honde vpon his brest and makeþ hym wonder bysy to pyke and scratteþ þe nose þrilles shal dye wiþ in a short tyme 13	¶ ffirst for þe hede ake.or swellinge in þe face wiþ out rode. and wiþ þe lift honde always piketh his nose thriles. in xiiij. day he he schal dye.

In turn, Table 2 illustrates the sign in the Latin translation.

Table 2. Comparison of sign number one in the Latin witnesses of *Capsula eburnea*

Sudhoff Version 1	Sudhoff Version 2	Hunter 96
(I) Si habuerit dolorem vel tumorem in facie sine tusse <et sine ullo dolore> et sinistra manus vel pectus seu nares assidue scalpserit in XXII die morietur.	(I) Quando in facie infirmi fuerit apostema, cui non inuenitur tactus, et fuerit manus eius sinistra posita super pectus suum, tunc scias quod morietur usque ad 23. dies, et precipue quando in principio sue agritudinis palpat nares.	(I) In caput dolorem habentis siccum tumores in faciem habuerit sine dolorem et sinistra manus pectus et naris sibi adsidue scapet ad XXXII dies moritur.

From here the focus will be on the contents of the tokens, mainly the parts of the body mentioned and symptoms that can predict the death of the patient. Whereas signs number two and three are quite similar in all the versions, in sign number four Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29 show no contents related to both versions in Additional 34111. As can be seen in Table 3, version 1 of Additional 34111 follows Sudhoff's recension 2, while

version 2 is comparable to Sudhoff's first recension. In the Latin translations, the position of the pustule is under the tongue in recension 1 ("sub lingua illi papula"). Thus, in the second version in Additional 34111 "a whelk vnder þe tong" can be read, whereas in the second Latin recension "super linguam pustula" is rendered as "vpon þe tong a kinsel" in the first version of Additional 34111.

Table 3. Comparison of sign number four in four witnesses of *Capsula eburnea*

Add. 34111 Version 1	Add. 34111 Version 2	Sudhoff Version 1	Sudhoff Version 2
¶ Whan þat it is vpon þe tong a kinsel as a tike þow shalle wyte he shalle dye þe same day and þis is þe tokenyng of the sekenes ate þe bygynnyng desireþ hote metes in here kynd	¶ ʒif þat it be a whelk vnder þe tong and desireþ water and þan and aecke a feuer in þis sekenes and ʒif swellyng be in þe grete to grete or smale in þe seuen day shalle dye	(4) Item qui una in causa fuerit, si sub lingua illi papula apparuerit sicut lenticula quasi modica sive lavacra aut vaporem desideraverit [et intus passionis febricitantia fuerint – et si in digitis pedum pollicis tumor niger vel modice fuerit, in VII die morietur] <sup>7</sup>	(4) Quando fuerit super linguam pustula, sicut musca canina aut sicut granum pentadactili, tunc scias quod patiens eam morietur in die et huius est signum, quod desiderat in principio res calidas in suis naturis.

Signs five and six in the Latin versions and in Additional 34111 deal with pustules in the feet. This part is missing in Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29, inasmuch as the information after the first three signs corresponds to number six in Sudhoff's first recension:

- (1a) Item in febre acuta si in stomacho seu in dextro pede pustellam habuerit in planta, non altam sed aequalem, deterrimum humorem tenentem, et nullum desiderium habuerit, in XXII die morietur (Sudhoff 1915/16)

<sup>7</sup> Hunter 96 version is similar at the outset but differs notably in the second half of the sign: "(IV) Hubula cui in causa fuerit sub lingua papula apparuerit sicut tisticulis porciunus et labagra siue uapura uenerit inicium passionis ipsius morietur".

- (1b) /ŋ/ Aso yf the seke be in the feuer ageus and haþe an euyll stomake and in the ryghte foote or in þe lefte fote wax A wenne or in the sole of the fote so þat it be not to grete but evyn lyche and as colour as ynde and A party swellynge and no desyringe to mete þe xxijti day he schall dye /ŋ/ (Hunter 513)
- (1c) ¶ And þe seke be in a feure agu. and hath euil stomak. oþer in þe ri3th foot. or in þe lifth. or in þe sole of þe foot wex a wen. but þat hit be not gret. but eunlich. and hath colour as ynde. and aparty whellith. and no talant hath to meth. in þe. xxij. day he schal dye. (Cambridge Dd VI 29)

