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RHYMING RECIPES IN MEDIEVAL COOKBOOKS*

The present paper deals with a late medieval culinary collection, *Liber Cure Cocorum*. The collection differs from the other known culinary manuscripts of the time due to its being written in verse. Altogether the poem consists of 137 recipes and four other fragments which introduce four sections of the collection: pottages, sauces, roast foods and ‘small cookery’. Most of the instructions included in *Liber Cure Cocorum* are known from other medieval collections, written in prose (cf. Hieatt 2006). In the article the collection will be analysed from two perspectives. First, the structure of culinary poems will be discussed in order to examine the degree of their compliance with the traditional model of the medieval recipe. Next, although the authorship of the collection is anonymous, we will try to reveal who its author was and whom he meant as the target audience. For this purpose, we will pay attention to fragments in which the author directly refers to himself and/or to the potential reader. Additionally, any details included in the particular recipe components which might expose the potential poet and/or the audience will be discussed. By looking closely at the structure of the recipes and the intended audience, we will try to answer the question why it was written in verse rather than in prose.

1. Introduction

The number of rhyming recipes found in medieval manuscripts is scarce. To our knowledge, only two Middle English culinary manuscripts contain instructions written in verse; these are: Sloane MS 1986 (with 140 recipes) and Pepys MS 1047 (with only 4 rhymed recipes, all of which are also found in the former manuscript). Görlach (2004: 127) suggests two possible reasons for such a scarcity of culinary verse: (1) the text type evolved too late to be affected by the rhymed form; and (2) rhymes might have been perceived inappropriate for the recipe. Whilst so unpopular in terms of English culinary recipes, the interest in verse increased among

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writers of the alchemical instructions from the 14th century on (see Timmermann 2013). Timmermann claims that the interest in rhymed recipes was motivated by such practical reasons as (a) ease to remember the ingredients and the particular steps of the procedure, and (b) by the fact that it was a practical way of introducing new (alchemical) terminology and ingredients. The latter has also been suggested by Weiss Adamson (2002), who analysed a German medieval cookbook¹.

2. *Liber Cure Cocorum*

Before we start the analysis of the structure and content of the recipes included in *Liber Cure Cocorum* (*LCC*), we shall briefly discuss what is known about the collection. It was written in a 15th-century northern dialect by an anonymous author and constituted an appendix to a larger collection, i.e., *the Boke of Curtasye* (written in prose). Our analysis will be based on the first edition of *Liber Cure Cocorum*, which was prepared by Richard Morris.²

Altogether, the collection consists of one hundred and thirty seven recipes and four fragments which introduce or conclude the four thematic sections of the collection: pottages, sauces, roast foods, and ‘small cookery’ (‘petecure’), see example (1). *Liber Cure Cocorum* makes the impression of being designed as a complete cookbook. Apart from the division into sections, it begins with a table of contents. And the author himself tells the reader how to use the collection and what to expect in terms of the structure of the collection: “Po names in tabulle I schalle sete / Po number in augrym above, with outen lete, / In augrim þat schalle wryten be, / An þo tytels with in on þo same degre” (*LCC* ll. 11-14).

- (1) **Here endes oure cure, þat I of spake,
Of potage, hasteletes, and mete ibake
And sawce þer to,** with oute lesyng,
Cryst mot our sowles to hevene bryng.

Explicit hic quartus passus.

Of petecure I wylle preche;
What falles þer to 3ow wylle I teche;
Fore pore menne þys crafte is tolde
(...)

(*LCC*)

¹ Weiss Adamson refers to the prologue of the oldest German cookbook, *Das buch von gûter spise*, dated to the middle of the 14th century, which written in verse explains that the recipes are “designed to make inexperienced cook wise” (2002: 167).

² Nowadays a number of online transcriptions are also available, for instance, by Thomas Gloning: <http://www.staff.uni-giessen.de/gloning/tx/lcc3.htm>, or Cindy Renfrow: <http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/lcc/parallel.html>.

In fact, what we actually find in the collection deviates from the author's words: the recipes are neither numbered, nor are they in agreement with the table of contents. For instance, thirteen recipes found in the collection have not been included in the table of contents (e.g., *For heroun rostyd*, *Pur verde sawce*, *Capons in Cassolyce*); and some recipes listed at the beginning of the collection have not been included further in the cookbook (e.g., *Mylke of almonde*).

