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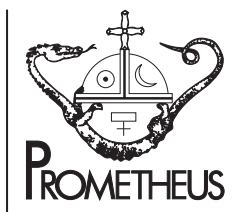
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ÁRMANN JAKOBSSON

THE MAGICAL PAST, THE TERM *FORNESKJA* AND THE CHRISTIANIZATION OF ICELAND IN 13TH AND 14TH CENTURY HISTORY WRITING

In 13th and 14th century Icelandic historiography the Christianization of Iceland and Scandinavia around the millennium of 1000 seems to have been of paramount interest. Thus, most historical narratives from the period (such as the *Íslendingasögur* and *Konungasögur*) are partly concerned with this period of upheaval, which is often depicted as a giant leap into a new era with the pagan religions consequently becoming symbolic for the past itself. This very interest is a testament to the pivotal importance of the pagan past in defining the Nordic Christian self. At the same time, with the gradual institutionalisation of Christianity from *ca.* 1000 to the end of the 13th century, other religious practices get equated with magic, which is often termed *forneskja* ‘oldness’, a word that appears in several medieval Icelandic prose narratives. In this study, this term is explored in detail along with its relationship to other terminology that it is often linked to in the narratives (e.g. *fjölkyngi*, *hindurviti*, *heiðni*, and *galdrar*). The equation between the past and paganism, and the last decades of pagan worship in Iceland in particular, have held a powerful attraction for historians several centuries after this great shift to the more unified behavioural system of Christianity. An important issue to consider is whether the significant social changes of the 13th and 14th century lead to an idea of that Christianization constituted an absolute break with the past and its ways. This is an elusive issue but a careful textual examination of the 13th and 14th century historical sources may shed light on it, thus helping to determine how the past, the pagan religions and magic were intertwined in the mind of the historiographers of that era.

1. *The climactic event*

In his *Íslendingabók*, dated to *ca.* 1130, Ari Þorgilsson the Learned depicts the Christianization of Iceland as *the* climactic historical and narrative event. It happens at the *alþingi* in the year 1000 when the attorney general Þorgeirr declares that all Icelanders shall be Christian.¹ Thus, Ari the Learned presents the Christianization as a legal event, as a wise pagan authority figure installed

¹ Jakob Benediktsson 1968, 16-17. The traditional translation of *lögsögumaður* is ‘lawspeaker’, which I am not using since it is one of the many words used about medieval Iceland which suggests a more primitive and tribal society than it actually was.

with momentary dictatorial power, who is still not a king, makes the decision according to an agreement with his Christian counterpart. In Ari's work, the attorney generals are among the main protagonists of the narrative, a role later taken up by the bishops of Iceland, and thus it fits his general theme that the word of the attorney general at the heated 1000 parliament is the last word.²

However, Ari himself did not have the last word about the Christianization of Iceland. This topic kept fascinating Icelandic historiographers (many of whom were clerics and monks) for the next three centuries, and consequently there are abundant sources about precisely this moment in Icelandic history. In addition to *Íslendingabók*, the Christianization of Iceland is addressed in *Hungrvaka*, *Kristni saga*, most Sagas of Icelanders, the multiple sagas of King Óláfr Tryggvason from the 13th and 14th centuries,³ and, at greatest length, in *Óláfs saga in mesta*. The latter is a 14th century compendium of kings' sagas, sagas of other western regions, and those Sagas of Icelanders where King Óláfr has particular relevance due to his most important achievement as the missionary king who had Christianized Iceland, the Faroe Islands and various other western lands,⁴ although in posthumous veneration he still came second to King Óláfr the Saint who was given primary credit for the final Christianization of Norway.⁵ As the sources grew in number, the Christianization of the North gradually became more and more complicated and so did the attitudes to the past that preceded the event.⁶

In most 13th and 14th century historiography, Christianization is seen as a sharp break with the past, a giant leap into a new era, to such a degree that the pagan past is seen as fundamentally different from the present. The evocative first sentence of L.P. Hartley's novel, *The Go-Between* (1953): "The past is a

² Hermann 2005, 73-90; Grønlie 2017b, 123-146; Sverrir Jakobsson 2017, 75-99; Mundal 2011.

³ Scholarship on the sagas of Óláfr Tryggvason is in a very fertile phase and among the most significant studies are Grønlie 2013, 19-36; Grønlie, *The Saint and the Saga Hero*, 2017; Grønlie, *Conversion Narrative and Christian Identity*, 2017, 123-146; Phelpstead 2007; Bagge 2006, 473-513; Bagge 2016, 1-38; Abram 2015, 114-157; Lindow 2007, 64-80; Kaplan 2008, 472-489; Rowe 2004, 459-474; Rowe 2006, 167-200; Males 2017, 491-514; Zilmer 2008, 227-248; Lal 2014, 99-128; Goeres 2011, 45-46.

⁴ These include *Laxdæla saga*, *Hallfreðar saga*, *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* and, of course, the various þættir preserved in the *Óláfs saga in mesta*.

⁵ For recent scholarship on the sagas of Óláfr Haraldsson, see e.g. Bagge 2010, 281-321; Townend 2005, 251-279; Lindow 2008, 103-127; Jesch 2010, 103-117; Mills 2019, 544-570; DuBois 2004, 1-52; Bandlien, 2013, 355-377.

⁶ See e.g. Haki Antonsson 2012, 71-140; Haki Antonsson 2018; Phelpstead 2007; Wellendorf 2010, 1-21.

foreign country; they do things differently there” may serve as a useful starting point for an exploration of Old Icelandic attitudes to the distant past and its pagan ethos. In this study, the focus will be placed on a word that may well signify this idea of a decisive break that lead to the absolute exoticism of the past.

An important facet of the foreignness of the past was magic along with the idea that occult practices belong to the past and are imbued with essential ‘pastness’. Past and magical practices are, in fact, united in the term *forneskja*, which appears in various medieval Icelandic texts.⁷ This noun, derived from the adjective *forn*, ‘old’ or ‘ancient’, is easily glossed as ‘oldness’, although it means much more as will gradually emerge in the discussion below.⁸ The term will not be translated in the traditional sense in this article since such a translation sometimes indicates that there is more clarity to meaning than is actually the case. On the contrary, its very meaning is under scrutiny and its usage provides an interesting prism through which to observe the much larger issue of the interconnection of pagan worship, magic and the past in medieval Icelandic historiography.

2. *Paganism and the past*

The aforementioned King Óláfr Tryggvason was the king of Norway from 995 to 1000. He is almost non-existent in contemporary sources but is mentioned in Adam of Bremen’s *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* (ca. 1075). He also later acquired great significance in Icelandic historiography from the early 12th century onwards as the missionary king of Norway, Iceland and the west in general.⁹ Most of the historical writing from the late 12th

⁷ There are about 60 examples in toto of the term *forneskja* in Old Norse literature to be found in the Íslenskt textasafn of the Árnastofnun (<arnastofnun.is/page/textasafn>) and the *Ordbog over det norrøne prosasprog* (<onp.ku.dk>). Neither list can be said to be exhaustive and thus a precise number cannot be given and it would be of little value to discuss each and every example. Thus, even though all the examples in these two data banks have been considered in the present study, only a representative sample will be discussed. As is the custom of dictionaries, the meanings of the words are categorised in the *Ordbog* but a more careful discussion like in this article will reveal that the general meaning is not the only meaning, the word also has connotations, and sometimes there is ambiguity about the meaning.

⁸ The author has translated all Old Norse quotes, unless otherwise indicated.

⁹ See e.g. Weibull 1911.

century onwards makes it abundantly clear that his enemies include not only his rivals, other human kings and magnates, but also otherworldly demons and trolls of various kinds, including sorcerers and the pagan gods known as the Æsir in the post-pagan period.¹⁰

Although King Óláfr is, in the end, killed by human antagonists, his greatest struggle is with an otherworldly powers, beings and things often referred to as *forn* ‘ancient’.¹¹ This is not only reflected in his missionary efforts, as depicted in *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*, but also his many appearances in the Sagas of Icelanders, such as when he meets his later court poet Hallfreðr Óttarsson the troublesome bard. In both versions of *Hallfreðar saga* (the *Möðruvallabók* and the *Flateyjarbók* versions), the word *forneskja* makes an appearance in the initial encounter between king and poet:

Þar var Óláfr konungr fyrir, ok var honum sagt, at þessir menn mundu vera heiðnir ok nýkomnir af Íslandi. Hann stefnir þeim á sinn fund, ok er þeir kómu þar, talði konungr trú fyrir þeim ok bað þá kasta forneskju ok illum átrúnaði, en trúa á sannan guð, skapara himins ok jarðar.¹²

(King Óláfr was there and he was told that these men were probably pagan and recently arrived from Iceland. He commands them to come and meet him and when they arrived the king preached the Christian faith to them and asked them to let go of oldness and evil faith but believe in the true God who created heaven and earth.)

konungr m(ælti). Þu munt vilia trúa æ sanan guþ. en kasta forneskiu ok illum atrúnaði. þv ert maðr skörulegr ok einarðligr ok er þer einsætt at þiona eigi lengur fianda.¹³

(The king said: ‘You will want to believe in the true God but let go of oldness and evil faith. You seem like an accomplished and valiant man, and there can be no alternative to no longer serve the devil’.)

¹⁰ Ólafur Halldórsson 2006, 259-262. Cf. Lindow 2007; Kaplan 2008.

¹¹ Ólafur Halldórsson 2006, 212-214, 263-264, and 281-282.

¹² Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1939, 153. As mentioned before, in the examples discussed in this article, I will consistently translate *forneskja* as ‘oldness’ throughout, even though, as I will explain in detail, it has a variety of meanings.

¹³ Ólafur Halldórsson 1958, 372.

The king immediately frames this encounter between monarch and subject, Norwegian and Icелander, as an encounter between God and *forneskja*, the latter of which is coupled with *illr átrúnaðr* ‘evil faith’. *Forneskja* is, in this case, equated with the Pre-Christian religions of the North, or paganism. It lies at the heart of a binary opposition that the king presents to his potential retainers at their first meeting: the king stands for the true faith against *forneskja*. And they have to choose sides.

While it would be a fallacy to treat medieval words as scientific or scholarly concepts,¹⁴ the choice of words is still significant. In highlighting *forneskja*, King Óláfr, as represented in the 13th and 14th century literature, is also framing himself as a man of the present, or even the future. He is not only a Christian but a man of the new times who stands against oldness and pastness and with the emerging true faith. What he opposes is not only evil, it is old and outdated, vanishing and soon to be obsolete. The outcome is not uncertain: as irreversible as the march of time, so is the fact that Christianity belongs the present and the future while pagan beliefs belongs in the past.

Thus, the very pagan religions themselves are in their nature *forneskja* and do not have any role in the present or the future. This equation between paganism and the past lies at the heart of much of 13th and 14th century Icelandic historiography. The Christianization of the North around 1000 is not only a historical event, it is the fundamental event that marks the shift from the past to the present. When the Icelanders in *Hallfreðar saga* go to see King Óláfr, they may be taking only small steps as men but, simultaneously, they are taking a giant leap into the future, and the saga writers of the 13th and 14th century are aware of this. One reason for their escalating preoccupation with precisely this period of history is their interest in this giant leap from past to present.

3. *Paradigm shift*

From the start to the finish of the age of saga composition, the Christianization period fascinated Icelandic historiographers who were obviously eager to explore this historic break. Interestingly enough, there are Sagas of Icelanders from across this period that seem to present the advent of the new religion as a paradigm shift and use the word *forneskja* to that end. Among the oldest Sagas

¹⁴ See e.g. Ármann Jakobsson 2013, 199-213; Hafstein 2001, 7-32.

of Icelanders is *Eyrbyggja saga* (ca. 1250) while in its present form *Grettis saga* may well be one of the youngest (ca. 1450).¹⁵ Both include authorial speculation on the nature of the shift to Christianity, whereas in neither is the shift seen as easy or the work of one summer at parliament. Furthermore, in both sagas the word *forneskja* is used to denote the old and defunct (but still surviving) pagan belief system.

The advent of Christianity is described in the latter part of *Eyrbyggja saga*. Soon after the conversion, wondrous things take place at the farmstead of Fróðá on the Snæfell Peninsula. One such incident concerns the farmer who drowns and returns to his own wake as a ghost:

En it fyrsta kveld, er menn váru at erfinu ok menn váru í sæti komnir, þá gengr Þóroddr bóndi í skálann ok fǫrunautar hans allir alvátir. Menn fǫgnuðu vel Þóroddi, því at þetta þótti góðr fyrirburðr, því at þá höfðu menn þat fyrir satt, at þá væri monnum vel fagnað at Ránar, ef sædauðir menn vitjuðu erfis síns; en þá var enn lítt af numin forneskjan, þó at menn væri skírðir ok kristnir at kalla.¹⁶

(But the first night when people were at the wake and were in their seats, then Þóroddr walks into the hall with his companions, all of them soaking wet. People cheered him since this was seen as a good omen, since people then thought that men had been well received by Rán if those lost at sea came to their own wake. At that time the oldness was not so much abandoned even if people had been baptized and were nominally Christian.)

There is no terror when the ghosts arrive, since only later do the people of the house see the hauntings as a paranormal infestation. And the saga author's historical explanation for their initial positive response is that, while the populace has become nominally Christian, the break with the past and its pagan ways has not been completed.

The Fróðá wonders episode in *Eyrbyggja saga* concerns this break and explores it in depth. The hauntings continue until the magnate, renowned sage and one of the leaders of the Christian faction at the conversion parliament Snorri goði is brought in. He arrives with a priest who exorcises the entire place with holy water and Christian chants. Finally, an improvised court is held where the zombies are sentenced to leave and meekly accept this verdict.

¹⁵ See e.g. Ármann Jakobsson, Tirosh 2020, 102-138.

¹⁶ Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1935, 148.

This scene is full of compelling information about old superstitions but what is noteworthy for our theme is how the word *forneskja* is used to frame the Christianization as a paradigm shift. Much like in the admonishing speeches of King Óláfr, the confrontation at Fróðá is depicted not only as one between good and evil, but also between past and present. The superstitious guests at the wake may have nominally embraced the Christian god but they have still stuck to some of their old ways and thus they are partly stuck in the past. The *forneskja* has not been totally eradicated, but it needs to be, and the Fróðá wonders episode concerns this need to complete the paradigm shift.

Grettis saga, too, is concerned with the incompleteness of religious transformation in 11th-century Iceland. This comes into play near the end of the saga when Iceland has been nominally Christian for three decades. Grettir has distinguished himself as a ghostbuster and trollhunter, and is even occasionally misidentified as a troll himself, but is still clearly on the side of the angels. Grettir is a marginal figure who still serves a crucial purpose in defending society against the dark arts and varieties of paranormal evil.¹⁷ It is fitting that he is, in the end, vanquished in part by sorcery, and the existence of this magic is another proof of the incompleteness of the millennial paradigm shift. As the saga historian explains, this relates to a broader issue of education. While the populace had embraced Christianity, many of them were still born into a pagan past and thus naturally lapsed into pagan ways:

En þó at kristni væri á landinu, þá váru þó margir gneistar heiðninnar eptir. Þat hafði verit lög hér á landi, at eigi var bannat at blóta á laun eða fremja aðra forneskju, en varðaði fjörbaugssök, ef opinbert yrði. Nú fór svá mörpum at gjörn var hönd á venju ok þat varð tamast, sem í æskunni hafði numit.¹⁸

(But even though the country was now Christian, many heathen embers still survived. It had been the law of the country that it was not forbidden to worship in secret or commit other oldness but merited outlawry if it became public. And it happened to many that the hand did as it was used to doing and people stuck to their childhood learning.)

This slightly cynical authorial observation coincides with the introduction of the former nanny of Grettir's adversary Þorbjörn öngull, an old witch who is

¹⁷ See e.g. Hume 1974, 469-486; Ármann Jakobsson 2009, 307-316; Kanerva 2013; Bennett 2009, 119-125.

¹⁸ Guðni Jónsson 1936, 245-246.

still practicing sorcery. According to the author, she does this partly because this is what she had been trained to do, and, though presumably nominally Christian like everyone else, she had not really performed the giant leap into a new era.

One message of both sagas is that *Íslendingabók*'s account of the conversion does not tell the whole story. This is also a prominent theme in Snorri Sturlusson's *Óláfs saga helga* (ca. 1225), which illustrates in countless scenes that it takes at least two missionary kings to drive the new faith firmly into the hearts and souls of the populace, and it is neither easy nor painless.¹⁹ A newly Christian society is bound to include some pagan relics, as well as people who cling to their old pagan ways. The word *forneskja* is used to encapsulate this reluctance to enter the new age. In this sense, it signifies not only old ways but is also used to indicate that old magic has survived into the new era. Thus, the past and magic become intertwined in the many narratives of the millennial paradigm shift.

4. *Could it be magic?*

The word *forneskja* contains several layers of meanings but they all seem to be intertwined. One, of course, is the past and not just any bygone time but a past that has been outlawed in a new society that has undergone a decisive shift. The second but equally strong meaning of the word is the old evil faith that now has been gradually cast away and is no longer acceptable. The third signification of *forneskja* is more specific and yet remains intertwined with the former two. That signification is to those ritual practices often referred to as “galdrar”, which are often coupled with the term *forneskja* in the Sagas of Icelanders.²⁰ The fact that these practices are essentially heathen is evident from their coupling with *forneskja*, which means that magic practices are defined as essentially old (and heathen) wisdom, not merely because they are practised by old people such as Öngull's nanny, but since they belong to that ‘foreign country’ and abandoned period from before Christianity.

In each of *Grettis saga*, *Gísla saga* and *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss*, *forneskja* is presented essentially as synonymous to “galdrar” and, thus, simply as another term for magic:

¹⁹ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, e.g. 100-101, 176, 179-181, 182-183, and 354-357.

²⁰ While only a handful of examples can be discussed here, other cases indicate that *forneskja* is something you can practice (*fara með*) and study (*lært*).

[...] en eigi muntu né kerling, fóstra þín, dæma þessi mál, því at galdrar ykkir ok forneskja hafa drepit Gretti, þó at þér bærið járn á hann dauðvána, ok gerðuð svá mikit níðingsverk ofan á fordæðuskap²¹

(But you and that old woman your nanny will not be the judges of this, since your magic and oldness have slain Grettir even though you later brought weapons to him as he lay dying and thus added wickedness to your witchcraft)

[...] Þá kom inn draumkona mín in betri ok sagði, at það merkði aldr minn, hvat ek ætta eptir ólifat, ok hon réð mér þat, meðan ek lifða at láta leiðask forna sið ok nema enga galdra né forneskju ok vera vel við daufan ok haltan ok fátæka ok fáráða [...]²²

(And then came the better dream woman and told me that this signified my age and how much time I have left, and she advised me that during my lifetime I should abandon ancient custom and not learn any magic or oldness, and be kind to the deaf and the limping and the poor and the powerless)

Síðan vanði Dofri hann á alls kyns íþróttir ok ættvísi ok vígfimi, ok eigi var traust, at hann næmi eigi galdra ok forneskju, svá að bæði var hann forspár ok margvís, því at Dofri var við þetta slunginn.²³

(Then Dofri made him practice all kind of skills and genealogy and weaponry and it was not impossible that he also studied magic and oldness so that he became both a prophet and a sorcerer since Dofri was involved with that)

As the passages from *Gísla saga* and *Bárðar saga* both seem to indicate, *forneskja* can be studied, but all three examples show that it is essentially the same as magic. The term refers to ritual practices the dimensions of which are very unclear but may indicate chanting (*galdr* being related to *gala* ‘chant’). The precise nature of these ritual practices is not evident in this word usage (*forneskja*), but it nevertheless conveys the idea that they are essentially old and belong to the past.

Sometimes the word *forneskja* may even replace *galdr* altogether, as in an example from *Brennu-Njáls saga* where the pagan warlord Bróðir, antagonist

²¹ Guðni Jónsson 1936, 262-263.

²² Björn K. Þórólfsson, Guðni Jónsson 1943, 70.

²³ Þórhallur Vilmundarson, Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, 103.

of Irish King Brian Boru, attempts a pagan prophecy, which is referred to as *forneskja*:

Reyndi Bróðir til með forneskju, hversu ganga mundi orrostan, en svá gekk fréttin, ef á föstudaginn væri barizk, mundi Brjánn falla ok hafa sigr, en ef barizk væri fyrr, þá mundi þeir allir falla, er í móti honum væri.²⁴

(Bróðir tried with oldness to discern how the battle would go, and what he learned was that if they fought on Friday King Brjánn would fall and still win, but if they fought earlier all who opposed him would fall.)

This long episode of *Brennu-Njáls saga*, taking place in the early years of Christianity in the North, is riddled throughout with magic and paranormal events.²⁵ It is an episode of clear opposites. On one side of the struggle is the good Christian king Brjánn (Brian Boru), favoured so much by God that miracles are eventually associated with his death. On the other side is the hell-bound viking Bróðir who, after the battle, is tortured to death with the obvious approval of the saga author and presumably the audience. That this relapsed Christian should try to gain paranormal power with sorcery is one of many proofs of his wickedness. That his sorcery should be referred to as *forneskja* indicates, on the other hand, that magical rituals, the pagan religions and the distant past are all intertwined in the minds of the saga's late 13th century author and their audience.

5. Power

In the discourse of the magical past, an element of awe is also present. Inserted into the story of the conflict between the heathen past and the Christian present, where the present is the inevitable victor, one may still find statements

²⁴ Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1954, 449.

²⁵ When Bróðir and his men are preparing for the battle they experience three nights of terror. On the first night it rains blood, on the second all their weapons start fighting on their own, and on the third ravens with beaks and claws of iron attack them. Each night men are killed on all of their ships and many are wounded. (446-448). During the battle a man named Dörruðr on Katanes (Caithness) witnesses chanting witches who are weaving with human intestines for warp and weft and human heads for loom weights, swords for battening and arrows for shuttles. (454-459). At the same time a priest at Svínafell has to take off his chasuble as it has become drenched with blood (459).

about the power of the ancient lore. The *forneskja* will eventually give way but it is still potent and harmful. In *Grettis saga*, Ásdís, the mother of Grettir and Illugi, is taking leave of her sons for the last time, when she mentions her unquiet sleep:

[...] En undarlíga hafa mér draumar gengit. Gætið ykkar vel við gørníngum; fátt er rammara en forneskjan.²⁶

(My dreams have been sinister of late. Be wary of sorcery. Few things are stronger than oldness.)

Dreaming and in a vulnerable state, the dark arts may creep upon the sleeper and they are no laughing matter. This warning does indeed turn out to be prophetic. In her dreams, Grettir's mother has presumably become aware of her counterpart, Öngull's nanny, who will eventually be the downfall of Grettir with her old ways and witchcraft. This knowledge has put such a mark on her that she cries after warning her sons. Though a Christian and the representative of goodness and kindness in *Grettis saga*, Ásdís, too, does not dismiss the power of oldness. The old ways may be inherently evil and their practitioners despicable, but they are still a force to be reckoned with.

In the legendary saga *Sörla saga sterka*, taking place a while before the advent of Christianity, this power is harnessed by the protagonist who has in his entourage two Finnish sorcerers, Falr and Fróðél, who are “vel mentir í kýngikröptum öllum ok forneskju” (well versed in powerful lore and oldness),²⁷ and who help him defeat his adversary with these powers. Being one of the younger sagas, possibly composed as late as the 16th century, *Sörla saga sterka* reveals none of the pain or the urgency seen in *Grettis saga* and the Sagas of Icelanders in general.²⁸ What remains is the idea that the old magic is still considered powerful and even desirable for a select few who seem to be able to control it. The past is defeated and yet it is not. It still has considerably harmful power and may even be put to good use by those not overly troubled by their consciences, its potency demonstrating how hard won impressive the triumph of Christianity in the North actually was.

²⁶ Guðni Jónsson 1936, 223-224.

²⁷ Rafn 1830, 444; cf. Hufnagel 2012, 431-454.

²⁸ *Sörla saga sterka* is traditionally assigned to the corpus called *Fornaldarsögur Norðurlanda*, created by C.C. Rafn with his edition of that name in 1829. The oldest manuscripts of the majority of the legendary sagas are from the 15th century.

6. *Belief*

As has emerged from the cases so far presented, *forneskja* can be used to refer to both the heathen past and paganism itself, as well as the magical practices clearly seen as being intertwined with paganism. Furthermore, some examples indicate that the word *forneskja* can simply refer to the old belief system as such and may be synonymous with the term *átrúnaður* ‘belief’. This is evident in the fairly old Icelandic homily book (ca. 1200), which includes a confession of sins, including erroneous faith: “Ec hefe synþer gort i hindrvítne ok í forneskio. i atrunapi rængom” (I have sinned with superstition and oldness and erroneous faith).²⁹ This confession may have been badly needed throughout the 12th century. As is mentioned in *Grettis saga*, the embers of the old religion may survive in a nominally Christian society and the problem may be even bigger than that saga’s theory of people reverting to the custom of their youth. Even though the Christian faith is comprehensive, it will never eradicate all old customs. The pre-Christian religions are bound to have left their marks for centuries, perhaps even to this day,³⁰ in various tiny superstitions and rituals. In some cases these lasting marks may be so insignificant that they would have escaped the attention of the Christian authorities, or, even more likely, priests decided to ignore them as harmless to the official faith.

King Óláfr the Saint made it his mission to make sure Norwegians and all other people he felt he had dominion over, i.e. those North Atlantic regions originally populated from Norway, adopted Christian customs and let go of heathen ways.³¹ Even such a missionary zealot as Óláfr would have realised this was close to impossible, but his steadfast refusal to condone any deviation from proper Christianity can be seen in *Heiðarvíga saga* when he meets Icelandic patrician Barði Guðmundsson (*Víga-Barði*) and rules that this accomplished man of good standing is still not Christian enough to enter his service. Barði is, of course, nominally Christian but according to the king he has erroneous faith (*átrúnáðr*), which includes *forneskja*, and this bars Barði from entering his service:

²⁹ Wisén 1872, 147; cf. 212.

³⁰ This is discussed in more detail in Ármann Jakobsson, “Three Knocks and Three Norns: Remnants of the Old Norse idea of the fate and the world tree in modern folklore” (forthcoming).

³¹ See e.g. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 1945, 74 and 214.

Konungr svarar á þá leið: „Vér höfum frétt til þín, Barði,“ segir hann, „at þú ert ættstórr maðr ok mikill fyrir þér, ok þér eruð vaskligir menn ok hitt í nokkur stórræði og rekit harma yðvarra ok verit þó lengi fyrir, ok þó hafið þér nokkut forneskju ok þess konar átrúnað, sem oss er óskaptíðr, ok fyrir þá sök, at vér höfum þat svá mjök frá oss skilit, þá vilju vér eigi taka með yðr. En þó skulu vér vera vinir yðrir, Barði,“ segir hann, „ok mun nokkut mikilligt fyrir yðr liggja. En þat kann opt verða, er menn hitta í slíka hluti, ok verðr svá mikið rið at, ef nokkut verðr við blandit forneskju, at menn trúa á það of mjök.“³²

(The king responds: ‘We have heard of you’, Barði, he says, ‘that you are a noble man and accomplished and that you are doughty men and have done great deeds and avenged your grievances and yet suffered them long but still you have dabbled in oldness and the sort of faith that we do not care for. And since we have abandoned such things, we do not wish to take you on. And yet we shall be your friend, Barði’, he says ‘and you are destined for greatness. But it is often so that when people are forced to such deeds, it leads to such unbalance, if oldness is involved and people believe to much in it’.)

The king’s opaque speech has naturally been of much interest to scholars. Bjarni Guðnason, for example, has surmised that the oldness in question cannot be magic or actual paganism but refers to Barði’s devotion to revenge culture, which is un-Christian in the eyes of the king.³³ Bjarni’s careful analysis is compelling and it would indeed seem unduly harsh of the king to label Barði as a sorcerer. Yet, the link between *forneskja*, paganism and sorcery is so strong that, even though the surface meaning is that Barði’s killings are un-Christian, it is still hard to ignore the additional slur that Barði’s behaviour also makes him half-pagan, especially since *forneskja* is here coupled with the word *átrúnaðr*. While it seems likely that the main reason for Barði’s exclusion from service is his proven devotion to revenge and the unbalance created by the bloodshed, the fact remains that the king seems also to be categorising Barði, if not as an enemy of Christendom, then still half-pagan or even half-demonic and thus unfit to serve a Christian ruler.

Another coupling of *forneskja* and faith can be seen in *Bárðar saga Snæfellsáss* where the term is equated with *heiðni*. This example, even more than the example from *Heiðarvíga saga*, indicates that *forneskja* is partly seen as a faith that can be preached and agitated for:

³² Sigurður Nordal, Guðni Jónsson 1938, 324-325.

³³ Bjarni Guðnason 1993, 45-65

ok er þeir kvámu norðr fyrir Dumbshaf, kom maðr af landi ofan ok réðst í ferð með þeim; hann nefndist Rauðgrani; hann var eineygr; hann hafði bláflekkótta skautheklu og knepptu niðr í milli fóta sér. Ekki var Jósteini presti mikit um hann. Rauðgrani taldi heiðni ok forneskju fyrir mönnum Gestu ok taldi þat bezt að blóta til heilla sér. Ok einn dag, er Rauðgrani taldi fyrir þeim slíka vantrú, reiddist prestr ok þreif róðukross ok setti í höfuð Rauðgrana; hann steyptist fyrir borð ok kom aldri upp síðan. Þóttust þeir þá vita, at þat hefði Óðinn verit. Fátt gaf Gestr sér at presti.³⁴

(When they came north of Dumbshaf, a man came from the shore and took passage with them. He was called Rauðgrani and was one-eyed. He wore a blue checked coat and buttoned down in between his legs. Jósteinn the priest did not care much for him. Rauðgrani preached paganism and oldness to the men of Gestr and thought it best to sacrifice for good luck. And one day, when Rauðgrani was preaching such sacrilege, the priest became so angry that he took a cross and hit him on the head. Rauðgrani fell over board and never came up again. Then they decided that this must have been Óðinn. Gestr did not interact much with the priest.)

Frequently appearing in the sagas as an enemy of Christ and the true faith,³⁵ Óðinn joins this expedition primarily to champion paganism, presumably including belief in himself and his royal family of Æsir, but he is quick to surrender to the sacred cross and the divine powers of the priest. The religion he is espousing is called “heiðni ok forneskja” and in this coupling, the old ways have merged completely with the old religion.

Magic, heathenism and the old customs are all intertwined in the minds of this historian and many others of the period. In fact, the very past itself is often inseparable from the assumed dominating religion of that period. Oldness is paganism and magic and this past must disappear into the murky depths for the Christian religion to gain hegemony.

7. *Era*

There are also instances where *forneskja* is used neutrally just to denote a past custom, without any overt religious or sorcerous connotations. One such case

³⁴ Þórhallur Vilmundarson, Bjarni Vilhjálmsson 1991, 163.

³⁵ See e.g. Lassen, 2005.

is in *Snorra-Edda* where the dress of women in the past is thus described: “þat var í forneskiv qvæna bvnnaðr, er kallat var steinasqrvi, er þær hofþv ahalsi ser” (In oldness, there was a clothing item for woman called stone watcher that they carried around their necks).³⁶ This seems like a fairly neutral reference to the past, and some further examples like this can be found in other Old Norse texts.³⁷ And yet it is not completely innocent, or unconnected to the pagan religion, since the talisman in question must have been linked to some heathen beliefs or rituals and, thus, it belongs to the past of the old religions.

The same applies to the following eddic poetry descriptions of old beliefs where the word *forneskja* is used to refer to the past:

Þat var trúa í forneskju at menn væri endrbornir, en þat er nú kǫlluð kerlingavilla. Helgi ok Sigrún er kallat at væri endurborin.³⁸

(It was the belief in oldness that people were reincarnated but now people call that an old wives’ tale, and it was said that Helgi and Sigrún were reincarnated.)

Sigurðr dulði nafns síns, fyrir því at þat var trúa þeira í forneskju, at orð feigs manns mætti mikit, ef hann bǫlvaði óvin sínum með nafni.³⁹

(Sigurðr hid his name since it was a belief in oldness that if a dying man cursed his enemy using his name, these words would have great power.)

In both cases, the word seems to be used to literally denote ‘the ancient past’, but it is used when describing heathen superstitions such as reincarnation and cursing your enemy. Thus, once again there is a clear link between the old religion, ritual practices and the very past itself. In the same way, when Saint Óláfr spars with the sceptic King Hrærekr, the term *forneskja* is used to denote the past and yet, once again, denotes more than just chronology:

Óláfr konungr svarar: „Nú er hátíð mikil haldin í minning þess, er Jesús Krístr sté til himna af jörðu.“ Hrærekr konungr svarar: „Ekki skil ek af, svá at mér

³⁶ Finnur Jónsson 1931, 120.

³⁷ There are several other examples of this kind in various Old Norse texts, such as *Fagrskinna* and *Sverris saga*, where *forneskja* simply means ‘the past’.

³⁸ Jónas Kristjánsson, *Vésteinn Ólason*, 2014, II, 283.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 301.

hugfestisk þat, er þér segið frá Kristi. Þykki mér þat mart heldr ótrúligt, er þér segið. En þó hafa mörq dæmi orðit í forneskju.⁴⁰

(King Óláfr replies: ‘Now there is a great feast to celebrate the ascension of Jesus Christ from earth to heaven.’ King Hrærekr responds: ‘I do not really understand enough to remember what you tell me of Christ and much of it seems somewhat incredible, but still strange events happened in oldness’.)

King Hrærekr’s reaction is not only cynical, not to mention humorous, but verges on blasphemy since he equates the miracles of Christ with wondrous events from the *forneskja* period, and, thus, implies a link between the holy and the unholy. Such an equation is contrary to all the teachings of the Christian doctrine where much emphasis is placed on distinguishing the miracles of God from the magic performed by fiendish agents of the devil.⁴¹ Demonstrating Hrærekr’s scoffing nature, this episode is also an indication of the kind of reaction King Óláfr had to deal with in his missionary efforts and of the prolonged echoes of many a pagan custom.

When the word *forneskja* is used about time itself, time is not neutral. On the contrary it is laden with meaning, in this case it signifies the strong connection between the past itself and the pagan religion that dominated the period. Thus, the past is unholy and demonic, and it is important to distance oneself from it. This is a conundrum that was evidently of much interest to the historians of the 13th and 14th centuries who were fascinated by the past and their ancestors and, yet, had to distance themselves from them and their heathen ways.

8. *New culture*

In *Heimskringla*, the word *forneskja* appears in a description of Earl Erlingr the Crooked who lived in the late 12th century:

Erlingr var hár maðr ok harðvaxinn, nokkut barraxlaðr, langleitr, skarpleitr, ljóslitaðr ok gerðisk hárr mjök, bar hallt höfuðit nokkut, hugaðlátr ok veglátr, hafði forneskju-klæðabúnað, langa upphluti ok langar ermar á kyrtlum ok

⁴⁰ Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1945, 124.

⁴¹ See e.g. Ward 1987.

á skyrtum, valskikkjur, uppháva skúa. Slíkan búnað lét hann konung hafa, meðan hann var ungr, en þá er hann réð sjálf, bjó hann sig mjök í skart.⁴²

(Erlingr was a tall man and sturdy, often bareshouldered, long in the face, sharp, blond and became very tall, leaned his head a bit to the side, [he was] thoughtful and generous, dressed in oldness fashion with long tunics and long sleeves on the kirtles and shirts, French coats and tall shoes. This dress he also made the king wear when he was young but when he was his own master he adopted far more glamorous wear.)

This example is one of the few that seems relatively neutral: the Earl likes old-fashioned and modest dress, whereas his son forsakes it and is swift to dress in a more glamorous and modern way. While there are, in this example, no obvious connotations of magic and the old religions in the use of the word *forneskja*, it still provides a good illustration of how the new culture judges the old and finds it wanting. The tremendous antiquarian interest discernible in the historical writing of the 13th and 14th centuries was replete with such value judgements.

The diverse meanings of the word *forneskja* examined in this study indicate that:

- 1) there is no clear distinction between magic and the old religion in the minds of historians writing about the distant past in the 13th and 14th centuries,
- 2) magic and the old religion are seen as such essential parts of the past that the same term can be used for all three,
- 3) old religions and the old magic are fascinating and yet they are found wanting and are not a part of the present and its novel ways.

Itself a period of upheaval, of state formation and of the introduction of a new system of joint secular and religious government, the past seems to have been found singularly alien and even abhorrent to the 13th and 14th century authorities whose point of view is reflected in the historical writing of the time. This attitude is reflected in various ways, one of them being the word *forneskja* and how it encapsulates the past, its outdated customs and its magical practices in a single term.

⁴² Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1951, 412.

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JASMINE BRIA

LE PRATICHE DIVINATORIE NELLE *MERAVIGLIE*
D'ORIENTE: LA FIGURA DEI DONESTRI

In the literary space of Old English documentation, the treatise known as *Wonders of the East* deals with the representations of everything that Anglo-Saxon society perceived as completely foreign, the Other posited in the Elsewhere. Within these descriptions the dimension of magic seems to enter in a marginal but significant way. In particular, besides the inserted fragment depicting the two sorcerers of the apocryphal Old Testament, Jamnes and Mambres, the hybrid race known as *donestre* is represented as a people of soothsayers. Their main feature is, effectively, the ability to guess the language of the people who visit them in order to better communicate, learn their trust and eventually killing them by eating them. The divinatory power, used for evil purposes, adds to the deceptive and anthropophagic nature of the *donestre* and it becomes a further determining element of monstrosity. This essay aims to investigate how the treatise establishes an association between these semi-human creatures, located beyond the edge of the known world, and the practitioners of magical arts, positioned on the fringes of the Anglo-Saxon community, while identifying the ways in which magic can be used as a characterizing element in the marginalization of the Other.

Il trattato teratologico denominato *Meraviglie d'Oriente* costituisce il contributo anglosassone a una lunga tradizione di testi originati dalla cosiddetta *Lettera di Farasmane*. Questa epistola fittizia, probabilmente composta intorno al II secolo e indirizzata all'imperatore Adriano o all'imperatore Traiano, era dedicata alla descrizione di luoghi e creature incontrate in un immaginario viaggio attraverso terre note e ignote fuori dai confini occidentali. Le redazioni sopravvissute della *Lettera* sono state suddivise in due gruppi principali, indicati convenzionalmente con le lettere F e P, in base alla corruzione del nome del presunto mittente, Φαρσαμάνης, re di Iberia – odierna Georgia – intorno al I secolo d.C.¹

¹ Si pensa che un primo nucleo dell'epistola in greco risalga al II secolo e, successivamente, sia stato tradotto in latino tra la fine del IV secolo e l'inizio del VII, diffondendosi quindi sul continente europeo. La trasmissione in Inghilterra potrebbe essere avvenuta intorno al VII secolo. Al gruppo F appartengono i testi identificati dai titoli convenzionali *Lettera di Feramen ad Adriano* (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, nouv. acq. lat. 1065, ff. 92v-95v, IX secolo) e *Feramen Rex ad Adrianum imperatorem* (Montecassino, Archivio dell'Abbazia 391,

Nell'Inghilterra anglosassone i territori straordinari e gli esseri al limite dell'umanità che l'opera descrive devono aver suscitato interesse per diverso tempo: il testo, privato della cornice epistolare, è conservato in tre manoscritti che, prodotti sull'isola tra la fine del X secolo e la metà del XII, tramandano due versioni in latino e due versioni in antico inglese, ascrivibili al gruppo P. Il codice London, British Library Cotton Vitellius A. xv (fine X secolo - inizio XI), il manoscritto del *Beowulf*, trasmette una traduzione in antico inglese, contenente trentadue capitoli accompagnati da trentuno illustrazioni (ff. 98v-106v). Nel London, BL, Cotton Tiberius B. v (metà XI secolo) sono conservate due versioni, in latino e in antico inglese, arricchite di cinque capitoli nella parte finale, con relative illustrazioni (ff. 78v-87v). Un terzo manoscritto, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 614 (XII secolo), presenta una rielaborazione del testo latino e delle illustrazioni, con l'aggiunta di ulteriori dodici capitoli (ff. 36r-48r).²

Nella documentazione dell'inglese antico, il trattato sulle *Meraviglie d'Oriente*³ costituisce, pertanto, un'articolata rappresentazione di ciò che la cultu-

ff. 82v-84v, XI secolo; Cava dei Tirreni, Archivio dell'Abbazia 3, ff. 393r-394v, XI-XII secolo; Madrid, Biblioteca Nacional 19, ff. 198v-199r, XII secolo; Paris, BNF, anc. fond. lat. 7418, ff. 268r-270v, XIV secolo). Riconducibile a questo ramo della tradizione è anche una versione del testo inserita nel libro III (capitoli lxxii-lxxxii) degli *Otia Imperialia* di Gervasio di Tilbury (c. 1211). Il gruppo P si contraddistingue per una riduzione significativa dei capitoli iniziali e, oltre alle versioni trasmesse in Inghilterra, è composto dai testi dell'*Epistola Premonis Regis ad Trajanum imperatorem* (un tempo tradito in Strasbourg, C IV 15, codice perduto in un incendio nel 1870, il testo è stato pubblicato in edizione diplomatica da Graff nel 1827), e da quelli dell'*Epistola Parmoenis ad Trajanum imperatorem* (appartenente a un codice non identificabile di Vossius a Leida, trascritto da Pitra nel 1884), a cui si aggiunge una traduzione in antico francese conosciuta come *Lepistle le roy Perimenis a lempereur* (Bruxelles, Bibliothèque Royale, 14562, ff. 5vb-6vb, XIII secolo). Per una discussione più ampia sulla trasmissione e sulla datazione del testo si vedano Knock 1982, 31-34 e Lendinara 2002, 186-188.

