

**A TREATISE ON THE
ASTROLABE, A. D.
1391; TRACTATUS DE
TONCSIONIBUS ASTROLABII**

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A treatise on the astrolabe, A. D. 1391; Tractatus de Toncionibus Astrolabii by Geoffrey Chaucer & Walter W. Skeat

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GEOFFREY CHAUCER & WALTER W. SKEAT

**A TREATISE ON THE
ASTROLABE, A. D.
1391; TRACTATUS DE
TONCSIONIBUS ASTROLABII**

A Treatise on The Astrolabe

addressed to his son Lewis
by
Geoffrey Chaucer

A.D. 1391

EDITED FROM THE EARLIEST MSS.

BY

WALTER W. SKEAT

'His Astrelabie, longynge for his art'

Canterbury Tales, A 3209

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P R E F A C E.

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE MSS.

§ 1. THE existing MSS. of the "Astrolabe" are still numerous. I have been successful in finding no less than *eighteen*, sixteen of which I here describe.¹ It is remarkable that, although many printed editions of the treatise have appeared, no first-class MS. has ever hitherto come under the notice of any one of the various editors. This point will appear more clearly hereafter.

§ 2. A.—MS. Dd. 3. 53 (part 2) in the Cambridge University Library. The "Treatise on the Astrolabe" begins at fol. 212 of the MS. considered as a whole, but the folios are now properly renumbered throughout the treatise, as in the present volume. The MS. is of vellum, and the writing clear and good, with a great number of neatly drawn diagrams, which appear wherever the words "lo here thi figure" occur in the text. This MS. I have made the basis of the text, and it is followed with minute exactness except when notice to the contrary is given in the Critical Notes. Wherever any change of even slight importance is made, notice is drawn to the alteration by the use of square brackets.

This MS. is of considerable importance. The hand-writing

¹ Two were kindly pointed out to me by Mr Bradshaw after this Preface was in type. Both are imperfect. They are (1) MS. Bodley 68, ending with Part ii. sect. 36, chiefly remarkable for containing the title "Bred and Mylk for children"; and (2) MS. E Museo 116, in the Bodleian Library, which contains a fragment of the latter part of the treatise on vellum, in the hand-writing of the scribe of MS. Camb. Gg. 4. 27.

exactly resembles that in MS. B., and a comparison of the MSS. leads to the following results. It appears that MSS. A. and B. were written out by the same scribe, nearly at the same time. The peculiarities of spelling, particularly those which are faulty, are the same in both in a great many instances. It is also clear that the said scribe had but a very dim notion of what he was writing, and committed just such blunders as are described in Chaucer's Lines to Adam Scrivener, and are there attributed to "negligence and rape."¹ It is still more interesting to observe that Chaucer tells us that he had to amend his MSS. by "rubbing and scraping" with his own hand; for MS. A. and B. differ precisely in this point, viz. that while the latter is left uncorrected, the former has been diligently "rubbed and scraped" by the hand of a corrector who well knew what he was doing, and the right letters have been inserted in the right places over the erasures. These inserted letters are in the hand of a second scribe who was a better writer than the first, and who was entrusted with the task of drawing the diagrams. The two hands are contemporaneous, as appears from the additions to the diagrams made by the writer of the text. Unfortunately, there are still a good many errors left. This is because the blunders were so numerous as to beguile the corrector into passing over some of them. When, for example, the scribe, having to write "lo here thi figure" at the end of nearly every section, took the trouble to write the last word "figure" or "vigour" in nearly every instance, we are not surprised to find that, in a few places, the word has escaped correction. It further appears that some of the later sections, particularly sections 39 and 40, have not been properly revised; the corrector may very well have become a little tired of his task by the time he arrived at them. It must also be remembered, that such blunders as are made by a scribe who is not clear as to the meaning of his subject-matter are by no means the blunders which are most puzzling or most misleading; they are obvious at once as evident blotches, and the general impression left upon the mind by the perusal of this MS. is—that a careless scribe copied it from some almost perfect original, and that his errors were

¹ I. e. haste, rapidity. Cf. "Rydyng ful *rapely*;" *Piers the Plowman*, B. xvii. 49.

partially corrected by an intelligent corrector, who grew tired of his task just towards the end.