3. The structure of the recipes

To start with, a few words concerning the traditional (i.e., written in prose) model of a medieval culinary recipe have to be written to serve as a point of reference for the analysis of the structure of the rhymed instructions. The composition of medieval culinary recipes was discussed by for instance Görlach (1992, 2004), Carroll (1999), Bator (2016), Bator and Sylwanowicz (2017a).³ These authors agree on the following pattern of the text type:

HEADING (title/statement of purpose) ^ PROCEDURE (list of ingredients/preparation) ^ SERVING

The study conducted by Bator and Sylwanowicz (2017a) has shown that the obligatory elements of a culinary recipe are the heading and the procedure. The former usually takes the form of a title (i.e. a noun or a nominal phrase), which was the case in 79% of the medieval instructions analysed by the authors. The latter obligatory component, i.e., the procedure usually does not make any distinction between the list of ingredients and the preparation (the former are incorporated into the latter), cf. Carroll (2005-6); the prevailing grammatical structure used in the preparation section is the imperative, cf. Görlach (2004). Finally, the serving component is an optional element in the medieval recipes. The information on serving is usually limited to a formulaic phrase *and serve forth*, which as Bator (forthc.) argues should belong to the preparation rather than the serving component, since in most cases it occurs at the end of a recipe and is not accompanied by any specifying details, cf. “and serue hem forth.” vs. “And serue him forthe colde with leues of parcelly wet in vinegre.” (*Boke of Kokery*).⁴ Some precise information on serving was included only in 14% of the medieval recipes written in prose (Bator and Sylwanowicz 2017a: 25-28).

³ Additionally, the structure of other types (medical, alchemical, general) of medieval recipes was discussed among others by Stannard (1982), Hunt (1994), Alonso Almeida (1998-1999), Taavitsainen (2001), Grund (2003), Mäkinen (2004), Marttila (2014).

⁴ On the discussion of the formulaic phrase *and serve forth*, see also Jones (1998) and Bator (2014: 182-184).

Similarly to the traditional recipe model, in *Liber Cure Cocorum* we may distinguish the heading, the procedure and the serving component. A closer look at the particular sections, however, reveals certain differences between the instructions written in verse and in prose. All but three rhymed recipes begin with a heading. But unlike in the traditional model, most of the headings in the analysed collection (57%) take the form of statements of purpose (which come to only 20% in the traditional collections). These begin with: (a) a prepositional phrase, (b) an infinitive, (c) a nominal phrase followed by a prepositional phrase, (d) a clause, or (e) *another*-phrase,⁵ for examples see (2).

- (2) (a) For pekokys and pertrikis.
 For lamprays bakun.
 For tenchis in grave.
 For a brothe of elys.
- (b) For to make a rape.
 To preve venegur, weper hit be fyne.
 For sethe ray.
 For to make a potage of oysturs.
- (c) Sawce fore vele and venysone.
 Gawncel for þe gose.
 Sawce best for capons rostyed.

The remaining 43% of the headings in *Liber Cure Cocorum* are titles, which consist of nouns or nominal phrases, sometimes followed by a prepositional phrase which usually specifies with what or when the dish is to be served, see examples under (3). This form of the heading dominates (79%) in the collections written in prose. The ratio of occurrence of the particular heading forms found in *Liber Cure Cocorum* is illustrated in Figure 1.

- (3) Furmente.
 Iusselle.
 Kaudel Ferry.
 Gruel of Porke.
 Chekyns in browet.
 Gose in a Hogge pot.
 Hasteletes on fysshe day.

⁵ In the traditional model the statements of purpose take the form of: (a) a prepositional phrase – 2%, (b) an infinitive – 16%, (c) a clause – 1%, and (d) *another*-phrase – 1% (Bator and Sylwanowicz 2017a).