² Da qui in poi, le versioni in antico inglese saranno identificate con la denominazione convenzionale di *Meraviglie d'Oriente*; mentre per i corrispondenti testi latini prodotti nell'Inghilterra anglosassone si userà, altrettanto convenzionalmente, la denominazione latina, *Mirabilia*, in luogo di *De Rebus in oriente mirabilibus*. Per riferirsi ai singoli manoscritti si useranno le sigle V, T e B.

³ Testo latino e testo in antico inglese sono stati pubblicati congiuntamente per la prima volta da Cockayne, 1861, 33-39 e 62-66. Tra i numerosi lavori successivi, le edizioni più recenti sono consultabili in: Gibb 1977; Knock 1982; Orchard 1995, 173-203; Fulk 2010, 15-31; Mittman, Kim 2013, 39-71. Nel presente lavoro si farà riferimento alla suddivisione in capitoli suggerita dall'edizione curata da Orchard, da cui saranno tratti anche i riferimenti testuali. È opportuno precisare però che Orchard segue principalmente la lezione di T sia per il testo in volgare che per il testo latino. Pertanto, per le lezioni esclusivamente presenti in V, si farà riferimento all'edizione di Mittman e Kim.

ra medievale interpretava come *mirabilia*, intesi come eventi, luoghi, creature – umani, animali, ibridi – e cose impossibili da esplicitare se non ricorrendo al dominio del sovrannaturale, un universo d'oggetti, in parte diverso dalla categoria letteraria e mentale del meraviglioso, per la sua pluralità intrinseca.⁴ Nella molteplicità delle forze caratterizzanti i *mirabilia* rientra anche la capacità di controllare o influenzare eventi straordinari attraverso l'appello a potenze sovrannaturali. Indirizzato alla descrizione delle straordinarietà riscontrabili in un universo estraneo, il trattato offre, quindi, la possibilità di indagare una dimensione della magia, marginalmente ma significativamente inserita nella caratterizzazione mostruosa.

Nell'eterogeneità delle creature descritte, la struttura dei capitoli appare abbastanza fissa: generalmente il testo indica prima un luogo, seppur vago, presenta la meraviglia attraverso un nome e una descrizione fisica, talvolta aggiunge qualche riferimento ad abitudini ritenute singolari, più raramente si fa cenno ad aspetti sovrannaturali. Per esempio, la capacità di prendere fuoco delle galline giganti del capitolo 3 è giudicata come un caso di stregoneria inaudita, “ungefregelicu lyblac”.⁵ Diverso il riferimento concernente le donne barbute (§26) che, soltanto secondo il testo tradito in V, farebbero ricorso alla magia durante le loro pratiche venatorie: “mid heora scin ***e þ hy tohuntingþ”.⁶

Una prospettiva negativa e di impianto esplicitamente cristiano sulle pratiche magiche emerge nelle *Meraviglie d'Oriente* in modalità più estese nell'episodio interpolato con protagonisti Jamnes e Mambres, i due negromanti che si sareb-

⁴ Sebbene elaborata in riferimento a un periodo più tardo, la nota definizione di Le Goff, in merito al concetto di *mirabilia*, separato dalla più moderna concezione del meraviglioso, risulta pertinente anche per il contesto delle *Meraviglie d'Oriente*: “Une des caractéristiques du merveilleux c'est, bien entendu, d'être produit par des forces ou des êtres surnaturels, mais qui sont précisément multiples. On retrouve quelque chose de cela dans le pluriel *mirabilia* du Moyen Âge. C'est que non seulement le merveilleux renferme un monde d'objets, un monde d'actions diverses, mais que par-dérrière, il y a une multiplicité de forces.” (Le Goff 1978, 68).

⁵ Il riferimento alla stregoneria è assente nella corrispondente versione dei *Mirabilia*, ma presente in altri testi del gruppo P, come nella versione antico francese, in cui è possibile leggere la lezione: “car eles sont envenimees”. Cfr. Knock 1982, 557.

⁶ Mittman, Kim 2013, 54. Nelle due versioni di T, le donne barbute si limitano a cacciare con l'ausilio di fiere selvatiche: “pro canibus tigres et leopardos nutriunt, et omnia genera bestiarum quae in eodem monte nascuntur cum illis ueniantur”; “7 fore humdum tigras 7 leopardos þæt syndan þa kenestan deor. 7 ealra ðæra wildeora kynn, þæra þe on ðære dune aken-de beoð, þæt hi gehuntingþ”. Pur nella difficoltà di lettura, dovuta alla bruciatura dei bordi di V, la radice visibile della parola *scin-*, probabilmente *scinlac* (cfr. Sisam 1962, 81), si riferisce a magia o stregoneria. Sembrerebbe essere una traduzione di un *cum illis* confuso erroneamente con il *cum illis* presente nella versione latina. Cfr. Knock 1982, 743.

bero opposti a Mosè attraverso trucchi di stregoneria.⁷ Nella documentazione in antico inglese, i due fratelli sono menzionati anche in altre testimonianze. Così nella versione in volgare dell'*Historia adversus paganos* di Orosio (I, 8):

Pa þaet gesawon þa Egypte, hy þa getrymedon hyra dryas, Geames and Mambres, and getruwedon mid hyra dry-craftum, þaet hi on þone ilcan weg feran meahtan.⁸

(Quando gli Egizi videro ciò, i loro maghi, Geames e Mambres, li incoraggiarono, e confidarono che, con le loro arti magiche, avrebbero potuto attraversare quella stessa via).⁹

rispetto al testo latino, si aggiunge sia il riferimento ai due maghi sia la dichiarazione di fiducia nelle loro arti magiche da parte degli Egizi. Oppure nel *De auguriis* di Ælfric:

Fela sædon þa dry-men. þurh deoffles cræft. Iamnes and mambres. swa swa moyses awrát. and hi pharáo forlærdon mid heora lotwrencum oððæt he adranc on ðære deopan sæ.¹⁰

(Molte cose dissero i maghi, Iamnes e Mambres, attraverso le arti del diavolo, come scrisse Mosè; essi sedussero il faraone con i loro inganni finché egli annegò nel mare profondo).

dove il riferimento al passo biblico e ai due negromanti lascia emergere in modo più evidente una posizione di condanna, coerente con il contesto di

⁷ Nelle versioni ebraica e canonica dell'Esodo (VII e VIII), prima della partenza degli Israeliti, sono dei generici maghi d'Egitto a sostenere le parti del faraone contro Mosè e Aronne. Nella seconda lettera a Timòteo (III, 8) i maghi sono identificati come Ιαννῆς e Ἰαμβρῆς. Le tradizioni giudaica e cristiana conservano numerosi riferimenti alla loro vicenda. L'episodio narrato a conclusione delle *Meraviglie d'Oriente* in T è collegato ai testi frammentari trasmessi in due papiri greci: Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Pap. Vindob. Greek inv. 29456 + 29828 verso (III secolo), e Dublin, Chester Beatty Library and Gallery of Oriental Art, Pap. XVI (IV secolo). Cfr. Biggs, Hall 1996. Per una discussione più ampia sulla tradizione riguardante i due negromanti si rimanda a Pietersma 1994. Per ulteriori frammenti del papiro vindobonense si veda Pietersma 2012.

⁸ Thorpe 1893, 273.

⁹ Le traduzioni dall'antico inglese sono a cura di chi scrive.

¹⁰ Skeat 1881-1900 I, 372.

un'omelia incentrata sui vantaggi del sostegno divino in luogo dell'aiuto ingannevole del demonio.

L'episodio narrato nelle *Meraviglie d'Oriente*, invece, ritrae i fratelli in una fase successiva e si concentra su un messaggio dello spirito di Jamnes che comunica dall'aldilà le pene patite all'inferno:

Her segð hu Mambres ontynde ða drylican bec his broðer Iamnes, 7 him geopenude þa heagorune ðæs deofolgildes his broður. Andswarode him Iamnes saul þyssum wordum: 'Þu, broðor, ic naht unrihtlice eom dead, ac soðlice 7 rihtlice ic eom dead 7 Godes dom wið me standeð for þam ðe ic wæs ana wisera þonne ealle oðre dryas 7 ic wiðstod twam gebroðrum Moyses hatte 7 Aaron, þa worhtan þa micclan tacna 7 forebeacnu. For þan ic eom dead 7 for þam ic eom gelædd on helwara rice mid, þær is seo miccle hatnys þæs ecan wites, 7 þær is se seað þæs singales susles þanon ne byð ænig upp adon. Nu, min broðer Mambre, beheald þe on þinum life þæt ðu do wel þinum bearnum 7 þinum freondum, for þan þe on helle ne byð nawiht godes nem ðe unrotnys 7 þystru. 7 æfter þam þe ðu DEAD bist, þonne cymst þu to helle 7 betwixt deadum mannum bið þin eardungstow, niðer on eorðan, 7 þin seað bið twegea cubita wid 7 feowra lang'.

(Qui si dice di come Mambres aprì il libro magico di suo fratello Jamnes, e a lui vennero rivelati i misteri più profondi dell'idolatria del fratello. L'anima di Jamnes gli rispose con queste parole: 'Fratello, io sono morto non ingiustamente, anzi sono morto in verità giustamente, e il giudizio di Dio si pone contro di me perché io solo sono stato più abile di tutti gli altri stregoni, e resistetti ai due fratelli chiamati Mosé e Aronne, che produssero quei grandi segni e portenti. Per questa ragione io sono morto, e per questo io sono stato condotto nel regno infernale, dove persiste il grande caldo della punizione eterna, e dove si trova la fossa dei tormenti perpetui dai quali nessuno mai ascende. Ora, Mambres, fratello mio, fa' attenzione a comportarti bene durante la tua vita con i tuoi figli e i tuoi amici, perché all'inferno non c'è nulla di buono, soltanto tristezza e oscurità; e dopo che sarai morto, allora verrai all'inferno e la tua dimora sarà tra i morti, sottoterra, e la tua fossa sarà larga due cubiti e lunga quattro'.)

L'aggiunta di questa narrazione a conclusione del trattato tradito in T,¹¹ oltre a

¹¹ Pur conservato nella versione dei *Mirabilia* di B, l'episodio, assente da tutte le fonti continentali, presenta significative divergenze rispetto agli altri capitoli del trattato tanto da

testimoniare la natura aperta di un testo come le *Meraviglie d'Oriente*,¹² dimostra ulteriormente come, nell'Inghilterra dell'XI secolo, le pratiche magiche di cui si macchiarono i due fratelli fossero percepite con valenza negativa; il ricorso alla negromanzia è chiaramente rappresentato come mostruoso.¹³ Anche l'illustrazione che accompagna il capitolo in T contribuisce a costruire questa visione (f. 87v). Nell'immagine, che occupa una pagina intera, lo spazio infernale è rappresentato, in analogia con la descrizione testuale, come una fossa stretta e profonda in cui le anime dannate sono sottoposte a torture da parte di lupi e serpenti. La figura di Mambres è posta in alto al centro, reca in mano un codice e ne indica le pagine. Jamnes, che è collocato sulla destra del foglio in posizione dominante sulla cavità che ospita i dannati, mostra degli evidenti tratti mostruosi: il corpo, di dimensioni fuori dalla norma, è ricoperto di peli e appare di un colorito verde-grigiastro,¹⁴ gli occhi presentano una sclera rossa e in luogo delle dita delle mani si ritrovano degli artigli.¹⁵

Più complessa l'introduzione del dominio magico nella presentazione della popolazione umanoide dei *donestri*. Nel capitolo 20 del trattato è descritta una stirpe di mostri che, collocati in un'isola del Mar Rosso, riescono a comunicare con gli stranieri nelle rispettive lingue d'origine; una simile abilità serve loro per ottenere la fiducia degli ospiti e poi mangiarne le carni:

Donne is sum ealand in ðære Readan Sæ, þær is moncynn þæt is mid us Donestre genemned, þa syndon geweaxene swa frihteras fram ðan heafde oð ðone nafelan, 7 se oðer dæl byð mannes lice gelic. 7 hi cunnon eall mennisc gereord. Þonne hi fremdes kynnes mann geseoð, ðonne næmnað hi hine 7 his magas cuðra manna naman, 7 mid leaslicum wordum hine beswicað, 7 him onfoð, 7 þænne æfter þan hi hine fretað ealne butan his heafde 7 þonne sittað 7 wepað ofer ðam heafde.

essere generalmente considerato un testo estraneo alla tradizione delle *Meraviglie d'Oriente*. Già Cockayne 1861, 50, ne curò la pubblicazione come frammento esterno intitolandolo "Mambres Magicus"; mentre Knock 1982 e Fulk 2010 escludono il brano dalle loro edizioni.

¹² Si ricorderà come la versione di B presenti in aggiunta, rispetto alla versione di T, altri dodici capitoli.

¹³ Cfr. Orchard 1995, 21-22.

¹⁴ Come suggerito dalle analisi condotte sul manoscritto da Ford 2016, 100.

¹⁵ La visione dell'inferno proposta in questa rappresentazione, come sottolineato da Semple 2003, 241-243 e Ford 2016, 99-101, riprende motivi della credenza popolare. Semple, in particolare, collega questa rappresentazione alle immagini infernali presenti nel salterio di Harley (London, BL, Harley 603) e alle pratiche di sepoltura riservate ai criminali.

(Poi c'è un'isola nel Mar Rosso in cui si trova una stirpe di uomini che da noi è chiamata *Donestre*, che sono nati come indovini dalla testa all'ombelico, mentre l'altra parte è simile all'uomo. Ed essi conoscono tutte le lingue degli uomini. Quando vedono qualcuno di stirpe straniera, lo chiamano per nome e nominano i suoi familiari con nomi conosciuti e con parole ingannevoli lo illudono e lo afferrano, e dopo che hanno divorato tutto di lui tranne la testa, si siedono e piangono su di essa.)

Il comportamento della creatura, nel quale all'atto di 'chiamare per nome' *namian*, segue l'inganno, *beswīcan* 'illudere', la consumazione, *fretan* 'divorare', e il pentimento, *wēpan* 'piangere', risulta fortemente ambiguo.¹⁶ A questo proposito, può risultare interessante la distinzione proposta da Ford nelle azioni compiute dal mostro, tra comportamenti giudicabili come fraudolenti e la capacità di indovinare il nome di ciascun visitatore, che costituisce la facoltà distintiva del *donestre*, una abilità che è giustificata assimilando la creatura mostruosa alla figura dell'indovino.¹⁷ Il testo delle *Meraviglie d'Oriente* identifica, infatti, la straordinarietà della creatura *donestre* in questa generica capacità divinatoria.

Forme di divinazione o di prognostica erano sicuramente praticate in taluni

¹⁶ Tale comportamento ha offerto, infatti, spunti interpretativi tra i più diversi. Focalizzandosi sull'aspetto antropofagico, Cohen 1999, Blurton 2007 e Howe 2008 hanno diversamente interpretato il *donestre* come l'incarnazione della paura dell'assimilazione etnica e culturale da parte di una popolazione altra. D'altra parte, Kim 1997 ha rilevato come il carattere ibrido della creatura sia individuabile nel contemporaneo superamento di limiti corporei e linguistici. La natura di "mixed monster" è sottolineata anche da Tyler 2008 che, rileggendo l'episodio secondo le teorie foucaultiane, identifica il *donestre* come trasgressore tanto delle leggi naturali quanto delle leggi umane; le leggi della società civile, infatti, non avrebbero i mezzi per fare fronte all'esistenza dell'ibrido. Concentrandosi, invece, sul comportamento fraudolento del mostro, Saunders 2010 ne interpreta la disonestà, in relazione ai codici di lealtà della società maschile anglosassone, come un atteggiamento femminile in contrasto con l'aspetto fisico visivamente maschile. Lehr 2018 vede nel mostro una creatura ermafrodita e rilegge l'assimilazione fisica di ciascun viaggiatore attraverso la teoria medievale degli umori, le lacrime finali sarebbero, in questo contesto, il residuo di questa consumazione, l'espulsione delle parti non-necessarie. Roby 2019, più recentemente, ha, invece, posto l'attenzione sulla complessità delle emozioni attribuite al *donestre*, provando a leggere la creatura come figura del rimorso di fronte alla recidività del peccato.

¹⁷ Ford, tuttavia, non considera il potere divinatorio attribuito al *donestre* come una forma di stregoneria: "A *donestre* tells the names of a victim and their kin not by magic but by mastery of semiosis which, in this context is demonstrated by the power to name". Il potere di nominare consisterebbe nell'abilità di coordinare oggetto e segno linguistico come se la connessione tra essi fosse necessaria e non arbitraria. Cfr. Ford 2016, 144-145.

ambienti dell’Inghilterra anglosassone. Il lessico antico inglese concernente l’ambito della preveggenza appare vasto, benché dei sessanta vocaboli a esso riconducibili, diversi siano termini rari, attestati unicamente nelle glosse, in riferimento a concetti appartenenti alla cultura classica o tardoantica.¹⁸ L’esercizio della divinazione è più frequentemente indicato da *wīglung*, il veggente è denominato nella maggior parte dei casi *wīglere*, mentre l’azione è espressa dal verbo *wīglian*.¹⁹ Piuttosto diffuso anche l’uso di *cēpan*, che con il significato di ‘regolare, organizzare’, sottolinea un tipo di osservazione della natura comune nella prognostica, talvolta confusa con la divinazione.²⁰ In effetti, Ælfric, nell’omelia *Octabas et circumcisio Domini*, sembra voler mettere in guardia i fedeli contro queste attività:

Nu wigliað stunte men menigfealde wigelunga on þisum dæge, mid micclum gedwyldre æfter hæðenum gewunan ongean hyra cristendom, swilce hi magon heora lif gelengan, oððe heora gesundfulnysse mid þam ðe hi gremiað þone ælmihtigan scyppend. Sind eac manega mid swa micclum gedwyldre befangene, þæt hi cepað be ðam monan heora fær, 7 heora dæda be dagum, 7 nellað heora þing wanian on monandæge, for angynne þære wucan, ac se monandæg nis na fyrrest daga on þære wucan, ac is se oðer, se sunnandæg is fyrrest on gesceapenysse 7 on endebyrdnysse, 7 on wurþmynte.²¹

(Ora uomini stolti praticano molte forme di divinazione in questo giorno, con grande errore, secondo una consuetudine pagana, contro la loro cristianità, come se essi potessero prolungare la loro vita o la loro salute, con questo provocano l’Onnipotente creatore. Molti altri incorrono nello stesso errore, coloro

¹⁸ Cfr. Chardonnens 2011, 52-53. Tra i sostantivi che possono essere usati per indicare colui o colei che pratica una forma di divinazione compaiono anche *galdere*, *hālsere*, *wicca* e *wītega* che, tuttavia, assumono questo significato soltanto in alcune glosse, mentre generalmente indicano altre competenze magiche. *Galdere* indica un mago, colui il quale pronuncia incantesimi, un incantatore, mentre *hālsere* identifica in primo luogo l’esorcista (è, quindi, adoperato anche in riferimento a Cristo), sono entrambi associati alle figure degli indovini solo nelle glosse, cfr. Goossens 1974, 406 per *galdere*; cfr. Hessels 1890, 23, A 953 – per *hālsere*, nonché DOE 2018 s.vv. *galdere*, *hālsere*. *Wicca* si riferisce principalmente al mago o allo stregone, in generale; *wītega* è colui che è in possesso di un tipo di conoscenza derivata da fonti sovranaturali, principalmente il profeta e solo in secondo luogo l’indovino, cfr. Bosworth, Toller 1898-1972, s.vv. *wicca*, *wītega*.

¹⁹ Cfr. Bosworth, Toller 1898-1972, s.vv. *wīglere*, *wīglian*, *wīglung*.

²⁰ Cfr. DOE 2018 s.v. *cēpan*.

²¹ Clemoes 1997, 229.

che regolano i loro viaggi in relazione alle fasi lunari, e le loro azioni in relazione ai giorni, e non praticano salassi di lunedì perché è l'inizio della settimana. Tuttavia, il lunedì non è il primo giorno della settimana, ma il secondo; la domenica è il primo giorno della creazione sia per ordine che per importanza.)

Come noto, l'abate di Eynsham si pronuncia più volte contro le pratiche divinatorie, considerate estranee al cristianesimo.²² Così anche Wulfstan che, nell'omelia *De fide catholica*, colloca gli indovini in fondo a una lunga lista di peccatori, prossimi alla dannazione eterna:

Dyder sculan mannsлагan, 7 ðider sculan manswican; ðider sculan æwbrecan 7 ða furlan forlegenan; ðider sculan mansworan 7 morðwyrthan; ðider sculan giteras, ryperas 7 reaferas 7 woruldstruderan; ðider sculon þeofas 7 ðeodscaðan; ðyder sculon wiccan 7 wigleras, 7 hrædest to secganne, ealle þa manfullan þe ar yfel worhton 7 noldan geswican ne wið God þingian.²³

(Di là dovranno andare gli omicidi, e di là i traditori, di là dovranno passare gli adulteri e gli sporchi impudichi, di là dovranno passare gli spergiuri e gli assassini; di là gli avari, i predoni, gli sciacalli, i distruttori, di là i ladri e i criminali contro la comunità; di là i maghi e gli indovini e, per dirla in forma semplicissima, tutti coloro i quali hanno già compiuto malvagità e non vogliono desistere, né pregano Dio.)

In tale contesto culturale, l'attribuzione di un potere divinatorio, sommato alla natura ingannevole e antropofagica del *donestre*, potrebbe configurarsi come ulteriore elemento determinante l'estraneità della figura mostruosa.

All'interno della tradizione della *Lettera di Farasmane*, il capitolo 20 costituisce un'interpolazione presente solo in alcune versioni appartenenti al gruppo P. Nell'*Epistola Premonis* (xxvi.3) e nel corrispondente brano in antico francese (xxix), questa genia di mostri è presentata senza alcuna denominazione specifica e senza alcun riferimento ad abilità profetiche:

²² Si pensi, ad esempio, nuovamente all'omelia *De auguriis*: "Eall swa gelice se ðe gelyfð wiglungum oððe be fugelum oððe be fnorum oððe be horsum oððe be hundum, ne bið hé ná cristen, ac bið forcuð wiðersaca" (Così similmente colui che crede alla divinazione dagli uccelli o dagli starnuti o dai cavalli o dai cani, non è cristiano, ma un perverso apostata). Skeat 1881-1900, I, 370.

²³ Bethurum 1957, 163.

Est quoque insula in Mari rubro in qua est genus hominum qui a capite usque ad umbilicum sunt homines, reliquum vero corpus dissimile humano, omnium nationum linguis loquentes, et, si alienigenam viderint, ipsius lingua appellant et parentum cognatorumque dicunt nomina, blandientes sermone ut decipiant et comprehendant; et, cum comprehenderit, perdunt illos et comedunt.²⁴

Et la en le rouge mer est vne isle. en le quele sont gens qui parolent de tous langages. et saluent tous chlaus qui la vont. chascun en sen propre langage. et leur nomment leur cousins et leur lignage. et par beles paroles les decholvent et les prendent et menguent et quant il les ont mengie si se metent en orisons sur les testes.²⁵

È, tuttavia, probabile che il capitolo sui *tritonides* del gruppo F, creature dotate di poteri oracolari, possa aver influenzato la parte iniziale dell'episodio così come trasmesso nelle *Meraviglie d'Oriente*. Nella *Lettera di Fermes* (xxv) e in *Feramen rex* (xxvi) si leggono proposizioni che somigliano da vicino alla lezione "quod apud nos appellatur donestre. quasi divine" trasmessa dai *Mirabilia*:

Iuxta quod oceani fines stadia sunt ccclxx. In illo loco nascuntur soraci qui apud vos tritognides appellantur, quasi divini, quos de quacumque res interrogare volueris responsum accipies.²⁶

In persarum vero partibus nascuntur orhaci qui apud nos tritonides appellantur, quasi divini, quos de quacumque causa interrogare volueris, responsum accipies.²⁷

Come accade nei capitoli sui *tritonides* della *Lettera di Fermes* e di *Feramen Rex*, infatti, nel testo dei *Mirabilia*, la capacità profetica attribuita alle creature è specificata in apposizione alla denominazione.

Nella versione anglosassone, invece, sembrerebbe che sia considerata come una caratteristica fisica della creatura. Infatti, nel testo antico inglese il corpo del *donestre* è ritratto come diviso in una parte superiore, simile a

²⁴ Faral 1914, 211.

²⁵ Knock 1982, 912-913.

²⁶ Faral 1914, 211.

²⁷ Knock 1982, 938. Le creature sono chiamate *orhaci* (versione di Montecassino) o *orbaci* (versioni di Madrid e Parigi) per una probabile corruzione di lat. *oracoli*. Cfr. Knock 1982, 797 e Lendinara 2008, 264.

quella degli indovini, “swa frihteras”, e in una parte inferiore di forma umana, “mannes lice gelic”. Questa insolita contrapposizione è frutto di scelte interpretative determinate evidentemente da una tradizione testuale corrotta. È probabile che, in questo passaggio, il testo latino a disposizione del traduttore fosse poco chiaro.

I *Mirabilia* di T concordano con l’*Epistola Premonis* nel rappresentare la parte superiore della creatura come umana, ma rivelano un errore nel prosieguo della descrizione:

Itaque insula est in rubro mari. in qua hominum genus est quod apud nos appellatur donestre. quasi divine. a capite usque ad umbilicum quasi homines. reliquo corpore similitudine humana nationum linguis loquentes.²⁸

Da un punto di vista sintattico, “quasi homines” e “similitudine humana” sono posti in contrapposizione, dal punto di vista semantico, però, non è presente alcuna opposizione, poiché sia la parte superiore, “a capite usque ad umbilicum”, sia la parte inferiore, “reliquo corpore”, sono descritte come umane nella forma. Se il traduttore della versione antico inglese operava su un testo latino con una lezione molto simile a quella di T, si può supporre che abbia tentato di superare questa illogicità modificando la struttura della frase; “quasi diuine”²⁹ è letto come un dettaglio fisico, cui si aggiunge il verbo “syndon geweaxene” e viene eliminata la doppia ripetizione:³⁰

þær is moncynn þæt is mid us Donestre genemned, þa syndon geweaxene swa frihteras fram ðan heafde oð ðone nafelan, 7 se oðer dæl byð mannes lice gelic.

²⁸ Knock 1982, 891. L’edizione di Orchard, nel tentativo di accordare il testo latino con la versione antico inglese, modifica la punteggiatura presente in T, alterandone significativamente la lezione. Pertanto si è preferito in questo caso ricorrere all’edizione diplomatica curata da Knock, che conserva la punteggiatura originaria discernibile in T.

²⁹ Come è stato opportunamente notato, mentre B riporta la lezione “quasi divinum”, la lezione di T “quasi diuine” parrebbe confondere l’aggettivo *divinus*, -a, -um ‘divino, degli dei; straordinario, meraviglioso; profetico, ispirato dagli dei’ con il sostantivo *divinus*, -i ‘indovino’ (cfr. Lewis, Short 1879-1933, s.v., 602-603). In questa prospettiva, Orchard emenda in “quasi diuini”. Cfr. Orchard 1995, 179 nonché Ford 2016, 144-145.

³⁰ È interessante notare come anche il testo latino di B, che discende dalla versione latina di T (cfr. Gibb 1977, 5-13), sembri avvertire comunque l’illogicità del modello e pertanto sostituisca sia “quasi homine” che “similitudine humana”. La proposizione è così formata: “quasi divinum. a capite usque ad umbilicum deformatum ab hominum spetie. reliquo corpore similitudine existens humana”. Knock 1982, 891.

Unica occorrenza attestata nel corpus anglosassone, il sostantivo *frihtere*³¹ sembrerebbe, pertanto, tradurre in antico inglese il significato di *divinus* ‘indovino’.³² Si tratta di un *nomen agentis* dal verbo *frihtan* o *frihtian* ‘praticare la divinazione’,³³ corradicale del sostantivo astratto *friht*, che sembrerebbe indicare una richiesta di anticipazione del futuro, ‘divinazione, augurio’ ma anche ‘presagio’.³⁴ In una preghiera rubricata come *Ora ad barbas tondendas*, il sostantivo traduce *auspicium*, nel significato di ‘auspicio, presagio’:

God ðæs gast’ giscæft ælc wynsvm’ gifeaia giher beodo vs’ of’ ðiosne esne ðin gigoð’ ældo’ wlite wynsvmiende & æristvm l frvmmvm frehtvm to scearanne.³⁵

(Dio, il cui spirito esulta con gioia insieme a ciascuna creatura, ascolta la nostra preghiera riguardo questo tuo servo nello splendore della giovane età, possa, esultante, radersi al primo auspicio.)

Nello specifico, *friht*, però, parrebbe connesso a pratiche proibite. Infatti, nelle leggi nortumbriche (*Norðhymbra preosta lagu*, 48) e nel codice legale di Cnut (II, 5,1) è inserito in liste di attività vietate, in correlazione con l’esercizio dei sacrifici di sangue:

Gif þonne æni man agiten wurdæ, þæt ænigne hæðenscipe heonan forð dreoge oððe on blot oððe on firhte oððe on ænig wiccecræft lufige oððe idola wurðinge, gif he sy cynges þegn, gilde X healfmarc, healf Criste 7 healf landrican.³⁶

(Se qualcuno è scoperto a professare qualsiasi forma di paganesimo d’ora in avanti o tramite sacrifici di sangue o divinazione o pratica la stregoneria o venera gli idoli, se egli è seguace del re, paga un’ammenda di dieci mezzi marchi, metà al Cristo e metà al feudatario.)

³¹ Attenendosi alla sola lezione di V, “frifteras”, Mittman e Kim hanno invece ipotizzato che la forma potesse essere collegata all’antropofagia del mostro e ricondotta al verbo *fretan* ‘divorare, mangiare con voracità’ o all’aggettivo *frettol* ‘vorace’ (cfr. *DOE* 2018, s.v. *fretan*). Tuttavia, questa interpretazione non tiene conto del testo latino. Cfr. Mittman, Kim 2013, 19.

³² Cfr. *DOE* 2018, s.v. *frihtere*.

³³ Verbo debole di prima o seconda classe, equivalente al latino *facere auguria*. Si veda la glossa “i. strichtrat” in Meritt 1945, 51.

³⁴ Cfr. *DOE* 2018, s.v. *friht*.

³⁵ Lindelöf, Thompson 1927, 97.

³⁶ Liebermann 1903-16, I, 388.

Hæðenscipe byð þæt man deofolgyld weorþige hæðene godas 7 sunnan oððe monan, fyr oððe flod wæterwyllas oððe stanas oððe æniges cynnes wudutreo-wa, oððon wiccecraft lufige, oððon morðweorc gefremme on ænige wisan, oððon on blote oððon fyrhte, oððon swylcra gedwimera ænig þingc dreoge.³⁷

(È considerato pagano l'uomo che venera idoli e divinità pagane, il sole o la luna, il fuoco o i flussi d'acqua o le rocce o qualsiasi specie di albero, o pratica la stregoneria, o chi causa morte tramite pozioni in qualsiasi modo, o tramite sacrificio di sangue o tramite divinazione, o compie una qualsiasi di tali stregonerie.)

Appare quindi probabile un'associazione tra i *donestri* e queste figure praticanti stregoneria poste ai margini della legalità nella società anglosassone del X secolo.

Le abilità profetiche della creatura potrebbero aver giocato un ruolo anche nella formazione della denominazione *donestre*, che compare ex novo nei manoscritti insulari. In genere, il senso attribuito ai nomi delle popolazioni mostruose nelle *Meraviglie d'Oriente*, quando non esplicitamente chiarito come, per esempio, negli episodi riguardanti gli *homodubii* (§8 e §17), è deducibile in base all'aspetto o al comportamento delle creature: i giganti cannibali *hostes* (§13) sono nemici perché attaccano chiunque incontrino, i cinocefali (§7) contengono in qualsiasi nome a essi assegnato (*healfhundingas*, *cenocéphale* o *conopoenas*) un riferimento alle fattezze canine. Pertanto, il significato della forma *donestre* potrebbe essere deducibile nel capitolo stesso e legato alla pratica profetica: potrebbe essere corruzione della forma tardo latina *divinatores*,³⁸ con la possibile interferenza del suffisso *-estre*, usato per formare *nomina agentis* principalmente femminili.³⁹ Tale suffisso potrebbe, inoltre, suggerire anche un'interpretazione androgina della creatura: nonostante l'iconografia rappresenti il mostro con aspetto maschile, i discorsi ingannevoli e disonesti potrebbero essere considerati come comportamenti culturalmente associati al femminile, in opposizione ai

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 312.

³⁸ Si vedano Friedman 2000, 15 e, in particolare, Lendinara 2008, 270-271. Un'altra possibile interpretazione potrebbe ricondurre alla radice del verbo anglosassone *dōn* 'fare, agire, causare' (cfr. *DOE* 2018, s.v. *dōn*). In questa prospettiva, la denominazione, indicante 'colui che agisce/colui che causa', denoterebbe il ruolo attivo del mostro nell'incontro con il visitatore. Cfr. Saunders 2010, 26-27.

³⁹ Cfr. Davis 1992, 103-116; Lendinara 2008, 271; Torre Alonso 2011, 43.

codici di rispetto della parola data tipici della società guerriera e prettamente maschile anglosassone.⁴⁰

D'altra parte, i tratti comportamentali di questa popolazione mostruosa rimandano a un'antica commistione tra le tradizioni sulla iena, sul corocotta e sul coccodrillo. Tra questi animali, la iena era ritenuta da disprezzare sin dalla tarda antichità, perché capace di cambiare sesso ogni anno, quindi contrassegnata da una presunta natura ermafrodita. A queste caratteristiche si aggiungono anche alcune facoltà magiche, tra cui quella di incantare gli esseri umani, spingendoli a perdere il senno (*Naturalis Hist.* XXVIII, xxvii, 92):⁴¹

Hyaenam Magi ex omnibus animalibus in maxima admiratione posuerunt, upote cui et ipsi magicas artes dederint vimque, qua alliciat ad se homines mentes alienans, permutationes sexus annua vice diximus cetera que monstrosa naturae eius; nunc persequemur quaecumque medicinis produntur.⁴²

Plinio riferisce le informazioni che egli stesso considera straordinarie su questo animale: della iena, infatti, si credeva che si appostasse all'esterno delle capanne dei pastori, e che imitasse la voce degli umani, imparando a pronunciarne i nomi, per attirarli e ucciderli (*Naturalis Hist.* VIII, xlv, 106):

Multa praeterea mira traduntur, sed maxime sermonem humanum inter pastorum stabula adsimulare nomenque alicuius addiscere, quem evocatum foris laceret, item vomitionem hominis imitari ad sollicitandos canes quos invadat. Ad uno animali sepulcra erui inquisitione corporum.⁴³

Un comportamento simile era associato anche al corocotta, la iena maculata, che in antichità si credeva fosse un animale ibrido frutto dell'unione tra il maschio di una iena striata e una leonessa. Per questa natura violenta e ingannevole, Claudio Eliano (*De natura animalium* VII, 19) introduce le due belve come animali di indole malvagia, κακότηες.⁴⁴

L'affinità nella descrizione tra il comportamento dei *donestri* e di questi animali è evidente. Si può ipotizzare che il nucleo centrale del capitolo traesse origine dalla rappresentazione del corocotta in commistione con il dettaglio

⁴⁰ Cfr. Lehr 2018, 183-184.

⁴¹ Cfr., tra gli altri, Lendinara 2008, 265-267.

⁴² Jan, Mayhoff 1892-1909, IV, 307.

⁴³ *Ibid.* II, 115.

⁴⁴ Garcia Valdés *et al.* 2009, 183.

finale derivante, invece, dalle leggende sul pianto del coccodrillo. L'immagine del coccodrillo piangente sul corpo delle proprie vittime nasce dall'osservazione del comportamento in natura del rettile, le cui secrezioni lacrimali sono causate dalla necessità di idratazione quando l'animale è costretto a nutrirsi lontano dall'acqua.⁴⁵ Nella tradizione del *Fisiologo* greco le caratteristiche che abitualmente erano attribuite al coccodrillo si combinano alle descrizioni di drago e serpente,⁴⁶ il rettile inizia a esser considerato come creatura distinta solo dal X secolo in poi nelle versioni *B* del *Fisiologo* latino. La summa delle conoscenze sul coccodrillo disponibili nel tardo XI secolo si trova nel secondo libro di un'opera costituita da alcuni capitoli del *Fisiologo*, con interpolazioni da Solino e Isidoro, il *De bestiis et aliis rebus*; nel capitolo "De crocodili natura" (II, viii) si legge:

Crocodilus a colore croceo dicitur, et nascitur in Nilo flumine, quadrupes animal, terra et aqua vivens, longitudine plerumque viginti cubitorum, dentium et unguium immanitate armatum, cuius cutis tantae duritiae dicitur, ut quamvis percutiatur in tergo lapidum ictibus, nihil laedatur. Nocte in aquis, die in humo quiescit; qui si aliquando inveniat hominem comedit eum, si vincere potest, et postea eum semper plorat.⁴⁷

Nella tradizione della *Lettera di Farasmane*, i testi del gruppo P che tramandano il capitolo non menzionano né corocotta, né coccodrillo. La commistione tra le due tradizioni potrebbe verosimilmente essere avvenuta a causa della somiglianza tra i due nomi: nel corso della trasmissione qualche copista potrebbe aver avuto accesso a un bestiario oppure a un testo enciclopedico analogo organizzato in ordine alfabetico.⁴⁸ L'aggettivo latino *croceus*, infatti, dal greco κρόκος 'zafferano', indicava il colore tra il giallo e l'arancione

⁴⁵ Cfr. Shaner, Vliet 2007, 615-617. Questa particolarità sul coccodrillo secondo Knock sarebbe un elemento che si lega alla descrizione del corocotta in area latina nella tarda antichità (cfr. Knock 1982, 178-179), Lendinara, invece, suggerisce l'ipotesi che l'interpolazione sia di ambito greco, poiché il motivo del coccodrillo addolorato dopo un pasto è attestato a lungo unicamente in opere di lingua greca. Le lacrime di coccodrillo sono menzionate, infatti, per la prima volta in un'omelia di Asterio di Amansea (c. 380-410). Cfr. Lendinara 2008, 267-268.

