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"EYRSILFR DRUKKIT, ÞAT GERIR BANA"

The Earliest Old Norse Medical Book, AM 655 xxx 4to, and its Context

A thirteenth-century Icelandic manuscript fragment of only four leaves, bearing the shelf mark AM 655 XXX 4to, stands as the earliest surviving evidence of a medical book in the vernacular within medieval Scandinavia. Although the manuscript clearly used to be larger, the extent of its original size remains uncertain. The fragment contains fifty-two articles, all of which focus on medicinal topics, describing various ailments and their cures as well as the medical effects of different plants and other materials.

The origins of this manuscript remain enigmatic, with little known regarding its provenance and the circumstances of its acquisition by the manuscript collector Árni Magnússon. Only its Icelandic origin and estimated writing date in the latter half of the thirteenth century are evident. This essay offers an examination of the manuscript AM 655 XXX 4to in order to shed what light is possible on its origins and use. It includes a description of the manuscript's physical characteristics, an analysis of its literary and sociological context, and a critical discussion of what this may tentatively tell us about the production, purpose, and use of the medical codex to which the fragment once belonged. An English translation of the fragment's text is appended.

Historical background of the manuscript and research history

The fragment is one of only six surviving manuscripts of medieval medical books written in Old Norse.[1] The six manuscripts are all translations or adaptations derived from non-native sources.

1 Additionally, a Danish fragment of a medical book, AM 187 8vo, is preserved in the Arnamagnæan collection, written in Danish and Latin, dated to 1400–1424. It was bought

Table 1. Medieval fragments and manuscripts of medical books in Old Norse

	Collection	*Shelf mark*	*No. of leaves*	*Dating*	*Origin*
1.	Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute	AM 655 XXX 4to	4	1250–1300	Iceland
2.	Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute	AM 696 I 4to	2	c. 1350	Norway or Iceland
3.	Reykjavík, Arnamagnæan Institute	AM 673 a II 4to	[27 lines]	c. 1370	Iceland
4.	Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute	AM 194 8vo	12	1387	Iceland
5.	Copenhagen, Arnamagnæan Institute	AM 434 a 12mo	40	1450–1500	Iceland
6.	Dublin, Royal Irish Academy	23 D 43 [8vo]	74	1475–1500	Iceland

Three scholars have dated AM 655 4to to the second half of the thirteenth century.[2] This date means the fragment was produced towards the end of an exceptionally transformative period in Europe, marked by significant social changes and prolific cultural activity. These transformations occurred broadly from *c.* 1050 to 1250, spanning what is known as the long twelfth century, with periods of transitions before and after.[3] This was a time of robust economic and population growth, the development of towns and cities, the emergence of new institutions and structures for learning, and the rise of the international orders of the Roman Catholic Church. Extensive translations of Arabic and Greek philosophical and scientific works into Latin were made at the beginning of this period. The

by Árni Magnússon at an auction in Denmark, and there is no indication that this manuscript has ever been in Iceland. The text is printed in Viggo Såby, ed., *Det Arnamagnæanske håndskrift nr. 187 i oktav, indeholdende en dansk lægebog* (Copenhagen: Thieles, 1886).

2 Hreinn Benediktsson, ed., *Early Icelandic Script, as Illustrated in Vernacular Texts from the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*, Icelandic Manuscripts: Series in Folio II (Reykjavík: Manuscript Institute of Iceland, 1965), xlix; Kristian Kålund, *Katalog over den Arnamagnæanske håndskriftsamling*, 2 vols., vol. II (Copenhagen: Kommissionen for det Arnamagnæanske legat; Gyldendal, 1889–1894), 66; and Konráð Gíslason, *Um frumparta íslenzkrar túngu í fornöld* (Copenhagen: Hið íslenzka bókmenntafjelag, 1856), lxxxv.

3 On the demarcation of the period, see Robert Norman Swanson, *The Twelfth-Century Renaissance* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 212–213.

translations introduced a renewed medical corpus to the Latin West, creating a flow of ideas that had a decisive influence on intellectual thought and science in Europe.[4] Consequently, interaction with this new information stimulated the production of additional medical writings, both practical and theoretical, which drew upon the translated canonical works. One of the notable figures of the translation movement was Constantine the African (d. before 1099), who was associated with the medical school in Salerno, Italy, which soon became one of the most important sources of medical knowledge in Europe.[5] Constantine's translations were copied and circulated in Europe throughout the Middle Ages, both as separate treatises and as parts of compilations of medical texts. One of the "medical bestsellers" of the long twelfth century, Monica Green concludes, was Constantine's Latin translation of an Arabic text, *De gradibus* (On the Degrees of Medicines), by the Tunisian physician Ibn al-Jazzar.[6] Marius Kristensen has shown that *De gradibus* was transmitted to Scandinavia through the Danish translations and adaptations of the physician Henrik Harpestræng (d. 1244).[7] Some of Harpestræng's herbal pharmacology was subsequently translated into Old Norse, of which the two-leaved fragment

4 Literature on the translation movement and the transformation of Europe in the long twelfth century is ubiquitous; see, e.g., Thomas F. X. Noble and John Van Engen, eds., *European Transformations: The Long Twelfth Century* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012); Johann P. Arnason and Björn Wittrock, eds., *Eurasian Transformations, Tenth to Thirteenth Centuries: Crystallizations, Divergences, Renaissances* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

5 On Constantine, see Charles Burnett and Danielle Jacquart, eds., *Constantine the African and 'Alī ibn al-'Abbās al-Maǧūsī: The Pantegni and Related Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1994). A recommended introductory reading on medieval medicine is by Nancy G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

6 Monica H. Green, "Medical Books," in *The European Book in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Erik Kwakkel and Rodney Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 281.

7 Marius Kristensen, ed., *Harpestræng: Gamle danske urtebøger, stenbøger og kogebøger, udgivne for Universitets-jubilæets samfund* (Copenhagen: Thieles, 1908–1920), xi, xxii. Harpestræng's work survives in two main manuscripts, both from *c.* 1300; NKS 66 8vo (Copenhagen, Royal Library) and K 48 (Stockholm, National Library), published by Marius Kristensen in ibid. A table showing the corresponding chapters and examples can be found in ibid., xix–xxii. Harpestræng is thought to have been the canon of Roskilde and a royal Danish physician, who possibly studied or worked in Orléans. Among Harpestræng's other identified main sources was the widely read Latin medical poem *De viribus herbarum*, written under the pseudonym Macer.

AM 696 I 4to (no. 2 in Table 1) has been established to be a later copy.[8] AM 655 4to, like the other five Old Norse medical manuscripts, contains clauses originating in *De gradibus*, serving as a material illustration of the dissemination of medical knowledge across the continent in the long twelfth century: "Gras þat er rubea heitir, þat er roðagras – Þat hrindr út ór óléttri konu, þó at barn sé dautt." (The plant called rubea, that is *roðagras* [lit: reddening plant], expels a baby out of a pregnant woman, even if it is dead).[9] A similar clause can be found in Harpestræng's herbal pharmacology, and the corresponding clause in *De gradibus* reads: "Radix rubeæ mulieribus supposita menstrua prouocat, fœtum que mortuum expellit" (the root of rose madder induces menstruation if put beneath a woman and expels a dead foetus).[10] Nevertheless, all six manuscripts in Table 1 also include clauses that are absent from any known writings of Harpestræng. For this reason, it has been speculated that Harpestræng may have written another medical book, on diseases and cures, which no longer exists but could have served as a source for the Old Norse manuscripts.[11] The possibility of alternative sources cannot be ruled out, but current knowledge of Latin sources that were available in the medieval north is obfuscated by the fact that the textual evidence is extremely fragmentary. For the north as a whole, it has been estimated that 99 per cent of the Latin manuscript leaves that existed at the start of the Reformation are now lost.[12]

A surge of interest in the Old Norse medical books around the turn of the twentieth century led to almost all the existing editions and publica-

8 See Marius Hægstad, ed., *Gamalnorsk fragment av Henrik Harpestreng*, Skrifter udgivne af Videnskabs-Selskabet i Christiania. II. Historisk-filosofisk Klasse (Christiania [Oslo]: Jacob Dypwad, 1906), 9–10; Kristian Kålund, ed., *Den islandske lægebog Codex Arnamagnæanus 434 a, 12 mo*, Den Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskabs Skrifter (Copenhagen: Kongelige Danske Videnskabernes Selskab, 1907), 8–9.

9 Fabian Schwabe, ed., *AM 655 XXX 4to – Ór læknisbók*. Version 2.2, http://www.menota.org. Medieval Nordic Text Archive (2020), fol. 2^{v}. All translations in the essay are mine.