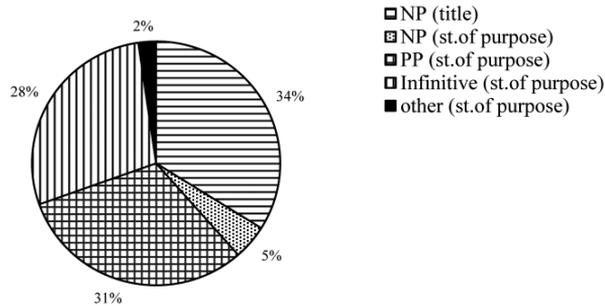


Figure 1. The number of occurrences of the particular types of headings in *Liber Cure Cocorum*.

The headings are followed by the procedure, which in the case of *Liber Cure Cocorum* is more varied in terms of the grammatical structures than in the traditional recipe. In the collections written in prose it is the imperative which prevails with RNF⁶ of over 160 occurrences, comparing to only 14 RNF of personal verbal forms, 2 RNF of modal verbs and 0.5 RNF of infinitives found in the analysed traditional collections (Bator and Sylwanowicz 2017b). In *Liber Cure Cocorum* apart from the typical imperative clauses (65%), as in (4), the poet uses verbal structures preceded by the 2nd or 1st person pronouns (16% and 10% respectively). The former constructions (2nd p. pronoun + verb) might, in turn, take a variety of forms to express obligation, for instance by the use of (a) the imperative form of verb, (b) modal verb, (c) indicative form of verb, etc., see examples under (5). The latter verbal structures, i.e., those with the 1st person pronoun, occur exclusively at the end of lines, which might indicate that they were used purely to obtain such poetic devices as rhyme or rhythm⁷, see (6).

- (4) **Take** good almonde mylke anone
 And **lye hit up** with amydone
 Or with floure of ryse, þou may;
Coloure hit with safron, I þe say;
Boyle hit after yche adele,
Charge hit with flesshe brayed wele;
Seson hit with sugur and þen þy dysshe
 With almondes set þou schalle florysshe.
 (Viande de Cipur)

⁶ RNF = relative frequency normalized to 1,000 words.

⁷ The use of poetic devices in the collection is a broad topic on its own and deserves a separate publication, thus, it will not be discussed in the present paper in detail.

- (5) (a) Take capons and schalde and pyke hom þen;
 Þe skyn **þou opon**, as I þe kenne,
 (Capons in Cassolyce)

- (b) Thre leches of bacun **lay þou mot**
 In brothe; and serve fulle wele þou wot
 (For white pese after porray)

With sugur candy, **þou may hit dowce**,
 If hit be served in grete lordys howce.
 (Furmente)

Put hit in cofyn, þat harde is bake,
 And 3olke of egge þen **schalt þou take**,
 (For custanes)

- (c) And þagh **þou sethe** hit alle day,
 Hit wolde seme rawe by any kyn way.
 (Now sly3tes of cure wylle I preche)

- (6) On smalle gobettis; put hom in pot
 With mynsud onyouns, ful wele **I wot**,
 (For comyne sewe)

Fyrst wortes and salt befe þou shalle have,
 With capon in erbe þer to **I cawe**;
 (For a servise on flesshe day)

Fyrst stop þy capone with saveray,
 With persyl, a lytil ysope **I say**;
 (For capons in erbis)

Additionally, there are also occurrences of other structures, such as relative clauses or passive constructions, as in (7), however, these were rather insignificant in number. Figure 2 presents the ratio of occurrence of the most prominent verbal structures found in the rhymed collection.

- (7) Pekokys and pertrikys **perboyld schyn be**,
 (For pekoes and pertrikis)

Alle rawe þo hare **schalle hacked be**,
 (Harus in sewe)

Coloure hit with safron, **þat is me lefe**,
 (Iusselle)

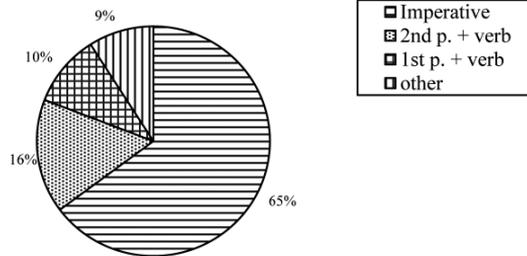


Figure 2. The ratio of occurrence of the most prominent verbal constructions found in the preparation section of the recipes in *Liber Cure Cocorum*.