⁴⁶ Cfr. i capitoli 10 e 11, sulla vipera e sul serpente, oltre a tutti i capitoli dedicati ai nemici del drago (§16 sulla pantera, §30 sul cervo, § 43, sull'elefante), Zambon 1975.

⁴⁷ Migne 1854, ed. dig. in *Corpus Corporum: repositorium operum Latinorum apud universitatem Turicensem*, <<http://mlat.uzh.ch/?c=2&w=AuInHuD.DeBeEtA>> (ultimo accesso 07/04/2021).

⁴⁸ Cfr. Knock 1982, 70-71.

dello zafferano. Come visto, anche il *De bestiis et aliis rebus* riprende la falsa etimologia fornita al nome del cocodrillo da Isidoro (XII.vi.19): “Crocodillus, a croceo colore dictus, gignitur in Nilo, animal quadrupes in terra et aquis ualens”.⁴⁹ Analogamente, *croceus* è stato a lungo considerato all’origine del nome del corocotta, a causa della pelliccia giallognola tendente al rossiccio dell’animale.⁵⁰ Anche le rappresentazioni iconografiche spesso sovrapponibili avrebbero potuto contribuire a questa confusione iniziale. Infatti, nelle immagini dei bestiari le squame del rettile e la criniera del mammifero venivano abitualmente ritratti con il medesimo dorso crestato. Ad esempio, nel caso del bestiario del manoscritto New York, Pierpont Morgan Library M. 81 (XII secolo), sia la iena (f. 14v), che il cocodrillo (f. 70r) sono rappresentati con il corpo color corallo, gambe lunghe e un dorso crestato, che si potrebbe definire di colore *croceo*, mentre le enormi fauci sono impegnate a divorare un essere umano.⁵¹

Le illustrazioni che accompagnano il testo delle *Meraviglie d’Oriente* concordano nel rappresentare la figura del *donestre* come un ibrido uomo-animale. Questo aspetto bestiale accentuato potrebbe essere una strategia degli illustratori per rappresentare visivamente il senso dell’ibridità esplicitata in termini indefiniti nella descrizione testuale. In V (f. 103v), il mostro è ritratto con un corpo umanoide e il capo di un animale dal muso allungato; nella mano sinistra brandisce una gamba recisa, sventolandola in direzione della spaventata figura femminile con cui condivide la cornice. Nell’illustrazione di T (f. 83v), la parte inferiore del corpo del mostro è chiaramente rappresentata come umana, mentre la parte superiore possiede tratti animaleschi: la figura è colorata come se fosse dotata di un manto di pelliccia e il capo possiede una criniera leonina. L’immagine ritrae un incontro tra un *donestre* e un viaggiatore, sviluppandolo in tre scene: nella prima, i due sono impegnati in una pacifica conversazione; nella seconda, in basso a destra, il *donestre* assale il viaggiatore costringendolo a terra per divorarlo e, nella terza, ne rimpiange la perdita, ver-

⁴⁹ Valastro Canale 2004, 454.

⁵⁰ Questa falsa etimologia ha avuto vasta risonanza. Ancora nel 1979, Ernout e Meillet, nel *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue latine*, annotano, alla voce *crocus*, tra i derivati anche *crocuta*, *-as*. Come dimostrato da Funk, *crocuta* in realtà deriva da *κροκόττας* e dal sanscrito *koṭṭhāra*, originariamente indicante lo sciacallo dorato. Cfr. Funk 2010, 50-52.

⁵¹ Simile nella colorazione e nelle lunghe gambe anche l’illustrazione che ritrae la leucrota, ulteriore ibrido leone-iena, spesso confuso con il corocotta (f. 47v). Cfr. Lendinara 2008, 269.

sando lacrime sul capo mozzato. L'illustrazione di B (f. 42r) è sostanzialmente basata su quella di T.⁵²

Secondo Harpham, queste rappresentazioni iconografiche potrebbero spingere a leggere il comportamento del mostro come infuso di principi di "primitivism or bestiality".⁵³ Eppure, questa prospettiva non appare del tutto convincente: non sembra che il testo e le illustrazioni pongano unicamente in risalto il lato bestiale, non c'è solo istintività brutale nel comportamento della popolazione descritta. Piuttosto, nel testo la caratteristica principale parrebbe una forte capacità di manipolazione, determinata, in primo luogo, dal potere divinatorio; i *donestri* superano le remore dei visitatori di passaggio non con atteggiamento violento ma con la conoscenza preternaturale dei loro nomi e quindi con l'uso seducente delle parole, ed è, in tal modo, che essi riescono a sopraffare le proprie vittime con un minimo sforzo fisico. Se è vero, come scrive Cohen, che nell'illustrazione in T, i dettagli come la criniera leonina e il muso allungato del mostro prendono il sopravvento nel momento dell'aggressione,⁵⁴ è altrettanto vero, e forse più sorprendente, che la prima scena ritrae una conversazione dall'aspetto del tutto pacifico: il *donestre* fronteggia il suo ospite e le braccia gesticolanti dei due suggeriscono un dialogo coinvolgente.

Questo talento manipolativo è, come nel caso dei suoi antecedenti iena e corocotta, esplicitamente associato al dominio delle particolari arti magiche necessarie per fare del mostro *donestre* un *frihtere*. In quanto poliglotta e cannibale, il *donestre* incarna simultaneamente una mostruosità legata sia al corpo che al linguaggio,⁵⁵ tuttavia, oltre a conoscere e a padroneggiare i segni della comunicazione verbale, nel suo essere "swa frihteras", il mostro è collocato tra i maghi e gli indovini aspramente criticati dalle autorità anglosassoni. Questo accostamento a figure appartenenti ai margini della comunità anglosassone, ne definisce la pericolosità in termini differenti: il *donestre* rappresenta l'anello di contatto tra ciò che è estraneo e mostruoso e ciò che risiede nello spazio della comunità. Attraverso la capacità di sembrare familiare e ac-

⁵² Unica differenza tra B e T riguarda la visibilità degli organi genitali maschili del mostro: evidenziati dall'inchiostro rosso in T, completamente censurati in B. Anche in V gli organi genitali sono visibili, solo apparentemente coperti da un triangolo di tessuto.

⁵³ Harpham 1982, 9.

⁵⁴ Cfr. Cohen 1999, 2.

⁵⁵ I due aspetti che distinguono l'uomo dall'animale nelle teorie medievali, come scriveva Isidoro di Siviglia nelle *Etimologie* (XII.i.5): "Pecus dicimus omne quod humana lingua et effigie caret", Valastro Canale 2004, 436.

cogliente, trasforma ciò che appare sicuro in qualcosa di alieno e spaventoso, crea così una minaccia nella familiarità.⁵⁶

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⁵⁶ Cfr. Kim 2003, 162-180 e Saunders 2010, 2.

- uscript Contexts*. London/Boston: Brill (Library of the Written Word - The Manuscript World, 45).
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DONATA BULOTTA

LE FORMULE MAGICHE MEDIO INGLES
DEL XV SECOLO
TRA CONVENZIONALITÀ E INNOVAZIONE

The precariousness of the health situation in England from the 14th century onwards led to the use of any curative means, whether scientific, religious or ritual-magical. In this context, healing charms were seen as accessible and practicable methods. They were often added to medical prescriptions and herbal remedies in medical or pseudo-pharmacological compilations, as they were considered an alternative form of therapy equally valid in the treatment of ailments. Many charms created during this period were a mixture of magic, religion and folklore, but some received new cultural stimulus, by incorporating original elements and symbolism from Arabic, Greek and Hebrew magical texts introduced to the island. This work will focus on a selection of 15th century healing *charms*. The analysis aims to demonstrate that the principles of the new occult and esoteric doctrines, circulating in the intellectual and cultural centers of the island, influenced the magical healing ritual. The study of pseudo-Solomonic texts, although strongly censored by the Church, however contributed to the creation of new textual amulets, which were used in addition to the pre-existing charms so becoming a further alternative medium in the therapeutic procedure.

1. *Introduzione*

Il ricorso agli incantesimi come mezzi per la risoluzione di malattie, di cui si ha testimonianza già nella fase antica della cultura anglosassone,¹ perdurò in Inghilterra anche dopo il XII secolo, nonostante il grande sviluppo delle dottrine mediche e un approccio sempre più scientifico alla cura delle patologie. I nuovi centri di cultura contribuirono alla nascita di una letteratura sofisticata di cui facevano parte, oltre che le scienze e le filosofie antiche, nuove discipline come l'alchimia e l'astrologia, ma anche l'occultismo e la magia. In questo processo furono determinanti gli stimoli culturali provenienti dall'estero,² in particolar modo dalla Spagna e dal sud della Francia

¹ Si vedano i *charms* conservati in manoscritti antico inglesi che tramandano testi di medicina come il *Lācebōc* e i *Lacnunga*. Cfr. Cockayne 1864-66; Pettit 2001.

² Herbers 1999, 244-247.



dove l'introduzione di nuove nozioni scientifiche e la fusione tra la filosofia mistica ebraica e islamica avevano stimolato la nascita di un nuovo concetto di scienze, legato a una visione fortemente religiosa e spirituale della realtà.³ Nonostante l'azione di censura a cui furono sottoposte dalla fine del XIII secolo in poi, opere di astrologia, alchimia e magia comparvero numerose all'interno di collezioni di tipo scientifico o devozionale perché considerate altrettanto essenziali nell'affinamento della conoscenza e delle competenze. I principali promotori di questa letteratura furono membri degli ordini religiosi che durante il XIV secolo si dedicarono a raccogliere, scrivere e studiare tali testi, che non consideravano del tutto estranei alla loro vocazione, ma anzi, un possibile supporto per esaltare la bellezza della creazione divina.⁴ La magia, in particolare, veniva vista come mezzo per comunicare con le creature celesti, nonché sostegno nella richiesta dell'intervento divino per la cura dell'anima e del corpo.⁵

È in questo contesto che rientrano i *charms* verbali medio inglesi per scopi medici: un insieme di formule, frasi, espressioni e nomi che spesso richiamavano l'aiuto di Dio, di Gesù e dei santi nelle procedure terapeutiche e dove l'elemento magico si affiancava a quello scientifico, per supportarlo quando si dimostrava poco efficace.

2. I charms curativi medio inglesi e l'elemento occultistico

L'aumento della superstizione nei confronti delle malattie e la convinzione che recitare nomi sacri e invocazioni costituissero un modo per garantire la cura del corpo e dell'anima, stimolò, principalmente nel periodo dalla seconda metà del 1300 al 1500, la stesura di ricette in medio inglese basate su amuleti testuali a carattere magico-rituale.⁶ Queste formule, che inizialmente furono trascritte a margine dei codici, forse per supportare la memoria o per permettere ad altri di utilizzarle, successivamente furono inserite nel corpo del testo, diventandone parte integrante.⁷ Tale tendenza ebbe come esito la nascita di compendi di medicina pratica in cui rimedi erbari di tradizione classica venivano affiancati da altri caratterizzati da una componente magica e religiosa.

³ Freudenthal 2011, 491-493 e Pingree 1987.

⁴ Theisen 1995.

⁵ Caciola 2003, 291-315.

⁶ Skemer 2006, 107-115.

⁷ Smallwood 2009, 87.

Proprio l'elemento religioso che caratterizza la maggior parte di questi testi sembra essere stato il principale veicolo di diffusione. I documenti pervenuti lasciano supporre infatti un ampio uso orale con formule e lessico tratti dalla liturgia cristiana.⁸ La religione cattolica, con il suo insieme di riti e tecniche per comunicare con gli angeli e per accedere alla visione celeste, si prestava perfettamente a essere usata nel rituale curativo, e i *charms* tardo medievali dimostrano come essa fosse riuscita ad appropriarsi del rito magico per trasformarlo in strumento di salvezza.⁹ I fondamenti che si ravvisano nella maggior parte di queste formule, trovarono consonanza con alcuni principi esoterici ebraici. Alcune formule evidenziano infatti un ulteriore stadio di ibridazione caratterizzato da un linguaggio enigmatico e composto di espressioni di argomento religioso, di acronimi di difficile interpretazione e di una ricca nomenclatura riferita a Dio e Gesù in diverse lingue.¹⁰

L'esoterismo cabalistico si diffuse in tutta Europa in virtù di una forte connessione con alcuni fondamenti della religione cristiana.¹¹ Esso faceva uso di una terminologia mista tratta dall'ebraico, dal latino e dal greco, che ben presto fu considerata idonea anche alla formulazione degli incantesimi medio inglesi.¹²

Il generale interesse per le scienze occulte ebbe i suoi effetti sulle attività dei centri culturali in Inghilterra, complice la fitta rete di relazioni con le università della Francia, di Parigi in particolare. Roger Bacon, infatti, intorno al 1260 denunciò la presenza di opere pseudo-salomoniche circolanti sull'isola,¹³ ma già un secolo prima lapidari, prognostici e bestiarî si diffusero ovunque, in quanto, se non proprio testi di magia, si inserivano comunque nel contesto del potere occulto degli oggetti della natura. Testi

⁸ Nelle formule maccheroniche, dove si alternano il medio inglese, il francese e il latino, i termini con particolare potere evocativo vengono resi sempre in latino. Un esempio è offerto dal codice Tokyo, Takamiya 61, risalente al XV secolo. Esso contiene oltre al trattato filosofico *the Secrets of philosophy*, alcuni rimedi, lunari e *charms*. Cfr. Hunt 2000; Olsan 2005, 30-32; Pahta 2004.

⁹ Fanger, Klaassen 2005.

¹⁰ Sembra che questi elementi linguistici costituissero una base comune per molti autori cabalistici in Europa. Lo scrittore catalano Eiximenis (XIV secolo) nelle sue opere inserisce spesso liste di nomi di Dio, di cui molti in lingua greca e ebraica. Nei capitoli 43 e 44 del suo *Llibre dels àngels* compaiono 21 appellativi. Su questo si veda Webster 1980, 40 e Viera 1994.

¹¹ Lucentini 2000; Weill-Parot 2002, 268-272.

¹² Questo lessico sarà utilizzato e ampliato anche dalla cabala cristiana nel XV secolo. Cfr. Forshaw 2014.

¹³ Brewer 1859, capp. I e II, 523-528.

platonici, astrologici, astronomici e di filosofia naturale furono considerati basilari per la conoscenza della realtà e la particolare attrazione per le opere di tradizione araba sull'astrologia e sui poteri occulti delle forze celesti generò una considerevole quantità di opere sulle immagini magiche e sui talismani.¹⁴ La connessione tra i misteri della natura e Dio in quanto suo Creatore collocava la magia all'interno di un contesto cristiano, autorizzando i monaci, a dispetto delle condanne e delle censure, a raccogliere e studiare testi sull'occulto.¹⁵

In alcuni monasteri, come l'abbazia di Sant'Agostino a Canterbury, la possibilità per i religiosi di usufruire di una collezione personale, che non prevedeva necessariamente la condivisione col resto della comunità religiosa, incentivò la trascrizione e lo studio di testi "illeciti" insieme a quelli sacri. La posizione isolata che essa visse nei secoli XIV e XV, e che la risparmiò da possibili controlli e censure, permise lo sviluppo di una letteratura intellettuale che influenzò in modo determinante le pratiche magiche del periodo rinascimentale¹⁶. I documenti pervenuti consentono di ricostruire una ricca biblioteca con una sezione dove testi occulti e magici vennero compilati insieme ad altri di materia scientifica, testimoniando dunque l'interesse da parte dei monaci per gli studi sull'aspetto imperscrutabile della realtà e sulla ricerca dei mezzi per intervenire su di essa.

In questo contesto furono creati i primi amuleti e oggetti magici su cui concentrare particolari energie propiziatriche, spesso tramite l'invocazione dei nomi degli spiriti divini che dovevano essere pronunciati a voce. Solo così il potere naturale della parola poteva agire sulla materia e quindi anche sull'individuo.¹⁷ Le diverse sperimentazioni sull'occulto determinarono la diffusione del cosiddetto 'Ciclo Salomonico', un gruppo di grimori omogenei nel contenuto e nella struttura, che circolarono clandestinamente tra il 1300 e il 1500. Di questi, l'*Ars notoria*¹⁸ e il gruppo di testi denominati con

¹⁴ Tra questi, di grande impatto culturale fu l'opera pseudo-aristotelica *Secreta Secretorum*, un compendio tradotto da un originale arabo che analizzava i segreti della natura e considerava la magia come una scienza naturale. Su questo testo si veda Williams 2003.

¹⁵ Klaassen 1998, 7.

¹⁶ Page 2013, 6-7.

¹⁷ Si veda su questo Fanger 1999 e Burnett 2009.

¹⁸ Composto probabilmente in Italia nel XII secolo, questo trattato contiene un ricco elenco di preghiere, rituali magici e termini cabalistici da insegnare al praticante e consentirgli di accedere a tutte le arti. Si è conservato in più di cinquanta manoscritti databili tra il XIII e il XVIII secolo. Cfr. Véronèse 2004.

il nome di *Clavicula Salomonis*¹⁹ furono i più letti e studiati, come dimostrano le numerose glosse e note nei manoscritti pervenuti.²⁰

Nell'*Ars notoria* sono contenute numerose preghiere che l'allievo doveva rivolgere a Dio e agli angeli per chiedere la loro intercessione e favorire l'acquisizione di particolari conoscenze e capacità, anche mediche e divinatorie. Queste orazioni si conformavano perfettamente a quelle di uso devozionale ed è forse questo aspetto che contribuì a rendere l'*Ars notoria* un testo "lecito". Certamente, la concezione che il popolo ebraico fosse particolarmente legato ai riti magici e l'associazione di Re Salomone con la magia ebraica costituirono due aspetti concomitanti che condussero alla propagazione di liste di nomi divini o angelici da pronunciare durante i riti magici. La presenza in moltissimi *charms* curativi medio inglesi di espressioni tratte da tali invocazioni, come gli appellativi del Dio ebraico Agla, Adonay e Eloim, fanno supporre che ben presto furono adattate per la realizzazione di amuleti testuali di tipo pratico-farmacologico che poi si propagarono in tutta l'Europa medievale.²¹

La *Clavicula*, di cui il più antico manoscritto risale al 1572 (London, British Library, Sloane 3847),²² ma che circolava già da molto prima in Inghilterra,²³ fu sottoposta a forte censura a causa dei rituali in cui venivano evocati gli spiriti demoniaci e che a volte includevano l'uso del sangue.

Ciò che oggi è pervenuto di questi testi rappresenta solo una minima parte di quanto riportato negli inventari delle biblioteche medievali, ma è

¹⁹ Di esso sono pervenute diverse redazioni in numerosi manoscritti in greco, latino, italiano, ebraico e francese, risalenti dal XV secolo, ma derivati da un prototipo più antico, anche se non sembra sia stato prodotto prima del XIV secolo. Il più antico manoscritto è il Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ital. 1524, datato 1446 e scritto in italiano. Cfr. Gal *et al.* 2017, 362-419.

²⁰ Véronèse 2012, 39-40.

²¹ La vasta diffusione di queste formule è testimoniata dal ritrovamento anche in area scandinava di amuleti su cui sono incise in rune le denominazioni di Dio, come *agla* o la formula *sator*. Su questi rinvenimenti si veda MacLeod, Mees 2006, 134-135. Iscrizioni sono state trovate anche in alcune chiese, come ad esempio a Borgund in Norvegia dove su una tavola di legno di datazione incerta è inciso in rune: "emanuel sabaopþ abo¶nai usion agios oþan¶nabos ælæison ¶ alfa æþ o messias soþer filæhs artifæhas ¶ deus iesus saluat¶or agios oþonna¶þos ælæison ael ¶ (g)aagelai ag(e=)la". Si veda lo Skaldic Project all'indirizzo: <<https://skaldic.abdn.ac.uk/m.php?p=ms&i=20074>> (ultimo accesso: 22/12/2020). In Italia si trovano in preghiere e scongiuri del XIII secolo. Cfr. Baldelli 1971.

²² Per l'edizione di questo manoscritto si vedano Peterson 2001 e Mathers 1888.

²³ Un riferimento a un *vinculum Salomonis* è presente in un catalogo del tardo XIV secolo della biblioteca monastica di York (York, Austin Friars, A8 362). Cfr. Humphreys 1990, 87-88.

comunque indice di come avessero continuato ad attrarre l'interesse di molti intellettuali.²⁴ Sebbene l'ermetismo e il ricorso nelle preghiere a nomenclature di Dio e degli angeli di tradizione greca e ebraica siano testimoniati sull'isola ancor prima dell'avvento della magia cabalistica e occulta,²⁵ la loro pressoché totale assenza nei *charms* del periodo antico inglese indica che furono perlopiù vietati negli scriptoria proprio perché non corrispondenti all'ideologia ufficiale della chiesa.²⁶ Il ritorno al loro uso dal XIV secolo dimostra quindi come, in seguito alla forte crisi sanitaria, l'esigenza di appellarsi a qualsiasi forza divina avesse contribuito al rifiorire delle idee occultiste e a un uso massiccio della loro simbologia retorica. Molte delle formule magiche medio inglesi testimoniano la convinzione che il livello di enigmaticità fosse direttamente proporzionale alla capacità di sviluppare l'energia necessaria per la guarigione e poiché esse si basavano sul potere della parola, era necessario che il lessico fosse misterioso e oscuro.²⁷ Così il nuovo vocabolario magico si arricchì di locuzioni derivate dal greco, ma soprattutto dall'ebraico, considerato da molti la lingua della magia naturale per eccellenza, non soltanto a causa delle sue proprietà mistiche, ma anche perché la sua pronuncia suonava inconsueta. I grimori pseudo-salomonici, che fondavano i loro riti sulla terminologia ellenistica e cabalistica ebraica costituirono un canale importante nel rinvigorismento e diffusione di questa nuova tipologia di *charms*.

²⁴ Sul cosiddetto 'Clerical underworld' si vedano Boudet 2006, 353-354 e Kieckhefer 1989, 151-175.

²⁵ I nomi ebraici di Dio sono ricordati da Isidoro nelle sue *Etymologiae*, che li trae a sua volta dal trattato *De decem Dei nominibus* di Girolamo (PL 23, 1329-1340), e nelle Lettere di Bonifacio. Cfr. Lindsay 1911, VII i, e Emerton 1940, 105. Al secolo VIII appartengono due testimonianze di invocazioni dei Santi per motivi curativi: una lettera in cui una donna chiede la guarigione del proprio fratello e un *charm* contro la febbre contenuto nel Messale di Bobbio. Su queste ultime attestazioni si vedano Dümmler, Gundlach 1892, cap. VI, 428-429 e Lowe 1920, 153.

²⁶ Fa eccezione la formula *sator* di cui esiste testimonianza fin dal IX secolo e che successivamente divenne quella più utilizzata nei *charms* inglesi per favorire il parto. La più antica testimonianza in cui appare con questa funzione si trova in un *charm* trascritto a margine di Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41 risalente all'XI secolo, che tramanda una copia anglosassone della *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* di Beda. Su questo, cfr. Olsan 2013, 141-143.

²⁷ Doležalová *et al.* 2013, 5-8.

3. *Nomenclatura divina ebraica e elementi pseudo-salomonici nei charms medio inglesi del XV secolo*

Le cospicue raccolte di rimedi in medio inglese pervenute fino a oggi non contengono che una piccola parte delle formule che venivano tramandate oralmente, anche a livello domestico e privato, ma consentono comunque di stabilire quali fossero le principali preoccupazioni sanitarie del periodo. Sicuramente, i tragici effetti causati dalla peste avevano creato insicurezza e instabilità emotiva, spingendo ad affidarsi sempre più a qualsiasi mezzo terapeutico,²⁸ e a ricorrere spesso a maghi curatori per prevenire o guarire le malattie, sia dell'uomo sia del bestiame, o per salvaguardarsi da altri danni, come il furto. Il proliferare di queste formule denota la forte esigenza di trovare protezione divina individuando paralleli e motivi biblici a cui fare riferimento.

I testi medici scritti in medio inglese nel XV secolo sono molto più numerosi di quelli in lingua latina e in generale manifestano poche variazioni rispetto a un nucleo centrale che si ripete in più raccolte pressoché uguale, spesso anche nella forma e nella modalità di attuazione del rimedio.²⁹ Anche i *charms* presenti all'interno di questi compendi sembrano riflettere la stessa situazione. Molti, infatti, presentano uguali espressioni e motivi religiosi, tuttavia, alcuni di essi si discostano da questa tendenza per ricorrere a espedienti e formule nuove di derivazione esoterica. La selezione qui presentata di *charms* in latino e in volgare riguarda rituali contro le difficoltà nel parto, la febbre e le emorragie ed è tratta dai seguenti compendi: il cosiddetto *Leechcraft Corpus*,³⁰ il *Liber de diversis medicinis*,³¹ e le raccolte dei codici London, BL, Sloane 962 e Add. 34111,³² che nelle loro convergenze e divergenze costituiscono un campione rappresentativo di come l'elemento

²⁸ Rawcliffe 2002.

²⁹ Singer 1918-19.

³⁰ Si tratta di un insieme omogeneo di rimedi in latino e inglese riscontrato in un gruppo di manoscritti, London, BL, Add. 33996 e altri ventuno codici, tra cui Cambridge, University Library, Add. 9308, che condividono, tra gli altri, gli stessi testi contro febbre, emorragia e difficoltà nel parto. Sedici di queste raccolte si aprono con un prologo in cui viene usato il termine *leechcraft* per definirle. Da qui la scelta di Olsan di chiamarlo *Leechcraft Corpus*. Cfr. Olsan 2009. I testi, sono tratti da Cambridge, UL, Add. 9308. Per l'edizione di London, BL, Add. 33996 si veda Heinrich 1896. Sui prologhi si veda Keiser 2003, 301-309.

³¹ Una raccolta di rimedi per diverse malattie elencati secondo l'ordine che va dalla testa ai piedi. All'interno il codice tramanda anche romanzi, liriche religiose, scritti mistici e sermoni che denotano un uso riservato e familiare della collezione. Cfr. Ogden 1938, 49, 57 e 63.

³² I testi sono tratti rispettivamente da Hunt 1990; Braekman, 1986, ff. 70r-76v.

esoterico ebraico fosse stato assimilato e adattato al nuovo contesto tardo medievale.

Il *Leechcraft Corpus* raccoglie una serie di ricette mediche, composte principalmente da erbe, insieme a alcuni *charms* per determinate patologie, le cui caratteristiche lasciano ipotizzare che il guaritore non dovesse essere necessariamente un medico, ma anche un semplice mago-guaritore. Il fatto che questa raccolta sia pervenuta in un gran numero di copie manoscritte indica che si trattasse di un gruppo di ricette già ben stabilito sull'isola e diventato un modello comune di riferimento indipendentemente dalle esigenze personali del singolo committente.³³ Il *Liber de diversis medicinis*, conservato nel codice Lincoln, Cathedral Chapter Library, A.5.2, presenta una composizione eterogenea, frutto di ricezione di materiale derivato da molte compilazioni precedenti, sia classiche che contemporanee.³⁴ I testi conservati spaziano da ricette semplici a impiastri più complessi, ad altri che si rifanno alla medicina ippocratica, galenica o post-galenica, cui si affiancano elementi cristiani e magici, come i *charms*, e quelli di derivazione orientale. È impossibile determinare se lo scriba, il cui nome è Thornton come segnalato in annotazioni sparse su alcuni fogli del manoscritto, avesse eseguito una copia da un altro codice o se avesse avuto a disposizione diverse compilazioni da cui attingere. Ciò che è evidente è che si tratta di una collezione che si rifà a ricette circolanti sin dalla fine del XII secolo, cui furono aggiunte altre, forse di origine orale, coeve alla trascrizione del compendio stesso.

London, BL, Sloane 962 è un taccuino del XIV e XV secolo contenente trattati di diversa natura medica: testi su dieta e salasso, un erbario medio inglese, una copia dell'*Agnus castus*, un *Liber medicinarum* e incantesimi per favorire il parto o contro la febbre, i ladri e le emorragie. London, BL, Add. 34111 conserva, tra l'altro, una copia del *Liber Trotuli* (sic) e dello *Speculum medicorum* e una serie di *charms* e esperimenti di magia naturale. Anche queste due raccolte rappresentano quindi un chiaro esempio di una prassi medica che poteva prevedere indifferentemente il metodo scientifico o chirurgico insieme a quello di natura magico rituale.

³³ Discordanze riguardano aggiunte o assenze di alcuni rimedi, a volte dovute a folia mancanti in alcune copie o a scelte dei singoli copisti, o a variazioni lessicali, come nel caso del nome ebraico Ysmael in un *charm* contro l'insonnia dell'ammalato che, probabilmente percepito come estraneo alla cultura cristiana, in London, BL, Lansdowne 680 è stato sostituito da Michael. Cfr. Olsan 2009, 219 e 226, nota 66.

³⁴ Ogden 1938, xvii-xxv.

L'attenzione nei confronti di questi quattro compendi è derivata dal fatto che, in quanto risultanza di una attività di raccolta e selezione di materiale diffuso nel corso di circa tre secoli, da un lato condividono elementi contenutistici riscontrabili a loro volta anche in altre collezioni coeve, dall'altro dimostrano eterogeneità di materiale e peculiarità specifiche dovute spesso alle scelte arbitrarie dei copiatori che si sono succeduti durante questa lunga trasmissione, nonché alla loro natura o ultima destinazione d'uso. A differenza della letteratura medica contemporanea di tipo intellettuale sviluppata nei luoghi di cultura come le università, le scuole dei grandi monasteri o la corte e che basava il proprio sapere sullo studio di testi scientifici, la tipologia di ricette di questi compendi e soprattutto la diversità di approcci alle malattie, indica un uso popolare, e altresì una maggiore libertà da parte degli scribi nel mettere insieme materiale di diversa provenienza.

4. Charms *per favorire il parto*

Per quanto attiene i *charms* per la protezione del parto questi quattro compendi, sebbene con modalità di attuazione diverse, dimostrano di muoversi nella stessa tradizione anglosassone antica, usando la formula del *sator* e le figure delle sante madri bibliche. Il codice Sloane, insieme al seguente incantesimo di preghiera:

For Womman þat traueles of childe. Sey iii over þo womman þat traveles þo psalme Quicumque wult and she shal have childe if her tyme be comen (f. 35v)

(Per la donna che è in travaglio. Di' tre salmi sulla donna che è in travaglio, qualunque voglia e ella partorerà il bambino quando sarà giunto il momento)

riporta una prescrizione per creare un amuleto da mettere sul grembo della partoriente, che richiama le figure della Madonna, di Sant'Anna e di Santa Elisabetta insieme alla formula del *sator*:

An oþer. Bynde to hir wombe + maria peperit christum + anna mariam + Elisabeth Johannem + enclina remigium + **Sator** + **arepo** + **tenet** + **opera** + **rotas** (f. 35v)

(Un altro. Lega intorno al grembo: maria peperit etc.)

Una formula simile si trova nella creazione di un amuleto in London, BL, Add. 34111, dove però alla supplica a Maria è stata aggiunta quella a *Alpha e Omega*:

For woman þat haþe grete trauail in childes beryng.
 Do write þis writte in perchemyn of a calf and bynd
 to þe wombe: + In nomine patris et filij spiritus sancti.
 Amen. + Sancta maria peperit et mater illa non doluit christum
 genuit qui nos suo sanguine redemit **alpha + et O** +
 Christus vincit + christus imperat + (f. 73r-v)

(Per la donna che soffre molto nel partorire il bambino.
 Scrivi questo su una pergamena di vitello e legalo intorno al grembo:
 in nomine etc.)

Questo *charm* è seguito da un altro di tipo tradizionale, basato sulla recitazione del *Pater noster* e dell'*Ave Maria*:

For to deliuere sone of childe.
 Whan þow comest in to þe house þer þat þe
 woman trauaileþ: Say ate furst begynnyng þe pater noster
 wiþ þe aue, and afterward say þes wordes in latyn:
 Elizabeth peperit precursorem, maria peperit redemptorem. [...]
 And þan say .iij. pater noster. (ff. 73v-74r)

(Per far nascere subito un bambino.
 Quando giungi nella casa dove c'è la donna in travaglio: di' all'inizio il pater
 noster con l'ave maria, e dopo di' queste parole in latino: Elizabeth peperit
 etc.)

Il *Liber de diversis medicinis*, invece, presenta una situazione variegata. Esso, infatti, tramanda orazioni in latino rivolte alla Madonna per la protezione della partoriente (f. 303v), oppure istruzioni per la creazione di un amuleto testuale in cui la formula con l'invocazione viene scritta su un pezzo di pergamena da apporre sul grembo della donna (ff. 303v-304r). Tuttavia, come alternative curative, riporta due *charms* tipologicamente differenti. In uno la formula *sator* viene incisa su burro o formaggio per realizzare un amuleto edibile che quindi favorirà il parto agendo dall'interno del corpo:

Tak & write thir wordis in buttre or in chese & gare hir ett it: **Sator arepo tenet opera rotas** (f. 303v)

(Prendi e scrivi queste parole su burro o formaggio prima che lo mangi: **Sator arepo tenet opera rotas**)

nell'altro la formula si apre direttamente con l'incantesimo in cui viene richiamata l'immagine dell'oceano e la sua forza quale mezzo propiziatorio per facilitare il parto:

Oceanum age, surge, rumpe & explica moras. Write this charme & binde it to hir knee righte with-in &, alsone als scho es delyuered, tak it a-waye (f. 303v)

(Oceanum age, surge, rumpe & explica moras. Scrivi questo incantesimo e legalo intorno al ginocchio proprio all'interno e, non appena ella ha partorito, buttalo via)

Quest'ultimo *charm*, sebbene come è stato notato, richiami alcuni versi dell'Eneide,³⁵ con la forma all'imperativo rivolta all'oceano, è più probabile che appartenga ai riti della magia naturale.

Il *Corpus* conserva invece il seguente *charm* in latino:

For womman þat trauaileth of child.

Bind þis writ to here rigt thy: In nomine+patris+et filii+et *spiritus sancti* amen. Per uirtutem Dei sint medicina mei pia *crux* et passio + *Christi*. Vulnera quinque Dei sint medicina mei.+*sancta* Maria Peperit +*Christum*. + *sancta* Anna peperit + *Mariam*. *sancta* Helizabeth peperit+*Iohannem* *sancta* Cecilia peperit+*Remigium*.+ **sator + arepo + tenet + opera + rotas** + *Christus* uincit + *Christus* regnat + *Christus* imperat+*Christus* te vocat+. *Mundus* te gaudet. *Lex* te desiderat. + *Christus* dixit, Lazare, veni foras. + *Deus* vlcionum *dominus*+*deus* ulcionum, libera famulam tuam . N[ame]. + *Dextera* [manus] *domini* fecit *virtutem*+**a+g+l+a+alpha+et oo**. *Anna* peperit *Mariam* + *Helizabeth* *precursorem* + *Maria* + *dominum nostrum* + *Iesum* + *Christum* sine dolore et *tristitia*. O *infans*, exi foras siue *uiuus* siue *mortuus* *quia* + *Christus* vocat te ad *lucem* + *agios* + *agios* + *agios* + *Christus* regnat + *Christus* imperat + *sanctus* + *sanctus* + *sanctus* + *dominus* + *deus omnipotens* + *qui* es et *qui* eras et *qui* uen-

³⁵ “Heia age, rumpe moras. varium et mutabile semper femina” (libro IV, v. 569); “rumpe moras omnis et turbata arripe castra” (libro IX, v. 13). Jones, Olsan 2015, 420.

turus es amen. + bhurnon + bhurini + blutuono + blutaono + Iesus + nazarenus + rex iudeorum + fili dei miserere mei amen (ff. 49r-50r).

(Per la donna che è in travaglio. Lega questo scritto sulla sua coscia destra: In nomine patris etc.)

Questa lunga formula propone convenzionalmente gli exempla evangelici delle partorienti seguendo un ordine cronologico che va dal momento più recente a quello passato e viceversa e che trova conferma nella frase palindroma del quadrato del *sator*, la cui lettura implica lo stesso movimento in avanti e indietro. Tuttavia, si contraddistingue per la presenza delle invocazioni a *Alfa e Omega* e a *Aglā*, tra gli appellativi di Dio più usati nei rituali esoterici propiziatori. Altrettanto interessante è la formula di chiusura “bhurnon + bhurini + blutuono + blutaono”, presente con piccole varianti in altri manoscritti dello stesso *Corpus*,³⁶ il cui suono iniziale bh- o bl- farebbe pensare a un’aggiunta inserita solo per creare assonanza tra termini che in realtà sono senza senso, ma utili per attribuire all’incantesimo un tono musicale e un’aurea misteriosa. Quest’ultimo elemento richiama una tecnica insegnata nella *Clavicula* (Libro I, cap. XVI) dove vengono date istruzioni su come usare alcune parole per beffare e illudere il pubblico.³⁷

5. Charms contro la febbre

I *charms* per accelerare la guarigione dalla febbre, a differenza di quelli per il parto, dimostrano una maggiore penetrazione di elementi ebraici nella creazione di preghiere e amuleti testuali.

Il *Corpus*, che tramanda il maggior numero di *charms* contro la febbre, rivela una situazione abbastanza diversificata. È presente infatti un testo che riporta la stessa *historiola* evangelica sulla guarigione prodigiosa di Pietro da parte di Gesù, che troviamo in numerosissime altre collezioni medievali

³⁶ Si trova anche in London, BL, Add. 33996 (f. 103v), dove i termini allitteranti sono: “bhurnon + bhurnu + blutano + Christus + nazarenus [...]” (cfr. Heinrich 1896, 144); e in London, BL Sloane 3160 (f. 169r): “Blurcion + blurrun + blutanno + bluttionno + Jesus + nazarenus [...]” (cfr. Hunt 1990, 99).

³⁷ I suoni consigliati sono: “ABBAC, ABDAC, ISTAC, AUDAC, CASTRAC, CUAC, CUSOR, TRISTATOR, DERISOR, DETESTATOR, INCANTATOR”, con variazioni nelle diverse redazioni manoscritte pervenute.

inglesi, ma che in realtà è una rielaborazione sbagliata di un episodio che vede invece Gesù attuare il miracolo sulla suocera di Pietro (Mt. 8:14-15; Mc. 1:29-31; Lc. 4:38-39):

A charm for almaner feueris.

In nomine+patris etc. Virgo maria succurre mihi febricitanti

amen. +Iesus+nazarenus rex iudeorum, fili+dei, miserere mei amen.

Ante portam latinam iacebat beatus Petrus febricitans, et superveniens

Iesus+Christus dixit illi: Petre, quid iaces hic? Beatus Petrus respondit:

Domine, iaceo hic de malis febribus.+Deus atque dixit: Surge et

diuitate illas. [...] Deus atque dixit: Fiat iuxta uerbum tuum+**a+g+I+a+** Marcus+

Matheus+Lucas+Iohannes succurritemihi et ab omni mala

febre liberate me amen. (ff. 65v-66v).

(un incantesimo per ogni tipo di febbre

In nomine patris etc.)

Allo stesso tempo, però, trasmette tre formule, dalla struttura simile, che fanno ricorso alla grafologia tramite l'uso di ostie o foglie di salvia come amuleti su cui scrivere l'incantesimo e poi ingerirle. Ciò che distingue tra loro questi *charms* è l'invocazione alle forze celesti chiamate in causa. Due di esse sono di contenuto cristiano e si chiudono con la prescrizione del *Pater noster* e *Ave maria* (f. 14v e f. 78r-v), ma una terza invoca il Dio ebraico *el, elte, sabaoth* e *adonay*:

For te feueres.

Tak. iii. vbles & write on oon þerof, + **el + elþe + sabaoth** & ete þu

þat þe ferst day. þe next day writ on þat oþer,+**adonay+alpha &**

o + messias. & ete it. þe thrid day writ on þat oþer, + pastor + agnus +

fons+& ete it. & aftir ech vble eting, sey iii pater noster & iii aue

Maria & .i. credo (f. 53r)

(Contro la febbre.