10 Kristensen, *Harpestræng*, 90; Constantine the African, *De gradibus quos uocant simplicium liber*, in *Constantini Africani post Hippocratem et Galenum …* (Basel: Heinrich Petri, 1536), 351.

11 See Kristensen, *Harpestræng*, v; Kålund, *Den islandske lægebog*, 10.

12 Åslaug Ommundsen and Tuomas Heikkilä, "Piecing Together the Past: The Accidental Manuscript Collections of the North," in *Nordic Latin Manuscript Fragments: The Destruction and Reconstruction of Medieval Books*, ed. Åslaug Ommundsen and Tuomas Heikkilä (New York: Routledge, 2017), 4.

tions of the texts of the six Old Norse medical books (from 1860–1931), some accompanied by extensive introductions – an interest that seems to have declined abruptly before and during World War II. The majority of studies on the Old Norse medical corpus are thus a century old or more. Finnur Jónsson's 1912 monograph on medicine in the medieval north, along with a medical section in his history of Old Norse literature, was followed by Ingjald Reichborn-Kjennerud's writings on the history of medicine in the north, published in five parts from 1928.[13] At the same time, Danish scholars took great interest in the Danish medical author Henrik Harpestræng, whose texts were edited and published.[14] As for Old Norse medical books, scholarly publications have, since the middle of the last century, mostly been limited to entries in encyclopaedias and overviews, such as the comprehensive essay by Jón Steffensen in the series Íslensk þjóðmenning.[15] An essay on the lapidaries in AM 194 8vo (no. 4 in Table 1) by Adèle Kreager was recently published, and Arngrímur Vídalín writes on the scribe of the same manuscript and the part of it known as *Leiðarvísir*.[16] Little has been written specifically about AM 655 xxx 4to, save Kristian Kålund's discussion of it in relation to a later medical book, AM 434 (no. 5 in Table 1).[17]

13 Finnur Jónsson, *Lægekunsten i den nordiske oldtid*, ed. Vilhelm Maar, Medicinsk-historiske smaaskrifter (Copenhagen: Vilhelm Trydes forlag, 1912); Finnur Jónsson, *Den oldnorske og oldislandske litteraturs historie*, 2 ed., 3 vols. Vol. II (Copenhagen: Gad, 1920–1924), 909–946; Ingjald Reichborn-Kjennerud, *Vår gamle trolldomsmedisin*, 5 vols., Skrifter utgitt av det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, Hist.-Filos. Klasse (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1928–1947).

14 Most important are Marius Kristensen's editions of the herbal pharmacology in *Harpestræng*. See also, e.g., the Latin text *De simplicibus medicinis laxativis*, ed. John William Schibby Johnsson (Copenhagen: Vilhelm Priors Kgl. Hofbogshandel, 1914); Henrik Harpestraeng, *Liber herbarum*, ed. Poul Hauberg (Copenhagen: Hafnia, 1936).

15 Jón Steffensen, "Alþýðulækningar," in *Alþýðuvísindi: Raunvísindi og dulfræði*, ed. Frosti F. Jóhannsson, Íslensk þjóðmenning VIII (Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, 1990), 103–191. See also a recent book aimed at the public by the folklorist Ólína Kjerúlf Þorvarðardóttir, *Lífgrös og leyndir dómar: Lækningar, töfrar og trú í sögulegu ljósi* (Reykjavík: Vaka-Helgafell, 2019).

16 Adèle Kreager, "Lapidaries and *lyfsteinar*: Health, Enhancement and Human–Lithic Relations in Medieval Iceland," *Gripla* (2022); Arngrímur Vídalín, "Óláfr Ormsson's *Leiðarvísir* and Its Context: The Fourteenth-Century Text of a Supposed Twelfth-Century Itinerary," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 117.2 (2018).

17 Kålund, *Den islandske lægebog*, 359–360, 379–384.

AM 655 XXX 4to as an artefact

While there is no documented information regarding the provenance of AM 655 4to, the fragment itself may provide insights into the context in which it was created. The manuscript, as a physical object, inherently "represents a culture," as Stephen Nichols points out; its features convey how it was used and for what purpose.[18] The specific dynamics of the Icelandic society, economy, and culture during the thirteenth century affected the production of AM 655 XXX 4to. As a result, the fragment can be meaningfully interpreted through examining its distinct features and aligning them with the characteristics and culture of its period. The author of this essay examined the fragment at the Arnamagnæan Institute, Copenhagen, where it is preserved. It is catalogued with thirty other parchment fragments of different origins and content under the same shelf mark, differentiated by the numbers I–XXXIII.[19]

The fragment consists of four conjoint vellum leaves (two bifolia). The text is continuous and uninterrupted through all eight pages but ends *in medias res*. It can, therefore, be assumed that the leaves formed an inner part of a quire. The vellum is worn and brown in colour with scattered signs of rot or mould. All four leaves show marks of regular horizontal and lateral folds, indicating that the fragment had once been used in some type of packing or binding or stored in a folded state.

Even though the shelf mark indicates quarto size, the dimensions of the fragment correspond to the smaller octavo size, measuring 157 x 123 mm. The text is written neatly in a single column, and each page has exactly seventeen lines. The margins are 10–15 mm at the left, right and top of each page, and on average 30 mm at the bottom. There are signs of pricking at the outer margins but no signs of ruling. The leaves have not been trimmed.

The text is written in one hand, in proto-Gothic script. The ink is dark brown in colour, sometimes black, and appears dense and clear on the pages. There are no rubrics or illuminations in the manuscript, but eight

18 Stephen G. Nichols, "Why Material Philology? Some Thoughts," *Zeitschrift für deutsche Philologie* 116 (1997). Quote at 14.

19 Discrepancy in the numbers (thirty fragments, numbered I–XXXIII) is caused by two of the fragments having two numbers. Brief descriptions of all the fragments can be found in Kålund, *Katalog* II, 58–67.

black initials appear in the text. Additionally, at the points where most new articles begin, scattered small, faint guide letters appear on the far edges of the outer margins, clearly to indicate where initials should later be placed, perhaps by a separate illuminator. These would have been cut off if the manuscript had been trimmed. Where an initial is intended, the corresponding letter is missing in the text itself. Most articles start at the beginning of a new line, and a space is left blank where the previous article ends. This results in many 20–40 mm long gaps at the end of the lines where the articles end.

No slip accompanies the fragment, and there is no record, marginalia, or other information regarding its provenance or how it came into the hands of Árni Magnússon. However, the fragment is referred to in Jón Ólafsson's catalogue of the manuscripts in Árni Magnússon's collection, which dates from *c.* 1731.[20] The manuscripts grouped under the shelf mark AM 655 I–XXXIII 4to are all fragments, predominantly dating back to the thirteenth century, with some among the oldest in the collection (*c.* 1200). Fragment 655 XXX is not the sole example in this group for which Árni Magnússon omitted details regarding its acquisition. In the instances where he did make such a record, he often notes that they were discovered embedded within the bindings of other books, whether in the spine, acting as a cover, or affixed to a cover.[21] This may have been the fate of 655 XXX, given the folding marks on its vellum support, or it may have been retrieved like one of the other fragments in the group, which was found discarded in the trash at a farm.[22] Such findings were characteristic of Árni's approach, which distinguished him from many other collectors, as he meticulously pursued every vellum fragment, tear, and snippet, regardless of condition.[23]

The fragment is currently in a modern conservation binding, sewn onto a guard and preserved in a cardboard cover, and bears no immediate trace of its original binding. Kålund remarks (in 1894) that the leaves are

20 AM 477 fol., 44^{v} (*Catalogus Librorum Msstorum Arnæ Magnæi*).

21 See Kålund, *Katalog* II, 58–67.

22 This is AM 655 V 4to; see ibid, 59.

23 On Árni's methods, see, e.g., Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, "Manuscripts on the Brain – Árni Magnússon, Collector," in *66 Manuscripts from the Arnamagnæan Collection*, ed. Svanhildur Óskarsdóttir, Matthew James Driscoll, and Sigurður Svavarsson (Copenhagen: Arnamagnæan Institute, 2015).

damaged and contain numerous small holes.[24] These holes have since been repaired (1958–1959), but the signs are clearly visible.[25]

The text of 655 was published by Konráð Gíslason in 1860 in a normalised version that contains small errors.[26] In 2008 this edition was replaced by Fabian Schwabe's digital edition on the website of the Medieval Nordic Text Archive, with a second edition published in 2020.[27] Schwabe's edition includes a facsimile, a diplomatic version, and a normalised version. A close examination of the fragment's linguistic features and orthography has yet to be conducted. However, Kristian Kålund concludes in his 1907 examination of AM 434 4to, published with variants from AM 655 4to, that both these Icelandic manuscripts include some Danish and Norwegian words and word forms, indicating that they both stem from a Norwegian translation of a Danish text.[28] Their common ancestor, predating 655, is likely to have been transmitted through this route.