The final recipe component gives the reader details concerning the serving of a particular dish. Although it is not an obligatory recipe component, it was found in 67 of the analysed culinary poems (i.e., 49%), whereas, as found in Bator and Sylwanowicz (2017a), in the traditional collections information on serving was included only in 14% of the recipes. Among the details on serving found in *Liber Cure Cocorum* we may distinguish the following (see also Figure 3):

- the best time to serve a particular dish (e.g., at feast, on fish/flesh-day):

(8) Of servis tel 3ou no more I wylle,
For a comyne fest at home be skylle.
 (For anoþer maner of service on flesshe day)

þat called is mylke soppys in serves
For Satyrday at ny3t, so have I blys.
 (For seke menne)

- the place where the dish should be served (e.g., in hall):

(9) With oute, with batere of egges and floure,
To serve in sale or ellys in boure.
 (For wesels)

For to be served in goode mennys howse.
 (Chekyns in browet)

- the way of serving, the plate or the ingredients with which it should be served (e.g., boiled, hot, sliced, with wine, etc.):

(10) **On brode leches serve hit þou schalle,**
With fraunche mele or oþer metis with alle.
 (For a tansy cake)

In þe same sewe; serve hit þou may
In a disshe togedur I say.

(For sirup)

Servid forthe with pekok and pertrik wylde.

(For pekokys and pertrikis)

– the people to whom the dish should be offered (e.g., good men, lords):

(11) And frye hom in buttur, as I þe kenne,
 To serve on fyssh day **before gode men.**

(For a froyse)

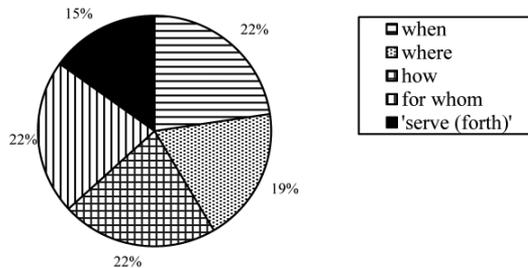


Figure 3. The ratio of occurrence of the 'serving' information in *Liber Cure Cocorum*.

On the surface the structure of the recipes in *Liber Cure Cocorum* agrees with that of a traditional medieval culinary recipe, i.e., heading > procedure > serving. However, a closer look at the internal structure of the particular components reveals a number of differences: (a) the preferred form of the heading in *Liber Cure Cocorum* is the statement of purpose; (b) the prevailing structure used throughout the preparation section, similarly to the recipes written in prose, are imperatives, but in *Liber Cure Cocorum* other structures such as personal verbal forms are more common than elsewhere; and (c) many more rhymed recipes contain information about the way of serving a particular dish. Table 1 shows the differences more precisely.

The above mentioned differences may result from the fact that being written in verse, the collection required a number of poetic devices, such as rhythm and rhyme, to be applied. These in turn might have affected the variety of grammatical structures used in the analysed collection, e.g., frequent use of the 1st person pronoun which always occurs at the end of lines. The use of verse may also explain the addition of some details such as serving information, which is rather infrequent in the texts written in prose. The discrepancies in the form of the heading may be accounted for by the difference in the intended audience. Medieval culinary collections were aimed at professional cooks who knew the

Table 1. The ratio of occurrence of particular structural elements in *Liber Cure Cocorum* and traditional recipe collections written in prose⁸

		<i>Liber Cure Cocorum</i>	Traditional recipes
Heading	title	43%	79%
	statement of purpose	57%	20%
Procedure	imperative	65%	90%
	personal verb forms	26%	8%
	other	9%	2%
Serving		49%	14%

dishes (together with their names) and did not need to be informed what the dish is good for (cf. Hammond 1993, Scully 1995); thus, the traditional headings were usually names of dishes (i.e., titles). The predominance of statements of purpose in *Liber Cure Cocorum* suggests that the collection was aimed at lay audience rather than at qualified chefs. Some more evidence which may prove non-professionals as the target audience is presented in the next section.