Prendi tre ostie e scrivi su una di esse, el, elþe, sabaoth, e mangiala / Il primo giorno. Il successivo scrivi sull'altra, adonay, alpha / e omega, messias. E mangiala. Il terzo giorno scrivi sull'altra, pastor, agnus, / fons e mangiala. E dopo aver mangiato le ostie, di' tre pater noster e tre ave Maria e un Credo)

Anche il *Liber* tramanda due formule da scrivere su ostie delle quali, una evoca il dio ebraico:

Tak iij obles & write firste in ane of theym+.1. **elie+sabaoth**+and on þe toþer oble+**adonay+alpha+& o+Messias**+& on þe thirde oble+pastor+agnus+fons+and gif thir thre obles to hym þat hase þe feuers thurgh iij dayes with haly water fastande (f. 306v)

(prendi tre ostie e scrivi per primo su una di esse, el, elie, sabaoth, e sull'altra ostia, adonay, alpha e omega, Messia e sulla terza ostia, pastor, agnus, fons, e dai queste tre ostie a colui che ha la febbre per tre giorni con acqua santa, in astinenza)

l'altra riporta un elenco di nomi tratti dalla preghiera *trisagion*, Ἅγιος ὁ Θεός, Ἅγιος ἰσχυρός, Ἅγιος ἀθάνατος, ἐλέησον ἡμᾶς, in uso nel rito della chiesa ortodossa:

Or tak iij obles & write firste in ane+Pater est Alpha+& O+Filius+vita+Spiritus sanctus remedium+&tak & write in perchmyn + **Agios + Otheos + Atanatos + yskiros + ymas + eleson + Ego sum Alpha + & O** + Christus vincit + Christus regnat + Christus imperat + and, when he es hale, caste þe charme in the fire (f. 306v)

(o prendi tre ostie e scrivi sulla prima, pater est Alpha et Omega, filius vita spiritus sanctus Remedium e prendi e scrivi su un pezzo di pergamena, Agios, Otheos, Atanatos, yskiros, ymas, eleson, Ego sum Alpha et omega, Christus vincit, Christus regnat, Christus imperat, e quando è guarito, butta l'amuleto nel fuoco)

La grafia errata di ὁ Θεός ha dato vita a una forma cristallizzata *Otheos*, forse come conseguenza di una trascrizione da una precedente fase orale. La sua presenza in altri *charms* in ambito spagnolo e francese lascia supporre che anche l'espressione del *Liber* possa risalire allo stesso nucleo originario di formule creato probabilmente in Spagna e propagato nel resto d'Europa.³⁸

³⁸ Così appare nel *Llibre dels àngels* di Eiximenis (cfr. Viera 1994, 46) e in un rotolo-amuleto da porre sulla partoriente per accelerarne il parto e renderlo indolore (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, nouv. acq. franç. 4267 [III], fine del XIII secolo) che contiene una serie di preghiere e formule in versi in francese antico seguite da un elenco di nomi di Dio: "Messyas + Sabaoth + Otheos + Eleison + Eloy". Cfr. Skemer 2006, 241-242.

Il manoscritto Add. 34111 trasmette solo una ricetta medica che prescrive contro la febbre terzana l'uso della piantaggine (f. 74v).

Invece, particolarmente interessante è il rimedio contro la febbre tramandato nel manoscritto Sloane, dove la figura dell'architriclino, che nel vangelo di Giovanni è colui che presiede al banchetto delle nozze di Cana, diventa l'immagine del guaritore che, utilizzando una 'bacchetta magica' fatta con il legno di nocciolo, pronuncia la formula di guarigione, conferendo al ramo un potere taumaturgico:

Item pur fevers un charme:

Archidecline syttes on hye and holdes a vergyne 3erde of hesil in his hande and seys "also soth os þo prest makes Godes bodi in his handes and also soth os God blessed is moder Mari and also soth, I conjure þe, vergin 3erde of hesil, that þu close and be bote of þis evel fever to þis man .N." In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, amen. (f. 38r).³⁹

(In aggiunta per la febbre un incantesimo:

l'Architriclino siede in alto e tiene un ramoscello vergine di nocciolo nella sua mano e dice "così come il sacerdote compie il corpo di Dio nelle sue mani e così come Dio benedisse sua madre Maria e così anche, io invoco te, vergine ramoscello di nocciolo, affinché tu fermi e sia di aiuto a questo uomo, N., contro questa cattiva febbre")

Questo riferimento costituisce un raro caso in cui appare la figura del mago, di evocazione salomonica, che per la sua posizione innalzata sullo scranno avrebbe richiamato quella dell'architriclino.⁴⁰ L'amuleto, in questo caso co-

³⁹ Nello stesso manoscritto una formula analoga è indicata per far guarire un cavallo (Hunt 1990, 97, n. 79); una versione simile è conservata in London, BL, Sloane 3160, f. 168v risalente al XV secolo in un incantesimo in latino contro la febbre: "Architricline in altes sedens virgam corulim virginiam inter manus tenens dicebat: [...] sic conjuro te, virgam virginiarum, ut adiuvas et coniungas te in medioosculando [...]. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, amen. Adiuo te, virgam virginiam, per virtutem sacratissimorum nomenum Dei + Adaye + Sadaye + tetragramaton + Sother + Emanuel + Sabaoth + Adonay [...]" (Hunt 1990, 98, n. 85), il cui elenco finale replica nello stesso ordine quello convenzionale di molte preghiere esoteriche.

⁴⁰ Una variante in latino di questo *charm* si trova in un compendio di ricette mediche ad opera di John of Greenborough conservato nel in London, BL, Royal 12 G.IV (XIV secolo) dove appare il riferimento alla bacchetta di nocciolo come strumento di guarigione, ma manca la figura dell'architriclino. Cfr. Hunt 1990, 96-97, n. 21.

stituito da un oggetto per il quale si precisa che è stato tagliato da un ramo vergine, consente di individuare un aspetto particolare dei riti di guarigione legato alle nuove filosofie dell'occulto. Nella *Clavicula*, nella sezione dedicata alla creazione degli strumenti necessari nell'arte magica (libro II, cap. VIII), è scritto infatti che la bacchetta da usare per i riti debba essere fatta di legno vergine di nocciolo.⁴¹

6. Charms *contro le emorragie*

Dalla forte connessione tra il sanguinamento e la passione di Cristo fu generata una serie di formule per fermare le emorragie, legate all'immagine di Longino e a quella del battesimo di Gesù nel fiume Giordano, riscontrabili in *charms* provenienti da tutta l'Europa. Sotto questo aspetto, i compendi presi in esame condividono e perpetuano gli stessi componenti di moltissime altre raccolte medio inglesi trascritte sin dalla fine del XII secolo.

Contro questa patologia il *Corpus* tramanda infatti *charms* che richiamano le due *historiolae*, seguite o da una prescrizione, come nella seguente formula il cui stile poetico, con qualche eco di rime, farebbe supporre una recitazione orale:

- (1) A charm for same.
 Iesu þat was in Bethlem born
 & baptised was in flum Iordan.
 & stinted þe water upon þe ston
 stint þat blod of þis man . N[ame] . þi seruaunt
 þoru þe vertu of þin holy name + Iesu
 & of þi cosin swete seynt Iohn.
 & sey þis charm .v. times with.v. pater noster
 in þe worschep of þe fiue woundes (f. 36r)

(Un incantesimo per la stessa malattia.

Gesù che nacque a Betlemme / e fu battezzato nel fiume Giordano. / e fermò le acque sulla pietra / ferma il sangue di questo uomo. Nome. Il tuo servo / per virtù del tuo santo nome Gesù / e del tuo dolce cugino San Giovanni. / E di' questo incantesimo cinque volte con cinque pater noster / In onore delle cinque ferite)

⁴¹ Lo stesso riferimento si trova in un altro grimorio salomonico, il *Liber Juratus Honorii* che risale al XIII-XIV secolo. Cfr. Hedegård 2002, cap. CXXXII.

oppure da uno scongiuro rivolto direttamente al sangue stesso:

(2) A charm for te bloody flix.

In nomine+patris+et filii+et *spiritus sanctus*. Amen. Stabat + Iesus contra flumen Jordanis et posuit pedem suum et dixit, Sta, aqua per deum te coniuro. Longinus miles latus domini nostri Iesu+Christi perforauit et continuo exiuit sanguis et aqua, sanguis redempcionis et aqua baptismatis. In nomine patris, restet sanguis. In nomine filii, cesset sanguis. In nomine spiritus sancti non exeat sanguinis gutta ab hoc famulo dei N. sicut credimus quod sancta Maria vera mater est et verum infantem genuit christum, sic retineant vene que plene sunt sanguinem. Sic restet sanguis sicut restabat Iordanis quando christus in ea baptizatus fuit. In nomine patris etc. (ff. 32v-33r)

(Un incantesimo contro l'emorragia)

In nomine patris etc.

(3) ffor to staunche blood [...]

Whan our lord was don on þe cros
þan cam þeder Longinus
& smot him with a spere in þe side.
Blod & water com out at þe wounde
& he wiped his eyen and sey anon.
þoru þe holi uertu þat God dede þer
Y coniure þe blo þat þu ne go out
of þis cristen man or womman .N[ame].

In nomine patris etc.

Sey þis charm thries & lok þu knowe þe mannis name whersoever
he be (ff. 86v-87r)

(Per arrestare il sangue [...])

Quando nostro signore fu messo sulla croce / allora giunse li Longino / e lo colpì con una lancia nel fianco. / Sangue e acqua uscirono dalla ferita / ed egli asciugò i suoi occhi e fece buio a mezzogiorno. / Per il santo potere che Dio compì li / io ti invoco sangue affinché tu non esca fuori / da questo uomo o donna cristiani. Nome. / in nomine patris etc. / pronuncia questo incantesimo tre volte e assicurati di conoscere il nome dell'uomo dovunque egli sia

(4) A charm for to staunche blod.

Longinus miles latus domini nostril + Iesu Christi lancea perforauit et continuo exiuit sanguis et aqua in redempcionem nostram. Adiuro te sanguis per ipsum+Christum per latus eius per sanguinem eius + sta + sta + sta. + Christus et Iohannes descenderunt in flumen iordanis. aqua obstipuit et stetit, sic faciat sanguis istius corporis. In + Christi nomine et sancti Iohannis baptiste amen. Et dica ter paternoster et ter Aue Maria (f. 35r-v)

Il codice Sloane evidenzia una commistione di elementi, poiché insieme a due *charms* basati sull'*historiola* di Longino (f. 38v) e una su quella del fiume Giordano (f. 131r), riporta anche una formula per arrestare il sangue in cui vengono chiamati in azione nomi di dio ebraici:

An oþer:

'Longius hebreus cum lancea percussit latus domini, sanguis exiuit et aqua et lanceam ad se retraxit. **Tetragrammaton + Messias + Emanuel + Sabaoth.** Ita cesset sanguis ab isto christiano sicut istud verum est' in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, amen (ff. 38v-39r).⁴²

Le formule riscontrate nel codice London, BL, Add. 34111 e nel *Liber* si discostano fortemente da tutte le altre, poiché il rituale per fermare l'emorragia viene affrontato con l'ausilio di un amuleto testuale realizzato secondo modalità che evocano la magia occulta dei riti della *Clavicula*, tra cui l'uso del sangue come inchiostro e l'uccisione di un animale:

(1) For to staunche blode.

marie trewliche broght furþe crist. So trewliche þow veyne wiþholde þi blode. In þe name of þe fader and þe sonne and þe holy gost; and write þes names in perchemyn: + **Ineuba + Ineuba + thebal + gut guttany + alpha et [OMEGA OMITTED]** + and bynd þis write vpon þe brest of man or woman. And 3if þow wille

⁴² Una versione riadattata di questo *carmen* con nomenclatura ebraica si trova nel in London, BL, Add. 33996 (ff. 146v-147r) in una formula per agevolare l'estrazione di un pugnale: "Carmen ad extrahendum quarellum. / Longius miles hebreus pereussit latus domini nostri + / ihesu christi; sanguis exiuit ⁊ aqua, ⁊ latus / ad se traxit lanceam + tetragrammaton + / Messias + Sabaoth + Adonay + Emanuel +; / unum sunt ista verba, fuerunt verba christi, six exiat / istud ferrum sive quarellum ab isto christiano . Amen . ⁊ / sey þys charme fyue tymes in þe worsehe / pe of þe fyue woundes of god". Cfr. Heinrich 1896, 231.

proue þis for soþe, wryte þes in a knyf et sle a swyne, et
þe blode shalle no3t come oute. (Add. 34111, f. 70r)

(Per arrestare il sangue

Maria castamente partori Gesù. Così fedelmente voi vene / trattenete il sangue.
Nel nome del padre e del figlio e / lo spirito santo e scrivi questi nomi su una
pergamena: Ineuba / Ineuba, thebal, gut guttany, alpha et [omega] e lega que-
sto / scritto sul petto dell'uomo o donna e se volete / provare questo se è vero,
scrivi questo su un coltello e uccidi un maiale, / e il sangue non uscirà)

- (2) Or tak þe blode of hym þat bledis & wryte in his fronte + a + g + l + a + & he
sal sone stanche (*Liber*, f. 299v)

(O prendi il sangue di colui che sanguina e scrivi sulla sua fronte agla e subito
si arresterà)

Non è un caso che altrove, in amuleti testuali contro le emorragie, siano pre-
senti le tipiche frasi criptiche dell'esoterismo e occultismo salomonico.⁴³ In-
fatti, sempre nel codice London, BL, Sloane 962, nella sezione dedicata ai
rimedi veterinari, un amuleto per arrestare l'emorragia di un cavallo presenta
la formula composta da acronimi: "pone ista signa ad umbilicum sripta super
aliquid. Fac pe. n. m. x. a. s. z. i. ii. lii" (f. 135v).⁴⁴

Se nella storia di Longino il collegamento concettuale con l'emorragia ap-
pare immediato,⁴⁵ quella riguardante l'arresto del corso del fiume Giordano da
parte di Gesù al momento del battesimo non trova corrispondenza nelle storie
bibliche ufficiali. Essa potrebbe essere il risultato di una interpretazione errata
dell'episodio dell'Antico testamento che narra dell'attraversamento del fiume
Giordano da parte degli Ebrei guidati da Giosuè trasportando l'Arca dell'Alle-
anza (Gs. 3:14-17). La confusione sembra essere derivata dalla variante ebrai-
ca del nome di Giosuè, Yehoshua, di cui la trascrizione greca Ἰησοῦς avrebbe

⁴³ Esempi si trovano in amuleti testuali contro l'emorragia in manoscritti come il Lon-
don, BL, Harley 2558 (XV secolo) che raccoglie ricette del medico Thomas Fayreford:
"G.k.B.x.k.2.1.o.x.a. o.1.R.o.1.R. m.H.y.Z.R" (f. 125v) e il Glasgow, University Library, Hunter
185 (primi del XV secolo): "+ p + G + C + p + e + u + o + t + a + ges + ij + u + iij + etc. + Arisme
cladauis + + + + Arisme cladauis + + + + Arisme cladauis + + + + " (f. 65r), che a causa della loro
complessità, sono di difficile decifrazione. Cfr. Jones 1995; Alonso-Almeida 2000, 300-301.

⁴⁴ Hunt 1990, 97.

⁴⁵ I motivi tratti dai racconti biblici di Longino, San Pietro e il battesimo nel fiume Gior-
dano sono presenti anche in *charms* in ambito tedesco. Cfr. Holzmann 2001.

in definitiva portato alla coincidenza tra Giosuè e Gesù. O ancora, potrebbe risalire alla diffusione di racconti apocrifi e leggende medievali estranei alla religione cristiana riconosciuta, forse di derivazione orientale. Queste formule quindi mettono in luce ancora una volta, a dispetto dei richiami evangelici canonici, un forte legame con una tradizione che probabilmente va fatta risalire al periodo d'oro della cultura ebraica in occidente.

7. Conclusioni

La storia e lo sviluppo dei *charms* medio inglesi sono complicati e non lineari, per cui diventa impossibile ricostruirne gli aspetti e gli schemi generali. Troppi sono gli influssi delle diverse culture e delle diverse dottrine coinvolte. A tutto questo va aggiunto che i loro richiami alla magia li rese sospetti e malvisti dalla Chiesa. Di alcuni di essi, ormai scomparsi, rimangono citazioni proprio nelle opere dei censori e quelli che si sono salvati non permettono di conoscere quanto fosse ampia la produzione originaria.⁴⁶ Ciò che possiamo evincere è che si tratta di una 'letteratura pragmatica' a carattere popolare che tradisce una mescolanza di credenze e pratiche della cultura classica e cristiana con quelle ebraiche e occultistiche e cabalistiche, provenienti dai centri culturali dell'isola. Il confronto tra i diversi rimedi contro una data patologia all'interno di una stessa collezione permette di vedere l'eterogeneità di approcci e gli effetti del sincretismo culturale del periodo sulla loro composizione.

L'analisi qui condotta, infatti, ha individuato l'esistenza di un nucleo di motivi e espressioni comuni che si era diffuso non solo in Inghilterra, ma in tutta Europa. Ciò è confermato dal continuo richiamo a *historiolae* evangeliche e orazioni cristiane e dalla condivisione di errori di interpretazione, come il lemma *Otheos*, che da una originaria formula di partenza fu poi perpetuato nelle successive redazioni, o la storia travisata sulla guarigione di Pietro da parte di Gesù.

Altrettanto convenzionali si dimostrano i *charms* per aiutare il momento del parto, dove una quasi totale uniformità tra i compendi nel ricorrere alla formula del *sator* e alle sante partorienti è espressione di una tradizione che pone le sue radici nella fase antica della cultura inglese e che ora appare ben rinsaldata.

⁴⁶ Boudet 2006, 26-27.

Tuttavia, a parte le formule comprese all'interno di questa comune produzione di incantesimi curativi, ve ne sono altre che rivelano fisionomie proprie e lasciano emergere elementi originali acquisiti dalle nuove dottrine, come la filosofia dell'occulto e le relative opere salomoniche. Riguardo al parto, infatti, il *Liber*, che come si è visto è una mescolanza di rimedi di derivazioni diverse, si rivela quello più innovativo, poiché accanto a incantesimi con le consuete orazioni e con la formula del *sator* ne aggiunge un altro con un richiamo alle forze della natura. Qui l'immagine legata al motivo evangelico della resurrezione di Lazzaro, che si riscontra in molti *charms* medio inglesi per il parto, è stata sostituita da quella delle acque dell'oceano che si innalzano.

Altre formule analizzate si distinguono per un sostanziale uso di nomi sacri di tradizione ebraica che non sembra essere stato altrettanto produttivo in altri contesti linguistici europei. Il ricorso a questa nomenclatura, di cui si ha testimonianza, sebbene rara, nelle formule magiche già secoli prima, ricevette nuovo impulso e vigore dal XIV secolo in poi attraverso la riproduzione e la lettura delle opere pseudo-salomoniche. Infatti, espressioni formulaiche greche e ebraiche sono presenti nelle formule contro la febbre del *Corpus* e del *Liber*, in alternativa ad altre che richiamano i motivi evangelici.

Parallelamente, anche i principi esoterici, verso i quali è attestata una particolare attrazione da parte degli intellettuali inglesi, riuscirono a eludere la censura penetrando nei *charms* curativi sotto forma di piccole allusioni. Ognuno dei compendi presi in considerazione in questa analisi tradiscono una eterogeneità riguardo all'assimilazione di queste nozioni. I nuovi argomenti occultisti, non facendo parte di una memoria consolidata da secoli, sottostarono a scelte autonome da parte di trascrittori che si sentirono svincolati da una comune tradizione. Il codice Sloane riporta un incantesimo contro la febbre in cui si fa ricorso non a una preghiera o all'episodio di Pietro, ma a un oggetto da usare come amuleto che molto probabilmente risale ai riti custoditi nella *Clavicula*. I *charms* per arrestare le emorragie si prestarono probabilmente a collegamenti con i riti di sangue e le formule specifiche dell'esoterismo e occultismo salomonico, spesso accompagnati dalle tipiche frasi criptiche. Ne rappresentano una dimostrazione i *charms* nel *Liber* e in London, BL, Add. 34111 dove oltre alla storia di Longino o del fiume Giordano, viene chiamato in causa il sangue utilizzato come inchiostro per scrivere l'amuleto testuale. In questi casi, spesso la formula prevedeva anche un registro linguistico che, per poter comunicare con le forze celesti, doveva essere simbolico e quindi contenere acronimi e segni. Del resto, l'aspetto misterioso e l'incomprensibilità sono parte del motivo per il quale il popolo riponeva grande fiducia negli in-

cantesimi. Oggi non sappiamo quanto questa tipologia di *charms* fosse frutto di una esigenza rituale specifica appartenente a un contesto destinato a poche persone, o se guaritori improvvisati e ciarlatani ne facessero uso ugualmente inventando simboli, frasi e codici che non avevano alcun senso, ma che permettevano loro di suggestionare il pubblico.

In conclusione, i centri intellettuali inglesi particolarmente ricettivi nei confronti dell'esoterismo promossero e diffusero in segreto gli studi occultisti, vietati a livello ufficiale. Qui, l'interesse per gli aspetti misteriosi della natura aveva determinato la redazione di molti testi accademici in cui si mescolarono elementi magici, esoterici, cosmologici e filosofici. Probabilmente le nozioni sviluppate in questi ambienti intellettuali penetrarono successivamente nei contesti popolari, assimilandone a loro volta le caratteristiche folcloristiche. L'ambito magico permise una commistione da cui fiorì una letteratura medica caratterizzata da tradizioni erboristiche popolari e rituali magici e religiosi. Alcuni rimedi delle raccolte pervenute oggi, di cui qui è stato esposto un campione, svelano nella loro semplicità, come i fondamenti esoterici della letteratura intellettuale fossero entrati, attraverso un processo di adattamento e semplificazione, nei livelli più bassi della popolazione dove circolarono in maniera informale basando la loro trasmissione su fonti scritte e sulla memoria orale. Essi contribuirono così alla nascita di formule magiche curative inconsuete, ma necessarie alla vita quotidiana di individui, che davanti alle difficoltà economiche e all'impossibilità di ricorrere a cure costose, ponevano le proprie speranze sul supporto del rituale magico-religioso.

Per tutti questi motivi, sebbene questi nuovi *charms* appaiano fondati su superstizioni popolari e religiose, dal punto di vista speculativo svelano, nella loro semplicità e ordinarietà, quel sincretismo magico-religioso che aveva mosso segretamente i primi passi tra il XIV e il XV secolo negli ambienti accademici in Inghilterra e in tutta Europa. La fiducia nei confronti delle arti occulte, considerate un elemento essenziale nella vita dell'uomo e che nelle formule sin qui riportate appare a livello embrionale e velato, sfocerà nella riforma spirituale di pensatori intellettuali come Cornelio Agrippa, il quale giungerà a considerare la magia come "totius nobilissimae philosophiae absoluta consummatio".⁴⁷

⁴⁷ Cfr. Perrone Compagni 1992, lib. I, cap. ii, 86.

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CLAUDIO CATALDI

THE VERSE FORMS OF THE OLD ENGLISH “METRICAL” CHARMS

This essay takes into account the metre of the so-called *metrical charms*, arguing that these charms are characterised by a number of prosodic elements such as free alliterative verses, recurring repetition and some occasional rhyme. These features mark a difference between the “metrical” charms and standard Old English verse. On the other hand, this prosodic mixture anticipates that which is to be found in post-Conquest early Middle English poetry, where alliterative verse, rhythmical prose and rhyme are employed. The prosody of early Middle English poetry was described as “rhythmical alliteration” by Norman F. Blake in 1969. In my view, the “metrical” charms might therefore be re-labelled as *rhythmical charms*. Interestingly, Middle English verse charms, for their part, will generally adopt the rhyming couplet as their verse form.

1. Introduction: “metrical” charms and Old English poetry

The name *metrical charms* refers to a group of twelve Old English incantations that exhibit several prosodic elements which distinguish sections of their text from ordinary prose. These charms vary in date of attestation, manuscript context, length, and structure. Nevertheless, because they all share the prosodic elements that are the object of this study, they will be considered here as a unitary group. In the discussion below, I will begin by identifying the distinctive elements of the prosody of the “metrical” charms, as well as their verse forms, in order to study the continuity of a prosodic tradition that would eventually flow into early Middle English poetry.

The standard collection of the twelve “metrical” charms is that edited by Dobbie 1942, cxxx-cxxxviii, 116-128, 207-220 in the sixth volume of the *Anglo-Saxon Poetic Records*. Before Dobbie, all these texts were edited and translated by Grendon 1909, 164-169, 172-187, 190-195, 206-209. Dobbie’s edition was followed by Godfrid Storms’ study of Anglo-Saxon magic, where all the “metrical” charms are edited, translated, and analysed (Storms 1948, 132-151, 154-163, 166-203, 206-223). Storms also identifies some new verse passages that Dobbie previously printed as prose, such as those in *For Theft*

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of *Cattle* (Dobbie no. 9/ Storms no. 15).¹ Since then discrete studies have focused on single charms – and especially on *For Unfruitful Land* (also known as *Æcerbot*) and the *Nine Herbs Charm*. Some charms have also been discussed in their manuscript context, most notably in the editions of the *Lacnunga*.² Their prosody has attracted rather less interest, although there are studies devoted to this feature – such as those by Vaughan-Sterling (1983) and Roper (2011) – which provide a useful background to this essay.³ Regarding the metre of the charms, Roper has stated that “the prosodic practice found in the ‘Metrical Charms’ is at variance with most other surviving Old English alliterative verse: the ‘Metrical Charms’ are, it seems, not very metrical”. While supposing that “we could see it as a function of the genre’s popular character”, he also notes that “there might be something *genre-specific* at work here”.⁴ The “metrical” charms are apotropaic texts, which answer the specific needs of those who perform them. As in the case of prose charms, they often feature instructions for performance, usually in the form of prose sections introducing or following the verse passage(s).⁵ The language of the “metrical” charms differs from ordinary prose and from classic Old English poetry; in Vaughan-Sterling’s words, we can find the “presence of at least the most rudimentary poetic lexicon, or the impulse toward the construction of such a specialized vocabulary”.⁶ Notable features are a number of formulas (e.g. *ofer sæs hrycg* ‘over the sea’s ridge’ *Nine Herbs Charm* 28);⁷ a few compounds (e.g. *beadowræd* ‘war-company’ *For the Water-Elf Disease* 7)⁸; the occasional use of binomials (e.g. *mæran domine* ‘mighty Lord’ + *miclan drihten* ‘powerful Lord’ *For Unfruitful Land*

¹ The modern titles of charms that are used in this essay are those by Dobbie 1942.

² The *Lacnunga* (London, British Library, Harley 585) includes five “metrical” charms: *Nine Herbs Charm*, *Against a Dwarf*, *For a Sudden Stitch*, *For Loss of Cattle*, *For Delayed Birth*. See especially Grattan, Singer 1952, 150-157, 160-163, 172-177, 182-183, 188-191; Petitt 2001, I, 60-67, 72-75, 90-95, 102-103, 114-115. *For Unfruitful Land* survives in London, BL, Cotton Caligula A. vii, while *For the Water-Elf Disease* is part of *Leechbook III* in London, BL, Royal 12. D. xvii. Four charms occur as marginal additions in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41: *For a Swarm of Bees*, *For Theft of Cattle*, *For Loss of Cattle*, *Journey Charm*. *Against a Wen* survives in London, BL, Royal 4. A. xiv.

³ Petitt 2001, II, 89-164, 171-196, 212-261, 273-284, 316-331 also provides metrical schemes and analysis of the *Lacnunga* charms.

⁴ Roper 2011, 117-118.

⁵ On the structural features of Old English charms see Olsan 1999.

⁶ Vaughan-Sterling 1983, 191. On the language of the “metrical” charms see also Weston 1985; Petitt 2011, II, 226.

⁷ These formulas are listed by Vaughan-Sterling 1983, 196-197.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 191

27; *mihtum and mægenum* ‘might and main’ *For the Water-Elf Disease* 15). Prominent rhetorical devices are repetition, anaphora, the so-called “incremental pattern” (climax or anti-climax)⁹ and the use of similes.¹⁰ The style of the charm is “invocative or imperative”,¹¹ characterised by the use of verbs (and their accumulation), in the form of requests or appeals to upper forces. Most of all, it is from a metrical point of view that the “metrical” charms differ from “standard” Old English poetry, whose criteria they often abandon.¹²

The “metrical” charms are *prosimetra* that feature a looser form of alliteration, frequent repetitions, and occasional rhymes. Rather than “standard” Old English poetry, the peculiar prosody of these texts parallels that of a group of early Middle English poems, composed between the twelfth and the thirteenth century. Studies by Blake (1969) and Bredehoft (2005) have investigated the evolution of medieval English versification, arguing that post-Conquest poetry is characterised by a loose, non-standard form of alliterative poetry, which is typical of late Old English. The place of the “metrical” charms within such development should be adequately assessed. To do so, I shall first discuss the prosodic elements of the “metrical” charms, with excerpts from the texts; I shall then provide parallel examples from early Middle English poetry; finally, I will take into examination verse Middle English charms.

2. Prosodic elements of the “metrical” charms: “rhythmical charms”?

In considering the metre of the “metrical” charms, one must take into account the fact that their prosodic elements were functional to recitation, rather than representing a strict metrical constraint. In this context, “repetition is one rhetorical device that underscores the oral-formulaic nature of a charm, though not all repetition in the charms involves established formulaic language”.¹³ In fact, repetition is both a rhetorical and a prosodic feature.¹⁴ Rhetorically, it gives the incantation part of its performative power. In the charms discussed below, repetition often takes the form of the rhetorical device of anaphora.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 198-199.

¹⁰ Cf. Grendon 1909, 120; Dobbie 1942, cxxxviii.

¹¹ Storms 1948, 118.

¹² The principles governing standard Old English metre were first formalised in the pivotal study by Sievers 1893.

¹³ Vaughan-Sterling 1983, 197.

¹⁴ Formulaic gibberish has a similar function; on which see Arthur 2018.

From a prosodic standpoint, repetition consists of the reiteration of sounds such as syllables or clusters of consonants within a single line, or may be employed to bind a cluster of lines together; therefore, it plays a role similar to that of alliteration and rhyme. Repetition may involve single words, part of sentences, and occasionally whole sentences, which form a sort of refrain.¹⁵ Repetition of single words is a prominent feature of the “metrical” charms and it is often combined with alliteration and occasional rhyme, as it will be shown by the examples below. Rhyme plays a marginal role, although some occurrences may be found. It may be end-rhyme, as in *For Delayed Birth*, ll. 4-6, where it is combined with anaphora and alliteration on the last two positions:

þis me to bote þære laþan lætbyrde,
 þis me to bote þære swæran swærbyrde,
 þis me to bote þære laðan lambyrde.¹⁶

As discussed by Vaughan-Sterling,¹⁷ rhyme may also occur between half-lines, binding hemistichs together; see *Journey Charm*, l. 21-22: “Hi me ferion and friþion and mine fore nerion, | eal me gehealdon, me gewealdon”;¹⁸ *Against a Wen*, l. 6 “Under fot wolues, under ueþer earnes”;¹⁹ in l.1, “wenne wenne, wenchichenne”;²⁰ rhyme is associated to repetition.²¹ Rhyme and alliteration are used within the same line, as in *For Unfruitful Land*, ll. 53-54: “æcera wexendra and wridendra, | eacniendra and elniendra”.²²

As the examples above demonstrate, and as discussed below, different kinds of alliterative patterns are employed in the “metrical” charms. These patterns can be summed-up as follows:²³

¹⁵ Vaughan-Sterling 1983, 197.

¹⁶ All charms are quoted from Dobbie 1942. Emphasis (for alliteration) and italics (for rhymes and assonances) in quotations are my own. (This be a remedy for me for the hateful late birth; this be a remedy for me for the troublesome painful birth; this be a remedy for me for the hateful weak birth). Translations are the author’s.

¹⁷ Vaughan-Sterling 1983, 195.

¹⁸ (May they carry me and protect me and save my journey; wholly defend me, control me).

¹⁹ (Under the wolf’s foot, under the eagle’s feather).

²⁰ (Wen, wen, little wen). Vaughan-Sterling 1983, 195 suggests that *wenchichenne* “was plucked out of the air because of the desire for rhyme”.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 195

²² (Fields growing and being productive, increasing and getting strong).

²³ In the discussion that follows, *a* indicates alliterative staves; *x* indicates non-alliterating staves; *b* stands for a second alliterative staff; | indicates caesuras.

1. verses with single alliteration in the first half-line (ax|ax, xa|ax);
2. verses with double alliteration in the first half-line (aa|ax);
3. cross alliteration (ab|ab);
4. alliterative pairs (aa|xx, xx|aa, aa|aa);
5. double alliterative pairs (aa|bb).

With regards to classic Old English poetry, the latter two patterns can be considered to be non-standard, as well as features of late Old English verse.²⁴ Standard alliteration is occasionally found in whole passages, for example in *For a Swarm of Bees*, which Storms considers to be the only charm which displays a fairly regular metre;²⁵ see for example ll. 9-12:

Sitte ge, sigewif, sigað to eorþan!
 Næfre ge wilde to wuda fleogan.
 Beo ge swa gemindige mines godes,
 swa bið manna gehwilc metes and epeles.²⁶

A passage wholly constructed out of double alliteration in the first hemistich is that in *For Unfruitful Land*, ll. 33-37:

toðum ontynan þurh trumne geþanc,
 aweccan þas wæstmas us to woruldnytte,
 gefyllan þas foldan mid fæste geleafan,
 wlitigigan þas wancgturf, swa se witega cwæð.²⁷

Single alliteration is often combined with anaphora, thus giving clusters such as that in the *Nine Herbs Charm*, ll. 47-54:

wið ðy readan attre, wið ðy runlan attre,
 wið ðy hwitan attre, wið ðy wedenan attre,
 wið ðy geolwan attre, wið ðy grenan attre,
 wið ðy wonnan attre, wið ðy wedenan attre,

²⁴ Bredehoft 2005, 78-79.

²⁵ Storms 1948, 119.

²⁶ (Sit you, victory-women, fall down on earth! Do not ever fly wild to the woods. Be as mindful of my benefit as each man is of food and homeland).

²⁷ (Open the mouth with teeth; by firm purpose awake the growth for our worldly needs, fill the fields with constant faith, make beautiful this grass-land, as the prophet said).

wið ðy brunan attre, wið ðy basewan attre,
 wið wyrngelbæd, wið wætergelbæd,
 wið þorngeblæd, wið þystelgeblæd,
 wið ysgeblæd, wið attorgeblæd.²⁸

This passage of the *Nine Herbs Charm* displays a clear formulaic, performative character, which is underlined by the instruction for singing that closes the text (ll. 69-74). Overall, the quotations from *For a Swarm of Bees* and the *Nine Herbs Charm* show that, in the “metrical” charms, alliteration often takes the form of single alliteration.²⁹ If we consider extended charms such as *For Unfruitful Land* and, again, the *Nine Herbs Charm*, single alliteration accounts for more than 60% of total alliterative lines; the percentage is even higher in shorter texts such as *For Delayed Birth* and *Against a Wen*. Comparatively, it has been noted that *The Battle of Maldon* has 46% of double alliteration, with *Beowulf* almost reaching 50%.³⁰ Moreover, the prosody of the “metrical” charms frequently favours alliterative pairs³¹ or the inclusion of two discrete alliterative staves per line. Roper observes that the fourth syllable often makes use of alliteration, so that we find alliterative patterns of ab|ab cross alliteration (for example, *A Journey Charm*, l. 27: “þæt me beo **Matheus** helm, **Marcus byrne**”)³² or aa|bb double alliterative pairs (for example *Nine*

²⁸ (Against the red poison, against the foul poison, against the white poison, against the blue poison, against the yellow poison, against the green poison, against the black poison, against the blue poison, against the brown poison, against the purple poison, against the worm-blister, against the water-blister, against the thorn-blister, against the thistle-blister, against the ice-blister, against the poison-blister). As regards “standard” alliteration, this passage poses at least two critical points. In l. 48, we would have to suppose that alliteration exists between *hw* and *w*, which is unlikely, although not totally unparalleled in late Old English; cf. Pope 1968, 129 on Ælfric’s rhythmical prose, where this feature occurs, although “very rarely”. In l. 49, one should posit alliteration between palatal and velar <g>; on the contrary, this is allowed in standard poetry, albeit as an early feature; see Minkova 2014, 333; cf. Petitt 2011, II, 119, 228.

²⁹ Petitt 2011, II, 121 highlights the high number of one-stress verses and hypermetric lines in the *Nine Herbs Charm*.

³⁰ See Orchard 2009, 432.

³¹ Grendon 1909, 222 writes that the “enumeration in alliterative pairs [...] is present in many charms”; Storms 1948, 160 notes that in *For the Water-Elf Disease* “the alliteration is not part of the verse-line as a whole and it is mainly limited to alliterative pairs”.

³² (That Matthew may be my helm, Mark my breastplate). On the presence of this feature in *Nine Herbs Charm* cf. Petitt 2011, II, 119.

Herbs Charm, l. 10: “ofer ðe **bryde bryodeton**, ofer þe **fearras fnærdon**”).³³ Alliteration sometimes is found in the fourth position even in the absence of aa|bb or cross alliteration.

In the “metrical” charms, another remarkable element of alliterative lines is the absence of enjambment, which has been noted by Roper.³⁴ In other words, lines often represent syntactic units. In addition to elements that are either allowed in standard Old English poetry (cross alliteration) or slightly unusual in the classic metre (alliteration on the fourth position, the aa|bb pattern), we must consider that the normative principles of measures and patterns are often broken in the “metrical” charms. Although this aspect has been ascribed to scribal corruption,³⁵ it rather seems to play a functional role within the prosodic system of the charms. This “rupture” yields hypermetric verses on the one side, and shorter verses on the other, as well as alliteration on minor syllables. For example, *For the Water-Elf Disease*, ll. 8-9 has a line with alliteration on the fourth position followed by a three-stress line where all three positions alliterate: “Ic benne awrat **betest beadowræda**, | swa benne ne **burnon**, ne **burston**”.³⁶ Clusters of short verses are often linked by repetition and by sequences of verbs in the imperative tense, which is typical of charms; see, for example, *For Theft of Cattle*, ll. 6-9:

Garmund, godes ðegen,
find þæt feoh and fere þæt feoh
and hafa þæt feoh and heald þæt feoh
and fere ham þæt feoh.³⁷

As discussed by Vaughan-Sterling, the “metrical” charms also feature lines that have more than four stresses.³⁸ Notable examples are: “se god, se þas grundas geworhte, geunne us growende gife” (*For Unfruitful Land*, l. 79);³⁹

³³ (Brides trampled over you; bulls snorted over you). Roper 2011, 117.

³⁴ Roper 2011, 116.

³⁵ For example, by Vaughan-Sterling 1983, 194; Storms 1948, 160.

³⁶ (I have wreathed the best war-troop around the wounds, so that the wounds won’t burn or burst).

³⁷ (Garmund, God’s servant, find the cattle and lead the cattle, and have the cattle and hold the cattle, and bring the cattle home).

³⁸ Vaughan-Sterling 1983, 195-196. On hypermetric verses in Old English poetry see Bliss 1972; Bredehoft 2005, 51-57; Cocker 2019.

³⁹ (May the God that created these grounds grant growing gifts to us). Here too one finds alliteration between palatal and velar <g> (see above).