From here, following the information provided by each version is not an easy task, since it appears in different order and, subsequently, the correspondence between signs is not always linear. Kuhne (1989a: 6) points out the equivalences between Sudhoff's recensions. Thus, according to her, the order follows the pattern shown in Table 4:<sup>8</sup>

Table 4. Distribution of signs in Sudhoff's first and second recensions

Signs in Sudhoff version 1	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	20	16	17	18
Signs in Sudhoff version 2	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	17	18	20	22

Furthermore, the information presented in Latin can be found in the sign above or below in Middle English. Some of the texts are numbered by the scribe, while in others there is no numbering. What is easily observed is the fact that Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29 are comparable to Sudhoff's first recension and sometimes agree with Additional 34111 second version, whereas the first version in Additional 34111 relies on Sudhoff's second recension on a regular basis. A case where Hunter 513, Cambridge Dd VI 29 and Additional 34111 version 2 seem to have been following Sudhoff's first recension or the Hunter 96 tradition can be seen in Table 5.

<sup>8</sup> Our own examination of the texts makes us disagree on the final equivalences of her sequence, whereby in Sudhoff's version 1 signs 20 and 18 correspond respectively to signs 17 and 22 in Sudhoff's version 2.

Table 5. Comparison of Hunter 513, Add. 34111 version 2, Camb. Dd VI 29 and Sudhoff's version 1 and Hunter 96

Hunter 513	Add. 34111 version 2	Camb. Dd VI 29	Sudhoff version 1	Hunter 96
(10) /¶/ Also yf <del>the too</del> A man be seke of the splene / and blede at þe nostrellis as come the xiiij day he schall dye	¶ zif þat þe splene haue grete ache and ariseþ in þe left honde white whelkes and comeþ out þek blode ate þe nose shalle dye wiþ in short while	¶ And a man be seke in þe splene. and blede at þe nose thirles [as] come. þe .iiij. day he schal dye.	(11) Item si splen doluerit et papulae albae in sinistra manu ei natae fuerint in pares, et si per narem sanguis quasi spumusus cucurreit, in XII die morietur.	(XI) Splenicum si papule multe albe sinistra manum apparuerint et per nares sanguis espumosis exierit in XII die moritur

Whereas the Latin texts and the second version in Additional 34111 mention a white wen on the left hand, this symptom is missing in Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29. In addition, some features are present in only these two texts in Middle English. As an example of the similarity, a comparison to *beans of Egypt* is mentioned in these two versions as well as in Latin:

- (2a) Saniem ex quacunque parte excreantibus si macule nate fuerint, sicut solent per omne corpus in modum fabe ægyptie Li. die morietur (Sudhoff 1915/16, version 1)
- (2b) Qui sanguinem uomen si maculem per omne corpus exierit in modum fabe egicie LII d<ie> mor<itur> (Hunter 96)
- (2c) /¶/ And yf the seke Caste blood /and there waxe blacke spottes þorughe owte his. body and þe membris be swollen and ryse bladderis like benys of Egipte þat day he dyethe for sothe (Hunter 513)
- (2d) And zif þe seke caste blod and blak spotte3. shewiþ thurghtout þe body. and men bris be neth. and rise bledders as it ware benes of egypte. þe ilke day he schal dye (Cambridge Dd VI 29)

In turn, Additional 34111 version 1 can be practically considered a total rendition of Sudhoff's second recension. This fact can be seen in sign twelve, where the symptoms are nose bleeding, a white pustule on the right hand and the rejection of food. The second version in Additional 34111 mentions blood spitting, but none of the other features.

Table 6. Comparison of sign twelve in Additional 34111 and Sudhoff's second version

Add. 34111 Version 1	Add. 34111 Version 2	Sudhoff Version 2
¶ Whan þat þe blode renneþ from þe nose þrilles and draweþ to whitnesse or to rednes and sheweþ in þe ryght honde a lytel white kyrnel he shalle deye þe þird day and in þe bigynnyng of þe sekenes he coueteþ metes in alle maner	¶ Who so speweþ blode and ariseþ whelkes white ouer alle þe body as grete as a bene shalle dye þe same day	(12) Quando fluit sanguis a naribus trahens ad subalbedinem uel rufedinem et apparet in manu dextra pustula alba non dolens, scias quod morietur die tertio sue egritudinis, signum est quod omnino non desiderat cibum.