4. The author and the intended audience of *Liber Cure Cocorum*

Although *Liber Cure Cocorum* is an anonymous collection, some details concerning the author may be found in the text. On the one hand, the author presents himself as a culinary authority and a teacher, implying that the intended reader is not an experienced cook. Therefore, the reader is constantly reminded that (a) the writer knows what he says, (b) the recipes have been proven tasty, and (c) the reader should follow the instructions carefully, see examples under (12). Moreover, the reader should not forget these teachings: “And loke þou for3ete no3t þys lore” (*LCC*).

(12) And sethe hit wele; alye hit þenne
 With þy forsayde brede, **as I þe kenne**,
 (For mustul bre)

Sew fast þo bylle grete ende, **I ken**;
 Þen sethe þy capone, **as I þe say**,
 (For capons in erbis)

⁸ The data referring to the collections written in prose are based on Bator and Sylwanowicz (2017a) and (2017b).

And kostyf of motone, **þat I wele knaw**,
(De Cibis assatis)

Bus schalt þu do, **I wot in dede**;
(To save venison fresshe over þe 3er)

Pese er hennes in browet, **levys þou me**.
(Hennes in brewes)

Wasshe hit fayre, put hit in pot;
Boyle hit tulle hit brest, þen
Let hit down, **as I þe kenne**.
(Furmente)

And hew hom smalle, **as I þe lere**;
(...)
Sett hit to þo fyre, **as I þe telle in tale**;
(Nombuls)

On the other hand, however, even though he knows so much, the poet is not necessarily a cook himself. He admits that he learnt some of the recipes from others, see (13). Additionally, as if to strengthen the value of his advice, he refers to the divine (God, the cross, etc.), see examples under (14).

(13) Bis is a rose, **as kokes telle me**.
(Rose)

Devoyded, **as men me tolde meke**;
(For heroun rostyd)

Bus have I lurnet at gentil men;
(For wodcock, sny3t and curlue)

Next after potage þay servyd schalle be,
As I have lurned in þys cuntree.
(Pro Salsamentis. To make sawce)

(14) Temper hit with water a lytel, **perdy**;
(Gawncel for þe gose)

Fyrst white pese and porray þou take,
Cover þy white heryng **for goddys sake**;
þen cover red heryng and set abufe,
And mustard on heghe, **for goddys lufe**;
þen cover salt salmon on hast,
Salt ele þer wyth on þis course last.
For þe secunde course, **so god me glad**,

Take ryse and fletande fignade,
(For a servise on a fysshe day)

Isope and sauge **I wot by þe rode.**
(For hagese)

Do mylke of almondes þer to **by þe rode,**
(For to make a potage of oysters)

When it comes to the target audience, a number of direct references to the reader suggest that the collection must have been aimed at male readers, see (15). And at least some parts of the collection are written for poor men who cannot afford expensive ingredients (see (16)).

(15) And serve hit forthe **Sir** at þo mele.
(Caudel dalmone)

Brysse hom or strene hom, **Sir**, wyturlye;
(For white pese after porray)

Þo herb3 on þe last **my dere brother;**
(For to make a compost)

(16) **Fore pore menne þys craft is tolde**
þat mowon not have spysory, as þay wolde;
For hit is nede to gode, to ken men gode
As wele þe pore as ryche by þo rode;
(Of petecure I will preche)

Moreover, at least at first glance, the collection seems to be aimed at laymen, due to such factors as: (a) the recipes contain very basic advice which would be irrelevant for professionals, such as: what to do if a dish turns out to be too salty, what signs would tell the cook whether a dish is good or bad, what tools or which hand to use for certain procedures, or what hygienic precautions to follow, etc., see examples under (17); and (b) as mentioned earlier, the writer calls himself ‘a teacher’ who advises the reader to follow his instructions carefully, the author assures that he will present the recipes in simple words, as in (18), and warns the reader against making mistakes, such as forgetting certain steps or doing them too fast, see (19).

(17) **Yf þy dysse metes dere ben to salt,**
kerve a grene sod, I wot, þou schalt,
And kover þy pot with þo gresse done,
þo salt on þo gresse shalle barke fulle sone.
With þy honde smyte of, I say;
(To powder befe with in a ny3t)

To preve venegur, weþer hit be fyne.

(...)

If hit be good, welle, syr, hit schalle,

Yf hit be no3t, downe wylle hit falle.