“Bethlem hattæ seo burh ðe Crist on geboren wes” (*For Loss of Cattle*, l. 3);⁴⁰ “þæt he næfre næbbe landes, þæt he hit oðlæde” (*For Theft of Cattle*, l. 10).⁴¹ Hypermetric lines mostly stand alone, but occasionally occur in clusters; for example, in *Against a Dwarf*, ll. 10-12; *For a Sudden Stitch*, ll. 20-26 (a passage also characterised by repetition). Longer lines are occasionally combined with standard alliterative verses and repetitions, as in *A Journey Charm*, ll. 1-5, where “cross” alliteration is also found:

Ic me on þysse gyrdel beluce and on godes helde bebeode
 wið þane sara stice, wið þane sara slege,
 wið þane grymma gryre,
 wið ðane micela egsa þe bið eghwam lað,
 and wið eal þæt lað þe in to land fare.⁴²

Another example is *For Unfruitful Land*, ll. 27-28: “bidde ic þone mæran domine, bidde ðone miclan drihten, | bidde ic þone haligan heofonrices weard”.⁴³ Some sections which are set out as prose by Dobbie actually show traces of alliteration;⁴⁴ all of the “metrical” charms but *A Journey Charm* feature a combination of prose and verse. With its mixture of loose alliterative patterns, repetitions, occasional rhyme (to all intents and purposes an accumulation of figures of sound), as well as with their prosimetric form, the verse forms of the “metrical” charms resembles that defined “rhythmical alliteration” by Blake: “at times the rhythm in rhythmical alliteration becomes so regular, as in passages of great intensity or emotion, that the result is close to poetry; at other times, when the rhythm becomes less insistent, prose”.⁴⁵ This

⁴⁰ (Bethlehem is the name of the city where Christ was born). Note the variant of this line in the *Lacnunga* charm *For Loss of Cattle*, l. 3. See also below.

⁴¹ (That may he never have any land to lead them away to).

⁴² (I surround myself with this rod and commend myself to God’s protection against the sore stitch, against the sore stroke, against the grievous horror, against the mighty fear that is hateful to everybody, and against every horror that travels the land). On the metre of the *Journey Charm*, Storms 1948, 220-221. observes that “the alliteration loses its structural character and tends to sterilize into short phrases and parallel expressions”.

⁴³ (I pray to the mighty Lord, I pray to the powerful Lord, I pray to the holy guardian of the heavenly realm).

⁴⁴ This applies to other charms too. In his discussion on *Seo halige sealf*, Storms 1948, 241 notes that the names of fifty-seven herbs listed in the charm are arranged by alliterative groups; Grattan, Singer 1952, 122 print this section of the charm in a verse layout.

⁴⁵ Blake 1969, 120.

seems to be true also in the case of the “metrical” charms, which might therefore be better labelled *rhythmical charms*. It is significant that the features discussed above are also found in early Middle English poetry, as I discuss below.

3. *Verse forms of early Middle English poetry*

As Derek Pearsall notes, in late Old English there is a “wide spectrum of alliterative writing” comprised of standard alliterative poetry, the later *Chronicle* poems, and the rhythmical prose by Ælfric and Wulfstan.⁴⁶ The latter, in particular, seems to have influenced the development of English poetry of the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. Rhythmical prose consists of a loose form of alliteration based on two-stress pairs, end-stopped lines, and repetition. It is worth quoting Pope’s definition of “rhythmical prose”: “a loosely metrical form resembling in basic structural principles the alliterative verse of the Old English poets, but differing markedly in the character and range of its rhythms as in strictness of alliterative practice, and altogether distinct in diction, rhetoric, and tone”.⁴⁷ Homilies by Ælfric and Wulfstan were copied well into the twelfth century; several anonymous homilies of the early Middle English period also include rhythmical passages.⁴⁸

In a broad sense, it is safe to affirm that early Middle English poetry inherits the variety of late Old English versification. While alliterative patterns disintegrate over time, lines are progressively bound by rhymes of various kind:⁴⁹ perfect rhymes; assonance; and, less frequently, identity of final consonants but difference of vowels.⁵⁰ This evolution is attested to by Middle English

⁴⁶ Pearsall 1981, 3. On Ælfric’s rhythmical prose see Pope 1967, 105-136; on Wulfstan’s, see McIntosh 1949.

⁴⁷ Pope 1967, 105.

⁴⁸ The use of rhythmical prose in early Middle English sermons cannot be adequately discussed here, although it is an aspect that also witnesses to the continuity of the alliterative tradition; see especially Bethurum 1935; Millett 1988.

⁴⁹ See McIntosh 1982, 27. However, this must not be considered a rule: *Poema Morale* is an example of early Middle English poetic composition that adapts a Latin metre (the septenary) into the vernacular, and where imperfect rhymes are occasional deviations from a pure-rhyme standard.

⁵⁰ On the variety of rhymes in Early Middle English poetry see Jefferson, Minkova, Putter 2014; Putter (forthcoming). An early witness of the combination of alliteration and rhyme is the *Rime of King William* preserved in the *Peterborough Chronicle*; see Bredehoft 2005, 94.

verse charms, as it will be discussed later on. From the late twelfth century onwards, it is especially the South-Western area that sees the emergence of a “new” poetry that, as noted by James P. Oakden, is based on the fusion of the traditional Old English alliterative metre with a “popular” kind of verse, which he deems as influenced by rhythmical prose.⁵¹ This versification was subsequently developed into rhyming couplets by the splitting of long lines with internal rhyme.⁵² Notably, this development took place in an area where Old English was still copied in the post-Conquest period. As highlighted by scholars, several scriptoria active in the South West were especially responsible for the preservation and reuse of the native literary heritage after the Conquest, by copying and glossing Old English texts in the twelfth and well into the thirteenth century.⁵³ In this context, it is worth noting that Cambridge, CCC, 41, which preserves four of the “rhythmical charms”, was probably produced in the South West and given to Exeter by Bishop Leofric in the eleventh century;⁵⁴ London, BL, Royal 4. A. xiv, which features the charm *Against a Wen* (f. 106v) was at Worcester in the twelfth century.⁵⁵ The tradition of the “rhythmical charms” has, then, a geographic connection with this area. Most importantly, the versification of the charms also anticipates that of a poem such as the so-called *Worcester Fragments*. This poem, homiletic in tone, develops the theme of the “Address to the Soul to the Body”, which was popular in Old and early Middle English literature; its metre has been defined a “prosodical mix” by its latest editor, Douglas Moffat.⁵⁶ The *Worcester Fragments* – whose sole, fragmentary copy is found in Worcester, Cathedral Library, F. 174, a manuscript from Worcester – feature several examples of a loose form of alliterative long-lines (with a majority of lines with single alliteration but also with instances in which all four positions bear alliteration), rhyming lines, short lines, and lines that do not feature either alliteration or rhyme.⁵⁷ This free alliterative verse has been thought of as harking back to Ælfric’s and Wulf-

⁵¹ The looseness of the early Middle English alliterative line, its resemblance to rhythmical prose, and the use of rhythmical prose in early Middle English sermons all lead us to question where the boundaries between “prose” and “poetry” lie. On this theme, cf. McIntosh 1982; Bredehoft 2005; Pascual 2014.

⁵² Oakden 1930, 134-152.

⁵³ For an overview, see Irvine 2000; on poetry, see Turville-Petre 1977, 14; Pearsall 1981.

⁵⁴ Cf. Dobbie 1942, liii; Ker 1957 [1990], no. 32; Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 39.

⁵⁵ Ker 1957 [1990], no. 250; Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, no. 455. Storms 1948, 155 notes that “the spelling [of the charm] points to a Southern source”.

⁵⁶ Moffat 1987, 26. On the dialect of the poem, see also Hall 1920, 232.

⁵⁷ See especially Moffat 1987, 25-33.

stan’s rhythmical prose, rather than to the classic Old English poetry.⁵⁸ Internal rhymes in the *Worcester Fragments* bind the two half-lines. One might take ll. D 8-16 as a sample of this “prosodical mix”:

Hwo so hit iseize he mihte beon offered:
 reowliche biþ so þin siþ eft(e)ri þin wrecche lif.
 Nu me wule swopen þine flor and þet flet clensien,
 for hit is h(eom þe) loþre þe þu þeron leize;
 heo wulleþ mid holiwatere beworpen ec þeo w(owes),
 ble(t)sien ham zeorne to burewen ham wiþ þe,
 beren ut þin bedstrau, b(eornen) hit mid fure;
 þus þu ert nu ilufed seopþen þu me forlure:
 al hit is re(owliche) þin siþ efter þin wrecche lif.⁵⁹

The metrical features of the “rhythmical charms” are all found in the poem: loose alliteration involving all possible positions; repetition (lines D 9 and D 16, which represent a refrain that recurs throughout the poem); the prominence of single alliteration; a verse that does not show any noteworthy prosodic feature (D 8). Repetition, in particular, is a remarkable feature of the prosody of the *Worcester Fragments*.⁶⁰ One might compare the excerpt from the *Nine Herbs Charm*, ll. 47-54 quoted above with this “Signs of Death” passage from the *Worcester Fragments*, ll. A 17-21:

Him deaueþ þa aren, him dimmeþ (þa) eizen,
 him scerpeþ þe neose, him scrinckeþ þa lippen,
 him scorteþ (þe) þunge,
 him trukeþ his iwit, him teoreþ his miht,
 him coldeþ his (liche): liggeþ þe ban stille.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Cf. Moffat 1987, 26; McIntosh 1982, 26.

⁵⁹ Moffatt 1987, 70. (Whoever sees it might be scared: grievous is your fate after your wretched life. Now your floor shall be swept and the paved floor cleaned, as it’s loathsome for them, because you lay on there; they shall sprinkle each wall with holy water, zealously bless themselves in order to be protected against you; carry outside the straw for bedding, burn it with fire. This is the way you are loved since you were separated from me: wholly grievous is your fate after your wretched life).

⁶⁰ Outside of prosody, it is worth noting that the *Worcester Fragments* and a charm such as *Against a Wen* also share the use of similes: compare the hedgehog simile of the early Middle English poem (ll. F 20-33) with the brief series of similes found in the charm.

⁶¹ Moffat 1987, 63. (His ears become deaf, his eyes dim, his nose gets sharp, his lips get

The structure of the two passages, with short lines based on anaphora and single alliteration, is basically the same. Closely related – especially from a textual standpoint – to the *Worcester Fragments* is the twelfth-century short poem *The Grave*. The text, whose sole copy is found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 343, written “near or at Worcester”,⁶² is mostly based on single alliteration.⁶³ This verse form is combined with repetition, as in ll. 5-6: “Nu me þe bringæð þer ðu beon scealt. | Nu me sceal þe meten, 7 þa mold(e) seoðða”;⁶⁴ l. 21: “for sone þu bist ladlic 7 lad to iseonne”⁶⁵ features two discrete alliterative staves, with pattern ab|ba. Alliterative pairs are limited to the first half-line in l. 12: “Dimme 7 deorcæ þet den fulæt on ho(n)d(e)”.⁶⁶ The aa|xx scheme is almost systematically employed in a legal formula preserved in two twelfth-century manuscripts: Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, 383, f. 59r-v and Strood, Medway Archive and Local Studies Centre, DRc/R1 (*Textus Roffensis*), f. 95r-v; see, for example, ll. 1-3:

Hit becwæð and becwæl se ðe hit ahte
mid fullan folcrihte, swa swa hit his ylðran
mid feo and mid feore rihte begeaton.⁶⁷

Another interesting example of loose alliteration is found in the *First Worcester Fragment* (a lament on the disuse of English in the post-Conquest period), preserved in the same manuscript as the *Worcester Fragments*, and whose prosody has been thoroughly analysed and reconstructed by Brehe.⁶⁸

dry, his tongue becomes short, his mind is lacking, his might fails, his body becomes cold: the corpse lies still).

⁶² Irvine 2000, 59. Oakden 1930, 42, states that “it is difficult to assign this poem either to the S. Western, or S.W. Midl. dialect”; Turville-Petre 1977, 9, assigns the poem to the South West Midlands.

⁶³ *The Grave* has been edited and discussed several times. I have also edited, translated and discussed this poem in Cataldi 2018, 129-133. A recent digital edition is available at *Digital Grave* <<https://sims2.digitalmappa.org/12>> (last accessed March 19, 2021).

⁶⁴ Edition is my own, from Cataldi 2018, 129-130 (Now you are brought to the place where you shall stay. Now you are being measured, and the earth after you).

⁶⁵ (Because soon you will be loathsome and horrid to see).

⁶⁶ (Dim and dark, the den will soon become filthy).

⁶⁷ Grendon 1909, 180. (He bequeathed it and died who owned it with full public right, as his ancestors obtained it by right with possessions and life).

⁶⁸ Brehe 1990.

In this lyric, “regular” alliterative lines alternate with shorter lines and hypermetric verses.⁶⁹

The examples above do not imply that the “rhythmical charms” have directly influenced all of these early Middle English texts; what is suggested here is rather that the “rhythmical charms” were part of the multifaceted verse tradition that informed the early Middle English poems, with their prosodic combination of repetition, rhythmical alliteration, alliterative verses; rhymes and assonances moved from the side-lines to centre-stage in the verse. The most impressive and ambitious representative of this “metrical system”⁷⁰ is *Lazamon*. Notable features of the metre of the *Brut* are the use of ab|ab and aa|bb alliterative patterns, the absence of enjambment,⁷¹ to which one must add the alternation between verse and prose: “even *Lazamon’s Brut* contains lines which have no alliteration, rhyme, consonance, or assonance-lines which in any other context would be accepted and printed as prose”.⁷² A brief sample from the *Brut* will suffice (ll. 112-116):

þa burh wes wel iþarwed; binnen lut ʒearen.
 he ʒef heo his stepmoder; for þon lofe of his broþer.
 & Lauinion þene castel; & muchel lond þar-to.
 þe his fader hefde imaked; þe wile þe he on liue wes.
 þis lond he hire lende; þat come hir lifes ende.⁷³

Scholars have frequently investigated the possible sources behind metre of the *Brut*, often relating it to the metre of other early Middle English texts such as the *Worcester Fragments*.⁷⁴ Blake has suggested that the versification of

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*; see also Hall 1920, 223-228. Oakden 1935, 3, writes that “the importance of this fragment [...] lies in the fact that it offers evidence for the survival of the Old English metrical form without traces of the influence of the older poetic diction”.

⁷⁰ I borrow the term from Hall 1920, 292, where it is referred to the *Proverbs of Alfred* in a comparison with the *Worcester Fragments*.

⁷¹ Blake 1969, 122-123.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 119.

⁷³ Brook, Leslie 1963-78, available at <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=cme;idno=LayCal>> (last accessed January 20, 2021). (Within a few years the city was well equipped. He gave it to his stepmother for the love of his brother, along with Lavinion, the castle that his father made while he was alive, and much land there; he granted her this land until the end of her life) (version of London, BL, Cotton Caligula A. ix; this manuscript originates from the South West Midlands). See especially Hall 1920, 463-466; Bredehoft 2005, 99-109; Brehe 2000.

⁷⁴ For example, see Turville-Petre 1977, 11-14.

the poem is descended from an “alternative” tradition of popular poetry that has not survived;⁷⁵ later *Chronicle* poems such as the *Rime of King William* have also been regarded as influences for Lazamon.⁷⁶ At the same time, it is worth considering the possibility that the poet relied on a varied tradition of verses that also included what Blake called “rhythmical alliteration”, as well as the prosodic variety of the “rhythmical charms”. Rather than assuming the influence of a “popular” poetry that has not survived, our records show that the “prosodic mix” already existed in Old English. In this context, the *Brut* would represent a development and systematisation of the loose metrical form developed by Lazamon’s ancestors and contemporaries.⁷⁷

4. Verse forms of Middle English charms

In early Middle English alliteration was in the process of becoming progressively more ornamental, leaving the role of organisation of the verse to rhyme and assonance. This development can be appreciated in the *Proverbs of Alfred*, a verse collection of sayings that was presumably assembled in the mid-twelfth century and which survives in six manuscript versions of various length.⁷⁸ Hall states that its versification is “a mixture of the national alliterative verse loosely constructed and rhyming couplets”.⁷⁹ The emergence of rhyming couplets is also evident in Middle English verse charms, which tend to adopt rhyme (of all types) as their main prosodic feature. A notable example (and a peculiar text) is *The Man that the Hare I-Met*, a charm preserved

⁷⁵ Blake 1969. This “popular” poetry is supposedly influenced by rhythmical prose: cf. Oakden 1930, 134-140; see also below.

⁷⁶ See especially Brehe 2000; Bredehoft 2005, 110-120.

⁷⁷ The Middle English *Bestiary*, copied in London, BL, Arundel 292, xiii^{ex} (editions in Hall 1920, 176-196; Wirtjes 1991), displays passages that are metrically similar to the *Brut* and the *Worcester Fragments*. The Middle English *Bestiary* does not belong to the South-Western area outlined above; Hall 1920, 590-591 suggests an East Anglian authorship. The poem displays a combination of verse forms that aims to reproduce the variety of its Latin model, and that falls outside of the scope of the present discussion. See especially Wirtjes 1991, lii-lxviii; Duncan 1992; Brehe 2000.

⁷⁸ Editions in Hall 1920, 18-29; Arngart 1942-55. The poem is regarded as a Southern product – perhaps of Sussex origin, although dialectal features vary on the basis of the manuscript. On the dialect of the *Proverbs of Alfred*, see Hall 1920, p. 292; Oakden 1930, 44; Arngart 1942-55, 16-37.

⁷⁹ Hall 1920, 292. Note that several passages that are less based on couplets still show the same mix of repetition and alliteration discussed above, with alliteration in all four positions.

in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 86 (a late-thirteenth-century manuscript originating from Worcestershire). The poem, in rhyming couplets, provides instructions in case a person meets a hare (ll. 1-2: “The **mon** that the hare **i-met**, | Ne shal him nevere be the **bet**”)⁸⁰ and gives a long list of names of the animal (ll. 11-12 “The hare, the **scotart**, | the **bigge**, the **bouchart**”);⁸¹ there is occasional ornamental alliteration (ll. 5-6 “**Be** hit staf, **be** hit **bouwe**, | And **blesce** him with his **helbowe**”).⁸² More often, Middle English verse charms retain the themes of their Old English counterparts: they mostly aim to heal the body, to recover stolen properties, and to obtain protection against thieves. The opening “Bethlehem” line of the charms *For Loss of Cattle* even recurs, centuries later, in Middle English charms to cure wounds and as protection against thieves, which suggests that this line must have been a widespread formula employed in incantations and prayers.⁸³ The “Bethlehem” charm against thieves is preserved in several manuscripts from the late fourteen to the sixteenth century.⁸⁴ Although the metre is uncertain,⁸⁵ one might note alliteration (ll. 1-2 “In **Bedlem** God was **born** | bitwen two **bestes** to rest he was **leyd**”),⁸⁶ inflectional rhymes (ll. 6-7 “defend oure boydes | & our catel fro þeues”)⁸⁷ and repetition (ll. 10-11 “be londe or be watere | be nigt or be day”),⁸⁸ while other sections of the text do not show any remarkable metrical feature. A slightly more regular charm that adopts the “Bethlehem” opening formula displays a combination of rhymes, assonances, repetition and alliteration (ll 1-4):

God was **iborin** in **Bedlem**;
Iborin he was to **Ierusalem**,
Ifolewid in þe **Flum Iordan**,
þer nes inemned ne **wolf** ne þe**f**.⁸⁹

⁸⁰ Edition in Wright, Halliwell 1845, 133-134. (The man who has met the hare will be no better than it).

⁸¹ (The hare, the *scotart*, the big one, the *bouchart*). For a discussion of this poem see Ross 1935.

⁸² (Be it staff, be it bow, and bless it with his elbow).

⁸³ See Smallwood 1989.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 211.

⁸⁵ Notably, Smallwood 1989, 211-212, prints the text out as prose.

⁸⁶ Olsan 2009, 224. (God was born in Bethlehem, and he was put to rest between two beasts). Olsan’s text is from Cambridge, UL, Add. 9308 (beginning of the fifteenth century).

⁸⁷ (Defend our bodies and our cattle from thieves).

⁸⁸ (By land or by water, by night or by day).

⁸⁹ Smallwood 1989, 207. “God was born in Bethlehem and he was taken to Jerusalem; he was baptised in the Jordan river; no wolf or thief were mentioned there”.

As it is the case with the “Bethlehem” texts, several formulas – usually invocations to Christ or to saints – are employed in Middle English charms. For present purposes, it is worth noting that alliteration survives well into the fifteenth century, for example in a rhyming charm against toothache that combines alliteration with repetition: “Thre gude brether are 3e | Gud gatis gange 3e”.⁹⁰ However, at this stage, alliteration ceased to be a structural feature of verse charms. Middle English charms know no “alliterative revival”; they rather employ the most popular metre – that of rhyming couplets – with occasional alliterative embellishments.

5. *Conclusions*

To sum up, the “metrical” charms – which I suggest should be re-labelled “rhythmical charms” – share a specific prosodic form which is characterised by repetition, rhyme and alliteration. Alliteration is rather loose and standard alliterative lines alternate with lines that contain cross or double alliteration, lines with alliteration in all four positions, as well as short and hypermetric lines. These elements were presumably functional to oral recitation, a feature which the prosimetric structure, the importance accorded to repetition, and the accumulation of figures of sound all demonstrate. Whether it can be considered a “popular” form of poetry (as in Blake’s view) or not, this verse form seems to be part of a tradition called upon by early Middle English poets. It is neither a degeneration of the epic metre of *Beowulf* nor a bridge towards the Alliterative Revival of the fourteenth century;⁹¹ rather, it represents a parallel tradition of less formal poetry.

Obviously, this metre does not remain fixed in time; there is an ongoing importance accorded to rhyme, which is minimal in the Old English phase and becomes remarkable from the mid-twelfth century.⁹² That the “rhythmical charms” and a poem like the *Worcester Fragments* are part of a shared poetic tradition can be assessed on both metrical and geographical grounds. The

⁹⁰ Horstman 1845, 375. “You are three good brothers; you travel a good path”. The text is preserved in Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral Library, 91 (fifteenth century). On this charm, see Olsan 2011.

⁹¹ On the vexed issue of the survival of the alliterative verse, see especially Oakden 1930; Blake 1969; Turville-Petre 1977; McIntosh 1982; Brehe 2000; Bredehoft 2005, 110-120; Pascual 2014; Pascual 2017.

⁹² Cf. Oakden 1930, 140.

provenance of the texts, in fact, adds further weight to the hypothesis. The South West played a key role in the preservation and re-use of pre-conquest English. Furthermore, we know that copies of the “rhythmical charms” circulated in this area: CCCC 41 is a South-Western product and *Against a Wen* was copied in the South West in the twelfth century. In short, this answers Blake’s statement that “if the popular alliterative poetry was found throughout the country, we have to explain why it led to a revival of the literary form of that poetry only in the West Country”;⁹³ because it was not a “revival” but rather the continuation of a poetic tradition without actual gaps in our records.⁹⁴ While the kind of prosodic mix found in the “rhythmical charms” merged into loosely alliterative early Middle English poetry (and died out with it), verse charms participated in the evolution of versification towards rhyming couplets.⁹⁵

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⁹³ Blake 1969, 118. In this context, it is of no little importance that the South West was also the area from which the “Alliterative Revival” was developed; see Pearsall 1981.

⁹⁴ The *Proverbs of Alfred* may indicate that this tradition stretched towards South. A key question that remains to be investigated is if and how this kind of poetry spread in other parts of the country. A major example is the ME *Bestiary*, which was copied outside of the South-Western area.

⁹⁵ This study benefited from research I conducted at the University of Bristol during an internship on the “Verse Forms of Early Middle English Poetry” (June-July 2018), supervised by Professor Ad Putter. I am most grateful to the University of Bristol for funding this research. I am also thankful to Professor Ad Putter and Professor Patrizia Lendinara for commenting on earlier drafts of this paper, and to the anonymous reviewers for their suggestions.

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PROBLEMI DI EDIZIONE
DEI PIÙ ANTICHI INCANTESIMI TEDESCHI

The oldest German charms: issues on textual criticism. Medieval German charms show two sets of problems when dealing with textual criticism: on the one hand, the issue of the charm as a *genre* and, on the other hand, the complexity of the manuscript transmission. Each critical edition should indeed fit a proper method, which may vary according to the textual *genre*, the historical period, and the transmission features to get as closer as possible to the original text, even when very little is known about its existence. This paper investigates all the known German charms of the 9th and 10th century: they happen to share important features, such as a manuscript transmission based on *codex unicus*, the marginal position of the text on the page and in the manuscript itself, the rare paratextual elements and the relationship between Latin and German language within the text. In this period, all charms are deeply rooted in a monastic environment and were not perceived as “magic” since they were written in the same books containing other Christian texts. Indeed, all these features change again if we consider charms of the following centuries, and then the author of a critical edition must consider other problems, such as, for example, a manuscript tradition based on many variant versions of the same text and also based on increasing contamination of different motifs merging in similar texts.

1. *Introduzione*

I problemi di edizione sono connessi, da un lato, alle caratteristiche della trasmissione manoscritta, dall'altro, alla complessa e non ancora risolta questione del genere o tipologia testuale in cui inquadrare gli incantesimi. Parlare di “edizione critica” degli incantesimi tedeschi medievali nel solco del cosiddetto metodo Lachmann o stemmatico può sembrare un esercizio ozioso e fine a sé stesso, dal momento che la maggior parte di essi sono tramandati o da un unico testimone oppure da una quantità non ancora censita di redazioni così difformi tra loro da non sembrare riconducibili in alcun modo né ad un unico capostipite, né tantomeno ad un “originale”, la cui stessa esistenza è messa in dubbio da una presunta tradizione orale. Ritengo utile invece mettere in evidenza e approfondire alcuni punti inerenti alla critica testuale degli incantesimi dal momento che, come ribadisce in maniera cristallina il Chiesa, la prima domanda che un filologo è tenuto a fare a sé stesso è proprio sulla effettiva

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necessità di una edizione critica che miri alla ricostruzione del testo originale, poiché, mentre per alcuni tipi di testo è necessario, per altre tipologie tale approccio potrebbe non essere adatto. In quest'ultimo caso bisognerà ricorrere ad altre strategie e ad altri criteri, poiché, quale che sia il metodo scelto per l'analisi critica, esso deve necessariamente essere adattato in maniera duttile alle problematiche di ogni singola opera.¹ Ed è proprio di tali specificità e caratteristiche degli incantesimi come singoli testi e nel loro insieme e delle difficoltà che queste sviluppano nella pratica della critica testuale che intendo trattare in questa sede, rinviando ad altri studi la complessa attribuzione del termine "incantesimo" ad un determinato genere. Utilizzo qui, mettendo da parte qualsiasi gerarchia o giudizio di valore, la designazione di "incantesimo" nel senso più ampio e inclusivo possibile iscrivendo in tale insieme tutti quei testi "magici" destinati a risolvere o a prevenire un problema per mezzo della forza delle parole messe in atto dal celebrante e che vengono variamente etichettati anche come scongiuri, formule magiche, rimedi verbali, fascinazioni ecc.²

Di tutti e tre i momenti della vita di un testo – composizione, trasmissione, ricezione – il lettore moderno ignora molti dettagli importanti, dal processo compositivo di un anonimo autore o compilatore, alle modalità di rielaborazione e traduzione nelle diverse lingue e dialetti che animano l'occidente medievale nel tempo e nello spazio. Sebbene non sia questa la sede per trattare i problemi della ricezione, va tenuto a mente che essa non deve essere intesa come un avvenimento singolo, ma deve essere immaginata come una serie di ulteriori "momenti" nel corso del tempo, poiché, mentre possiamo individuare l'emittente in un momento storico preciso, la fase di produzione del testo, la ricezione dipende dal punto di vista. Avremo quindi il "ricevente1" che coincide con il destinatario coevo al testo (per esempio il copista stesso o il celebrante dell'incantesimo), e un numero variabile di riceventi corrispondenti ai diversi momenti storici in cui il testo è stato letto e copiato, fino ad arrivare al lettore di oggi, che si trova tra le mani il "messaggio giunto in una bottiglia",³ espressione che mai come nel caso degli incantesimi si adatta opportunamente. Tuttavia, se da un lato conoscere il processo e la storia che hanno dato vita a una certa opera è importante al fine di pubblicare un testo affidabile, nel caso di testi non letterari come i nostri incantesimi, la loro stessa "natura" ha talvolta deviato l'attenzione. La ricezione degli incantesimi, l'uso

¹ Chiesa 2012, 144.

² In un suo recente lavoro, Frankfurter 2019 è tornato sulla complessa definizione del termine "magia".

³ Segre 1979, 14.

che ne veniva fatto dai suoi contemporanei, la diffusione e successiva rielaborazione sono stati a lungo considerati sopravvivenza di antiche superstizioni o, nel migliore dei casi, espressione di una letteratura popolare. Quest'ultima, insieme al folklore, ha risentito in passato di una marcata connotazione negativa specialmente in Italia, e questo nonostante proprio qui siano state prodotte importanti ricerche sul campo e illustri studiosi, abbiano affermato che *egemonico* e *subalterno*, lungi dal rappresentare due ambiti culturali nettamente separati, si collocano in costante rapporto lungo una linea di confine che varia con il mutare dei contesti storici che devono essere sempre presi attentamente in considerazione.⁴

Questo pregiudizio nei confronti dell'intero genere ha di fatto ostacolato a lungo la ricerca scientifica filologica ed è solo in tempi recenti che l'interesse per queste tematiche, oltre che per gli studiosi di antropologia culturale, storia delle religioni, Medioevo, folklore, storia locale, si è finalmente acceso anche sul piano della critica testuale.⁵ Resta il fatto che alcuni temi, motivi, archetipi ricorrono come "cellule" dagli incantesimi ai canti della tradizione popolare⁶ e vanno a confondersi quindi con *topoi* e *leitmotiv* letterari veri e propri, rendendo talvolta l'analisi interpretativa notevolmente complessa. Ad ogni modo, un incantesimo, prima di essere un rimedio per bloccare un'emorragia o per comporre una frattura, prima di essere la rielaborazione di antichissimi motivi di matrice indoeuropea, per un filologo esso è innanzitutto un testo. Testo che egli deve comprendere in tutte le sue sfaccettature per poter stabilire la migliore metodologia di analisi.⁷

Un esempio illustre di come lo studio del contesto abbia paradossalmente limitato la ricerca sul testo ci viene dai due *Incantesimi di Merseburg*, tràditi in un omiliario latino del IX secolo (Merseburg, Domkapitel 136/58, f. 85r). I due testi sono certamente i più conosciuti anche tra i non specialisti e sono i primi ad essere stati studiati. Sfolgiando la ricchissima bibliografia relativa non si può non osservare come fin dalla prima pubblicazione di Jacob Grimm avvenuta subito dopo la scoperta del manoscritto, le ricerche si siano concentrate quasi esclusivamente sul significato e sulla portata storico-culturale delle divinità pagane poco conosciute nominate nella *historiola* di entrambi i testi e

⁴ Mi riferisco agli studiosi italiani, come per esempio Ernesto Di Martino, Carlo Ginzburg e Alfonso Di Nola.

⁵ Una breve sintesi di tale pregiudizio in Barbato 2019, xi-xiv.

⁶ Per una interessante disanima dei problemi relativi a temi e motivi si veda Segre 1979, 71-79.

⁷ Segre 1979, 23-25.

solo in tempi molto recenti si è ragionato lucidamente anche sugli altri problemi interpretativi sul piano fonno-morfologico, lessicale e semantico.⁸

2. Edizioni, corpus

*Denkmäler deutscher Poesie und Prosa aus dem VIII-XII Jh.*⁹ e *Die kleineren althochdeutschen Sprachdenkmäler*¹⁰ sono certamente le antologie più note e prestigiose ed entrambe includono una ricca selezione di incantesimi, che entrano a far parte dei monumenti linguistici tedeschi più antichi. MSD separa i testi in versi da quelli in prosa in sezioni diverse, inoltre, gli incantesimi sono ulteriormente suddivisi tra *Sprüche* e *Segen*: ai primi viene riconosciuta una derivazione pagana e mitologica secondo quanto già individuato da Grimm, mentre i *Segen* vengono considerati testi di produzione e fruizione cristiani, distinzione che si riscontra anche in Steinmeyer. Entrambe le raccolte forniscono una trascrizione pulita e attenta dei testi, intervenendo con strategie editoriali tese alla maggiore chiarezza possibile per il lettore (scioglimento abbreviazioni, divisione in versi, uso di segni di interpunzione e di maiuscole, emendamento di lezioni palesemente erronee, debitamente segnalate). Interessante il fatto che la raccolta di “monumenti linguistici” databili fino al XII secolo è organizzata in ordine cronologico tranne che per gli incantesimi poiché, afferma Steinmeyer nell’introduzione, per questo tipo di testi è impossibile essere precisi proprio per via della loro secolare tradizione manoscritta frammentaria e irregolare “weil sie nur einzelne, zufällig uns bekannt gewordene, vielfach abgeleitete Glieder einer jahrhundertlang fortwirkenden Tradition darstellen”.¹¹ Nessuna delle due raccolte si può dire completa, sebbene Steinmeyer aggiunga alla sezione *Beschwörungen und Segen* alcune ricette provenienti dalla tradizione medica.¹²

Il primo tentativo di raccogliere in un unico libro tutto il *corpus* di incantesimi tedeschi dal IX al XIV secolo lo dobbiamo ad una tesi di dottorato del 1963

⁸ Impossibile in questa sede citare anche solo i riferimenti più essenziali ai *Merseburger Zaubersprüche*. Rimando agli studi e relativa bibliografia di Beck 2011 e precedenti.

⁹ MSD 1892.

¹⁰ Steinmeyer 1916.

¹¹ Steinmeyer 1916, V.

¹² Anche la più recente antologia di *Althochdeutsche poetische Texte* di Karl Wipf 1992 contiene una ricca sezione dedicata agli incantesimi, e ne viene fornita una traduzione in tedesco moderno, oltre che una stringata ma accurata interpretazione dei passi o dei termini più controversi.

The Old High German and Old Saxon Charms,¹³ in cui l'autrice fornisce una edizione diplomatica dei testi basata sulle foto dei manoscritti e riporta tutta la bibliografia scientifica allora conosciuta sui singoli incantesimi. La distinzione tra *charms* e *blessings* è basata sulla finalità dei testi, i primi sono rimedi per risolvere un male, gli altri per prevenirlo. Si tratta di un lavoro prezioso, poiché, pur rinunciando consapevolmente a qualunque tentativo di interpretazione, traduzione, datazione e classificazione, Miller fornisce di fatto la base testuale per tutti questi studi. Altrettanto ricco il corpus di incantesimi contenuto in *'Ich beswer dich wurm vnd wyrmin ...': Formen und Typen altdeutscher Zaubersprüche und Segen*¹⁴ (fino al XVI-XVII secolo), sebbene alcune volte le indicazioni sulla segnatura dei manoscritti e la trascrizione dei testi da articoli ottocenteschi, ne renda difficoltosa la verifica. *Incantesimi e benedizioni della letteratura tedesca medievale (IX-XIII sec.)*¹⁵ raccoglie, traduce e classifica l'intero corpus basandosi sulle edizioni di Steinmeyer, MSD e Miller.

3. Il genere

Tema particolarmente significativo per definire il *corpus* e individuare quelle proprietà di ogni incantesimo che lo qualificano e lo inquadrano come tale è il dibattito sul genere incantesimo. Esso non si è mai concluso con una definizione unanime né sul piano testuale e nemmeno su quello più genericamente culturale, in quanto un incantesimo ha molti tratti comuni (sul piano formale e fattuale), oltre che con la poesia allitterante, con preghiere, benedizioni ed esorcismi cristiani da una parte, con rimedi e ricette mediche dall'altra, oltre che, in alcuni casi, con rituali giuridici e giuramenti. Nella nota discussione sulla *Fachliteratur* medievale¹⁶ (chiamata anche *Sachliteratur* o *Gebrauchsliteratur*), Gerhard Eis, con i contributi di altri importanti studiosi come Peter Assion, Gundolf Keil e Bernard Schnell, convinceva la comunità scientifica a includere gli incantesimi (presi nel loro insieme) tra le *Artes mechanicae* (identificate come tali dopo il XII secolo), riconoscendo loro una sorta di utilità pratica al pari dell'agricoltura, la medicina, la caccia, oppure tra le *Artes incertae*, in cui confluiscono tutti quei trattati di mantica, negromanzia, arti occulte e discipline

¹³ Miller 1963.

¹⁴ Holzmann 2001.

¹⁵ Cianci 2004.

¹⁶ Ricchissima la bibliografia a riguardo, per una sintesi si veda il volumetto di Eis 1967, in particolare 34-53.

esoteriche che in seguito (ma molto più tardi rispetto al periodo di cui ci stiamo occupando) finiranno nel mirino degli inquisitori nella caccia alle streghe. Ma se questo *status* si potrebbe adattare bene agli incantesimi aventi finalità curative raggiungibili attraverso l'uso di determinate parole e perciò definibili come veri e propri "rimedi verbali",¹⁷ vergati, oltretutto, nelle stesse pagine di manoscritti medici recanti altre terapie, altri incantesimi, come per esempio il già citato *Primo Incantesimo di Merseburg (Eiris sazun Idisi)* per liberare i prigionieri, sul cui reale significato le ricerche sono ancora aperte, oppure il meno noto *Nu vuillih bidan*, uno scongiuro simile ad un esorcismo per allontanare il diavolo,¹⁸ non sono definibili come tali. La discussione sul genere, pur avendo avuto il merito di aver ampliato le prospettive di riflessione ha di fatto evidenziato e dato maggiore consapevolezza dell'esistenza di questo problema.

L'incertezza dell'attribuzione degli incantesimi a un determinato genere testuale è particolarmente significativa non solo poiché riguarda l'oggetto stesso della ricerca, la cui natura si presenta in modo sfuggente ancora prima di iniziare, ma anche e soprattutto perché rende estremamente difficoltoso raggruppare e organizzare l'intero *corpus* all'interno di una determinata tradizione linguistica.¹⁹

4. Problemi di datazione

A quanto appena menzionato e oltre alle cangianti modalità della trasmissione manoscritta, si aggiungono altre variabili che incrementano l'incertezza e i problemi nell'affrontare la critica del testo, come per esempio la datazione oscillante dei singoli incantesimi. A guardare il *corpus* nella sua interezza sembra impossibile trovare un solo dato costante e questo naturalmente pregiudica qualsivoglia metodo di ricerca filologico. Come si è visto, il problema nasce prima di tutto dal considerare gli incantesimi come un genere letterario omogeneo e immutabile; a causa, invece, delle trasformazioni significative avvenute nel corso dei secoli, è importante considerare le questioni e i problemi tenendo distinti i vari momenti storici in cui gli incantesimi sono stati annotati.²⁰

¹⁷ Anche Buzzoni 1996 si riferisce agli incantesimi anglosassoni come "rimedi verbali", applicando le definizioni della pragmalinguistica.

¹⁸ Cianci 2004, 213-214; <<https://handschriftencensus.de/8871>>.

¹⁹ Per una sintesi della questione si veda Cianci 2004, 51-56 e 218-227.

²⁰ Per una visione d'insieme delle modalità di trasmissione si veda Cianci 2007, inoltre l'intero studio di Haeseli 2011 è incentrato sulla *mise en page* degli incantesimi e il suo significato.

Per stabilire dei criteri condivisi sul metodo di critica testuale da preferire è importante prendere in esame un arco temporale tale da poter individuare quella che Stock definisce una “comunità testuale” di riferimento che sia sufficientemente omogenea e stabile.²¹ Possiamo dire che, grosso modo, fino all’anno Mille la modalità di trasmissione testuale degli incantesimi presenta delle caratteristiche abbastanza uniformi. Nell’XI secolo si comincia infatti a verificare un mutamento nella modalità di trasmissione che diventerà ancora più evidente nel XII e cambierà nuovamente a partire dal XIII. Questi cambiamenti riflettono, come è noto, altrettanti importanti trasformazioni storico-culturali nella società dell’epoca.²² Gli incantesimi aumentano in varietà e quantità, l’annotazione frammentaria e marginale gradualmente lascia il posto all’inclusione a pieno titolo nella pagina scritta nel corpo del manoscritto, segno che nuovi spazi mentali e fisici permettono agli incantesimi di trovare il loro spazio vitale nella società che essi riflettono e raccontano. Inoltre, sempre dopo il XIII secolo si assiste alla proliferazione di redazioni diverse dello “stesso” testo²³ e a quella di temi e motivi che si intrecciano negli incantesimi tedeschi ormai totalmente affrancati dai modelli latini sia sul piano linguistico che sul piano dei contenuti.