The order of the conclusions in Part ii. differs from that in all the editions hitherto printed, and the MS. terminates abruptly in the middle of a sentence, at the words "howre after howre" in Conclusion 40. A portion of the page of the MS. below these words is left blank, though the colophon "Explicit tractatus," &c., was added at the bottom of the page at a later period.

Certain allusions in the former part of the MS. render it probable that it was written in London, about the year 1400.

§ 3. B.—MS. E Museo 54, in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. This is an uncorrected duplicate of the preceding, as has been explained, and ends in the same way, at the words "howre after howre," followed by a blank space. The chief addition is the rubricated title—"Bred and mylk For childeren," boldly written at the beginning; in the margin are the following notes in a late hand—"Sir Jiffray Chaucer"—"*Dominus* Gaufredus Chaucerus"—"*Galfredi* Chauceri Tractatus de Ratione et vsu Astrolabij ad Ludovicum filium." At the end is the note—"Liber Francisci Beyley, 1637. Franc. Bayley, Noui Collegij Socius, Anno Dom., 1637. Ned. Tourner."

Before I undertook the present edition, a transcript of part of this MS. had been made for the Early English Text Society, which afterwards came into my hands. A portion of the text was "set up" from it, but the proof sheets were corrected by MS. A. I mention this to show how *closely* the two MSS. resemble each other in spelling. It is very seldom that such a course is practicable; but in this instance it occasioned no difficulty.

§ 4. C.—MS. Rawlinson, Misc. 1370 (leaves 22—42), in the Bodleian Library, Oxford.

This is a beautifully written MS., on vellum, with 38 pages of text, and 4 blank pages. It has the conclusions in the same order as the preceding, six well-executed diagrams, and corrections on nearly every page. It is of early date, perhaps about A.D. 1420, and of considerable importance. It agrees closely with the text, and, like it, ends with "howre after howre." Some variations of spelling are

to be found in the Critical Notes. In this MS. the "Conclusions" are numbered in the margin, and the numbers agree with those adopted in this edition.

§ 5. D.—MS. Ashmole 391, in the Bodleian Library. This contains several tracts of very different dates—including tracts on astrology, calendars, tables, a *printed* tract, a tract on houses and horoscopes, a Latin tract with a very carefully painted picture resembling that given as fig. 19 in this volume, and finally, Chaucer's "Astrolabie." This is an old and well-written copy on vellum, with illuminated border on the first page, fair diagrams, blue and flourished capital letters, &c., and is much faded. It begins—"Lite lowys my sone, I aparceyue wel by certeyn euydences"—and contains the following, viz. all of Part i; Part ii, sections 1, 2, and part of 3, down to "18 degrees of heighte taken bi myn" in l. 30, after which several leaves are lost; then comes sect. 25, beginning at l. 17—"but for ensauple; For wel I woot þe latitude of Oxenford," &c., followed by sections 26, 27, 28, 29, 30, and part of 31, down to l. 9—"The maner of diuysion of þe." The rest is torn away. I have made but little use of this MS., on account of its being so imperfect.

§ 6. E.—MS. Bodley 619. This MS., like B., has the title—"Brede and Milke for children." Like other good MSS., it ends sect. 40 with "houre after houre." But after this, there occurs an additional section, which is probably not genuine, but which I have printed here (for the sake of completeness) as section 46; which see.

There are some Latin notes in this MS. which are worth notice. The first is a note on Chaucer's words in Part i, sect. 10, l. 14, that "the sonne dwelleth ther-for neuere the more ne lesse in on signe than in another," which declares this to be a mistake, for the sun dwells longer in Cancer than in Capricorn; an observation which is perfectly correct.

Again, at the end of sect. 3 in Part ii, we have a Latin paragraph, beginning—"Nota, quod si quot miliaria sunt inter duas regiones"—and ending—"dando 100. miliaria. Idem facies de longitudinibus, si fuerint diuerse, & latitudines eodem." This is a quotation from Mesahala (see p. 97), and is very interesting, be-