(To preve venegur)

When hit is colde, **leche hit with knyves**;

(Mylke rostydy)

Enbene hit wele **withe þy ry3t honde**.

(Capons in Cassolyce)

(18) Þer of **I schalle speke more in playn**.

(Amydone)

(19) Coloure þou hit with safron, **or þou fer goo**,

(Chawdewyne de boyce)

Grynde brede and peper and **be not batte**;

(Hennes in brewes)

However, taking into consideration the fact that the collection is written in verse, it seems more plausible to argue that the above-mentioned factors are used to retain the necessary poetic devices rather than to shed light on the author or the intended audience of the collection. Firstly, the direct references to the author and his knowledge are placed at the end of lines, see (20), which contributes to the length of lines and rhyme.

(20) Take almonde mylke **as I con preche**;

Coloure hit with safron **as I þe teche**;

(...)

Florysshe hit with powdur, **as I þe kenne**,

Þenne may hit be served, before gode men.

(Bucnade)

Secondly, the recipes, even though they contain certain basic instructions, lack many details necessary for any dish preparation, such as: (i) the particular steps the cook should take in the preparation process, and (ii) the amounts of ingredients required for a dish preparation. Even though these are usually absent from a traditional medieval culinary recipe (cf. for instance Carroll 2009, Bator and Sylwanowicz 2017c), such recipes were aimed at professional chefs who knew these details well (Hammond 1993, Scully 1995, Brears 2008). In the case of collections aimed at inexperienced cooks, precision is crucial.

On the one hand the author himself suggests non-professional target audience, but on the other hand, it seems obvious that a layman would not benefit from such imprecise instructions. All this as well as the choice of verse for writ-

ing a culinary collection suggest the entertaining rather than instructional function of the text. Such an assumption seems reasonable when we look at the first three recipes of the collection. They only pretend to be recipes⁹, and their function is far from guiding how to prepare a tasty dish. Instead, these texts instruct the reader how to make cooked meat look like raw, or look as if a meal was full of worms, etc., see example (21). Following Weiss Adamson (1995: 178), such poems aim to “make fun of medieval culinary conventions”.

- (21) Now sly3tes of cure wylle I preche,
 How somme mete schalle seme raw I teche;
 Take harus blode, or kyddus ful fayre,
 And dry hit in powder and kepe hit fro ayre;
 When flesshe or fysshe his served wele hote,
 Cast on pe powder of hare I wot;
 Hit is so frym, ren hyt wylle
 An malt as sugur, by ry3t good skylle
 And make po flesshe to seme, iwys,
 As hit were raw, and 3yt hit nys.
 And pagh pou sethe hit alle day,
 Hit wolde seme rawe by any kyn way.
- (LCC)

5. Conclusions

The present paper has discussed a unique medieval culinary collection, *Liber Cure Cocorum*, which was written in verse. The major aim of the study was to analyse the structure of the instructions and to uncover what can be told about the possible author and the intended audience of *Liber Cure Cocorum*.

In terms of the general structure, the rhymed collection does not differ much from any other medieval cookbook. The few discrepancies in the internal structure of the particular recipe components in *LCC*, such as: (a) the heading taking the form of a statement of purpose rather than a title, (b) the procedure consisting of a variety of grammatical structures, and (c) the serving component being more detailed than in prose, stem from the necessity to retain certain poetic devices.

Despite the fact that the author refers to himself, we do not learn who he might be and where he learnt the recipes. Similarly, not much is revealed about the intended reader. Although one might have the impression that the collection is aimed at an inexperienced cook, it is argued that fragments related to the reader’s lack of experience and culinary knowledge are used purely for poetic purposes, whilst the form of the collection (verse) indicates the entertaining rather than instructional function of the text.

⁹ Weiss Adamson (1995: 183-184) calls such instructions ‘practical jokes’.

Unfortunately, we do not have any medieval collections (neither in verse nor in prose) which would be aimed specifically at lay audience¹⁰ to use as a reference point for comparison; and thus, our conclusions can only be tentative.

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¹⁰ The available medieval collections (written in prose) are aimed at professional cooks, who used them as memory aids (cf. Hammond 1993; Scully 1995; Brears 2008).

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