L’incantesimo, pur non obbedendo in maniera rigida a un genere, se analizzato in un arco temporale circoscritto a un preciso contesto storico-culturale, permette di essere comparato con testi analoghi di epoca coeva aventi caratteristiche simili sul piano formale e culturale. In questa sede, andremo a esaminare più da vicino solo gli incantesimi del periodo più antico.

Gli incantesimi tedeschi più antichi del IX e X secolo sono stati copiati in un momento diverso, successivo alla scrittura del testo principale del manoscritto, perciò quando parliamo di datazione bisogna tenere conto di almeno tre momenti distinti, il primo, relativo alla fase di creazione dell’incantesimo stesso, poi quello della stesura del testo principale nel manoscritto e infine il momento in cui il nostro incantesimo è stato effettivamente vergato. Raramente la datazione di un incantesimo ha visto concordi gli studiosi. Torniamo a prendere come esempio il testo citato sopra. L’opinione degli studiosi sulla datazione di *Nu vuillih bidan*, basata prevalentemente su osservazioni di natura paleografica, oscilla tra il IX e il XII secolo. L’incantesimo si trova, senza

²¹ Per il concetto di comunità testuale si veda Stock 1995, 157-174.

²² Si veda anche Haeseli 2011, 61-86.

²³ Un esempio della moltiplicazione di redazioni diverse di uno stesso testo si può osservare nelle decine di versioni nelle lingue volgari del *Drei Brüder Segen/ Tres boni fratres* (Cianci 2013, 39-150).

apparenti connessioni con il testo principale, nel margine inferiore del f. 65v nel codice 564 proveniente dall'abbazia benedettina di S. Mattia di Treviri (nel X secolo l'abbazia era dedicata al primo vescovo di Treviri S. Eucario). Il codice è un manoscritto composito, che per sua stessa natura ha una datazione crescente, con fascicoli databili a partire dal IX fino al XIV secolo contenenti una miscellanea di testi scritti in latino di argomento religioso di provenienza monastica. Inoltre, il testo *Nu vuillih bidan*, o più propriamente *Nxvukl lkh bidbn*, è stato copiato utilizzando un alfabeto conosciuto come *Notae bonifatii* o anche *bfk*, sorta di cifrario in cui ogni vocale si sostituisce con la consonante successiva dell'alfabeto. Steinmeyer lo aveva collocato nell'XI secolo, mentre Schützeichel, analizzandone i versi rimati in stile otfridiano e alcuni elementi fonico-morfologici del francone centrale della zona di Treviri (e non francone renano come indicato da Steinmeyer), lo attribuisce all'inizio del X secolo.²⁴ Sulla base di una più approfondita analisi paleografica ed extratestuale, in un suo recente contributo, Müller stabilisce il IX secolo, regalando al nostro incantesimo il doppio primato di più antico testo tedesco "cifrato" conosciuto e anche di incantesimo più antico agli albori della tradizione scritta alto-tedesca,²⁵ sempre che, come si è detto, lo si possa attribuire al genere incantesimo. Inoltre, il fatto che l'incantesimo sia scritto in questo modo, con una scrittura segreta che però era agevolmente decifrabile da tutta la comunità testuale di riferimento, ha portato gli studiosi a formulare le più svariate ipotesi sulle motivazioni di tale scelta.

5. *Trasmissione manoscritta degli incantesimi tedeschi del IX-X secolo*

Prima di esaminare da vicino le problematiche della critica testuale degli incantesimi, è necessario passare molto brevemente in rassegna i pochi studi specifici che sono stati fatti sulla trasmissione manoscritta e a questo proposito non si può che menzionare un articolo del 1987 di Stuart e Walla in cui per la prima volta viene fatto il tentativo di censire e sistemare il *corpus* partendo dai manoscritti esistenti e sottolineando quanto le caratteristiche della trasmissione possano informarci su vari altri aspetti del testo tradito. Nel caso specifico, gli studiosi individuano come unica categoria di incantesimi che al momento della stesura avrebbero potuto avere un effettivo uso pratico quelli copiati nei margini o nei fogli di guardia, mentre tutti gli altri e a maggior ragione quelli

²⁴ Schützeichel 1965, 242.

²⁵ Müller 2015, 170.

tradotti dal latino o dal greco sarebbero stati copiati “per puro gusto antiquario”. Con l’articolo di Hellgardt del 1997, *Die deutschen Zaubersprüche und Segen im Kontext ihrer Überlieferung (10. bis 13. Jahrhundert). Eine überlieferungsgeschichtliche Skizze*, diventa chiaro quanto sia importante e urgente lo studio approfondito sulla trasmissione manoscritta. Egli individua un’ulteriore tipologia di incantesimi a cui poter attribuire un uso pratico, quelli cioè vergati nei libri ad uso didattico. Al centro dell’attenzione c’è il tentativo di capire a che scopo i contemporanei mettersero per iscritto gli incantesimi, se e in che modo venissero usati e recitati e se venissero considerati “altro” rispetto al Cristianesimo. Un mio precedente contributo, *Emarginati o clandestini: modalità di annotazione degli incantesimi nei manoscritti medievali di area tedesca*, prende in esame gli incantesimi scritti nei margini, negli spazi vuoti e nei fogli di guardia con l’obiettivo di comprendere se questa “emarginazione” potesse riflettere un giudizio di valore nei confronti del testo e dei suoi contenuti e come si potesse quindi spiegare la “migrazione” dai margini al corpo principale del codice che investe gli incantesimi successivi all’XI secolo.²⁶

La recente monografia di Haeseli, *Magische Performativität. Althochdeutsche Zaubersprüche in ihrem Überlieferungskontext*, indaga più a fondo la trasmissione manoscritta e cerca di evidenziare alcune dinamiche della progressiva migrazione dai margini al corpo del manoscritto. L’autrice considera la *mise en page* dell’incantesimo come una sorta di *performance* scribale ed esemplifica questa idea analizzando tre manoscritti recanti caratteristiche diverse tra loro.

Infine, punto di riferimento da più di un decennio per tutta la tradizione manoscritta è il portale *Handschriftencensus.de* da cui è possibile trarre informazioni sempre aggiornate sui manoscritti recanti testi tedeschi medievali, incantesimi inclusi.

Andiamo ora a esaminare più da vicino, con l’aiuto di una tabella, gli undici incantesimi del IX e X secolo così come ci appaiono nei manoscritti. Nella prima colonna a sinistra è indicata la segnatura del codice, in ordine alfabetico secondo il nome della città che conserva il manoscritto, seguono: la probabile sede di produzione e la datazione del codice, l’argomento, la tipologia e la lingua in cui è scritto il testo principale. Poi, andando verso destra, nelle ultime tre colonne seguono gli incantesimi denominati con l’incipit oppure il “titolo”, quando esistente, la lingua e la presunta datazione del testo e infine, il luogo fisico in cui l’incantesimo è stato annotato sulla pagina. Le note a piè di pagina

²⁶ Cianci 2007.

forniscono un link per ulteriori rimandi e informazioni sul manoscritto e sul testo ivi contenuto.

SEGNATURA	DATAZIONE MS. PROVENIENZA	ARGOMENTO/ LINGUA MS.	INCANTESIMO	DATAZIONE/ LINGUA INCANTESIMO	POSIZIONE
Città del Vaticano, BAV, pal. lat. 220, f. 58r ²⁷	inizio IX (già nel IX a Lorsch)	misc. rel (omelie) latino	1. <i>Krist imbi ist huze</i> ²⁸	X ata.	Margine sup. Testo rovesciato
Merseburg, Domkapitel, cod. 136/58, f. 85r	IX Fulda	misc. rel. latino	2. <i>Eiris sazun Idisi I</i> 3. <i>Phol ende Wodan II</i> ²⁹	X ata.	Foglio di guardia
München, BSB, clm. 18524b, f. 203v	IX Salzburg	misc. rel. latino	4. <i>Pro Nessia</i> ³⁰	X metà ata. (Tegernsee?)	Foglio di guardia
Trier, SB cod. 564, f. 65v	VIII-XIV Trier (abbazia S. Mattia)	(composito) misc. rel. latino	5. <i>Nu vuillih bidan</i> ³¹	IX (?) ata. (Trier?)	Margine inf. Testo criptato
Trier, SB cod. 40/1018	fine X? Trier? (presso Himmerod dopo il XII)	misc. rel. didattico? Glosse latino	6. f. 19v: <i>Ad catarrum dic</i> 7. ff. 36v-37v: <i>Incantacio contra equorum egritudinem quam nos dicimus spurihalz</i> ³²	X ata. con tracce basso-ted. titoli latino/ata.	Margine inf. con glosse lat. e altri incantesimi e rimedi lat.
Wien, ÖNB cod. 552, f. 107r	IX-X Baviera	misc. rel. latino	8. <i>Christ uuart gaboren er uuolfode diob</i> ³³	X ata.	Spazio libero con altri incantesimi lat.

²⁷ <https://bibliotheca-laureshamensis-digital.de/bav/bav_pal_lat_220/0121/scroll>.

²⁸ <<https://handschriftencensus.de/10478>>.

²⁹ <<https://handschriftencensus.de/6099>>.

³⁰ <<https://handschriftencensus.de/15162>>.

³¹ <<https://handschriftencensus.de/8871>>.

³² <<https://handschriftencensus.de/8843>>.

³³ <<https://handschriftencensus.de/11049>>.

SEGNATURA	DATAZIONE MS. PROVENIENZA	ARGOMENTO/ LINGUA MS.	INCANTESIMO	DATAZIONE/ LINGUA INCANTESIMO	POSIZIONE
Wien, ÖNB cod. 751 (Theol. 259), ³⁴ f. 188v	fine IX- inizio X Köln, Domkapitel	(composito) misc. rel. latino	9. <i>Contra vermes</i> 10. <i>De hoc quod spurihalz dicunt</i> ³⁵	X antico sassone titoli latino- ata.	Spazio libero ultimo foglio con altri incantesimi lat.
Zürich, ZB cod. 51 Rheinau, f. 23v	2 ^a metà IX-X Abbazia di Rheinau	misc. rel. (omelie) latino	11. <i>Longinus miles lango zile</i> ³⁶	X latino-ata.	Margine inf. con altri incantesimi lat.

Anche ad un primo sguardo, è facile notare che questo piccolo *corpus* costituito dagli undici incantesimi anteriori all'anno Mille, scritti in otto codici, ha degli elementi costanti nella modalità di trasmissione. La comunità testuale di riferimento è quella monastica e tutti i manoscritti comprendono testi unicamente in latino di contenuto religioso (prevalentemente liturgico). Già a partire dall'XI sec. le biblioteche si arricchiscono con miscellanee di testi di argomento medico che conterranno anche incantesimi in latino e in volgare. Un altro dato che può essere considerato una costante in questa fase storica è che tutti gli undici incantesimi sono stati aggiunti in un secondo momento rispetto alla realizzazione del testo principale, ma, pur non appartenendo alla originaria pianificazione dei contenuti del codice e non avendo apparentemente alcuna connessione con le tematiche trattate, non sembrano affatto essere stati aggiunti a caso. Si trovano nei margini, è vero, oppure in uno spazio rimasto vuoto alla fine del codice, ma non sono gli unici testi "aggiunti", anzi creano una piccola folla insieme ad altri testi in latino come benedizioni, preghiere ed esorcismi canonici che condividono la stessa finalità benefica di un incantesimo.

La tensione costante tra latino e volgare che, come vedremo, è in questa epoca direttamente proporzionale al rapporto tra testo e paratesto, è talvolta presente persino all'interno della stessa frase, come nell'incantesimo che se-

³⁴ <https://digital.onb.ac.at/RepViewer/viewer.faces?doc=DTL_7949538&order=1&view=SINGLE>.

³⁵ <<https://handschriftencensus.de/11053>>.

³⁶ <<https://handschriftencensus.de/18613>> segnato erroneamente come f. 23r; anche la foto a colori del manoscritto è quella errata: l'incantesimo si trova sul f. 23v.

gue (n. 11 *Longinus miles*) dove la maggiore difficoltà interpretativa sta proprio nello stabilire quali parole sono latine e quali tedesche (Zürich, ZB cod. 51 Rheinau, f. 23v, margine inferiore):

Longinus miles lango zile.
 Christes thegan ast astes.
 Adiuro sanguis per Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum
 ut non fluas plus quam Iordanis aha quando Christus in ea baptizatus est a
 Spiritu Sancto.
 III uicibus Pater Noster cum gloria.³⁷

Come si è visto, una delle caratteristiche che accomuna gli incantesimi di questo segmento temporale è la loro unicità. Si tratta cioè di attestazioni uniche, tramandate negli spazi vuoti in un unico codice. In un recente dibattito sulla critica del testo, si è tornato a parlare dell'edizione del codice unico, una condizione che a ben vedere non semplifica ma amplifica le istanze delle attestazioni plurime. Ma se il metodo stemmatico non è applicabile, questo non giustifica automaticamente il ricorso alla edizione diplomatica come unica soluzione possibile.³⁸ Del resto, il filologo può far ricorso ad altre strategie editoriali non lachmaniane anche nel caso di attestazioni plurime, metodi che diano maggiore evidenza al manoscritto come testimone sempre unico di quel preciso atto scribale di un testo storicamente inteso, senza che questa scelta debba essere concepita come una rinuncia alla sua capacità di giungere ad un testo univoco e criticamente emendato dalle lezioni errate.

L'unicità delle attestazioni appena menzionata non è tuttavia una condizione assoluta. Certamente non è possibile affermare di avere due testimoni dello stesso testo in questa epoca, ma nemmeno possiamo considerare questi incantesimi come dei sopravvissuti solitari. Sempre limitandoci al segmento più antico, troviamo versioni quasi identiche tra loro nella sostanza, ma diverse nella *facies* linguistica (alto/basso tedesco), oltre a versioni "simili" in latino che possono aver costituito il modello di partenza se non la vera e propria traduzione (cosa che in mancanza di un manoscritto recante quel testo latino resta una semplice ipotesi).

Per esemplificare il problema possiamo osservare da vicino due redazioni diverse (alto tedesco-antico sassone) del noto incantesimo contro i vermi *Contra vermes/Pro Nessia* (n. 9 e n. 4 della tabella precedente). A sinistra la

³⁷ Miller 1963, 115; Cianci 2004, 139-140.

³⁸ Digilio 2019, 91.

versione sassone conservata a Vienna sull'ultimo foglio del codice adeguatamente predisposto, rigato e scritto con grafia regolare. Il nostro testo condivide questa pagina con altri incantesimi: *Ad vermes occidendos*, *Ad apes conformandos*, *Ad pyllos de nido*, *Contra sagittam diaboli*, *De hoc quod spurihalz dicunt*, *Contra vermes*. A destra nella tabella, la redazione in tedesco superiore annotata sull'ultimo foglio del clm. 18524b, un codice latino di argomento religioso conservato a Monaco. Le due redazioni, a prescindere dai dialetti in cui sono scritti, differiscono sul piano semantico solo per un elemento: *ben/ adra*. Il verme/Nesso dovrà uscire dal corpo dell'animale seguendo il percorso midollo-ossa-carne-pelle nella redazione sassone, oppure il percorso midollo-vene-carne-pelle nella redazione alto tedesca. Le ultime parole *strala/tulli*, secondo le ricerche di Eis³⁹ significherebbero la stessa parte anatomica dello zoccolo del cavallo, quindi tutto l'incantesimo andrebbe interpretato come una terapia veterinaria.

Ulteriori differenze riguardano esclusivamente il paratesto: il cosiddetto "titolo" che in questo caso funge da indicazione terapeutica e la preghiera/ invocazione finale.

Wien, ÖNB cod. 751 (Theol. 259), f. 188v (ultimo foglio) – redazione antico sassone	München, BSB, clm. 18524b, f. 203v (spazio libero ultimo foglio) – redazione tedesco superiore
Contra Vermes ⁴⁰	Pro Nessia
Gang ut, Nesso, mit nigun nessiklinon ut fana themo marge an that ben , fan themo bene an that flesg, ut fan themo flesge an thia hud, ut fan thera hud an thesa strala .	Gang uz, Nesso, mit niun nessinchilnon, uz fonna marge in deo adra , vonna den adrin in daz fleisk, fonna demu fleiske in daz fel, fonna demo velle in diz tulli.
Drohtin uuerthe so!	Ter Pater noster

Allo stato attuale delle ricerche non è ancora possibile dire se questi due testi siano stati tradotti l'uno dall'altro (traduzione orizzontale o infralinguistica⁴¹) o se invece siano entrambi traduzioni da una o due redazioni latine. Sarebbe anche lecito chiedersi fino a che punto alto e basso tedesco nel X secolo possano essere considerate lingue differenti o mere varianti dialettali della stessa lingua.

³⁹ Eis 1964, 7-30.

⁴⁰ Steinmeyer 1916, 374 entrambe le redazioni.

⁴¹ Folena 1991, 12-13.

Certamente sono riflessioni che vanno prese in considerazione per una corretta interpretazione ed edizione del testo; inoltre, queste due redazioni potrebbero essere messe a confronto con una ipotetica versione latina, la cui esistenza è solo ammessa nel ragionamento, ma che potrebbe aiutare a comprendere meglio il processo con cui si sarebbero potute formare le varianti nel volgare.

Un ulteriore esempio della difficoltà di valutazione della *facies* linguistica ci viene dal numero 6 della tabella (*Ad catarrum*), dal codice di Treviri: Trier, SB cod. 40/1018, i cui margini superiori e inferiori sono popolati da una gran quantità di testi distribuiti e organizzati per argomenti. Gli incantesimi si trovano insieme ad altri testi curativi in latino, sempre nel margine inferiore: f. 19v: *Ad catarrum* e ff. 36v-37v: *Incantacio contra equorum egritudinem quam nos dicimus spurihalz*. Come si è detto, sia il codice che gli incantesimi non mettono d'accordo gli studiosi circa la datazione, ma nemmeno riguardo all'attribuzione linguistica.

Ad catarrum.	latino
Dic:	latino
Crist uuarth giuund, tho uuarth he hel gi ok gisund. That bluod forstuond So duo thu bluod	elementi sassoni: he: pronome 'egli' hel: aggettivo 'santo, sano, salvo' gi: congiunzione 'e' ok: congiunzione 'anche' elementi sassoni oppure franconi: bluod, uuarth, tho, that, gisund, forstuond, duo
Amen ter. Pater noster ter	latino

Se osserviamo il testo possiamo osservare che, a parte gli elementi in latino, la lingua usata può essere considerata antico sassone ma anche francone centrale con influsso sassone. Data la contiguità culturale e geografica del francone centrale con l'area sassone, non è da escludere una reciproca influenza e questo rende difficile la collocazione. Sia questo che il precedente *Contra vermes*, sono infatti inseriti sia negli studi di alto-tedesco che in quelli sassoni.⁴² Il materiale linguistico non è sufficiente a valutare con esattezza il periodo e la *facies* linguistica di riferimento come si è potuto osservare anche nell'esempio del *Longinus miles*.

⁴² Si vedano Braeckmann 1997 e Digilio 2008, 91-96.

6. *Il paratesto*

Si è accennato sopra all'esistenza di alcuni "titoli" degli incantesimi. Tale questione è un'altra di quelle che in questo primo gruppo di incantesimi antichi presenta una situazione piuttosto omogenea, destinata a cambiare in maniera radicale nei secoli successivi. Di questi undici testi, 5 hanno almeno il cosiddetto "titolo", 5 hanno l'indicazione finale di recitare l'*Amen* e almeno un *Padre Nostro* sempre in latino. La presenza/assenza di questi elementi paratestuali è qui piuttosto discreta, quasi impercettibile, ma il rapporto tra testo e paratesto in incantesimi analoghi si trasforma totalmente nei secoli successivi. Dalle ricerche svolte negli ultimi anni, emerge che è proprio l'elemento paratestuale a cambiare letteralmente i connotati agli incantesimi nel corso del tempo. In questo gruppo di incantesimi più antichi esso è quasi del tutto assente, ma diventa sempre più ingombrante e importante nei secoli successivi. Se riuscissimo per un momento a isolare ciò che è testo, cioè l'incantesimo vero e proprio, da ciò che con Genette abbiamo imparato a chiamare convenzionalmente "paratesto", viene fuori che *in nuce* l'incantesimo è costituito da un imperativo pronunciato da un "io" celebrante nei confronti di un complemento oggetto che può essere o il male da sconfiggere oppure il questuante: Es. (n. 6 della tabella): *so duo thu bluod* "tu, sangue, fai così".

Tale atto linguistico performativo può essere preceduto o meno da una *historiola* allo scopo di conferire maggiore autorità e forza alle parole pronunciate: Es. (6): *Crist uuarth giuund, tho uuarth he helgi ok gisund* "Cristo venne ferito, poi egli fu sano e anche salvo".

A questo nucleo testuale possono essere aggiunti vari elementi, la cui quantità e modalità varia notevolmente in base a diversi fattori. Ritengo classificabili come elementi paratestuali, oltre al titolo, anche tutte quelle "istruzioni per l'uso" paragonabili a delle indicazioni di regia che descrivono i gesti e il rituale e che indicano quantità, qualità e modalità di recitazione di preghiere e invocazioni aggiuntive che il celebrante e il paziente devono recitare prima o dopo l'atto.⁴³

Es. (n. 6 della tabella):

⁴³ Per una panoramica e un primo censimento delle istruzioni e degli elementi paratestuali negli incantesimi tedeschi (IX-XIII sec.) si veda Cianci 2008, in particolare 138-145.

Ad catarrum.	Contro l'epistassi	Paratesto: Indicazione terapeutica
Dic:	Di':	Paratesto: Istruzione (l'incantesimo va recitato ad alta voce)
Crist uuarth giuund, tho uuarth he helgi ok gisund. That bluod forstuond	Cristo venne ferito, poi egli fu sano e anche salvo. Il sangue si arrestò.	Testo: <i>Historiola</i> . Conferisce forza e autorità alle parole del celebrante, si riallaccia ad un evento miracoloso e potente.
So duo thu bluod	Tu, (flusso di) sangue, fai allo stesso modo.	Testo: Formula incantatoria. Imperativo rivolto al flusso di sangue.
Amen ter. Pater noster ter	(Di') tre volte un Amen e tre volte il Padre Nostro	Paratesto: Istruzioni per la conclusione del rituale. Numero esatto di ripetizioni: 3 volte

Mi preme sottolineare che l'attribuzione di queste "istruzioni" al "paratesto" non significa affatto svilirne l'importanza sul piano dell'efficacia magica del rito, poiché si tratta in ogni caso di atti linguistici performativi che anzi mirano, insieme alla prossemica⁴⁴, a potenziare ulteriormente le parole del testo.

L'attribuzione di queste parti del discorso al paratesto non ha a che fare con lo studio del contesto rituale e non inficia il valore dell'analisi pragmatico-linguistica del testo, l'importanza di questo approccio, consente dunque di reinterpretare tali "istruzioni" che possono guidare il filologo a districare il complesso intreccio di redazioni diverse e contaminate, avendo constatato che sono proprio gli elementi del paratesto che maggiormente subiscono modifiche, accrescimenti e contaminazioni tra incantesimi diversi. Non è di questa opinione la Haeseli, che, pur prendendo in considerazione l'ipotesi di "status" paratestuale di questi elementi del discorso, considera poi il problema sul piano della *performance* magica e dell'efficacia e quindi attribuisce all'ordine di recitare un *Padre Nostro* una importanza troppo grande per essere considerato un testo di serie b.⁴⁵

Credo di poter affermare che questi due punti di vista non siano in realtà in contrasto ma semplicemente complementari, a seconda del tipo di analisi che si sta facendo e del fine da raggiungere. Sul piano della critica testuale questi elementi entrano a pieno titolo nel paratesto, poiché è il copista/compilatore stesso che si sente libero di modificarli, verosimilmente contaminandoli con

⁴⁴ Roper 2003.

⁴⁵ Haeseli 2011, 101-102.

altre redazioni in suo possesso. Sul piano dell'analisi pragmalinguistica, se al posto un *Padre Nostro* trovo l'ordine di recitare un *Gloria*, l'efficacia dell'atto linguistico viene comunque garantita. Il paratesto può essere dunque modificato senza andare a diminuire l'efficacia magica del testo, tanto che la sua azione perlocutoria è prevista nella definizione di Genette.

Quando invece questi elementi sono assenti dalla pagina scritta, non significa che non esistano nella *performance*, anzi pare abbastanza evidente che l'autore li abbia ritenuti superflui perché già noti alla comunità testuale (l'ambiente ecclesiastico/monastico), così come si dà per scontato che si conosca il testo intero del *Padre Nostro* senza bisogno di riscriverlo, o che si sappia come e quando fare il segno della croce (spesso indicato con un piccolo segno nel testo, ma solo negli incantesimi del secolo successivo). Infatti, sempre secondo Genette, il paratesto, in quanto membrana tra interno ed esterno, tra significati impliciti ed espliciti, può riguardare anche la conoscenza implicita di un fatto che concerne il testo e che è patrimonio comune e condiviso tra i fruitori di quel testo.⁴⁶ Un'altra conseguenza evidente di questo fatto è che questi segmenti sono destinati ad essere *letti* dal celebrante ma non *ascoltati* dal "paziente". Questo conferma ciò che viene spesso dato per scontato, cioè che il destinatario del paratesto, il suo "ricevente1", è diverso dal ricevente del testo, cioè l'incantesimo vero e proprio.

Un altro fatto direttamente conseguente dalla presenza/assenza di paratesto è che esso serva a delimitare i confini testuali, a far capire cioè, dove inizia e dove finisce un incantesimo, cosa non di secondaria importanza per il lettore moderno che si trova davanti a incantesimi copiati uno di seguito all'altro. Nello studio critico di un testo dobbiamo anche considerare che, sebbene non abbiamo la prova certificata che gli incantesimi tedeschi siano stati tradotti dal latino, abbiamo però il dato oggettivo che in area tedesca, accanto (proprio negli stessi manoscritti) ai nostri testi sono stati copiati anche quelli in latino, e quindi il copista aveva di fatto una competenza in entrambe le lingue. Questo spiegherebbe anche la situazione apparentemente ovvia della presenza di elementi paratestuali in latino e non direttamente in tedesco come il resto dell'incantesimo. Sembra esserci una maggiore familiarità e disinvoltura nel maneggiare gli incantesimi latini.

Negli incantesimi dei secoli successivi, il paratesto acquista sempre maggiore spazio, e aumentano gli incantesimi in cui la parte sulla descrizione del rito è preponderante rispetto alla formula magica da pronunciare. A partire dal

⁴⁶ Anche chiamato "epitesto". Si veda Genette 1997, 344-403.

XIII secolo, poi, queste parti non vengono più espresse in latino, ma direttamente in tedesco, andandosi anche talvolta a confondere con l'incantesimo vero e proprio.

Questo processo di vera e propria testualizzazione di un originario paratesto merita un approfondimento che non può essere fatto in questa sede, ma ci si può fare un'idea osservando l'evoluzione anche cronologica nelle ventisei versioni tedesche delle "istruzioni mediche e rituali" inserite nel dialogo che costruiscono la cornice narrativa della *historiola* nell'incantesimo dei tre fratelli (*Drei Brüder Segen*), in cui viene "incastonata" la formula vera e propria, quella di Longino.⁴⁷

Chi si cimenta con la critica testuale degli incantesimi dovrà tenere conto di fattori e problemi che sono specifici di questa tipologia. Le operazioni che riguardano il *corpus* o una parte di esso vanno eseguite con ulteriore attenzione, perché incantesimi apparentemente simili tra loro, ma di periodi diversi, producono problemi differenti. Individuare un preciso segmento temporale e la comunità testuale di quel momento è importante anche per capire meglio la tensione, sempre presente ma che tende a scemare con il passare dei secoli, tra latino e tedesco. Per selezionare i testi del *corpus*, inoltre, applicare rigidamente i criteri con cui distinguere incantesimi da benedizioni e rimedi medici può dare risultati deludenti, poiché come si è detto, si tratta di un confine fluido che è impossibile irrigidire con le categorie del pensiero contemporaneo. Si è detto, inoltre, che anche in presenza di un *codex unicus* possiamo avere delle attestazioni non del tutto isolate, in cui redazioni in lingue volgari affini possono in qualche modo guidare il filologo verso la corretta comprensione di una lezione. Infine, credo che l'approccio che vada ad approfondire il rapporto tra testo e paratesto possa davvero essere un utile strumento per isolare l'incantesimo vero e proprio e distinguerlo da quelle altre parti che maggiormente subiscono contaminazioni e interferenze, al fine di ricostruire o almeno avvicinarsi al testo originale. Questo criterio non impedisce ovviamente di concentrarsi invece solo sugli elementi paratestuali se lo scopo fosse quello di approfondire lo studio che riguarda l'uso, i fruitori e la *performance* dell'incantesimo stesso.

⁴⁷ Sulla questione della formula di Longino e i vari moduli della cornice narrativa si veda Cianci 2013, in particolare 203-213.

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GIUSEPPE D. DE BONIS

EMITTENTE, DESTINATARIO ED ESECUTORE
NEI TESTI DI CARATTERE MAGICO IN INGLESE ANTICO

Old English magical texts are an integral part of speech acts aimed at healing people or repairing any kind of damage. They involve a sender (the sorcerer/expert healer), an addressee (a disease or a patient) and a performer. Sometimes the sender is the performer of the magical acts, but, on other occasions, sender and performer are two different participants in the same magical act. Indeed, imperative verb forms, such as Old English *writ*, *cweð*, *sing*, *gang swīgende*, imply the presence of a sorcerer/magician addressing a performer with directives and instructions in order to provide patients with some help and face a disease or a negative situation. Moreover, the performer can sometimes become a new sender with his own addressee(s). The present paper aims to highlight the relationships among the participants in magical speech acts in Old English magical texts and to show how this can contribute to identify the various magical text genres.

I testi di carattere magico, come ogni altro tipo di testo, implicano la presenza dei “partecipanti” all’atto comunicativo, che di solito sono un emittente (il mago/l’esperto) e un destinatario (l’inconveniente o il malessere di un malcapitato, oppure il paziente). Nei testi di carattere magico, però, a volte, tra emittente e destinatario si inserisce un esecutore (*performer*), diverso dall’emittente. Nei testi di carattere magico in inglese antico, in particolare, gli imperativi *writ*, *cweð*, *sing*, *gang swīgende* presuppongono la presenza di un mago che si rivolge a un esecutore affinché quest’ultimo agisca in soccorso della vittima di un disagio.¹ Talvolta, inoltre, il *performer*, che è il primo destinatario delle istruzioni fornite dall’emittente, è chiamato a rivolgersi a un nuovo destinatario, creando una catena comunicativa: emittente → *performer* / esecutore (che diventa il nuovo emittente) → destinatario.

L’analisi dei testi di carattere magico in inglese antico ha lasciato nell’ombra gli attanti, in generale, e l’esecutore, in particolare, a vantaggio del conte-

¹ L’interazione tra emittente, esecutore e destinatario è messa in atto sia mediante la parola detta che mediante la parola scritta. L’intreccio delle due modalità comunicative (orale e scritto) ravvisabile nei testi medievali ha determinato una ridefinizione sia del concetto di oralità nel Medioevo che del numero di partecipanti agli atti linguistici magici (Arnovick 2006, 11-16; per la definizione dei partecipanti agli atti comunicativi si rimanda a Matthiessen 2014).

nuto, della struttura e della finalità dei testi.² Il presente articolo, perciò, cerca di mettere in luce gli attanti attraverso una rilettura in chiave performativa dei testi di carattere magico tramandati dai codici anglosassoni.³ Nelle pagine che seguono, ci si propone di definire i contorni della figura dell'esecutore degli atti magico-curativi, di analizzare i processi eseguiti dal *performer* e di stabilire le relazioni tra i partecipanti all'atto magico. Si osserverà, in particolare, come l'identificazione del rapporto tra emittente ed esecutore possa contribuire alla classificazione dei testi magici, distinguendo tra testi caratterizzati dall'identità tra emittente ed esecutore (incantesimi), testi in cui l'identità tra emittente ed esecutore è sospesa (altre tipologie di testi magico-curativi, come ricette e iconogrammi), e altri testi in cui l'esecutore è invitato a richiedere l'intervento di un altro partecipante creando *performances* curative/manipolative con quattro voci: emittente (che si presenta come una sorta di voce narrante che esprime comandi), esecutore, aiutante e destinatario.

1. Introduzione

In generale, i testi di carattere magico hanno l'obiettivo primario di modificare la realtà o di proteggerla dall'azione di forze "negative". Nel corso del tempo, tali testi sono stati denominati "incantesimo", "formula magica", "scongiuro", "benedizione", sulla base di alcune caratteristiche interne e funzionali dei singoli testi magici. L'identificazione di tali caratteristiche ha poi condotto alla definizione di vari generi magici e alla distinzione tra testi legati a una religiosità primitiva e testi legati alla religione cristiana.⁴ Per quel che riguarda la forma dei testi, si è cercato di distinguere i testi di carattere magico in generi anche in base alla struttura del testo stesso (presenza di due parti,

² Cockayne 1864-66; Grendon 1909; Dobbie 1942; Storms 1948; Grattan, Singer 1952; Ramat 1976; Saibene 1985; Buzzoni 1996.

³ Già Garner ha avviato l'analisi degli incantesimi in inglese antico tenendo conto del contesto in cui essi venivano posti in atto. La contestualizzazione dei testi magici e il loro inserimento in una *performance* magica ha permesso di mettere in discussione le dicotomie scrittura-oralità, poesia-scienza, atto verbale-atto non verbale, pagano-cristiano, su cui si sono spesso concentrati gli studi dedicati ai testi medievali (Garner 2004, 20-21, 30 e 37). In tutto l'articolo si terrà conto dei presupposti teorici per l'analisi degli atti linguistici nella storia della lingua inglese presentati in Jucker, Taavitsainen 2008, in particolare 1-44. I testi presi in esame saranno letti anche alla luce delle considerazioni sulla coesione sintattica formulate da Lenker 2010.

⁴ Dolfini 1967, 635-642 e 658.

una mitica, *historiola*, e una conativa) e alla forza performativa assegnata alle parole impiegate in essi. Si pensi ai lavori di Helm, Dolfini, Ramat, Saibene, Buzzoni, sull'uso primitivo e meno primitivo della parola, sull'inserimento di invocazioni a figure divine per distinguere i testi in varie tipologie.⁵ In ordine di tempo, l'ultima a cimentarsi nell'impresa è stata Buzzoni, che distingue i testi di carattere magico in: formule, ossia "incantesimi" (testi caratterizzati da identità esplicita tra sistema magico e sistema linguistico, cioè da *semiotic fallacy*⁶) e iconogrammi (scrittura di lettere e simboli per garantire l'efficacia dell'intervento curativo/manipolatore della realtà), testi caratterizzati da poeticità, cioè da un'efficacia intrinseca nella trasformazione della realtà; e ricette/rimedi, testi in cui sistema magico e sistema linguistico sono distinti e l'efficacia magica dipende dagli atti compiuti effettivamente e non dalla parola in sé.⁷

I numerosi testi di carattere magico della tradizione anglosassone sono oggetto di indagine da parte degli studiosi da oltre due secoli. In essi sono stati

⁵ Helm, Dolfini, Saibene hanno osservato che la potenza della parola magica (base dell'efficacia della formula), legata nel mondo primitivo alla credenza nell'esistenza di forze presenti nella natura, ha perso importanza con l'introduzione del pensiero religioso. È possibile seguire, infatti, il progressivo depauperamento della parola magica nelle iscrizioni magiche su amuleti e oggetti risalenti al V-VII sec. d.C.: le più antiche contengono ordini alla realtà, le più recenti presentano invocazioni con nomi di divinità pagane o elementi cristiani (Helm 1953, II, 117-153). Nelle formule magiche meno antiche alla potenza della parola si associa il riferimento al passato come conferma della validità della formula e come modello archetipico del presente. L'*historiola* mitica, infatti, rappresenta il richiamo a un precedente, un caso in cui il potere della parola ha modificato la realtà rendendo quello specifico caso un riferimento mitico che autorizza e giustifica il riutilizzo magico della parola (Dolfini 1967, 643-660; Ramat 1976, 60-64; Saibene 1985, 23-27; Buzzoni 1996, 21-40; Cianci 2004, 46-51).

⁶ Nella tradizione magica, denominare equivale a individuare, definire, creare. Possedere la parola e conoscere il nome significa, dunque, esercitare un potere diretto sull'essere. Nel linguaggio primitivo, segno linguistico e referente vengono a coincidere. Volendo distinguere il linguaggio "evoluto" da quello "primitivo", si può affermare che nel primo caso il linguaggio è impiegato per esprimere o veicolare pensieri, che tra realtà e linguaggio esiste una relazione convenzionale e arbitraria, e che, perciò, le parole sono simboli di idee (significante e significato, si pensi a De Saussure 2005, 83-88). Nel secondo caso la parola non è simbolo di pensieri ma segno del referente al quale è legata da un rapporto diretto di causalità. Il segno, perciò, in tal caso, agisce direttamente sul referente trasformandolo perché "è" il referente stesso, non solo partecipa della sua sostanza, ma la determina, assumendo valore magico. Tale mancata distinzione tra segno e referente è chiamata *semiotic fallacy*. Si parlerà di magia ogni qual volta venga riscontrata una *semiotic fallacy* tra segno e referente (Buzzoni 1996, 28, 34-39, 107). Sul valore della *semiotic fallacy*, cfr. Nöth 1977, 70; Nöth 1995, 190-191.

⁷ Buzzoni 1996, 36-37.

individuati motivi narrativi e, in generale, elementi culturali legati alle tradizioni germaniche oppure alla tradizione classica (mondo mediterraneo, tradizione greco-latina e latino-cristiana).⁸ In particolare, lo studio della tradizione magico-medica anglosassone si basa principalmente su tre raccolte di testi in inglese antico note come:

Læcebōc (*Libro del medico*) o *Bald's Leechbook*, un manuale tramandato dal manoscritto London, British Library, Royal 12. D. xvii, datato alla metà del X sec. e vergato probabilmente a Winchester.⁹ L'opera si compone di tre libri: i primi due raccolgono materiale medico di provenienza mediterranea e anglosassone; il terzo libro comprende testi che non mostrano l'influenza di rimedi riconducibili alla tradizione greco-romana.¹⁰

Lacnunga (*Rimedi*), conservato nel manoscritto London, BL, Harley 585, datato tra la fine del X e l'inizio dell'XI secolo.¹¹ Si tratta di una raccolta di circa duecento prescrizioni, rimedi e incantesimi derivati da fonti greche, romane, bizantine, celtiche e germaniche, che non seguono alcun principio ordinatore; i testi magici e le invocazioni sono redatte in inglese antico e in parte in latino e irlandese antico.¹²

⁸ Olsan 1990, 116-142; Grattan, Singer 1952, 23-79.

⁹ Per la descrizione del manoscritto, si vedano Ker 1957 [1990], n. 264 e Gneuss, Lapidge 2014, n. 479. D'ora in avanti citati come Ker e Gneuss, Lapidge. Si ha motivo di credere che il codice sia la copia di una raccolta di materiale magico-medico databile all'epoca di re Alfredo (849-899). La copia sarebbe stata effettuata da un certo Cild per ordine di Bald, come riportato al f. 109r del manoscritto (Cockayne 1865, II, xx-xxi).