As for the content of the fragment, each of the fifty-two articles is fairly short and concise, and most refer to common general health problems one might reasonably expect in a thirteenth-century household. For instance, there are cures for insect bites, infections, cough and lung problems, hoarseness, eye problems, problems of digestion and bad breath, as well as ways to exterminate mice and flies. There is also advice for stopping bleeding, for healing wounds and broken bones, and for getting rid of warts. There is counsel for how to minimise lasciviousness, prevent conception, and on obstetrics. The medical conditions discussed in the fragment are quotidian rather than extraordinary and thus reflect a selection of cures based on common functionality.

The articles are generally of the two types that are most common in medieval European medical manuscripts in the vernacular: ailments listed with recipes for their cures, and herbal pharmacology (on the medical

24 Kålund, *Katalog* II, 66.

25 I am thankful to Anne Mette Hansen, curator at the Arnamagnæan Institute in Copenhagen, for providing me with additional information on the repair and preservation of the fragment.

26 Konráð Gíslason, ed., *Fire og fyrretyve for en stor deel forhen utrykte prøver af oldnordisk sprog og litteratur* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1860), 470–475.

27 Schwabe, *Ór læknisbók*.

28 Kålund, *Den islandske lægebog*, 398–400.

effects of mainly plants, but also minerals and animal substances).[29] The former is characterised by presenting the ailment, followed by a remedy, beginning for example by "Við beinbrot" (for a broken bone) or "Við of feitan kvið" (for a belly that is too fat), sometimes organised by ailments from head to foot. The pharmacology in the fragment follows the usual format of other texts of the same nature, such as Harpestræng's writings, by naming the plant or the substance, followed by its effects: "Eyrsilfr drukkit – Þat gerir bana" (Drinking quick-silver, that brings death), or "Gras þat er heitir feniculum – Stappa þat við vín. Þat er gott við blǫðrusótt." (The plant which is called fennel – mash it with wine. That is good for disease of the bladder.) The pharmacology is heavily abridged compared to Harpestræng's pharmacology, which also contains the above clause on fennel. There, however, the clause is included among explanations of various other effects of the plant in over two hundred words, compared to only fourteen in 655.[30]

The brevity of the articles, along with the selection of remedies being grounded in their usefulness in everyday situations, highlights the practicality of the medical book. Supporting this aspect of functionality, Norse words are written for some of the medicinal plants mentioned. Among examples are *læknisgras* (lit.: healing-plant, possibly a small plant called the plantain), *skógarsúra* (sorrel), *mynta* (mint), *malurt* (wormwood), and the Latin word *rubea* is further explained by reference to the word *roðagras* (*rubia tinctorum*, or rose madder), a plant also used to dye cloth. Thus, the translated material was adjusted to better fit the target audience. Furthermore, the arrangement of the manuscript's layout, characterised by gaps in the writing field that arise from starting new articles on separate lines, implies that the scribe's primary concern was not to maximise the use of the expensive vellum. The writing field of the parchment is not completely filled, but the text is laid out in such a way that primarily facilitates quickly finding the desired information. This implies that the

29 On the contents of medieval medical texts in the vernacular, specifically in German and English contexts, see essays in Margaret R. Schleissner, ed., *Manuscript Sources of Medieval Medicine: A Book of Essays* (London: Routledge, 1995). A good overview of English texts is provided by Faye Getz, *Medicine in the English Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 35–64.

30 Kristensen, *Harpestræng*, 15. Pharmacology was sometimes organised alphabetically by plant names, such as in AM 696 I 4to.

book was valued as a functional tool. Furthermore, the compact size of the leaves (octavo) suggests that the original codex was crafted to be portable. The above indicates that the manuscript was considered both practical and important, and that its purpose was to be carried around as a handbook and used in practice.

The other five manuscripts

For the purpose of comparison, the other five manuscripts will be briefly described. The fragment *AM 696 I 4to* is the second oldest of the six, dated to *c.* 1350.[31] Its importance lies in its status as evidence of an Old Norse translation of Henrik Harpestræng's herbal pharmacology, with a possible Norwegian source text which is no longer extant as an intermediary.[32] It consists of two leaves from two different parts of a manuscript, of which the rest is now lost. The leaves are very damaged, apparently from being used in a binding, and the text is illegible in places. It appears to have once been an elegant manuscript; it is of quarto size, and each article starts with a pen-flourished initial in colour (and partly in gold, Marius Hægstad contends),[33] but now very faded. The text is written in a single column and the plants are listed in an alphabetical order, followed by long clauses, about 100–200 words each, on their effects. Hægstad argues, on the grounds of orthography and language, that the fragment was written in northwest Norway.[34] Stefán Karlsson, on the other hand, points out that this demonstrates only that it was "possibly copied from a Norwegian exemplar" and is just as likely to be of Icelandic origin.[35] Marginalia indicate that the manuscript was in Iceland in the seventeenth century.[36] The text was published with an introduction in Norwegian by Hægstad in 1906.[37]

The medical text in *AM 673 a II 4to* is in the plainest format of all six.

31 Stefán Karlsson, ed., *Sagas of Icelandic Bishops: Fragments of Eight Manuscripts in the Arnamagnæan Collection* (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde and Bagger, 1967), 52; Hægstad, *Gamalnorsk fragment*, 15–16.

32 Hægstad, *Gamalnorsk fragment*, 9–10.

33 Ibid., 1.

34 Ibid., 10–12.

35 Stefán Karlsson, *Sagas of Icelandic Bishops*, 52.

36 Fol. 2^{r}: "Þetta kuer a eg Biorn pettuʀ Son med ʀiettu | Anno 1692". See Kristian Kålund, *Katalog* II, 110. Árni Magnússon acquired the fragment from north-Iceland.

37 Hægstad, *Gamalnorsk fragment*.

It consists of only twenty-seven lines, added *c.* 1370 to fols. 6^{v} and 7^{r} of a manuscript which is almost two centuries older, the Old Norse translation of *Physiologus*, next to a text about the elephant and a drawing of one.[38] The lines are uneven and dense, the text flowing continuously, and the scribe made good use of the space by extending the lines well beyond the original text's margins. The medical advice is selective. Most of it pertains to various pains, such as headaches, and digestive problems, such as "Tak urriðagall ok súrt vín ok ambra, allt saman, ok smyrr umhverfis kviðinn. Þá batnar þat." (Take bile from sea trout and sour wine and spermaceti, all together, and apply it around the stomach. Then it will get better.)[39] There is also advice for scalp infection and intoxication. It may be speculated that the owner of the manuscript had access to another medical manuscript and wanted to make use of the empty space in *Physiologus* to copy down selected advice that could benefit their own specific health conditions. The provenance of the manuscript can be traced back only to the seventeenth century, to the West fjords of Iceland.[40] The text was edited by Marius Hægstad and published with an introduction in Norwegian in 1913.[41]

AM 194 8vo is much larger, fifty-two leaves in total. It contains encyclopaedic material, spanning various sciences known at the time of writing. The main scribe identifies himself as the priest Óláfr Ormsson and dates his writing to the year 1387 at Geirrøðareyri (Narfeyri) in Snæfellsnes, which is near the Augustinian monastery at Helgafell.[42] The condition of the manuscript is poor, and the text is illegible in many places.[43] The

38 On 6^{v} there is also a later addition of the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Latin. See manuscript details of AM 673 a I and II 4to on *handrit.is*, Icelandic Manuscript Catalog with Digital Reproductions. National and University Library of Iceland, https://handrit.is; Kålund, *Katalog* II, 90–91. On the dating of the medical text, see Marius Hægstad, *Eit stykke av ei austlandsk lækjebok fraa 14 hundradaaret*, Kristiania Videnskapsselskaps Forhandlinger, (Christiania [Oslo]: Jacob Dybwad, 1913), 8–9; *ONP: Dictionary of Old Norse Prose*, Den Arnamagnæanske Kommission, http://onp.ku.dk/.

39 Hægstad, *Eit stykke*, 4. The normalisation of the text to Old Icelandic orthographic standard is my own.

40 See Kristian Kålund, ed., *Arne Magnussons i AM. 435 A–B, 4to indeholdte håndskriftfortegnelser med to tillæg, udgivne af Kommissionen for det Arnamagnæanske legat* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1909), 15.

41 Hægstad, *Eit stykke*.

42 Kristian Kålund, ed., *Alfræði íslenzk. Islandsk encyklopædisk litteratur*, 3 vols., vol. I. Cod. Mbr. AM. 194, 8vo (Copenhagen: Samfund til udgivelse af gammel nordisk litteratur, 1908), 54f.