Contrariwise, the information in Sudhoff's first recension neither agrees with this one nor with version 2 in Additional 34111, but with the symptoms in Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29.

Table 7. Comparison of sign twelve in Hunter 513, Cambridge Dd VI 29 and Sudhoff's first version

Hunter 513	Camb. Dd VI 29	Sudhoff Version 1
(12) ¶ Also yf he haue Euyll in the bladder and þe flessche in þe lefte syde swelle and he may not slepe with in xv dayes he schall dye	¶ And 3if he haue euyll in þe bleddur. and þe flesch of þe lift sydy swelle. and he may not slepe. þe .xv. day he schal dye.	(12) Nescie dolor cum fuerit, si in sinistra parte rubores spissi fuerint sine dolore et olera desiderauerit cottidie xxv die morietur.

As shown above, Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29 share several pieces not present in the other texts. Thus, in sign thirteen specific symptoms in male genital parts may be foretelling death. A sign in Sudhoff's version 2



mentions the same part of male's body in its sign eighteen, but the rest of the symptoms do not coincide at all:

- (3a) /¶ Also yf þe seke haue grete maledye / in þe lendis and fallythe into þe yerde / aftyr swell vp into þe wombe / and comythe to the herte þe v. day he schall dye (Hunter 513)
- (3b) ¶ And ȝif þe seke haue gret malady in his lendes. and falliþ in to þe ȝerde of man. and aftur swelliþ vp in to þe wombe. and comiþ riȝth to þe hert. þe .xv. day he schal dye. (Cambridge Dd VI 29)
- (3c) Et accidit dolor quibus dam in preputio, id est in cute cooperiente uirgam. Cum ergo dolor accidit alicui, deinde apparet in cubito pustula fusci coloris. Cum ergo dolor accidit alicui, deinde apparet in cubito pustula fusci coloris. Scias quod morietur in .ix. die sue egritudinis ante solis ortum, et signum est, quod desiderat in principio sue egritudinis bibere vinum. (Sudhoff 1915/16, version 2)

The affinity between both Middle English manuscripts is even more noticeable in the final part, where the information presented is completely absent in the other texts. This divergence from the two Latin traditions (Sudhoff's version 1 and 2) and the English translations from it (Additional 34111) could be due to the influence of the third Latin recension that circulated at the end of the fifteenth century, according to Sudhoff (1915/16) and Kuhne (1984/5). Thus, it is unknown whether the following passages could be inspired by the third Latin tradition:

- (4a) /¶ Also yf ther waxe mechill spatett in his mouþe betokenythe þe bleddyr ys perished and yf he /haue in his breste so narowe þat he may onnethe drawe his breþe þat signifyethe þat postym stronge be wexynge of bloode (Hunter 513)
- (4b) ¶ Also ȝif þer were melil jpotil in þe mouth. hit be tokenes þe bleddur is percid. ¶ And ȝif he haue þe breste so narow þat he may vnnethȝ draw wynt. hit signifieȝ empostym to be stronge be waxynge of blod. (Cambridge Dd VI 29)
- (5a) /¶/ Also yf a man haue me chill rotynn fylþe at his mouthe þat sygnyfieth þe mydrem to be perished (Hunter 513)

- (5b) ¶ Also 3if he haue mikil glat. and castij mekel roten filth out at his mouth. hit signefies þe midrif to be parsed. (Cambridge Dd VI 29)
- (6a) /¶/ Also yf a man haue /euyll Aboute þe breste þat sygnyfyethe bloode to breke (Hunter 513)
- (6b) ¶ And 3if aman haue euil abouth þe breste. hit signifie3 þe bleddur to broke. (Cambridge Dd VI 29)
- (7a) /¶/ Also yf the seke loke dedely and tere his Cloþis as A man þat ys frantik betokenythe he schall die of þat selfe euyll (Hunter 513)
- (7b) ¶ And also 3if he loket hidoslich. and terreth his cloþus as man þat frentikhit bitakyns þat he schal dye þe same day./ (Cambridge Dd VI 29)

Despite the parallelisms, several prognostic sentences in Hunter 513 have no counterpart in any of the other versions. Furthermore, they do not deal with skin eruptions anymore. As an example, signs numbered seventeen to twenty in the manuscript show no coincidence with any other predictions in the other witnesses:

- (8) /¶/ Also yf þe erynn of the seke be colde and his teþe Cold and þe typpes of his nose and his Chynne hange dunward he schall dye with in v. days
- (9) /¶/ Also yf the seke turne ofte to þe wall ward and rubbe ofte his nose / thyrlles betokenythe þe dethe to be nyghe
- (10) Also yf the seke slepe and his mouþe opyn and gapyng vpward aske hym yf he haue euyll in þe wombe of fretyng and yf he caste noughte or he do wepe with þe ryght eye in þe iij day he schall dye
- (11) ¶ Also yf the seke turne his fete there his hede laye it sygnyfiethe dethe

Before concluding, it is relevant to mention that Kuhne (1989a: 12) associates the Arabic texts discussed by her with a pseudo-Galenic prognostic text, *De morte subitanea*, clearly linked to the *Capsula eburnea*. She claims that, among the twenty-five prognostic sentences analysed by her, there are some similar ones that are easily identifiable, others with several common

elements and the rest with some shared details that point to a common remote relationship (1989a: 13). It is likely that the Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29 scribes had different extant originals from the one used by the copyist of the Additional 34111, even for the second version. Thus, both Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29 scribes may have used another, possibly Latin, translation.

#### 4. Conclusions

In the present article we have shed light on the distinction between the different pseudo-Hippocratic prognostic treatises written in the Middle Ages, whose aim was to let the physicians and medical practitioners learn about the signs that would predict the imminent death of the patient, if some specific symptoms were present. Among them, the *Capsula eburnea*, a text allegedly written in Greek in the fourth or fifth century, which was translated into Latin between the fifth and the seven centuries, has been the focus of this article. By the seventh century, the text was also translated into Arabic and at the end of the twelfth century retranslated into Latin. These two Latin versions circulated widely in Europe as well as a third Latin version in the late fifteenth century giving rise to translations in vernacular languages in the late Middle Ages. Subsequently, the treatise is found in Middle English.

Being short medical pieces, pseudo-Hippocratic tracts were frequently inserted into other works and, as a result, they may have been overlooked thus far. This also explains why they have remained comparatively unknown, and the only way to identify parallel copies is by consulting different catalogues and published reference works, and by checking the original manuscripts. An important hindrance is the fact that even specialised catalogues are rarely comprehensive and often do not include cross-references to other catalogues, which makes the identification of parallel texts an arduous task and, consequently, their editing and study. The second obstacle to overcome is the fact that the treatise under consideration appears associated to or receives a wide variety of titles, and it is attributed within its title not only to Hippocrates, but also to other well-known physicians. The fact that they occur under different names in catalogues makes the information they provide sometimes inaccurate.

The absence of a list containing the Middle English witnesses of the *Capsula eburnea* has resulted in our attempt to obtain as many copies of the text as possible in order to narrow the search and finally to establish a reliable collection of manuscripts containing it. In this article, four versions have been examined: GUL Hunter 513; BL Additional 3411, version 1 and version 2, and

CUL Dd VI 29. These Middle English treatises have been compared with three Latin translations, as published by Sudhoff (1915/16) and Sigerist (1921). None of the Middle English manuscripts can be said to be an exact copy of any of the Latin versions, though some ascriptions can be done: Several variants of the different Latin traditions must have been in circulation. Thus, Additional 34111 version 1 clearly follows the Arabic text translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona, which corresponds to Sudhoff's second recension. The ascription of the other three copies is not so obvious. At some points, Additional 34111 version 2 has much in common with the first Latin translation, while Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29 versions, although following Sudhoff's first recension and Sigerist's transcription in many excerpts, also show passages absent in all the other versions, which makes it difficult to ascribe them completely to any of the explored traditions. All in all, Hunter 513 and Cambridge Dd VI 29 clearly share a large number of features, even if none can be said to be a copy of the other. They might be witnesses of the third thus-far unexplored Latin tradition in its Middle English translations.

To conclude, some aspects still need further research. For instance, there may be extant copies of the *Capsula eburnea* in Middle English that have not yet been identified. Thus, a detailed inspection and continued search among Middle English medical manuscripts could uncover further texts. The editing and analysis of them would be essential to establish their link to the above-mentioned traditions. Similarly requisite is a comparison of the different Middle English versions with translations in other vernacular traditions in order to investigate the circulation and transmission of the original Latin texts.

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