¹⁰ Pollington 2003, 71; Cameron afferma che nel terzo libro le piante e gli oggetti impiegati nelle cure hanno nomi in inglese antico piuttosto che traduzioni in inglese antico di nomi latini. Egli osserva, inoltre, che il terzo libro contiene più elementi magici rispetto ai due libri precedenti (Cameron 1993, 35-58). L'edizione critica del Libro III fu curata per la prima volta da Cockayne 1864-66, III, 300-360, poi da Wright 1955 e in seguito da Olds 1984; oggi è disponibile una edizione digitale a cura di Bullok 2016, <<https://leechbookiii.github.io/index.html>> (ultimo accesso 20/12/2020).

¹¹ Ker n. 231; Gneuss, Lapidge n. 421. Il titolo della raccolta si deve a Cockayne, primo editore dei rimedi, il quale intitolò l'edizione *Leechdoms* 'rimedi' (Cockayne 1864-66, III, 1-80). Il contenuto del codice fu poi edito da Grattan, Singer 1952. Il manoscritto tramanda anche l'*Herbarium* dello Pseudo-Apuleio e *Lorica* di Gildas.

¹² Per l'edizione critica e la traduzione della raccolta, si rimanda a Grattan, Singer 1952 e Pettit 2001. Gli incantesimi in versi tramandati dal codice Harley 585 sono editi anche da Dobbie 1942, 119-124.

Old English Herbarium (una traduzione libera dell'*Herbarium* di Apuleio, 125 d.C.), il cui testimone più autorevole è il manoscritto London, BL, Cotton Vitellius C. iii, datato all'XI secolo,¹³ che trasmette anche alcuni rimedi a base di erbe.

I testi curativi individuati nei tre manoscritti sopra citati occupano lo specchio di scrittura dei fogli. Altri testi di carattere magico-medico, trasmessi da codici datati tra la fine del X secolo e il XII, sono stati copiati, invece, lungo i margini o negli spazi originariamente liberi di fogli che accoglievano già altri testi. È il caso, per esempio, degli incantesimi tramandati dai manoscritti:

London, BL, Harley 6258B, datato alla seconda metà del XII secolo, uno dei testimoni dell'*Old English Herbarium*;¹⁴

Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41, proveniente da Exeter e vergato intorno al terzo quarto dell'XI secolo;¹⁵ si tratta di uno dei testimoni della versione in inglese antico della *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* di Beda, che presenta sei testi di carattere magico copiati lungo i margini di altrettanti fogli;¹⁶

Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 76 (4125), datato alla metà dell'XI secolo e proveniente da Worcester.¹⁷

Singoli testi di carattere magico sono tramandati isolatamente all'interno di altri manoscritti, a volte anche in più di un codice e in versioni differenti.¹⁸

Nel corso degli anni, tutti i testi magico-curativi (o magico-medici) della tradizione anglosassone sono stati raccolti in edizioni critiche che ne hanno

¹³ Ker n. 219; Gneuss, Lapidge n. 402. Per l'edizione in facsimile del manoscritto, si veda D'Aronco, Cameron 1998. Per la tradizione del sapere medico nell'Inghilterra anglosassone, si rimanda a D'Aronco 2007.

¹⁴ Ker 1990, xix; Cockayne ha curato l'edizione dei rimedi contenuti nel ms Harley 6258B, ff. 51rv (Cockayne 1864-66, I, 380-382). Per la descrizione del contenuto del manoscritto si veda: <<https://www.le.ac.uk/english/em1060to1220/mss/EM.BL.Harl.6258B.htm>> (ultimo accesso 20/12/2020).

¹⁵ Ker n. 32; Gneuss, Lapidge n. 39.

¹⁶ I testi magici occupano i margini delle pagine 182, 206, 272, 326, 329 e 350 del codice (Olsan 2013, 146-147; Ker n. 32, voci 4, 6, 10, 14, 15 e 16).

¹⁷ Ker n. 328; Gneuss, Lapidge n. 633.

¹⁸ Per l'elenco dei manoscritti che tramandano testi di carattere magico, si vedano Grendon 1909, 160, e Storms 1948, 25-26.

agevolato la fruizione. Non è possibile, tuttavia, definire il numero esatto dei testi pervenutici fino a oggi poiché le diverse edizioni e raccolte di incantesimi e rimedi in inglese antico sono state realizzate secondo criteri differenti. Alcune edizioni, infatti, propongono i testi nell'ordine in cui essi compaiono all'interno dei manoscritti che li trasmettono;¹⁹ altre edizioni, invece, raccolgono testi provenienti da manoscritti diversi, ordinandoli per tipologie (rimedi, incantesimi, amuleti) o per disturbi e malori da curare.²⁰ Solo le edizioni di Storms e di Grendon agevolano il conteggio dei testi magici, grazie a una numerazione progressiva.

Storms propone un elenco di 86 *charms* (e 16 preghiere usate come *charms*) creando un corpus a partire da quei testi che, secondo l'editore, risultano essere di chiara origine germanica, privi di influenze classiche o cristiane, per poi elencare i testi con influenze straniere e, infine, quelli che sembrano basarsi su fonti extra-germaniche. In tal modo, secondo Storms, sarebbe possibile seguire l'evoluzione della tradizione magica anglosassone in relazione ai contatti culturali avvenuti tra Anglosassoni e altri popoli.²¹

Grendon, invece, ha proposto un elenco di 146 *charms*, 62 incantesimi e altri 84 testi menzionati nella raccolta. Egli ha poi suddiviso i 62 incantesimi in cinque tipologie di testi, contrassegnate con le lettere A, B, C, D, E, così definite:

- A. Exorcisms of diseases or disease-spirits (24 testi).
- B. Herbal charms (7 testi).
- C. Charms for transferring disease (5 testi).
- D. Amulet charms (12 testi).
- E. Charm remedies (14 testi).²²

¹⁹ Rientrano in questo gruppo le edizioni di Grattan, Singer 1952 (l'edizione propone 194 testi tratti dai *Lacnunga* del manoscritto Harley 585, il n. 68 è la *Lorica* di Gildas), Wright 1955 (in facsimile), Olds 1984, Pettit 2001, e l'edizione digitale di Bullock 2016. In tre volumi distinti, Cockayne propone l'edizione dell'*Herbarium* di Apuleio, del *Medicina de quadrupedibus* (vol. I, che comprende anche i *Leechdoms from Fly Leaves of MSS* e una serie di *Charms (in part)* provenienti da codici diversi), del *Læcebo* di Bald (vol. II) e dei *Lacnunga* (vol. III).

²⁰ Grendon 1909; Dobbie 1942, che raccoglie solo gli incantesimi in versi; Storms 1948; Pollington 2003, che offre un quadro ampio della cultura della "cura" nell'Inghilterra anglosassone, tra erbe mediche, ricette mediche, incantesimi, amuleti e strumenti di lavoro del medico.

²¹ Storms 1948, 129.

²² Grendon 1909, 123. Diversamente da Storms 1948, nelle note in coda all'edizione, Grendon elenca i manoscritti che tramandano uno stesso testo di carattere magico (*ibid.* 214-237).

Tale varietà di classificazioni dipende dalla varietà di approcci alla questione della definizione del genere “incantesimo”.

Con questo articolo non si vogliono illustrare, né mettere in discussione le proposte di classificazione di “incantesimi” e “rimedi verbali” (due termini non marcati per riferirsi a testi di carattere magico), ma si vuole proporre una riflessione sui partecipanti agli atti “magici”. Per tale rilettura si è deciso di lavorare sulle raccolte di Grendon e Storms, pur tenendo conto anche delle altre edizioni critiche dei rimedi fin qui citate.

2. I partecipanti agli atti magici

I testi di carattere magico evocano un atto magico ossia un atto linguistico che si esplica in azioni trasformative che inducono a riflettere sulla trasformazione imposta/invocata o richiesta dall’incantesimo, sulla modalità di esecuzione dell’atto linguistico (mediante imperativi o ottativi) e sui partecipanti all’atto linguistico stesso. In particolare, si possono individuare i seguenti “partecipanti” all’atto linguistico magico:²³

- un emittente (il mago/l’esperto);
- un destinatario (che può essere l’inconveniente o il malessere di un malcapitato, l’individuo chiamato a fungere da nuovo emittente dell’atto magico, oppure un nuovo agente chiamato ad aiutare l’esecutore ultimo dell’atto magico);
- un esecutore (*performer*), che sembra essere anche il destinatario delle istruzioni fornite dall’emittente, chiamato a rivolgersi a un terzo destinatario, creando una catena comunicativa: emittente → *performer* / esecutore → destinatario.²⁴

²³ I testi di carattere magico sono un esempio di “atto linguistico” caratterizzato da performatività, in quanto il parlante, pronunciando un atto di parola, non si limita a descrivere un’azione, ma la compie (Austin 1962, 61).

²⁴ Nel definire i ruoli dei partecipanti all’atto magico si tiene idealmente conto dei modelli rappresentativi delle relazioni tra attanti proposti da Jakobson 1966 e da Greimas 1966. I nomi degli attanti proposti da Greimas sono per lo più derivati dall’analisi degli enunciati narrativi ispirata all’analisi degli enunciati linguistici di Tesnière 1959. Per la definizione degli attanti, Greimas propone uno schema narrativo a tre coppie di attanti (soggetto/oggetto, destinante/destinatario, aiutante/opponente, cfr. Greimas 1966, 246) che poi ridefini con uno schema formato da quattro attanti positivi e quattro attanti negativi (soggetto, oggetto, destinante, destinatario e antisoggetto, oggetto negativo, antidestinante, antidestinario, cfr. Greimas 1983, 48). Per la definizione dei rapporti tra gli attanti, Greimas propose uno schema narrativo in quattro fasi distinte, contratto o manipolazione, competenza, performance e sanzione (Greimas 1983, ix-x).

Rileggendo i testi di carattere magico, così come sono stati editi da Storms e Grendon, si possono individuare cinque tipi di relazione tra i partecipanti all'atto performativo.

2.1. *Tipo 1: emittente = esecutore*

Nei testi caratterizzati da identità tra emittente ed esecutore, quest'ultimo agisce direttamente sul destinatario (il malore o danno), dando vita, in termini metafunzionali,²⁵ a processi esperienziali connessi a un flusso di eventi di cambiamento. I processi materiali messi in atto sono di tipo trasformativo. L'emittente-esecutore, infatti, impone direttamente divieti, allontanamenti e ordina azioni che mirano all'annullamento del malessere.

In *Wið wennum* 'Contro le cisti',²⁶ un testo magico trascritto in uno spazio bianco del f. 106v del manoscritto London, BL, Royal 4. A. xiv (XII sec.), per esempio, il "mago" avvia l'azione imponendo al male dei divieti (*ne scealt þu timbrien* 'non costruirai', *ne nenne tun habben* 'né avrai dimora'), procede con l'allontanamento del male (*þu scealt north eonene* 'andrai a Nord') e con il suo occultamento:

He þe sceal legge leaf et heafde.
Under fot wolues, under ueþer earnes,
under earnes clea, a þu geweornie.

(Egli deporrà una foglia sul [tuo] capo. Sotto il piede del lupo, sotto l'ala dell'aquila, sotto la zampa dell'aquila, sparisca tu per sempre.)²⁷

L'emittente-esecutore esercita il proprio potere attraverso l'impiego di verbi che rivelano il carattere assertivo del suo atto linguistico magico. Egli interviene sul malore con verbi che appartengono al campo semantico del movimento nello spazio e della trasformazione della forma.²⁸ L'azione diretta, infatti, procede con l'evocazione di processi annullanti, espressi dagli imperativi *clinge* 'consumati', *scring* 'contraiti', *weorne* 'prosciugati' e dai tre ottativi *gewurþe* 'che tu diventi' legati prima a *litel* 'piccola' e poi a *nawiht* 'nulla'. L'emittente-

²⁵ Per l'aspetto sistemico-funzionale si fa riferimento a Sindoni 2011.

²⁶ Grendon 1909, 166 (A.3); Storms 1948, 154 (4); Dobbie 1942, 158.

²⁷ Se non diversamente indicato, le traduzioni in italiano dei brani citati sono mie.

²⁸ Traugott 1991, 392-393.

esecutore e la ciste (il danno da eliminare) sono gli unici partecipanti all'atto linguistico,²⁹ e, dal punto di vista pragmatico, l'efficacia dell'atto magico risiede nella fede che l'emittente-esecutore nutre nei confronti della parola.

Wið cyrnel 'Contro il gonfiore/rigonfiamento',³⁰ trasmesso dal manoscritto London, BL, Harley 585, f. 182r, offre un altro esempio di testo magico con identità tra emittente ed esecutore. Nella prima parte del testo, l'emittente-esecutore sembra non rivolgersi a nessuno, poiché egli rievoca una condizione passata caratterizzata da abbondanza (*Neogone wāran Noðþæs sweoster* 'nove erano le sorelle di Noththe') per indicare come tale abbondanza si sia gradualmente ridotta al nulla:

þā wurdon þā nygone tō VIII
and þā VIII tō VII
and þā VII tō VI
and þā VI tō V
and þā V tō IIII
and þā IIII tō III
and þā III tō II
and þā II tō I
and þā I tō ninum

(le nove divennero otto, / e le otto sette, / e le sette sei, / e le sei cinque, / e le cinque quattro, / e le quattro tre, / e le tre due, / e le due una / e l'una niente)

Nella seconda parte, invece, l'emittente diventa istruttore di un ammalato e si augura che il processo trasformativo possa essere efficace anche se attuato dall'ammalato stesso (*Pis þē lib bē cyrneles and scrōfelles and weormes and æghwylces yfeles* 'Questo sia per te un rimedio contro i rigonfiamenti e la scrofola e i vermi e ogni tipo di malattia'). Il testo si chiude con un imperativo con valore procedurale, poiché esprime un'istruzione (*Sing benedicite nygon sīþum* 'Recita (*sing*) il *Benedicite* nove volte') che colloca l'incantesimo iconico³¹ pagano in un contesto curativo di tipo religioso cristiano.

²⁹ Halliday chiama "actor" il partecipante attivo nella considerazione di un sintagma (ma anche in un enunciato) come rappresentazione di un processo dell'esperienza umana (Matthiessen 2014, 83). L'"actor" è "the one doing the deed, that is the one bringing about the change" (Halliday 2004, p. 179).

³⁰ Grendon 1909, 170 (A.9); Storms 1948, 150 (3).

³¹ Buzzoni 1996, 53. Il testo trova la sua efficacia nell'immagine della scomparsa gradua-

2.2. Tipo 2: emittente ≠ esecutore, il primo destinatario > emittente = esecutore

In *Wið ymbe* ‘Per uno sciame d’api’,³² copiato sul margine sinistro di p. 182 del manoscritto Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 41 l’emittente (esperto, mago) non è l’esecutore dell’atto magico: egli fornisce indicazioni a un esecutore e solo dopo la comunicazione delle istruzioni si ristabilisce l’identità tra emittente (futuro) ed esecutore (futuro). Nella prima parte del testo, infatti, l’emittente si rivolge a un esecutore (*performer*) con imperativi, imponendo prima un processo materiale di moto (*nim, oferweorp* ‘prendi, getta’) e poi un processo verbale (*cweð* ‘pronuncia’), che rendono esecutore il destinatario (*Wið ymbe nim eorþan, oferweorp mid þinre swiþran / handa under þinum swiþran fet, and cweð* ‘Per uno sciame d’api prendi della terra, gettala con la tua mano destra sotto il tuo piede destro e pronuncia’):

l’emittente si rivolge all’esecutore (*performer* = destinatario): *nim, oferweorp, cweð*;

l’esecutore diventa il nuovo emittente dell’atto magico.

Il testo prosegue con due sezioni in cui l’emittente (che torna a coincidere con l’esecutore) si rivolge direttamente al destinatario, le api che sciamano. Tali sezioni, tuttavia, sono divise da una nuova istruzione da parte del primo emittente. La prima sezione esprime il potere dell’esecutore sul destinatario dell’atto magico (*Fo ic under fot, funde ic hit* ‘io la tengo sotto il piede, che io la ritrovi lì’)³³ e la fiducia che l’emittente-esecutore nutre nei confronti della terra come agente potente che egli può controllare:

Hwæt, eorðe mæg wið ealra wihta gehwilce
And wið andan and wið æminde
and wið þa micelan mannes tungan

(Ascoltate, la terra è potente contro qualsiasi creatura / e contro la malizia, e contro la negligenza / e contro la lingua possente dell’uomo).

le del gonfiore. Tra la riduzione da nove a nulla e la scomparsa del gonfiore vi è una relazione semiotica di tipo iconico.

³² Grendon 1909, 168 (A.4); Storms 1948, 132 (1); qui si cita Dobbie 1942, 125.

³³ Per il significato e il valore della forma verbale *funde* (prima persona singolare dell’indicativo preterito o ottativo preterito) e per la traduzione in italiano, cfr. Buzzoni 1996, 44-45.

La seconda istruzione rivolta al futuro *performer* descrive un processo di estensione (*And wiððon forweorp ofer greot, þonne hi swirman* ‘e poi getta sopra della sabbia quando sciàmano’) e un processo verbale (*and cweð* ‘e pronuncia’) che riconduce all’emittente-esecutore che si rivolge direttamente al destinatario dell’atto magico con vari imperativi:

Sitte ge, sigewif, sigað to eorþan!
 Næfre ge wilde to wuda fleogan.
 Beo ge swa gemindige mines godes,
 swa bið manna gehwilc metes and epeles

(Posatevi donne vittoriose, scendete a terra! / non volate liberamente verso i boschi. / Siate così memori del mio bene / come ogni uomo lo è del cibo e della casa).

Le istruzioni del primo emittente dell’atto magico rendono intermittente l’identità tra emittente ed esecutore. Tale operazione, che sembra solo introdurre e incorniciare il testo primario caratterizzato dall’identità tra emittente ed esecutore, aggiunge uno strato/passaggio comunicativo che priva l’incantesimo della sua immediatezza, attutendone quasi il carattere magico.

2.3. Tipo 3: emittente ≠ esecutore, iconogramma

In *Wið dweorh* ‘Contro un nano’,³⁴ tramandato dal manoscritto London, BL, Harley 585, f. 164v, emittente ed esecutore non coincidono: gli imperativi dell’emittente, infatti, sono diretti a un futuro esecutore del rimedio, e quest’ultimo si presenta come iconogramma, poiché al *performer* viene imposto un processo materiale creativo (*writ* ‘scrivi’) che mira a modificare la realtà in modo implicito. La parola non si traduce immediatamente in azione, poiché passa attraverso lo stadio intermedio della iconicità: l’efficacia è legata all’atto di “indossare” il rimedio scritto (*Writ ðis onðlang da earmas wiþ dweorh: +T-ωA, 7 gnid cyleðeni gean on ealað, sanctus macutus sancte uictorici*. ‘Scrivi questo lungo le braccia contro un nano, e grattugia la celidonia nella birra. S. Macuto, S. Vittore’).

³⁴ Grattan, Singer 1952, 158, n. 87; il testo è edito anche da Grendon 1909 (E.6) e Storms 1948, 282 (44). Non è chiaro a che cosa si riferisca il ‘nano’ del titolo, ma è probabile che il sostantivo identificasse anche un ‘ragno’, un insetto che punge e produce delle irritazioni violente (Grattan, Singer 1952, 61; Storms 1948, 168) oppure un tumore (Grendon 1909, 215).

La conclusione del rimedio è occupata dalla richiesta di esecuzione di un nuovo processo materiale (trasformazionale), l'imperativo *gnid* 'grattugia', e dalla invocazione di due santi. Quest'ultimo elemento inserisce un nuovo partecipante all'atto linguistico: il santo o i santi invocati. Il verbo non è espresso, ma si può sottintendere 'prega, invoca'.

2.4. Tipo 4: emittente ≠ esecutore

Numerosi testi "curativi" tramandati dal manoscritto London, BL, Royal 12. D. xvii sospendono definitivamente l'identità tra emittente e destinatario. Tali testi, identificabili come "ricette", sembrano rivolti a un destinatario che diventerà esecutore delle istruzioni fornite dal testo per sé stesso o per altri. *Wið heafodece* 'Contro il mal di testa' (f. 7v) non rientra tra i testi raccolti da Grendon, né tra quelli editi da Storms: *Wið heafod ece hundes heafod gebærn to ahsan 7 snið þæt heafod lege on*³⁵ 'Contro il mal di testa: brucia una testa di cane riducendola in cenere; incidi (fai un taglio sulla) la testa; spalma (il preparato) sopra (la testa)'.

Il testo chiaramente fornisce indicazioni su come mettere in pratica il rimedio: la sua efficacia è legata al processo materiale del 'bruciare', che determina un cambiamento di stato (trasformazione in cenere), del 'tagliare' e dello 'spalmare, cospargere'.

2.5. Tipo 5: emittente ≠ esecutore, l'emittente si rivolge a un esecutore e a un aiutante

Alcuni dei testi di carattere magico-curativo introducono un nuovo partecipante all'atto magico, un aiutante, che viene richiesto dall'emittente. Un esempio di tale tipologia di testo è fornito da un'altra versione dei rimedi *Wið wennum* (Tipo 1) e *Wið dweorh* (Tipo 3), entrambi tramandati dal manoscritto London, BL, Harley 585.

*Wið wennum*³⁶ (f. 189r) si apre con l'indicazione della condizione per mettere in atto il rimedio magico (*Gif wænnas eglan mæn at þære heortan* 'se delle cisti affliggono una persona al cuore'), seguita immediatamente dall'elenco delle azioni che l'aiutante dovrà essere invitata a compiere (*gange*

³⁵ Cockayne 1864-66, II, 20-21 e 395: nell'*Old English Herbarium* lxxxviii, *hundes heafod* è la traduzione del nome della pianta *canis caput*, nota anche come *antirrhinum orontium* (cfr. anche Pollington 2003, 83 e 326-327).

³⁶ Grendon 1909, 212 (E.13); Grattan, Singer 1952, 196, n. 188.

mādenman tō wylle þe rihte ēast yrne ‘vada una vergine a una sorgente che scorre verso Est’; *and gehlade āne cuppan fulle forð mid ðām streame* ‘e prenda una tazza piena in direzione della corrente’; *and singe þæron Crēdan and Paternoster* ‘e canti (reciti) poi *Credo* e *Pater noster*’; *and gēote þonne on oþer fæt, and hlade eft oþre, and singe eft Crēdan and Paternoster* ‘e poi la versi in un’altra scodella, e poi ne prenda dell’altra, e di nuovo canti *Credo* e *Pater noster*’). Nella parte finale del testo, l’emittente torna a rivolgersi al destinatario delle istruzioni (futuro esecutore) con due imperativi³⁷ (*and dō swā, þæt þū hæbbe þrēo. Dō swā nygon dagas* ‘e fa’ in modo che tu abbia (tre tazze). Fa’ così per nove giorni’). Il testo si conclude con la promessa dell’efficacia del rimedio sul destinatario finale dell’atto curativo (*sōna him bið sēl* ‘egli presto starà bene’).

La seconda versione di *Wið dweorh* (f. 167r-v)³⁸ si compone di una parte in prosa e una in versi. Nella sezione in prosa, l’emittente si rivolge a un esecutore, elencando due azioni da svolgere: *man sceal niman VII lytic oflætan* ‘bisogna prendere sette ostie sottili’ e *writan þas naman on ælcra oflætan: Maximianus, Malchus, Iohannes, Martimianus, Dionisius, Constantinus, Serafion* ‘scrivere questi nomi su ogni ostia: Massimiano, Malco, Giovanni, Marciano, Dionisio, Costantino, Serapione’. Tali operazioni sembrano finalizzate alla creazione dell’iconogramma (di tipo cristiano) osservato nel Tipo 3. Il seguito del testo in prosa richiede poi il canto riportato nella sezione in versi (*Þænne eft þæt galdor þæt her æfter cweð man sceal singan* ‘poi di nuovo bisogna cantare l’incantesimo,³⁹ di seguito menzionato’) e l’intervento di un’aiutante, nuovamente una vergine come in *Wið wennum*, che deve portare le ostie alla persona colpita dal malore. La sezione si chiude anche qui con una promessa di guarigione *Him bið sona sel* ‘starà subito meglio’. La parte in versi rappresenta un testo che presuppone un emittente-esecutore come nei testi di Tipo 1 (l’emittente rievoca un mito rivolgendosi direttamente al malore). In questo caso, tuttavia, si osserva che nei versi finali l’emittente-esecutore funge da istruttore per probabili futuri esecutori dell’incantesimo:

³⁷ La forma *dō* potrebbe essere sia ottativo che imperativo (Campbell 1959, 347 §768b), ma la collocazione del verbo nel testo induce a ritenere che qui funga da imperativo. L’ottativo, infatti, è impiegato nell’atto linguistico indiretto che coinvolge la ‘verGINE’ in qualità di aiutante e dunque di partecipante ‘invitata’ all’atto magico. Il destinatario delle istruzioni, in quanto futuro esecutore dell’atto magico, riceve comandi (per gli atti linguistici indiretti, cfr. Levison 1985, 333-338 e Huang 2014, 135-151).

³⁸ Dobbie 1942, 121-122 (il testo è edito anche da Grendon 1909, 166 (A.2), Storms 1948, 166 (7), Grattan, Singer 1952, 161-162, n. 93).

³⁹ Sull’etimologia di *galdor* e sul suo impiego come ‘incantesimo’, cfr. Saibene 1985, 50.

[...] Þa com in gangan dweores sweostar;
þa geændæde heo and aðas swor
ðæt næfre þis ðæm adlegan derian ne moste,
 ne ðæm þe þis galdor begytan mihte,
 oððe þe þis galdor ongalan cuþe. Amen. Fiað.

([...] Poi entrò camminando la sorella del nano. / Mise fine a ciò e pronunciò giuramenti / che questo non avrebbe mai più potuto nuocere al malato / né a colui che potesse far proprio questo incantesimo / o che sapesse cantare questo incantesimo. Amen. Fiat.)⁴⁰

L'innovazione strutturale introdotta da *Wið wennum* e *Wið dweorh* nel Tipo 5 rispetto ai loro corrispondenti di Tipo 1 e 3 induce a ritenere che in area anglosassone i testi magici rivelano delle specificità in relazione alla modalità e al contesto della loro esecuzione.

Sul piano pragmatico, le due coppie di testi rappresentano due esempi di doppioni funzionali. I due *Wið wennum* (Tipo 1 e 5) e i due *Wið dweorh* (Tipo 3 e 5), infatti, mirano a ottenere lo stesso effetto: eliminare cisti e 'nani', rispettivamente. Nei testi di Tipo 5, tuttavia, l'efficacia dell'atto magico non dipende solo dalla fiducia nel potere magico delle parole da parte dei partecipanti all'atto magico, ma anche dalla modalità attuativa dell'atto stesso. L'emittente, che non è più esecutore, non si rivolge direttamente al malore (*clinge* 'consumati', *scring* 'contraiti', in *Wið wennum* 1) o al paziente (*writ* 'scrivi', in *Wið dweorh* 3) con degli imperativi che conferiscono potenza performativa alla parola. Egli si esprime in modo impersonale (*man sceal niman* 'bisogna prendere') oppure definisce una sottocategoria del malore (*Gif wænnas eglían mæn at þære heortan* 'se delle cisti affliggono una persona al cuore'), presentandosi quasi come un "esperto" di rimedi che fornisce istruzioni precise su come ottenere la guarigione.

L'analisi critica del discorso magico, inoltre, invita a riflettere sull'espressione conclusiva dei due testi (*sōna him bið sēl* 'egli presto starà bene'): essa può essere interpretata come un marcatore discorsivo,⁴¹ un'espressione rassicurante, il cui scopo è ricondurre l'attenzione sul paziente, piuttosto che sul senso delle parole o sull'atto magico in sé. Tale marcatore contribuisce a conferire ai due testi una veste più "medica" che "magica".

Se si recuperano le nozioni di uso primitivo e meno primitivo della parola,

⁴⁰ Buzzoni 1996, 33.

⁴¹ Brinton 2001, 225-227 e 224 sui livelli di analisi del discorso in prospettiva storica.

i testi di Tipo 5 sembrano essere il prodotto finale di un processo di stratificazione culturale che ha determinato il passaggio da testi caratterizzati da identità tra segno e referente (*semiotic fallacy*, uso primitivo della parola) a testi in cui la parola è a servizio della cura, ma non è la cura. Tale stratificazione è visibile, in parte, nell'aggiunta progressiva di partecipanti agli atti magico-curativi e, in parte, nella conservazione degli incantesimi incapsulati nei testi curativi privi di identità tra emittente ed esecutore (*Wið ymbe*) o che prevedono l'invocazione a santi e al Dio cristiano per effetto della diffusione della fede cristiana nel mondo germanico, in generale, e anglosassone, in particolare.⁴²

3. Considerazioni conclusive

La riflessione sull'identificazione dei partecipanti agli atti linguistici magici e sui rapporti che intercorrono tra di essi sembra agevolare il riconoscimento del genere di appartenenza di ciascun testo magico-curativo.

I testi caratterizzati da identità tra emittente ed esecutore (Tipo 1) si connotano come incantesimi, testi caratterizzati, come osservato da Buzzoni,⁴³ da identità tra parola e referente, vale a dire testi in cui è riscontrabile una relazione non arbitraria, bensì causale tra segno e referente: l'emittente-esecutore parla e opera mediante imperativi, ottativi o modali con funzione deontica (incitamento all'azione) che definiscono i suoi enunciati come ordini che non presuppongono uno scambio dialogico con il destinatario del messaggio (il malore). La rievocazione della *historiola* può essere letta come un atto perlocutivo, poiché mira ad avere un effetto concreto sul destinatario del messaggio (il malore/male)⁴⁴ che deve scomparire così come è scomparso nell'episodio rievocato nella *historiola*.

La sospensione dell'identità tra emittente ed esecutore, porta a riconoscere altre quattro tipologie di testi. Nel Tipo 2, in cui il compito di agire è trasferito dall'emittente-istruttore al destinatario delle istruzioni, l'identità viene subito ripristinata (primo destinatario = esecutore) per ricondurre il testo alla dimensione dell'incantesimo. L'unica differenza esistente rispetto al Tipo 1 è rappresentata dal fatto che i destinatari sono due (la persona che riceve le istruzioni e il malore) e non più una (il malore).

⁴² Arnovick 2006, 61-90.

⁴³ Buzzoni 1996, 28.

⁴⁴ Per la definizione degli atti locutivi, illocutivi e perlocutivi, cfr. Berruto 2011, 215 e Austin 1962, 109-131.

Nel Tipo 3, l'emittente si rivolge a un esecutore che è invitato a svolgere delle operazioni materiali finalizzate alla realizzazione di un oggetto "magico-curativo": l'oggetto, grazie anche all'invocazione dei santi (nuovi partecipanti all'atto magico) e alla parola scritta avrà una capacità trasformativa sul malore non istantanea, ma perdurante, poiché l'iconogramma così creato proteggerà l'ammalato nel tempo.

Se nel Tipo 1 e 2 è riconoscibile il carattere orale dell'atto performativo,⁴⁵ nel Tipo 3 l'oralità dell'atto magico si arricchisce di un dato nuovo: l'uso della scrittura che è sia parte integrante della *performance* magica che *performance* essa stessa, poiché il testo scritto non è solo trasposizione di un enunciato orale, ma strumento magico complementare alla parola detta.

Nel Tipo 4 rientrano quasi tutti i testi appartenenti al *Læcebōc* e alla raccolta dei *Lacnunga*: l'emittente fornisce al suo destinatario istruzioni su ingredienti e procedure curative. L'efficacia dei rimedi dipende dall'attuazione corretta delle procedure, più che dalle parole dette. Ciò elimina qualunque possibilità di azione sulla realtà mediante la parola e sembra confermare l'appartenenza di tali testi al genere della ricetta.

Sono stati individuati, infine, testi in cui all'emittente, all'esecutore e al destinatario si aggiunge un nuovo partecipante: l'aiutante (Tipo 5), che è chiamato a compiere azioni verbali che sembrano recuperare la forza manipolatrice della parola anche in testi in cui l'emittente non è esecutore diretto dell'atto magico e non interviene sulla realtà con parole legate al malore. L'aiutante, infatti, è chiamato ad abbinare all'atto magico la parola cristiana mediante la recitazione di preghiere.

L'aggiunta progressiva di partecipanti agli atti linguistici magici sembra corrispondere a una stratificazione culturale che tende solo ad attenuare, più che cancellare del tutto, il carattere magico di alcuni rimedi, rendendo difficile il riconoscimento del genere di appartenenza di alcuni testi curativi. Ciò si evince in modo particolare dai dopponi funzionali (*Wið wennum* e *Wið dweorh*) che sono conservati sotto forma sia di incantesimo (nello spazio vuoto del f. 106v del ms. Royal 4. A. xiv) e iconogramma semplice (sul f. 164v del ms. Harley 585) che di rimedi di tipo medico (nel ms. Harley 585, ff. 189r e 167r-v): a testi con la stessa funzionalità è stata assegnata una veste narrativa diversa che ne ha apparentemente modificato la natura.

⁴⁵ Sulla riconoscibilità dell'oralità nei testi manoscritti e sulle varie categorie di testi orali, cfr. Arnovick 2006, 20-21 e Foley 1991, 148-155.

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DANIELA FRUSCIONE

LA MAGIA NELLE *LEGES*. QUESTIONI STRUTTURALI

Beginning in the sixth century the Germanic peoples who established kingdoms in the western parts of the old Roman Empire enacted several law codes. The codes, composed in Latin, were partly influenced by Roman law. The early medieval decrees tell us what was prohibited and what was designated as magic, disclosing some magic practices like divination, storm rising, the use of ligatures and *veneficium*. However, the decrees do not always indicate the context of the forbidden acts. The article does not focus on the practice of magic but rather on the concerns of the authorities as to the provisions on magic contained in the laws. It will be shown that in the *leges* that were basically designed to assure both the wholeness or physical integrity of the person, and the safety of property, the use of magic is not punished as a religious offence, but rather for its destabilizing aspect regarding the social, political and economic order. The lawgiver's priority is not simply the material damage caused by magic practices, but also the damage caused by false witchcraft accusations, which can ruin the reputation of a woman and of her family group. Finally, the Romano-Germanic laws show that, beyond the damage caused to its subjects, the king feels offended by magic as an antagonistic instrument of power and social control. Thus, from early medieval laws, it is possible to observe the formal expression of areas through which public concerns over the practice of magic operated.

Il mondo magico è rappresentato in varie forme (divinazione, stregoneria) nelle più antiche leggi del Medioevo europeo.¹ La specificità della tradizione germanica relativamente alla magia² non è deducibile dalle *leges*, scritte in latino e in parte influenzate dalla tradizione del diritto romano-cristiano.

Anche per questo il seguente contributo si concentra piuttosto sulla rilevanza del magico come oggetto di regolamentazione nelle legislazioni roma-

¹ Sulla magia nel Medioevo, propedeutici Kieckhefer 1989 e Jolly 2002. Si veda poi Flint 1991, che stabilisce una continuità emozionale tra magia e religione cristiana, in base alla quale i missionari adattarono e adottarono in modo selettivo credenze e pratiche magiche dei convertiti. In relazione al lavoro di Flint: Kieckhefer 1994 sposta l'attenzione sulla razionalità dei fenomeni magici, e Murray 1992 fornisce un contesto sociale di ambiente ecclesiastico al sincretismo magico-religioso. Wood 1995, offre un'analisi delle fonti storiche tra cristianesimo e paganismi che fanno da sfondo alle pratiche magiche. Il punto di vista decostruttivista di Hen 2015, riguarda l'inadeguatezza delle fonti storiche cristiane dell'Alto Medioevo come testimonianza di credenze e pratiche magiche.

² Sulla magia in area germanica (soprattutto nordica) Haid-Dillmann, 2010.

no-germaniche. Tenendo conto che ci si può avvicinare alla comprensione degli interventi del legislatore solo riflettendo sugli aspetti giuridico-culturali propri del delicato momento di incontro tra la mentalità romano-cristiana e le germaniche, si mostrerà che nelle *leges* la magia viene normata nei suoi aspetti destabilizzanti dell'ordine sociale, politico ed economico.

Le fonti legislative dell'Alto Medioevo si riferiscono a quelle pratiche magiche che potevano essere usate per nuocere a terzi e che quindi erano costitutive di un crimine. In questo contesto a poco serve la classica suddivisione tra magia bianca e magia nera.³ Le *leges* mostrano che tale classificazione riflette una prospettiva che non è quella del legislatore: la divinazione ad esempio, considerata magia bianca, era condannata dal legislatore come una forma di potere in competizione con l'autorità del sovrano.⁴

L'accusa privata di stregoneria, infondata e usata per vantaggi personali, aveva grande diffusione negli stati romano-barbarici, ed era un aspetto molto chiaro al legislatore che l'ha disciplinata facendo uso di quegli istituti di risoluzione dei conflitti tipici di una società arcaica, spesso frutto di un pensiero magico.

1. *Una lunga storia*

I mietitori, quel giorno, avevano trovato una strega occupata a pisciare malignamente in un campo con l'intento di attirare la pioggia sul grano già mezzo fradicio in seguito a insoliti acquazzoni; l'avevano gettata nel fuoco senza alcuna forma di processo; ci si beffava di quella sibilla che s'immaginava di comandare all'acqua, ma non aveva saputo mettersi al riparo dalle fiamme.⁵

In uno dei più bei romanzi scritti verso la fine dello scorso millennio, il protagonista nella sua "vita errante" assiste a una scena che non considera affatto rara. Una donna, sorpresa a urinare in un campo da un gruppo di contadini, viene arsa viva all'istante. Il suo gesto viene interpretato come maledizione del raccolto. Il romanzo in questione si svolge nei Paesi Bassi nel XVI secolo e Zenone, il meraviglioso alchimista protagonista dell'Opera al Nero, è esperto di erbe, pozioni e magie, e nel corso del romanzo giudica amaramente sia la giustizia dal basso che quella dall'alto, di cui lui stesso, filosofo e *me-*

³ Su queste due forme di magia nella Gallia merovingia vedi Jiménez Sánchez 2017a.

⁴ Critici rispetto a queste classificazioni Schneider 2004, 564 e Petzoldt 2001, 147.

⁵ Yourcenar 2020, 32-33.

dicus, sarà vittima come portatore di conoscenze non ammesse dalla dottrina cristiana.

Il timore di perdere il raccolto e la conseguente severità delle pene per chiunque lo danneggi con l'aiuto di tecniche magiche hanno una storia molto lunga nella tradizione legale occidentale, considerato che già nella Roma arcaica la giovane società romana ne faceva una delle questioni da regolamentare.⁶ Le Leggi delle Dodici Tavole del V secolo a.C., di cui rimangono solo citazioni isolate, sembra che abbiano previsto pene severe per chiunque danneggiasse il raccolto del vicino.⁷ Nella Tavola VIII in cui è chiaro l'intento del legislatore di superare la sanzione primitiva dei delitti, consistente nella vendetta privata, non solo si dice che l'incantesimo rivolto a provocare la disgrazia di qualcuno (*qui malum carmen incantassit*) è punito con la pena capitale, ma si parla anche di chi maledice i raccolti (*qui fruges excantassit*), e di chi si appropria con la magia del raccolto di un altro (*neve alienam segetem pellexeris*).⁸

2. Danno al raccolto

Nelle prime leggi delle nazioni romano-germaniche, la maledizione del raccolto costituisce solo una delle pratiche magiche punite. Il danno al raccolto viene regolato nella *Lex Baiuvariorum* (XIII, 8) della seconda metà dell'VIII secolo.⁹ Qui si punisce l'*aranscarti*, il 'danno al raccolto' (aat. *are(a)n* 'raccolto', *scardi* 'taglio', vedi an. *skera* 'tagliare') provocato da una formula magica.¹⁰

⁶ Sulla questione della continuità nella magia, Murray 1992, 189: "This endurance reflects the nature of the forces that create these customs: not literary influence, but the age-old emotional geometry of social situations, involving love, death, jealousy and so on".