43 A description of the manuscript is provided in Kålund, *Alfræði íslenzk*, i–iii.

text runs continuously throughout in a single column, with occasional pen-flourished black initials and without headings. The medical material appears on twelve leaves (37^{r}–48^{v}). The section includes an introduction, a short chapter on prognostics (the signs of death), on seasonal regimens (a monthly calendar of diet and bloodletting), a section on diseases and cures, herbal pharmacology, and a lapidary. The manuscript was edited and published by Kristian Kålund in 1908 with an extensive introduction in Danish.[44]

AM 434 a 12mo is a charming, almost miniature, medical book the size of a hand, dated to *c.* 1450–1500. It contains forty leaves, but the beginning is missing. Despite its small size, the text is written neatly in two columns, heavily abbreviated. Most articles start with a pen-flourished initial in red and other colours, some of them large and decorated. The manuscript contains charms and conjurations (along with some magic runes and symbols), a section on prognostics and seasonal regimens, diseases and cures, herbal pharmacology, a chapter on hydrotherapy (on the benefits of baths), a short section on physiology and embryology (about the development of the foetus), information on infertility, and a lunar prognostication (prognoses according to the lunar day). This manuscript contains much of the text of the medical book in AM 194 8vo and nearly all the text of 655 in almost the same order. However, neither of these two manuscripts is the exemplar of 434.[45] Both 434 and 655 contain clauses that do not appear in the other, and 434 often contains a better reading. The text was published by Kristian Kålund in 1907 with a thorough introduction in Danish.[46]

Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43 (hereafter: D) is the most recent and most extensive of the six manuscripts, dated to the last quarter of the fifteenth century, in octavo size (146 x 114 mm). It is an attractive manuscript, neatly written in a single column, with rubrics and coloured, pen-flourished initials. All the other Old Norse medical books contain sections that are also found in this manuscript. The manuscript contains ten gatherings, of which two are incomplete, or seventy-four leaves in total. It comprises charms and conjurations, a herbal pharmacology with a section on phlebotomy, prognostics, seasonal regimen of diet and bloodletting, a section

44 Ibid.
45 See, Kålund, *Den islandske lægebog*, 360.
46 Ibid.

on diseases and cures (including a long chapter on the eyes), a chapter on hydrotherapy, another on compound drugs (antidotarium), a fragmentary lapidary, and a cookbook. It was edited and published in 1931 by Henning Larsen with an introduction in English, an index, and an English translation.[47]

Discussion

A handful of stemmas have been constructed to describe the relationship among the six manuscripts and/or their relationship to other sources, such as the herbal pharmacology of Harpestræng.[48] The results are conjectural, considering that although all the six manuscripts are clearly related through common foreign sources, this kinship manifests to a varying degree in different sections in each work, and each individual manuscript has additional material which cannot be found in the others. In addition, the manuscripts are each preserved in a more or less fragmentary state.

To further illustrate this issue, the appendix below contains an overview of my results of the comparison of each of 655's fifty-two articles to the texts of the other five medical books. The comparison highlighted that the closest relatives of the thirteenth-century 655 are the late fifteenth-century AM 434 and D. However, 655's relationship to each of the two is very different. Forty-four of 655's fifty-two articles (85%) are also found in D, often nearly verbatim – but they are scattered throughout the manuscript. In contrast, forty-seven (90%) of 655's articles also exist in 434, but in this case at the same place, almost in the same order, and often verbatim. AM 194 8vo contains nine of 655's articles (17%) in different places, and the wording is not as similar as in the other two manuscripts. AM 673 a II 4to contains one article also found in 655, about how to quench a man's thirst (no. 13 in 655), with very similar wording,[49] but none can be found in AM 696 4to.

47 Henning Larsen, ed., *An Old Icelandic Medical Miscellany. MS Royal Irish Academy 23 D 43 with Supplement from MS Trinity College (Dublin) L-2-27* (Oslo: Jacob Dybwad, 1931). See Larsen's linguistic and non-linguistic arguments for the dating on 15–23.

48 See Kristensen, *Harpestræng,* xxix, xxxv; Larsen, *Medical Miscellany*, 29; Jón Steffensen, "Alþýðulækningar," 134; see also stemmas in Fabian Schwabe, "Den norrøne legemiddelboktradisjonen," in *Translation – Adaptation, Interpretation, Transformation. Proceedings from the 28th Study Conference of IASS, Lund* (2010), 6, 10.

49 Hægstad, *Eit stykke*, 4, line 15.

The obscurity concerning the textual relationships among the six manuscripts is quite commonplace in the study of medieval medicine in the vernacular, as Faith Wallis points out, because it often results from the specific production culture of medical texts in the Middle Ages.[50] As opposed to medical texts within scholastic education, which were more uniform, medical texts in the vernacular and those from earlier times when medicine was not taught through institutions were "subjected to radical and unabashed reworking, dismemberment and de-authorization."[51] The rewritings were tailored to their individual specific purposes and contexts, and because pharmacology was the most popular subject within medieval medicine, that is where "the most disturbed textual traditions are found."[52] This poses a problem for the modern scholar striving to deduce from the extant material what people in the Middle Ages knew and believed. But, as Wallis points out, the selection and reorganisation in each medical manuscript are "not mechanical or random; choice and arrangement almost invariably mean something," and this rearrangement communicates information about their users and purpose.[53] Despite sharing the same topic and having many similarities, the six manuscripts exhibit notable differences in terms of their size, style, and content, which speaks to the different interests and aims of each maker or owner. Within the group, one (696) appears to have formed a part of a substantial, handsome codex with more or less unabridged clauses from the original material, Harpestræng's pharmacology; judging from the length of the clauses and the fragment's quarto size, it was possibly intended as a manual. Another (673) consists of only twenty-seven lines of selected short cures, scribbled unevenly like notes within an older manuscript. The third (194) can be characterised as a type of florilegium, where medical content is presented alongside other encyclopaedic knowledge encompassing diverse subjects. The youngest two manuscripts (434 and D), although small in size, are lengthy, and seem to

50 Faith Wallis, "The Experience of the Book: Manuscripts, Texts, and the Role of Epistemology in Early Medieval Medicine," in *Knowledge and the Scholarly Medical Traditions*, ed. Don Bates (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 102–107.

51 Ibid., 125. On this topic, see also Peter Murray Jones, "Medical Books Before the Invention of Printing," in *Thornton's Medical Books, Libraries and Collectors: A Study of Bibliography and the Book Trade in Relation to the Medical Sciences*, ed. Alain Besson (London: Gower, 1990).

52 Wallis, "The Experience of the Book," 109.

53 Ibid., 105.

have only included content of medicinal nature. Additionally, they encompass the most diverse assortment of medical material among all of them.

The last two manuscripts bear the closest textual resemblance to 655, especially 434, and they are also of a small handbook-size, similar to 655. This raises the idea that the codex to which 655 belonged may have included additional medical topics, similar to those found in 434 and D. The missing outer part of the quire, and possibly additional quires, might have included a more substantial list of diseases and cures, as well as a richer herbal pharmacology, in addition to other topics frequently found in medieval medical texts, such as sections on seasonal regimens, prognostics, phlebotomy, and so on. However, any attempt to estimate the length and possible other content of the codex to which the fragment originally belonged can only be speculative. As the descriptions of the other five manuscripts show, the extant Old Norse medical manuscripts are far from uniform. The same applies to the surviving medical manuscripts in other vernacular languages, such as English, of which the vast majority is derived from Latin source texts: they exhibit significant variation in complexity and range of subjects covered.[54] Comparing 655 XXX with 434 and D is further complicated by the fact that they are separated by two centuries.

Turning to the practice of medicine, it has been argued here that 655 was made to be used as a practical handbook and that the manuscript's features indicate that it was valued as such. But if it was really used, then how, and by whom? The available knowledge concerning actual medicinal practices in Iceland during this period is unfortunately very limited.[55] There is evidence suggesting that medical practice was somewhat regulated. The contemporary law code contains a clause addressing liability for medical adverse effects: the lawbook *Grágás* includes a section on the exemption from punishment of a well-intentioned healer if the patient suffers death or harm due to cauterisation, phlebotomy, or other healing practices.[56]

54 Linda Ehrsam Voigts provides a handy list of the most common topics in "Multitudes of Middle English Medical Manuscripts, or the Englishing of Science and Medicine," in *Manuscript Sources of Medieval Medicine: A Book of Essays*, ed. Margaret R. Schleissner (London: Routledge, 1995), 192. For an overview, see also Getz, *Medicine in the English Middle Ages*, 35–64.

55 An overview is provided in Finnur Jónsson, *Lægekunsten*. See also Jón Steffensen, "Alþýðulækningar".

56 *Grágás. Lagasafn íslenska þjóðveldisins*, ed. Gunnar Karlsson, Kristján Sveinsson, and Mörður Árnason (Reykjavík: Mál og menning, 1992), 267. A similar paragraph is in the

An account of such an incident indeed exists, as *Sturlunga saga* states that the chieftain Ormr Jónsson underwent bloodletting on his artery ("gjósæðinni") in 1241 but died as a result of complications stemming from the procedure.[57] In the contemporary sagas (*Sturlunga saga* and the bishops' sagas), a healer (*læknir*), or healing, is often mentioned. Setting aside miracle healings described in the hagiographies, accounts of the practice of medicine are few.[58] The most thorough description is found in *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar in sérstaka*, a contemporary saga with hagiographical features, estimated to have been written *c.* 1230–1260.[59] It tells of the best-known medieval Icelandic physician, the chieftain Hrafn Sveinbjarnarson (d. 1213). Hrafn is described in the saga as "inn mesti læknir ok vel lærðr ok eigi meir vígðr en krúnuvígslu" (the greatest of physicians and of fine learning, and not ordained above having received the tonsure).[60] The saga explicitly mentions and emphasises that Hrafn did not seek payment for his medical services.[61] This implies that there existed other practitioners of medicine in contemporary society who did charge a fee for their assistance. *Hrafns saga* is unique in its detailed account of how Hrafn performed lithotomy (surgical treatment for bladder stones), supported by the prayers of the clergy present. The saga also includes descriptions of phlebotomy, cauterisation, and other methods. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir concludes in her study of the saga that the described surgical methods accurately reflect the Latin medical doctrine of the thirteenth century.[62] The saga further highlights Hrafn's connections to Europe by recounting his wide-ranging travels to Saint-Gilles in Provence, Compostela, and Rome, as well as England for a meeting with St Thomas Archbishop of Canterbury.[63] In the saga,

Jónsbók law code, which came into effect in 1281. *Lögbók Magnúsar konungs, Lagabætis, handa Íslendingum, eður; Jónsbók hin forna; lögtekin á alþingi 1281*, ed. Sveinn Skúlason (Akureyri: [s.n.], 1858), 43.

57 *Sturlunga saga*, ed. Guðrún Ása Grímsdóttir, 3 vols., vol. II, Íslenzk fornrit XXI, (Reykjavík: Hið íslenska fornritafélag, 2021), 516–517.

58 On miracles in the bishops' sagas, see Diana Whaley, "Miracles in the Sagas of Bishops. Icelandic Variations on an International Theme," *Collegium medievale* 7 (1994).

59 Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, Introduction to *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, ed. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), lxxxviii.

60 *Hrafns saga Sveinbjarnarsonar*, ed. Guðrún P. Helgadóttir (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 2.

61 Ibid., 4.

62 Guðrún P. Helgadóttir, Introduction, xciv–cviii.

63 *Hrafns saga*, 3–4.

naturalistic and religious approaches to healing appear as complementary. This mirrors the prevailing contemporary attitudes in Europe. Katharine Park observes that in Europe, a diverse range of healing practices coexisted, including religious, supernatural, and naturalistic methods.[64] A healer could be any knowledgeable individual, male or female, including family members and priests – a diversity that one would expect in medieval Iceland as well. Monks and nuns are well documented as healers in Europe during this time, as medicine was integrated into the broader learned culture in monastic and cathedral schools – although these were replaced to an increasing degree in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries by secular medical practitioners.[65]

The text recommends the use of some plants that are not native to Iceland, which raises the question of how the users of the medical books would be able to follow some of its advice. Apothecaries, where ingredients for healing were sold, were a blooming business in medieval urban Europe, and the earliest record of a "pepperer" in England dates from the late twelfth century.[66] It is not inconceivable that medical ingredients were imported to Iceland to some extent, along with the wax, honey, wine, oil, balsam, incense, and other goods imported for the church and the lifestyles of aristocrats,[67] as well as some of the ink and pigments used for manuscript production.[68] The text of 655 XXX recommends the use of some of these churchly ingredients, such as myrrh, incense, oil, and balsam, as well as honey.[69] Some of the plants may have been cultivated in Iceland. Archaeological evidence combined with pollen analysis and ethnobotanical findings at twelve monastic sites in Iceland has revealed that there were

64 Katharine Park, "Medical Practice," in *The Cambridge History of Science*, ed. David C. Lindberg and Michael H. Shank (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 616–617.

65 Ibid. See also, on this development, Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, 17–47.

66 See Park, "Medical Practice," 618–620; Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, 18–20. On the *Gilda Piperarorium* in England, see T. D. Whittet, "Pepperers, Spicers and Grocers – Forerunners of the Apothecaries," *Proceedings of the Royal Society of Medicine* 61.8 (1968).

67 Helgi Þorláksson, "Frá landnámi til einokunar," in *Líftaug landsins. Saga íslenskrar utanlandsverslunar 900-2010*, ed. Sumarliði R. Ísleifsson (Reykjavík: Háskóli Íslands, Sagnfræðistofnun; Skrudda, 2017), 112–116.

68 Soffía Guðmundsdóttir and Laufey Guðnadóttir, "Book Production in the Middle Ages," 51–53.

69 See Appendix below, articles no. 44, 30, 46, 3, 14, 29, and 37, respectively.

botanical gardens where medicinal plants were grown at monasteries in Iceland during the Middle Ages.[70] Additionally, species of healing plants that are not a part of the Icelandic flora have been identified.[71] Further archaeological research on this topic awaits, but these findings correspond with the understanding of how contemporary European monasteries and abbeys operated; some had large herb gardens with medicinal plants.[72]

AM 655 4to may very well have been produced in association with a monastery, although this remains obscure. The scribe of another medical manuscript, AM 194 8vo (no. 4 in Table 1, written in 1387), was a priest, living in the vicinity of a monastery.[73] The 655 scribe's omission of the initials implies a collaborative process in the production of the manuscript, and therefore a potential association with a scribal centre or an illuminator. However, book production in medieval Iceland was not centred on monastic institutions to the same extent as in Europe.[74] Large estates of wealthy families are thought to have been essential centres for literary production, as are monasteries and cathedral schools.[75] The scribes of

70 See Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir, Inger Larsson, and Per Arvid Åsen, "The Icelandic Medieval Monastic Garden – Did It Exist?" *Scandinavian Journal of History* 39.5 (2014). See also, on plants in medieval Nordic monasteries, Johan Lange, "Lægeplanter," in *Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder fra vikingetid til reformationstid*, ed. Johannes Brøndsted et al. (Copenhagen: Rosenkilde og Bagger, 1966), 88–90.

71 Inger Larsson, Per Arvid Åsen, Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir, and Kjell Lundquist, eds., *Medeltida klostergrunder på Island – vegetation och flora, kultur- och relikväxter, samtida växtnamn* (Alnarp: Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet, 2012). See on some of the plants mentioned in AM 655 4to, such as wormwood (*Artemisia*), caraway (*Carum carvi*), pimpinella (*Sanguisorba officinalis, Sanguisorba alpina*), plantain (*Plantago*) and sweet gale (*Myrica gale*), in ibid., 51–80. See also on willow (*Salix*), opium poppy (*Papaver somniferum*), rue (*Ruta graveolens*), sage (*Salvia officinalis*), mint (*Mentha*), and lovage (*Levisticum officinale*), in ibid, Appendix 3, 8.

72 Park, "Medical Practice," 616. It has been established that Skriðuklaustur monastery (1493–1554) was a medical centre; see Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir, "Skriðuklaustur Monastery".

73 See above and Kålund, *Alfræði íslenzk*, 54f.

74 Soffía Guðmundsdóttir and Laufey Guðnadóttir, "Book Production in the Middle Ages," in *The Manuscripts of Iceland*, ed. Gísli Sigurðsson and Vésteinn Ólason (Reykjavík: Árni Magnússon Institute in Iceland, 2004), 54; Stefán Karlsson, "Íslensk bókagerð á miðöldum," in *Íslenska söguþingið 28.–31. maí 1997: Ráðstefnurit*, ed. Guðmundur J. Guðmundsson and Eiríkur K. Björnsson (Reykjavík: Sagnfræðistofnun Háskóla Íslands and Sagnfræðingafélag Íslands, 1998), 289–290.

75 For an overview of possible locations of book production in Iceland, see Haraldur Bernharðsson, "Scribal Culture in Thirteenth-Century Iceland: The Introduction of Anglo-Saxon 'f' in Icelandic Script," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 117.3 (2018): 282–285.

medieval Icelandic manuscripts that have been identified are not many, but among those that have been identified – writing both secular and religious texts – are monks and priests as well as secular chieftains and their scribes.[76] In the absence of any indications on the identity of the scribe of 655 XXX, or the origins of the manuscript, one can only reasonably contend that the maker or owner of 655 belonged to the literary elite – a group of learned individuals of high social standing that included wealthy landowners and clerics.[77]

Conclusion

This essay has sought to examine AM 655 XXX 4to as a physical artefact and contextualise this unique fragment alongside other surviving Old Norse medical books and the medical practices of medieval Europe and Iceland. While the history of the manuscript is enigmatic, its value for its thirteenth century owner is evident from its well-crafted production. Its layout, vernacular language adjustments, compact leaf size, concise articles, and selection of remedies tailored for everyday situations underscore its practicality as a medical book – a portable GP's handbook, if you like, based on a European medical bestseller.

While the six Old Norse medical manuscripts exhibit many similarities, some of them also manifest notable differences in size, style, and content. These variations reflect the adaptation of the foreign material to suit individual contexts, indicating the diverse interests and intentions of each maker or owner. 655 XXX is a valuable representative of the learned European knowledge system and intellectual trends in the thirteenth century. Further research into the medieval Icelandic medical literature could yield a more comprehensive history of medicine in Iceland than we have at this time, and in turn, enhance even further our understanding of 655 XXX's origins and usage.

76 For a discussion on the identified scribes, see Stefán Karlsson, "Íslensk bókagerð á miðöldum"; see also Ólafur Halldórsson, "Skrifaðar bækur," in *Munnmenntir og bókmenning*, ed. Frosti F. Jóhannsson, Íslensk þjóðmenning, VI (Reykjavík: Þjóðsaga, 1989), 82–87.

77 Essays in Stefka G. Eriksen, ed., *Intellectual Culture in Medieval Scandinavia, c. 1100-1350* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), present a thorough discussion on the topic of the literary elite in the medieval North.

Appendix: Translation of the text of AM 655 xxx 4to with notes

The original text follows the normalised version in Fabian Schwabe's digital edition of the manuscript, published at the Medieval Nordic Text Archive.[78] The references to other Old Norse medical books and page numbers in parenthesis are coded as follows: D = RIA 23 D 43 as printed in Larsen, *Medical Miscellany*; 434 = AM 434 a 12mo as printed in Kålund, *Den islandske lægebog*; 194 = AM 194 8vo as printed in Kålund, *Alfræði íslenzk*; 673: AM 673 a II 4to as printed in Hægstad, *Eit stykke*.

1.	Við svefnleysi – Tak gras þat er heitir migon[79] ok stappa í súru víni. Ok ríð þat um allan líkam manns ok gef honum súrur at eta. Þat gerir svefn allvel. (D:125; 434:379)	For sleeplessness – take the herb called poppy and mash it in sour wine. And apply it all over a man's body and give him sorrel to eat. This will produce a very good sleep.
2.	Við sár – Tak saur[80] ok legg við um dag ok nótt. Ok síðan tak svína gall eða nauta eða geita ok stappa við salt svá sem pipar ok legg við sár um kveld ok morgin í annat sinn. Þat grøðir einkum vel. (D:126; 194:65)	For wounds – take dirt [or: excrements] and apply it during day and night. And then take the gall of swine, or cattle, or goat, and mash it with salt as with pepper, and apply to the wound in the evening and in the morning for a second time. This will heal it especially well.
3.	Við ormsbit – Tak lǫg af læknisgrasi ok oleu ok salt ok gef honum drekka. Þat hrindr eitri ór. (434:379)	For a snake bite – take the juice of healing plant[81] and oil and salt, and give it to him to drink. This will expel the poison.

78 Schwabe, *Ór læknisbók*. English translation is mine. Silent modification of "in" to "enn" in article 41. Translations of plant-names were aided by Larsen, *Medical Miscellany*, Kristensen, *Harpestræng*, and Lange, "Lægeplanter."

79 "Migon" refers to *meconium* (ancient Greek *mēkōnion*) meaning poppy, or the thickened juice of the opium poppy. See "meconium, *n.*" in *OED Online. Oxford English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, http://oed.com.

80 "sallt" (salt) in D and AM 194 8vo.

81 The word *læknisgras* (lit.: healing plant) is likely to refer to the plant *Plantago major*, or plantain (*græðisúra*).

4. Við beinbrot – Tak hana ok stappa allan með fjǫðrum ok bitt við. Þat grøðir skjótast.
(D:129; 434:379)

For a broken bone – take a cock and mash [or: stuff] it all with the feathers and bind this to it. This will heal it the quickest.

5. Við of feitan kvið – Tak rugbrauð eigi blandat við annat korn ok brjót í vín eða ǫlðr ok lát standa nætr sjau. En síðan drekk af því hvern morgin ok hvern aftan of tolf mánuðr. Þá muntu svengjask.
(D:128; 434:379–380)

For a belly that is too fat – take rye bread that is not mixed with other grain, and break it down in wine or ale and let it stand for seven nights. And then drink from it every morning and every evening for twelve months. Then you will grow thinner.

6. Ef kveisa er komin í hǫnd þér, þá tak kǫtt ok drep ok stikk hendi þinni í hann, ef hann er varmr. En síðan bitt um til annars dags ok ger svá fjórum sinnum, ef þarf. Ok hvern dag tak kvikan kǫtt. En ef í ǫðrum stað er í holdi manns, þá bitt við varmt kattarhold nýdrepit til þess er kólnar. Þat dregr út hvarvetna kveisu ór mannsholdi.
(D:127; 434:380)

If a boil has come upon your hand, take a cat and kill it and stick your hand inside it, if it is warm. And then apply bandages until the second day, and do so four times, if needed. And every day take a living cat. But if it is in another part of a man's flesh, then bind warm cat-flesh to it, freshly killed, until it grows cold. This will pull out a boil everywhere in a man's flesh.

7. Við augnamyrkva – Tak ál kvikan ok ríst hann ok tak ór honum bæði blóð ok gall ok blanda bæði saman ok berr í augun. Þat birtir sýn manns.
(D:121; 434:380; (194:71))

For dim eyes – take a living eel and cut it open, and take out of it both the blood and the gall, and mix both of these together and apply to the eyes. This will clear a man's sight.

8. Við blóðrás – Tak gras þat er vex í hveitiakri með sínum blǫðum ok rauðu fræ ok stappa í víni eða ǫlðri ok syng meðan pater noster ok gef honum drekka.
(434:380)

For bleeding – take the herb that grows in a wheat field, with its leaves and red seeds, and mash it in wine or ale while singing Pater Noster, and give it to him to drink.

9. Við þá blóðrás, ef sár blǫðir – Tak náttlauk ok stappa vel ok legg þar í sárit sem blǫðir ok bitt við. (434:380)

For that bleeding when a wound bleeds – take a night-leek and mash it well, and apply it to the wound where it is bleeding and bind up.

10. Við spenbolga – Tak læknisgras ok bitt við. (D:129; 434:380)

For swollen nipples – take a healing plant and bind up with it.

11. Ef þú vill þik hefta at lostasemi, tak gras þat er ruta heitir ok et í þola. Þá mun linask. (D:114; 434:380)

If you want to restrain your lust, take the herb called rue and eat it incessantly. Then it will ease.

12. Við ormsbit – Tak rutam ok bitt við. (434:380)

For a snake bite – take rue and bandage with it.

13. Við þat, ef maðr er þorstlátr – Tak centauream ok stappa við vatn ok drekk fljótt. (D:129; 434:380; 673:4)

For that, if a man is thirsty – take centaury and mash it in water and drink quickly.

14. Við hǫfuðverk – Tak rutam ok stappa við skíra oleu ok ríð um enni. Þat tekr verk af ok bøtir augun. Þetta er oft reynt. (D:119; 434:380)

For headache – take rue and mash it with clear oil and rub it on the forehead. This will remove the ache and improve the eyes. This has often been tested.

15. Við lendaverk – Tak gras þat er centaurea heitir ok stappa í vatni ok drekk oft kalt. (D:129; 434:380)

For pain in the loins – take the grass called centaury and mash it in water, and drink it often cold.

16. Við sár – Tak dust af því grasi er centaurea heitir ok dreif á sárit. Þat grøðir ok hreinsar. (D:126; 434:380)

For a wound – take the powder of the grass called centaury and sprinkle it on the wound. This will heal and cleanse.

17. Við augnaverk – Tak rót af því grasi er verbena heitir ok blǫð þess gras er feniculum heitir ok stappa bæði saman ok berr í augun. (D:122; 434:380; (194:70))

For pain in the eyes – take the root of the grass called vervain, and the leaves of the herb called fennel, and mash them together and apply to the eyes.

18. Við augnamyrkva – Tak gras þat er heitir minna pulegium ok stappa vel ok drekk þat fastandi oft. Þat bætir ok birtir augu. (434:381)

For dim eyes – take the herb that is called lesser pulegium [pennyroyal][82] and mash it well, and drink it often while fasting. This will improve and clear the eyes.

19. Við tármild augu – Tak skógarsúru ok blanda við fornt vín ok hirt þat í glerkeri ok neyt af því oft. (434:381)

For teary eyes – take sorrel and mix it with old wine and keep it in a glass vessel and consume it often.

20. Við nasraufadaun – Tak lǫg af mintu ok hell í. Þat tekr óþef af. (D:120; 434:381)

For a stench in the nostrils – take a liquid of mint and pour it in. This will remove the odour.

21. Við augnamyrkva– Tak malurt ok stappa vel ok egg ok sjóð hart. Sker síðan í sundr ok tak ór it rauða ok legg í staðinn malurtina stappaða. En þá er þú ferr sofa, þá legg við útan á hvarmana sem þú mátt hafa. Þat skírir ok birtir augun. (D:122; 434:381)

For dim eyes – take wormwood and mash it well, and an egg and hard boil it. Then cut it and take the yolk out of it and put the mashed wormwood in its place. And when you go to sleep, then apply this outside your eyelids, as you can. This will clear and brighten the eyes.

22. Gras þat er vitrum heitir þurrkat ok gǫrt at dusti – Blanda þat við vín ok gef manni drekka. Þat brýtr stein í blǫðru manns. (D:113; 434:381)

The plant that is called [woad],[83] dried and made into powder – mix it with wine and give a man to drink. This will break a stone in a man's bladder.

23. Þors grønn stappaðr vel ok blandaðr við súrt vín – Þat er gott at þvá hǫfuð við. (D:119; 434:381; 194:64–65)

Sweet gale, green, mashed well and mixed with sour wine[84] – that is good to wash one's head with.

82 *Mentha pulegium*, see Kristensen, *Harpestræng*, 308.

83 This is uncertain. *Vitrum* may here possibly refer to glass rather than the plant woad, misunderstood as "gras" (grass). See Larsen, *Medical Miscellany*, 237; Kristensen, *Harpestræng*, 312. In *De gradibus*, the same effects are attributed to *Aros* (arum lilies?). Constantine, 350.

84 That is, vinegar.

24. Gras þat er acacia heitir – Legg við enda þarms, ef út snýst, þá mun aftr snúask ok svá sár, ef um vendisk. (D:112; 434:381)

The plant that is called acacia [gum Arabic] – apply it to the rectum if it twists out, then it will turn back, and also wounds if they become twisted.

25. Gras þat er rubea heitir, þat er roðagras – Þat hrindr út ór óléttri konu, þó at barn sé dautt. (D:88; 434:381)

The plant that is called rubea [rose madder], that is *roðagras* [lit.: reddening plant] – it expels a baby out of a pregnant woman, even if it is dead.

26. Jǫrð sú er á innsigli er lǫgð ok manns líkneski er á – Hon er góð við ormsbit ok annarra flugorma. Ok ef manni er gefinn ólyfjansdrykkr, þá drekki hann af þessi jǫrðunni. Þat hrindr eitri út, en sakar ekki. (D:124; 434:381)

The soil on which a seal is impressed and a man's likeness – it is good against a snake bite and the bite of flying insects. And if a man is given a poisonous drink, then he should drink from this soil. This will expel the poison, but does no harm.[85]

27. Muskus heitir forað. Þat elsk í kviði eins dýrs. Þat er kiðlingi glíkt þeim er elsk á Indíaland. Þat renn saman af blóði þess dýrs ok ystisk sem mjolk. En þá er þat er fullvaxið, þá óðisk svá dýrit, at þat þolir hvergi, nema renn til trés eða staurs. En þá staurask þat svá lengi við í óviti, at þat raufar á sér kviðinn. En forað þat fellr út. (D:124)

Muskus is the name of a monster [or: mud].[86] It grows in the belly of an animal that is similar to the kid that exists in India. It runs from the blood of that animal and curdles like milk. And when it is fully grown the animal becomes so mad that it cannot rest unless it runs into a tree or a post. And then it ramps on for so long in its folly that it tears its belly. And that monster falls out.

85 This is a reference to the so-called *terra sigillata*, "small moulds of clay containing iron oxide exported from the island of Lemnos. It was considered a good antidote for all poisons." (Larsen, *Medical Miscellany*, 208 f3). See also Kålund, *Den islandske lægebog*, 381–382f; Constantine, *De gradibus*, 353.

86 *Forað* can mean "mud" or "wet dirt," "pit," "morass," and the like, as well as "monster." The male musk deer produces a red-brown paste in its abdominal glands, used in perfumery. Here, *forað* seems more likely to refer to the mud-like substance, and the translation "monster" (Larsen, *Medical Miscellany*, 208) may perhaps be a mistranslation. See a corresponding Latin text in Constantine, *De gradibus*, 354; Kristensen, *Harpestræng*, 41, 131. Among the described effects of *muskus* are that it strengthens the body with its pleasant smell and combats infections. Ibid., 41.

28. Steinn sá er koralus heitir – Hann er góðr við augu ok augnamyrkva. (D:122; 434:382)

The stone that is called coral – it is good for the eyes and the dimness of the eyes.

29. Balsamum bøtir myrk augun ok skírir. ((D:121); 434:382)

Balsam[87] improves and clears dimness of the eyes.

30. Reykelsi stǫðvar blóðrás, hvaðan sem renn. Ok þat linar saur[88] í endaþarmi eða í ǫðrum stað lætr eigi vaxa. Ef þat er temprat við mjólk ok við lagt, þá er þat lækning. (D:51; 434:382; 194:67–68)

Incense stops blood from flowing, wherever it runs from. And it loosens excrements in the rectum or prevents it from growing in other places. If it is tempered with milk and applied, then it is a cure.

31. Dioskurides segir af grasi því er peonia heitir: „Ek sá svein einn átta vetra gamlan, er hafði þat gras hengt á hals sér. En þá barsk svá at of daginn, at þat gras féll af honum. En þegar jafnskjótt féll sveinninn niðr ok hafði brotfall. En þá var þat aftr horfit í annat sinn á hann ok þá sakaði sveinninn ekki meðan hann hafði þat á sér. En þá féll af honum í annat sinn, en jafnskjótt féll hann í ina sǫmu sótt sem hann hafði fyrr. En þá var grasit bundit á hann enn ok bǽttisk jafnskjótt. Ok sǫmu lund fór sinn it þriðja: Spiltisk er af var, en batnaði er á var bundit." Sama vitni berr Galienus, inn spakasti maðr, of þat sama gras. (D:120; 434:382)

Dioscorides says about the plant called peony: "I saw a boy, eight years old, who had that plant hung around his neck. And then it happened one day that the plant fell off him. And immediately the boy fell down and had an epileptic fit. And then it was put on him again and the boy was in no harm while he had it on him. And then it fell off him a second time, and immediately he fell into the same sickness as he had before. And then the plant was put on him again and he recovered straight away. And the same thing happened for the third time: deteriorated when it was off but recovered when it was put on him." Galen, the wisest of men, testifies in the same way about that same plant.

87 This presumably refers to balm of Gilead, or balsam of Mecca, the mastic of the tree *Commiphora gileadensis,* the Arabian balsam tree. See Larsen, *Medical Miscellany*, 228. However, balsam can be collected from a variety of plants. It was used by the church, mixed with olive oil, to make chrism.

88 "sar" (wound) in D (Larsen, *Medical Miscellany*, 51) and AM 194 8vo (Kålund, *Alfræði íslenzk*, 67).

32. Bǫrkr af selju við súrt vín stappaðr – Þat tekr af vǫrtur. (D:127; 434:382)

Bark of willow, mashed with sour wine – that removes warts.

33. Svá mælti Galienus: Mjolk sú er riðin er ór seljubǫrk þá er hon er blómguð – Þat birtir in augu ok bøtir mjǫk. (D:122; 434:383)

So said Galen: The milk that is wrung from willow bark when the willow has bloomed – that clears the eyes and improves them greatly.

34. Lǫgr af seljukvistum ok blómi, ef hann er drukkinn – Hann stǫðvar blóðrás ok meinar konum bǫrn at geta. (434:383)

The juice of willow twigs and flowers, if it is drunk – it stops a bleeding and prevents a woman from conceiving children.

35. Minta styrkir kvið ok gerir munn vel þefaðan. ((D:120,77); 434:383)

Mint strengthens the stomach and makes the mouth smell pleasantly.

36. En plástr gǫrt af mintu ok salti – Þat er gott við óðs hunds bit. (D:126,77; 434:383)

A plaster made of mint and salt – that is good against a mad dog's bite.

37. Gras þat er heitir elleborum hvítt blandat við mjolk ok temprat við hunang – Þat drepr mýs, ef eta því. En af því blandat dust við vatn ok stǫkt of hús – Þat drepr flugur. (D:129; 434:383; (194:73–74))

The plant that is called white hellebore, mixed with milk and tempered with honey – this kills mice if they eat of it. And its dust, mixed with water and sprinkled about the house – that kills flies.

38. Gras þat er ciminum heitir drukkit með víni – Þat hreinsar bit flugdýra. En ef þat er blásit í nasraufar manns – Þat heftir nefdreyra. (434:383)

The plant called caraway, drunk with wine – that cleans the bites of flying insects. And if it is blown into a man's nostrils – that stops a nosebleed.

39. Lǫgr grass þess er chelidonia heitir – Þat hreinsar ok hvessir sýn ok þunga vøkva í manni þurrkar þat. (D:122; 434:383; (194:69))

The juice of the plant called celandine – that cleans and sharpens the vision and dries heavy humours in a man.

40. Gras þat er ruta heitir – Þat drepr losta í manni ok hreinsar bit flugdýra. (D:122; 434:383)

The plant which is called rue – it kills lust in a man and cleanses the bites of flying insects.

41. Salt ok línfræ gǫrt af því plástr – Þat hreinsar enn flugdýrabit.
(D:122)

Salt and flax seed, made into a plaster – that also cleanses the bites of flying insects.

42. Eyrsilfr drukkit – Þat gerir bana. Því at í hvern lim er þat renn, þá skefr þat innan. En ef þat verðr í eld lagt, þá gerir þat meinsaman reyk. Þann flýja ormar ok af þeim reyk deyja flugdýr.
(D:122–123; 434:383)

Drinking quick-silver – that brings death. For it scrapes every limb it flows into from the inside. And if it is laid in a fire, it produces a harmful smoke. Worms flee from that smoke and flying insects die from it.

43. Malurt blandin við ufsagall[89] ok smurt of eyru manns – Þat styrkir þau ok hrindr frá óhljóð. En ef þat er lagt í klæðaǫrk, þá mun mǫlr eigi spilla. Ok ef blek verðr gǫrt af því vatni er malurt er í – Þær ritningar munu haldask. Þær þora eigi mýss skeðja.
(D:123; 434:383–384)

Wormwood mixed with coalfish-gall and rubbed on a man's ears – that strengthens them and repels noise. And if it is laid in a clothes-chest, then moths will do no damage. And if ink is made from water that contains wormwood – those writings will last. Mice will not dare to destroy them.

44. Við hósta – Tak reykelsi þat er mirra heitir ok halt lengi undir tungurótum.
(D:110; 434:384; (194:67))

For a cough – take that incense which is called myrrh and hold it for a long time under the roots of the tongue.

45. En við þat sama – Tak rót af grasi því er levisticum heitir ok stappa við vín ok drekk.
(D:110; 434:384)

And for the same – take the root of that plant which is called lovage and mash it with wine and drink.

46. En við þat sama ok svá at hreinsa lungu – Tak þat er vex á viði ellifu korn ok ellifu piparkorn ok ellifu af feniculo, mel þat alt í dust ok blanda við hunang. Ok et af þvísa hvern dag spán fullan fastandi. Þessa er opt freistat.
(D:110; 434:384)

And for the same and to clean the lungs – take eleven seeds that grow on a willow and eleven pepper corns and eleven of fennel, grind all this to a powder and mix it with honey. And then eat from this, a spoonful every day fasting. This has often been tried.

89 D reads "uxa gall" (ox-gall). See Larsen, *Medical Miscellany*, 123.

47. En við hósta – Gras þat er heitir pimpinella blanda við súrt vín ok gef honum drekka. Þá mun batna. (D:110–11; 434:384)

Again, for a cough – mix the plant which is called pimpinella with sour wine and give it to him to drink. Then it will improve.

48. Gras þat er heitir feniculum – Stappa þat við vín. Þat er gott við blǫðrusótt. (D:113; 434:384)

The plant which is called fennel – mash it with wine. That is good for disease of the bladder.

49. En við þat sama – Þá er þú ferr sofa, tak rúgbrauð ok svíð við eld ok et þat svá sviðit með vǫrmu víni. (D:113; 434:384)

And for the same – when you go to sleep, take rye bread and toast it over fire and then eat it toasted with warm wine.

50. Við siklan – Tak gras þat er salvia heitir ok stappa við súrt vín ok drekk. Þá mun létta. ((D:112n5))

For a flowing of the spittle[90] – take the plant which is called sage and mash it with sour wine and drink. Then it will improve.

51. En við þat sama – Haf baðar hendr þínar í vatni vǫrmu ok drekk lítit súrt vín. (D:112)

And for the same – keep both your hands in warm water and drink a little sour wine.

52. Til skírar raustar – Tak pipar ok tygg ok haf í munni þér lengi ok svelg síðan hrákann niðr ok spýt út fl[osinu].[91] (D:115; 434:384; 194:68)

For a clear voice – take pepper and chew it and keep it in your mouth for a long time, and then swallow the spit and spit out the sh[ells].

90 For the translation of this word, "siklan," which does not occur elsewhere, see Kålund, *Den islandske lægebog*, 384f. He points out that the word exists in Norwegian dialects, in this meaning.

91 The clause continues in 434. See Kålund, *Den islandske lægebog*, 384.

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SUMMARY

"Eyrsilfr drukkit, þat gerir bana": The Earliest Old Norse Medical Book, AM 655 XXX 4to, and Its Context

Keywords: AM 655 XXX 4to, medieval medicine, Old Norse medical books, history of medicine, Henrik Harpestræng, vernacular medical books, Old Norse medicine

This essay offers an examination of an Icelandic thirteenth-century manuscript fragment which represents the earliest extant traces of a medical book in the vernacular in medieval Scandinavian culture. The fragment contains fifty-two articles, describing various ailments and their cures as well as the medical effects of different plants and other materials. The origins of this manuscript remain enigmatic. The essay aims to shed what light is possible on its origins and use. It includes a description of the manuscript's physical characteristics, an analysis of its literary and sociological context, and a critical discussion of what this may tentatively tell us about the production, purpose, and use of the medical codex to which the fragment once belonged. The manuscript materially exemplifies the movement of Arabic and Latin medical knowledge from Italy to Denmark through Norway to Iceland. The essay further argues that the manuscript's obscure relationship to five other Old Norse medical books illustrates the common medieval tradition of freely reworking medical material into individual specific contexts. The physical features of the fragment indicate that the codex which it

represents was considered both practical and important, and that its purpose was to be used as an instrument in healing practices in thirteenth-century Iceland. An English translation of the fragment's text is appended.

ÁGRIP

„Eyrsilfr drukkit, þat gerir bana“: Elsta norræna lækningabókin, AM 655 XXX 4to, og samhengi hennar

Efnisorð: AM 655 xxx 4to, lækningar á miðöldum, fornnorrænar lækningabækur, Henrik Harpestræng

Í greininni er tekið til skoðunar íslenskt handritsbrot frá þrettándu öld sem inniheldur elsta varðveitta lækningatextann á norrænu tungumáli. Í handritinu eru fimmtíu og tvær klausur sem lýsa ýmsum krankleikum og viðeigandi lækningum við þeim, ásamt útlistunum á lækningamætti jurta og annarra efna. Handritið er birtingarmynd útbreiðslu arabískra og latneskra lækningatexta sem bárust til Íslands að öllum líkindum í gegnum Danmörku og Noreg. Uppruni þess er að öðru leyti óljós og er markmið greinarinnar að varpa ljósi á tilurð þess, notkun og sögulegt samhengi. Í greininni eru færð rök fyrir því að torrætt samband handritsins við fimm aðrar íslenskar lækningabækur frá miðöldum endurspegli þá algengu aðferð að endurrita læknisráð frjálslega, fyrir hvert og eitt einstakt samhengi. Efnisleg sérkenni handritsbrotsins benda til þess að handritið hafi verið talið gagnlegt og mikilvægt, og að tilgangur þess hafi verið að nota það sem handbók við lækningar á Íslandi á þrettándu öld. Í viðauka við greinina er ensk þýðing á texta handritsins með athugasemdum.

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