⁷ Crawford *et al.* 1996, II, 580-581, 677-679.

⁸ Rives 2002, 273-279.

⁹ Il danno al raccolto ha una storia lunghissima nelle fonti bavaresi e ancora molto tardi, alla fine del 1700, lo storico Johann Nepomuk Mederer (1793, 202-203) nel suo commento a questo passo delle leggi, riporta il racconto che "ein ehrlicher Landmann" gli ha fatto a proposito del danno al raccolto: "Der böse Mensch [...] der seinem Nachbar auf die gottloseste Weise schaden will, kommt um Mitternacht zu desselben eben reifenden Getreidacker, und ganz nackt, mit einer an den Fuß gebundenen Sichel, unter weiß nicht wie vielen Zauber und Beschwörungsformeln, gehet er mitten durch denselben, in der albernen Hoffnung, daß von jenem Theile des Ackers, den er mit seiner an den Fuß gebundenen Sichel durchgeschnitten hat, die Getreidekörner in seine Scheuer oder auf seinen Getreidekasten hinfliegen werden".

¹⁰ Kremer, Stricker 2018, 57-58.

Si quis messes alterius initiaverit apud maleficas artes et inventus fuerit, cum XII solidis componat, quod aranscarti dicunt, et familiam eius et omnem substantiam eius vel pecora eius habeat in cura usque ad annum. Et si aliquid perdidit homo ille de res suas in illo anno, illi reddat. Et si negare voluerit, cum XII sacramentales iuret aut cum campione cincto defendat se, hoc es pugna duorum.¹¹

Osserviamo il paragrafo della legge baiuvara, ponendo l'attenzione sulla posizione e sulla sanzione contenuta: la legge sul danno al raccolto segue un gruppo di leggi che costituiscono uno dei nuclei tematici e pittorici delle *leges* e che trattano la campagna, gli animali, le recinzioni. Ed è seguita da una sanzione contro chi si impossessa del servo di un altro aiutandolo a scappare. Il minimo comune di questa sequenza di leggi è quindi la difesa della proprietà.

In questo paragrafo si punisce la violazione di un ordine, di un assetto che riguarda il cuore delle leggi germaniche che trattano prevalentemente la protezione degli insediamenti, degli esseri umani, e dei beni mobili e immobili che ne facevano parte. Al danneggiamento (*scarti*) di questo bene (*aran*) si riferisce chiaramente anche la glossa *aranscarti* le cui componenti definiscono plasticamente l'offesa. E' da notare che questo termine è un composto, aspetto lessicale tipico dell'inizio di una lingua del diritto che non conosce concetti astratti, ma diventa lingua tecnica tramite l'accostamento di due parole del linguaggio comune.¹²

La sanzione per il danno di *aranscarti* è di tipo restitutivo. In alternativa, il caso si può risolvere tramite giuramento o duello, due istituti che riflettono una mentalità magica della risoluzione dei conflitti. Nel paragrafo della legge baiuvara la magia quindi non emerge solo come reato da sanzionare. Esiste anche un altro livello del magico nelle *leges*, quello delle istituzioni di diritto che sono da ricondurre ad una visione magica. Come insegna Niklas Luhmann, nelle forme arcaiche di diritto, il giuramento non è altro che lo spostamento della lotta per il diritto al livello magico, che si rivolge direttamente all'altra parte, all'avversario da sconfiggere.¹³

¹¹ von Schwind 1926, 410-411.

¹² von See 1964, 2-8.

¹³ Luhmann 1987, 112.

3. *Avvelenamento*

Un altro aspetto del magico trattato nelle *leges* è l'avvelenamento. La trattazione del maleficio e il suo accostamento all'avvelenamento nelle leggi delle popolazioni germaniche¹⁴ è in continuità col diritto romano cristiano, in cui la commistione tra veneficio e maleficio costituisce una costante.¹⁵

Con il diritto germanico cambia però il modello di giustizia penale di riferimento e anche l'omicidio da avvelenamento viene punito con una pena pecuniaria.

3.1. *Pactus legis Salicae 19*

Nel *Pactus legis Salicae* (inizio del VI secolo) il tema della magia viene trattato nel titolo 19 (*De maleficiis <hominum> vel herbis*) che contiene quattro paragrafi di cui gli ultimi due non sono contenuti in tutti i manoscritti e forse sono stati aggiunti nel corso del tempo.

Si quis alteri <maleficio fecerit aut> herbas dederit bibere ue, ut moriatur, <et ei fuerit adprobatum>, mallobergo touuer(f)o sunt, denarios VIIIIM qui faciunt solidos CC culpabilis iudicetur.

Si quis alteri <herbas dederit bibere uel> maleficio fecerit et ille cui factum fuerit evaserit, auctor sceletis, qui hoc admisisse probatur <vel conuictus fuerit> mallobergo seolandouefa hoc est, MMD denarios qui faciunt solidos LXII semis culpabilis iudicetur.

Si quis alteri maleficio superiactaverit ubilibet miserit (sive cum ligaturis), mallobergo thouuerphe, sunt denarii MMD qui faciunt solidos LXII semis culpabilis iudicetur.

Si quis mulier altera mulieri maleficio fecerit, unde infantes non potuerit habere, MMD denarios qui faciunt solidos LXII semis culpabilis iudicetur.¹⁶

¹⁴ L'assonanza tra veneficio e maleficio è confermata dalle legislazioni germaniche coeve: nella Lex Ripuaria (83,1) ad esempio tali ipotesi vengono indicate alternativamente senza alcuna distinzione, tra i possibili motivi per esercitare il diritto di ripudio della moglie da parte del marito: "si quis vir seu qua mulier Ripuaria per venenum, seu per aliquod maleficio aliquid perdidit, weregildum componat".

¹⁵ Mommsen 1899, 640. Anche Musumeci 2019, 113-128. La *Lex Cornelia de sicariis et veneficis* emanata da Lucio Cornelio Silla nell'81 a.C. colpiva chi preparava o somministrava un *venenum malum necandi hominis causa* (Rotondi 1912, 352-359).

¹⁶ Eckhardt 1962, 81-82.

Nei paragrafi che costituiscono il titolo, il termine *maleficium* compare con vari significati: indica il veleno, la magia e l'insieme delle sostanze che provocano aborto.

Il primo paragrafo regola il maleficio sotto forma di avvelenamento con conseguente morte della vittima, con una sanzione restitutiva pari a quella dovuta per l'omicidio di un uomo libero. Il secondo paragrafo prevede una pena pecuniaria inferiore nel caso in cui il veleno sia somministrato senza esito letale. Nel terzo paragrafo non si parla di avvelenamento ma genericamente di *maleficium* o, in alcuni manoscritti della *lex salica*, più tarda del *pactus*, di legature, una tecnica magica considerata in grado di bloccare e contrastare le funzioni vitali.¹⁷

La stessa pena pecuniaria viene applicata nel quarto paragrafo che disciplina l'ipotesi del reato di *maleficium* commesso da una donna nei confronti di altra donna "ut infantem habere non possit". In questo paragrafo sull'aborto la donna è eccezionalmente soggetto e oggetto.¹⁸

3.1.1. *La glossa malbergica touuerphe*

Nel mezzo del *si quis* del *Pactus legis Salicae* che stabiliva in modo immediato un rapporto di corrispondenza tra offesa e pena¹⁹ compaiono anche termini germanici in forma di glosse malbergiche, appartenenti al linguaggio procedurale.²⁰ Tra questi anche un composto che indica la magia come "dazione di un veleno" (*herbas dederit*): *thouuerphe*, dalle tante varianti quante sono più o meno le ricorrenze e i manoscritti. Si tratta di aat. *zoubar*, da confrontare con mbt., mned. *tover*, aisl. *taufr* 'magia', ags. *teafor* 'mistura, balsamo, pozione', che traduce il lat. *divinatio, incantatio, maleficium, sacrilegium*, e indica sia il mezzo che l'azione e anche l'effetto.²¹

Problematica l'interpretazione della seconda parte della glossa, e nessu-

¹⁷ Una tecnica magica che ricorre già in fonti antichissime. Come nella serie di Maqlû (Mesopotamia, primo millennio) che si compone di 10 tavolette cuneiformi ed è un rituale di controstregoneria. Nella I,9 si legge: "Con nodi /legature magiche mi hanno riempito la bocca". Vedi Abusch 2016, 283.

¹⁸ Mistry 2016, 207-237.

¹⁹ Daube 1956; sulla struttura sintattica delle prime leggi anche Ong 1982, 31-57.

²⁰ Fruscione 2016.

²¹ Secondo Kluge 1989, 806, l'etimologia è sconosciuta. Secondo altri sarebbe un sostantivo verbale da un verbo del "fare, preparare" (got. *Taujan*, aat. *zowjan*), così Niederhellmann 1983, 94; altri ancora (Battaglia 2008, 216) lo riconducono ad una rad. ie. *dap-, da cui lat. *daps damnum*, ma anche aat. *zebar* 'Opfer'.

na delle varianti (*trouuerpo, trouuer, thoouerpota, thoouerpo, touerbus*) può contribuire ad un'interpretazione più certa.²² Kern la considera una storpiatura di *gefo* da parte di copisti ormai incapaci di comprenderne il significato²³ mentre secondo van Helten²⁴ è conseguenza di una caduta precoce di *ge-*. Dando per buona l'interpretazione della seconda parte come *gefo*, la glossa sarebbe corrispondente a ted. *Zaubergabe* e il termine sarebbe forma parallela di aat. *eittargeba* 'veleno'.²⁵

3.2. Lex Ripuaria

La commistione tra veneficio e maleficio è confermata anche dalla legge dei Franchi Ripuari del VII secolo. Al titolo 83 (*De maleficio*) si legge:

Si quis baro seu mulier ribuaria per <venenum seu per aliquod> maleficium aliquem perdiderit <aut interfecerit>, weregildum conponat.

Si autem mortuos non fuerit, et varietatem seu debilitatem probabile ex hoc in corpus habuerit, C solidos culpabilis iudicetur, aut cum VI iurit.²⁶

Qui la pena pecuniaria viene espressa dal termine germanico *weregildum*, il cui ammontare dipende dal ceto sociale e serve a dare soddisfazione al posto della vendetta di sangue. Una variante da rilevare rispetto al *pactus* dei Franchi Sali si ha in caso di danno fisico che escluda la morte. In tal caso si offrono due possibilità per raddrizzare il malfatto, la pena pecuniaria o il giuramento di sei sacramentali. Il fatto che nelle più antiche leggi il giuramento costituisca un'alternativa alla compensazione materiale conferma che esso ai suoi inizi è un passaggio concreto verso il ripristino di una situazione di diritto.²⁷

²² Tale incertezza riflette i limiti della ricerca espressa da Elmar Seebold (2007, 3) che nell'introduzione a un progetto di analisi delle Glosse Malbergiche scrive: "Die hier geplanten Ausführungen sollen an größeren Materialgruppen zeigen, wieviel gesicherte Ergebnisse eine moderne Analyse erbringen kann – und in wievielen Fällen wir besser zugeben, dass die Bemühungen zu keinem ausreichenden und annehmbaren Ziel führen".

²³ Kern 1880, 485. La grande difficoltà di comprensione delle glosse malbergiche da parte dei copisti è confermata anche da Schmidt-Wiegand 2001, 185.

²⁴ van Helten 1900, 367.

²⁵ Niederhellmann 1983, 94.

²⁶ Beyeler, Buchner 1954, 131.

²⁷ Questa doppia possibilità per riparare un'offesa non è nuova alle prime leggi di una popolazione germanica. Per essa nelle prime leggi del Kent del VII sec. si è coniata anche una formula: *an feo oððe an aþe* "con beni o con giuramento". Vedi Fruscione 2005, 21.

4. *Influenza romano-cristiana e pena di morte: le leggi dei Visigoti*

Le forme di risoluzione dei conflitti quali il guidrigildo o il giuramento non sono presenti in una legge influenzata dal diritto romano, la *lex Visigothorum*, del VI secolo, che recepisce tre delle 12 costituzioni di Teodosiano dedicate a divinazione e magia.²⁸

Nelle leggi dei Visigoti il tema della magia è trattato in maniera articolata nel titolo 2 (*De maleficis et consulentibus eos adque veneficis*) del libro VI. In esso il riferimento penale e il *modus exponendi* sono influenzati dalla legislazione romana; alla paratassi delle altre *leges* si sostituisce l'ipotassi e il testo acquisisce enfasi tramite l'inserimento di aggettivi. Nonostante il tono sia quello di chi vuole imporre un'ideologia, il compilatore visigoto, pur assorbendo istanze dal diritto romano, le sintetizza in un'ottica non altrettanto religiosa o etica, ma pratica: la magia è proibita in quanto volontariamente dannosa e in ciò assimilabile al concetto di ingiuria.

4.1. *Si ingenuus de salute vel morte hominis vaticinatores consulat*

Come si intende dal paragrafo iniziale che vieta la consultazione di aruspici, i Visigoti sulla base del diritto romano stigmatizzano la magia come riprovevole non solo in quanto lesiva dell'integrità fisica ma in quanto avrebbe potuto comportare l'esercizio di un potere autonomo occulto, e perciò sfuggente all'autorità centrale.²⁹

Qui de salute vel morte principis vel cuiuscumque hominis ariolos, aruspices vel vaticinatores consulit, una cum his, qui responderint consulentibus, ingenui siquidem flagellis cesi cum rebus omnibus fisco servituri adsociantur, aut a rege cui iusserit donati perpetuo servitio addicantur. [...]³⁰

4.2. *De veneficis*

Nel paragrafo che segue, come nel diritto romano, il veneficio in senso lato, ovvero la mera preparazione e somministrazione del veleno è equiparato al veneficio vero e proprio. Diversamente dalle altre *leges* la legislazione

²⁸ Di Cintio 2013, 131-143.

²⁹ Di Cintio 2013, 104; sul tema ora: Herbers, Lehner 2021.

³⁰ Zeumer 1902, 257.

visigota commina la pena capitale in caso di morte della vittima.³¹ Al tono neutro ed essenziale delle altre leggi germaniche si contrappone lo stile retorico del legislatore visigoto che indulge nella descrizione delle pene fisiche inflitte.

Diversorum criminum noxii diverso sunt penarum genere feriendi. Hac primum ingenuos sive servos veneficos, id est, qui venena conficiunt, ista protinus vindicta sequatur, ut, venenatam potionem alicui dederint, et qui biberit mortuus exinde fuerit, illi etiam continuo subpliciis subditi morte sunt turpissima puniendi. Si certe poculo veneni potatus evaserit, in eius potestate tradendus est ille, qui dedit, ut de eo facere quod voluerit sui sit incunctanter arbitrii.³²

4.3. De maleficis et consulentibus eos: *sugli inmissores tempestatum*

Nel paragrafo *De maleficis et consulentibus eos* si legifera contro chi ha commesso un maleficio contro uomini, animali, o beni naturali come vigne o messi. L'affastellamento delle offese, la mancanza di forme restitutive per le vittime, il riferimento all'applicazione di un generico taglione e di pene corporali caratterizzano questo paragrafo che introduce il tema degli *inmissores tempestatum* e, unico, fa riferimento a forme di idolatria diabolica:³³

Malefici vel inmissores tempestatum, qui quibusdam incantationibus grandines in vineis messibusque inmittere peribentur, vel hii, qui per invocationem demonum mentes hominum turbant, seu qui nocturna sacrificia demonibus celebrant eosque per invocationes nefarias nequiter invocant, ubicumque a iudice vel actore sive procuratore loci repperiti fuerint vel detecti, ducentenis flagellis publice verbereuntur et decalvati deformiter decem convicinas possessiones circuire cogantur inviti, ut eorum alii corrigantur exemplis. [...] ³⁴

Il fenomeno degli *inmissores tempestatum* va letto alla luce della letteratura ecclesiastica in quanto rivela aspetti peculiari del fenomeno magico nel

³¹ Il capitolo delle leggi visigote sull'*avorsum* provocato da una pozione è uno dei paragrafi di una vasta legislazione sul tema aborto, condannato con la pena di morte; vedi Zubin 2016, 93-125.

³² Zeumer 1902, 259.

³³ Dutton 1995.

³⁴ Zeumer 1902, 259-260.

primo Medioevo: il rapporto tra credenze popolari precristiane e cristianizzazione e tra legislazione centrale e pratiche locali.³⁵

La condanna dei tempestari è un motivo che ricorre in varie fonti ecclesiastiche.³⁶ Altrettante fonti suggeriscono l'esistenza di *defensores*, individui con la capacità di allontanare i temporali dai campi, a cui i contadini davano in cambio parte del loro raccolto.³⁷

La Chiesa non si limitò a una critica di queste pratiche magiche,³⁸ ma si appropriò delle credenze popolari riguardanti i fenomeni meteorologici adattandoli al sistema del pensiero cristiano. Numerose Vite di Santi narravano della loro facoltà di dominare gli elementi naturali per favorire le coltivazioni,³⁹ e nella liturgia furono introdotti elementi per ottenere il favore del Signore per chiamare la pioggia o allontanare le tempeste.⁴⁰

L'idea che pagano e cristiano,⁴¹ magia e religione⁴² siano da considerare come poli opposti è contraddetta dall'osservazione delle fonti dell'Alto Medioevo che mostrano piuttosto un sincretismo funzionale e processi di fusione all'interno di un ambiente sociale che da una parte è in continua trasformazione e dall'altra rimane attaccato a pratiche del passato sopravvissute alla conversione ma ormai prive di significato religioso.⁴³

5. *L'accusa di stregoneria*

Diverse legislazioni romano-germaniche emesse nell'Alto Medioevo contengono paragrafi che regolano l'accusa infondata di stregoneria: la prevalenza di questi paragrafi su quelli che sanzionano delitti collegati a pratiche magiche nella legislazione dei Franchi Sali, degli Alamanni e dei

³⁵ Peters 2002, 185-186.

³⁶ Ad esempio nel *De correctione rusticorum* di Martino da Braga (VI sec.); questa ed altre fonti sono analizzate da Jiménez Sánchez 2017a.

³⁷ Così due fonti epigrafiche che si fanno risalire ad un periodo tra l'VIII e il X sec. Questa testimonianza trova una conferma nel *De grandine et tonitruis* di Agobardo vescovo di Lione (nato in Catalogna verso il 779). Vedi Jiménez Sánchez 2017b, 625.

³⁸ Peters 2012, 194.

³⁹ Fructuoso de Braga ad esempio, in: Jiménez Sánchez 2017b, 637.

⁴⁰ Lecouteux 1998, 155-158.

⁴¹ Mériaux 2010.

⁴² Hen 2015, 198 parla di "thin Line between Magic and Religion".

⁴³ Fruscione 2008, 405-406.

Longobardi,⁴⁴ mostra che il legislatore del tempo considerava tali accuse socialmente più dannose della stregoneria stessa.

Nelle *leges* le donne sono citate più raramente degli uomini, ma i capitoli in cui si accenna alla stregoneria costituiscono un'eccezione. Gli studi di genere sono d'accordo sul fatto che nell'Alto Medioevo le accuse di stregoneria non colpivano le donne in modo particolare.⁴⁵ I due dati non sono in contraddizione. Le accuse di stregoneria rilevate dalle leggi non riguardavano il rapporto tra la donna e l'autorità, erano accuse private e locali, rivolte per questioni di interesse personale e come tali punite. Il fenomeno doveva essere molto diffuso se il legislatore dovette intervenire ripetutamente.

La strega nelle leggi dell'Alto Medioevo è indicata prevalentemente da termini latini che ricorrono in coppia. L'accoppiamento di due parole corrisponde al tentativo di definirne meglio il significato e ridurre il rischio di incomprensione. *Stria* è accompagnata dai termini *meretrice*, *erbaria* e *masca*; di questi tre termini, sicuramente i primi due definivano attributi della strega già nella tradizione antica. Che l'analisi dei termini latini, il cui significato è cambiato nel tempo e nello spazio, sia problematica a causa dell'ambiguità delle fonti, lo ha ben dimostrato Bernadette Filotas, che ne ha intercettati quasi 50 analizzando i relitti pagani e le superstizioni nella letteratura pastorale dell'Alto Medioevo.⁴⁶

All'interno delle leggi saliche sono inseriti tre termini germanici indicanti persone che praticano forme di stregoneria. Due glosse malbergiche femminili, *granderba* e *faras*, indicano la strega nel linguaggio procedurale, mentre *herburgius* indica una figura maschile collegata alla strega ed è un termine della lingua parlata inserito nel testo.

5.1. Pactus legis Salicae 64

De herburgium

Si quis alterum herinburgium clamaverit, hoc est strioportio, aut illum, qui inium portare dicitur, ubi strias coccinant, et non potuerit adprobare, MMD denarios qui faciunt solidos LXII semis culpabilis iudicetur.

Si quis mulierem ingenuam striam clamaverit (aut meretricem) et non potuerit adprobare MMD denarios qui faciunt solidos CLXXXVII et semis culpabilis iudicetur.

⁴⁴ Non evidenziata dalla ricerca, vedi ad esempio Kaufmann 1998, 1617-1618.

⁴⁵ Stratton 2014, 17.

⁴⁶ Filotas 2005, 218-269. Vedi anche Murray 1992, 188.

Si stria hominem commederit et ei fuerit adprobatum, mallobergo granderba, sunt denarii VIIIIM qui faciunt solidos CC culpabilis iudicetur.⁴⁷

Il titolo 64 del *Pactus legis Salicae* è diviso in tre paragrafi:

I primi due paragrafi trattano l'offesa verbale connessa alla stregoneria. Il primo paragrafo stabilisce una pena pecuniaria per chi chiama un uomo *herburgium*. Questa parola germanica, interpretata dal copista come 'colui che trasporta il calderone della strega' (*strioportio*), divide la ricerca.⁴⁸

Il secondo paragrafo regola invece la punizione da comminare a chi accusa una donna di essere una strega (*stria*). L'assimilazione della strega alla prostituta (*meretrix*),⁴⁹ presente anche nell'editto di Rotari (198), è espressa in un unico testimone delle leggi saliche (Codex C6) anche dalla glossa malbergica *faras*, un hapax che dal punto di vista semantico indica la "vagabonda", la "passeggiatrice" e la cui morfologia esprime, secondo Heinrich Tiefenbach, il disprezzo per tali attività: "Erst sekundär sind anscheinend aus Frauenbezeichnungen für verachtete Tätigkeiten solche -s- Suffigierungen [...]".⁵⁰

Il terzo paragrafo regola la punizione da infliggere alla strega che divora un essere umano. Neanche qui compare la pena di morte, ma una punizione pecuniaria di 200 solidi di poco superiore a quella imposta per la falsa accusa di stregoneria (187 solidi).⁵¹ La glossa malbergica *granderba* è termine germanico per indicare la strega: il primo elemento si può confrontare con an. *grand* 'danno, malattia', ags. *grondor* 'cattiveria' (vedi il nome Grendel

⁴⁷ Eckhardt 1962, 230-231.

⁴⁸ Secondo i più *herburgium* è riportabile ad an. *hverr*, ags. *hwer* 'pentolone' + salfr. *burjo*, *buro* 'colui che porta' (Niederhellmann 1983, 115-116; Schmidt-Wiegand 1992, 584). Secondo Seebold 2012, 337, il termine indica 'il figlio della strega': la prima parte da confrontare con mbt. *herje*, *herge* 'prostituta', da cui il composto mbt. *hirsenson*, *herenson* 'figlio del diavolo'; e la seconda parte si potrebbe confrontare con got. *baur*, an. *burr*, ags. *byre* 'figlio'. L'accusa sarebbe quella di essere figlio del demonio in quanto figlio di una strega.

⁴⁹ Accostamento presente anche nella cultura romana: Stratton 2007, 71-105.

⁵⁰ Tiefenbach 1997, 276. L'hapax salico si può accostare sia al mat. *varnde vrouwen*, e al mned., *varende wiif*, *varende vrouwe* 'vagabonda, randagia, puttana', che al mat. *nahtvar* 'colei che gira di notte, strega'. Secondo Niederhellmann 1983, l'accostamento tra la strega e l'"andare" si riferisce sia al vagare alla ricerca di erbe che agli spostamenti per esercitare l'arte divinatoria e le guarigioni.

⁵¹ "Schwieriger mit dem christlichen Charakter der Kodifikation ist eine Bestimmung in Titel 64 (C) in Einklang zu bringen. Vielleicht darf man aber nicht von einem Widerspruch zwischen einer rudimentären Christianisierung und einem weiterlebenden Hexenglauben ausgehen. Diese Vorstellungen waren für die Bevölkerung im fränkischen Teilreich Chilperichs vermutlich ohne weiteres kompatibel" (Ubl 2016, 126).

mentre il secondo è stato interpretato da Mauritz Gysseling come sviluppo da ie. *(s)ker- ‘corvo, cornacchia’, riferentesi alla capacità della strega di trasformarsi in uccello.⁵² Da un punto di vista semantico questa interpretazione troverebbe una conferma in altre aree linguistiche in cui il termine indicante la strega è collegato etimologicamente al nome di un uccello, così il lat. *stria* (derivato come variante popolare da *strix* ‘civetta’) e il celtico irlandese *badb/bodb* che indica sia la ‘cornacchia’ che la ‘strega’.⁵³

5.2. Pactus legis Alamannorum 13,1

Si femina aliam stria aut erbaria clamaverit, sive rixam sive absente hoc dixit, solvat sol. XII.⁵⁴

La preoccupazione del legislatore salico è condivisa dal compilatore alamanico (prima metà del VII secolo). Il reato di colei che accusa una donna di essere una strega (chiamata *stria* oppure *erbaria*)⁵⁵ è anche qui punito con una sanzione restitutiva. Significativa la sequenza: il titolo che segue (13,2) della stessa legge sanziona l’offesa da parte di una donna nei confronti di un uomo di essere *subdolo* (*Si femina barone extra rixa subdolo clamaverit, solvat sol. XII aut cum XII medicus electus iuret maritus ipsius*).⁵⁶ Le due calunnie toccano aspetti parimenti infamanti poiché sottintendono dissimulazione e segretezza.

Per il legislatore dell’Alto Medioevo, sia chi esercita la magia che chi è *subdolo* è difficilmente prevedibile e governabile e questo è considerato un aggravante in un sistema in cui i conflitti si risolvevano con regole aperte tra le due parti.⁵⁷

⁵² Gysseling 1976, 75.

⁵³ Vedi Niederhellmann 1983, 111.

⁵⁴ Lehmann, Eckhardt 1926, 24.

⁵⁵ Sull’equiparazione *stria* ad *erbaria* vedi Niederhellmann 1983, 114-115. La conoscenza delle erbe, strumento di guarigione ma anche di morte, conferiva alla strega un potere che era considerato una minaccia.

⁵⁶ Müller 2017, 289.

⁵⁷ Althoff 2008, 19-20; Siems 2002, 85-86; Wesel 1977, 44. La questione dei delitti *in absconse* nell’Alto Medioevo è un *topos* della ricerca tedesca che tra la fine del 1800 e l’inizio del 1900 costruisce la teoria del *Meinwerk* (delitto infamante) basato sulla segretezza (*Heimlichkeit*). Brunner (1892, 558) scrive: “Ein Merkmal der niedrigen Gesinnung, durch die das Meinwerk sich kennzeichnete, sah man in der Heimlichkeit [...] Bestimmten Missetaten war die Heimlichkeit wesentlich; sie qualifizierte den Mord, Diebstahl, Mordbrand und die Zau-

5.3. *Le accuse di stregoneria nell'Editto di Rotari 197 e 198*⁵⁸

Che nelle *leges* l'intento del legislatore sia volto a frenare le calunnie di stregoneria, evidentemente molto diffuse, è infine confermato dalle leggi longobarde.⁵⁹ Ed è la loquacità del legislatore longobardo a svelare le ragioni di tali accuse nei paragrafi 197 e 198, che trattano il “crimine nefando”, ovvero la falsa accusa ad una donna di essere una strega.

Il capitolo 197 chiarisce al marito che accusa la moglie di stregoneria che non può impossessarsi dei beni della donna ricevuti con l'acquisizione del mundio. Per evitare la dispersione del patrimonio familiare, nel diritto matrimoniale longobardo il mundio sulla moglie non era un diritto acquisito in maniera irrevocabile dal marito. In conseguenza di una tale denuncia, se infondata, la donna torna sotto la protezione degli uomini della sua famiglia, o, in mancanza di questi, il re diventa il possessore del mundio. Alla base di questo paragrafo c'è quindi il mantenimento della proprietà familiare, uno dei capisaldi del diritto longobardo.

Il capitolo 198 regola il caso della donna accusata di stregoneria da qualcuno che non ne possiede il mundio; nel caso il colpevole di offesa sia disposto a ritirare la calunnia e ad ammettere di averlo fatto in un momento di rabbia, può discolarsi con l'aiuto di 12 sacramentali e risarcire l'offesa con la notevole somma di 20 solidi. Nel caso il colpevole non sia disposto a ritrattare l'accusa, si pone l'eventualità che la donna possa essere riconosciuta colpevole tramite

berei”. Vedi anche Fröhling 2014, 35.

⁵⁸ “197 De crimen nefandum. Si quis mundium de puella libera aut muliere habens eamque strigam, quod est mascam, clamaverit, excepto pater aut frater, ammittat mundium ipsius, ut supra, et illa potestatem habeat vult ad parentes, vult ad curtem regis cum rebus suis propriis se commendare, qui mundium eius in potestatem debeat habere. Et si vir ille negaverit, hoc crimen non dixisset, liceat eum se pureficare et mundium, sicut habuit, habere, si se pureficaverit.

198 De crimen in puella iniectum, qui in alterius mundium est. Si quis puellam aut mulierem liberam, qui in alterius mundium est fornecariam aut histrigam clamaverit et pulsatus penitens manifestaverit, per furorem dixisset, tunc praeveat sacramentum cum duodecim sacramentalis suos, quod per furorem ipso nefando crimen dixisset, nam non de certa causa cognovisset. Tunc pro ipso vanum inproperii sermonem, quod non convenerat loqui, componat solidos viginti, et amplius non calumniatur. Nam si perseveraverit et dixerit, se posse probare, tunc per camphionem causa ipsa, id est per pugnam, ad dei iudicium decernatur. Et si provatum fuerit, illa sit culpabilis, sicut in hoc edictum legitur. Et si ille, qui crimen misit, provare non potuerit wergild ipsius mulieris secundum nationem suam componere compellatur.” (Bluhme 1868, 48).

⁵⁹ Müller 2017, 172-175.

un duello tra l'accusatore e un rappresentante della famiglia della donna. Nel caso di sconfitta dell'accusatore, questi deve corrispondere alla donna una cifra pari al guidrigildo della stessa. La ricerca del diritto viene qui affrontata con tre istituti dei diritti germanici: il guidrigildo, il duello e il giuramento.

L'entità della somma di riparazione esprime la gravità dell'offesa, sanzionata tra i Longobardi con 20 solidi, e può essere confrontata con l'offesa rivolta ad un uomo di essere vigliacco (*arga*).⁶⁰ Tale offesa viene sanzionata nel c. 381 con una cifra inferiore, 12 solidi, pur essendo un'accusa particolarmente infamante in una cultura a connotazione militare come la longobarda, in cui la sopravvivenza del gruppo dipendeva anche dal coraggio degli uomini.⁶¹

5.4. L'autorità del legislatore longobardo: Rotari 376⁶²

Il capitolo 376 legifera sull'omicidio di un'aldia o di un'ancella altrui ritenuta una *striga* (*quod est masca*).⁶³ Questo paragrafo interviene a protezione della proprietà dell'uomo libero e non a caso è preceduto da un capitolo, il 375, che tratta il diritto di proprietà.

Il 376 è soprattutto uno di quei capitoli in cui il legislatore, oltre a legiferare, esprime opinioni che aiutano lo storico ad orientarsi. Il legislatore afferma di non credere al fatto che una donna possa mangiare un essere umano "dall'interno"; prende le distanze da tali accuse e mostra tutta la sua incredulità di fronte ad un fenomeno che la ragione cristiana non accetta.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Santoro 2002, in un'ampia analisi del termine *arga* fa risalire i vari significati ad una radice del 'tremare', 'tremare di paura'. Anche Francovich Onesti 2013, 61-62.

⁶¹ Müller 2017, 288-289.

⁶² "Nullus presumat aldiam alienam aut ancillam quasi strigam, quem dicunt mascam, occidere, quod christianis mentibus nullatenus credendum est nec possibilem, ut mulier hominem vivum intrinsecus possit comedere. Si quis de cetero talem inleceatam et nefandam rem penetrare presumpserit: si aldiam occiderit, conponat pro statum eius solidos LX, et insuper addat pro culpa solidos centum, medietatem regi et medietatem cuius aldia fuerit. Si autem ancilla fuerit, conponat pro statum eius, ut supra constitutum est, si ministriales aut rusticana fuerit; et insuper pro culpa solidos LX, medietatem regi et medietatem cuius ancilla fuerit. Si vero iudex huic opus malum penetrare iusserit, ipse de suo proprio pena suprascripta conponat." (Bluhme 1868, 87).

⁶³ I capitoli 197 e 376 dell'Editto di Rotari attestano la voce *masca*, usata nella formula *strigam, quod est mascam*. I due termini sono interni al latino e *masca* è da ritenersi un prestito dal latino usato dal longobardo. Vedi Niederhellmann 1983, 112-114.

⁶⁴ Il legislatore può riferirsi alle *striges* di tradizione latina, che si nutrivano di carne umana, e questo paragrafo sembra essere piuttosto una condanna delle tradizioni precristiane. L'indicazione della strega come divoratrice di uomini pare richiamarsi all'idea di *striga-strix*

Liquidata così la questione stregoneria, egli passa a quello che lo interessa di più: la sanzione e l'affermazione dell'autorità regale. Il legislatore stabilisce che la pena da comminare sia una somma da devolvere in parti uguali tra il proprietario della donna (risarcimento) e il re (pena). Nella somma destinata al re si intravedono i primordi di un diritto penale che spesso si accompagna all'affermazione dell'autorità regale.⁶⁵ Rivelatrice a questo proposito l'ultima parte del paragrafo in cui si prevede la possibilità che a uccidere la donna sia un giudice. Anch'egli è sottoposto alla stessa sanzione: non c'è spazio per azioni individuali e giudizi sommari in un momento in cui il re e il suo legislatore aspirano ad ergersi al di sopra dei giudizi locali.

6. *Liutprando: nuovi aspetti della regolamentazione della magia tra i Longobardi*

Le leggi di Liutprando (727), in cui la cristianizzazione ha modellato in parte la regolamentazione dei comportamenti, aggiungono una nuova prospettiva all'idea del magico presso i Longobardi. Nel paragrafo 84⁶⁶ è vietata la consultazione di aruspici e l'adorazione di alberi e fonti – offesa da pagare al re con una somma pari a metà del guidrigildo e da spiare secondo le disposizioni dei Canoni. La maggiore attenzione per comportamenti anticristiani da parte di Liutprando apre una finestra su quelle pratiche magiche, che apparentemente non sono offensive verso cose o persone, ma lo sono verso l'autorità regale, la quale è cristiana e non ammette poteri che sfuggano al suo controllo. Pur nelle somiglianze della materia, il tono di Liutprando nel regolare il tema degli aruspici e delle credenze pagane è più sobrio di quello del legislatore visigoto, e soprattutto esprime una maggiore abilità nella regolamentazione dei comportamenti. Prova ne è il paragrafo che segue.

Il paragrafo 85 può essere interpretato come atto di implementazione del paragrafo precedente; in esso il legislatore coinvolge i suoi ufficiali (giudici, sculdasci, saltari e decani) nella ricerca e condanna degli indovini e stabilisce

come mangiatrice di bambini e di cadaveri anche se *l'intrinsecus* del testo induce a pensare a forme di possessione (divoramento dall'interno). Vedi Stratton 2007, 71-105.

⁶⁵ Fruscione 2003, 122-129.

⁶⁶ “Si quis timoris Dei immemor ad ariolus aut ad ariolas pro aruspiciis aut quilibuscumque responsis ab ipsis accipiendis ambolaverit, componat in sacro palatio medietatem pretii sui, sicut adpretiatus fuerit, tamquam si eum aliquis occisisset, et insuper agat penitentiam secundum canonum instituta. Simili modo et qui ad arbore quam rustici sanctivum vocant, atque ad fontanas adoraverit, aut sacrilegium vel incantationis fecerit, similiter medietatem pretii sui componat in sacro palatio.” (Bluhme 1868, 141-142).

pene pecuniarie pari al loro guidrigildo per coloro che si sottraggono a tali compiti.⁶⁷

7. *Osservazioni riassuntive su alcune specificità della trattazione della magia nelle leges, o: delle priorità del legislatore altomedioevale*

Le *leges* trasmettono l'idea di una certa essenzialità del legislatore riguardo all'argomento magia: privo dello specchio deformante dell'ideologia cristiana, il legislatore infatti si preoccupa soprattutto di frenare l'isteria e la calunnia, e di smascherare gli interessi che possono spingere taluni a rivolgere accuse di stregoneria.

In materia di magia l'influenza del diritto romano-cristiano sulle *leges* non è preponderante e proprio per questo in esse l'accusa infondata di stregoneria è più perseguita della stregoneria stessa. La calunnia costituisce uno dei peggiori reati per la convivenza di un piccolo gruppo sociale che regola apertamente i propri conflitti, con o senza violenza. L'esistenza di pulsioni negative era una minaccia per l'indispensabile solidarietà nelle relazioni famigliari e di vicinanza.

Il *crimen nefandum* secondo i titoli 197 e 198 di Rotari è proprio quello di chi offende una donna dandole della strega. Mentre l'accanimento contro la donna come strega è estraneo alla mentalità del legislatore dell'Alto Medioevo, le calunnie collegate alla stregoneria sono prese molto sul serio perché scardinano gli assetti famigliari: il valore della donna nelle transazioni matrimoniali era molto alto e l'accusa di stregoneria danneggiava tutto il gruppo perché rischiava di disperdere il patrimonio famigliare. Proprio per limitare questo rischio, nel diritto longobardo il marito che accusa la moglie ingiustamente di stregoneria perde il mundio sulla donna, e con esso il controllo dei beni, che torna ai parenti maschi della famiglia di origine.

Al contrario della legislazione tardo romana e cristiana che condannava ogni tipo di magia, nelle *leges* si regolamentano solo quelle forme di magia che provocano la morte o danni di vario tipo a uomini e cose. Il termine germanico inserito in queste leggi che plasticamente indica questo tipo di offese materiali è *aranscarti*, il 'danno al raccolto' delle leggi baiuware.

⁶⁷ "Si quis iudex aut sculdais atque saltarius vel deganus de loco, ubi arioli aut ariolas fuerit, neglexerit amodo in tres menses eos exquirere et invenire, et per alios homines inventi fuerent, tunc componat unusquisque de locum suum mediaetatem pretii sui, sicut supra legitur [...]" (*ibid.*, 142-143).

Nei regni romano-germanici la magia quindi non è repressa come forma di eresia, di superstizione pagana, ma sanzionata in quelle forme che provocano offesa materiale. L'unica eccezione è rappresentata dalle leggi di influenza romano-cristiana dei Visigoti e del longobardo Liutprando. Ma mentre nelle prime il legislatore è animato da un impeto da caccia alle streghe e punta sulle punizioni corporali e sulla pena di morte, il secondo è guidato dall'esigenza di sanzionare condotte lesive del suo potere temporale in quanto oscure e difficilmente controllabili. E lo fa nelle sue leggi in un modo sobrio sia da un punto di vista stilistico che sanzionatorio.

Le linee guida delle *leges* a proposito della materia magica sono improntate a criteri di praticità, di facile fruibilità e di attualità del diritto. L'analisi rivela che il legislatore nell'Alto Medioevo europeo ha bisogno di vederci chiaro, e legifera facendo uso degli istituti che gli vengono dalla tradizione. Inoltre, l'osservazione dall'esterno, il punto di vista cosiddetto *etic* delle scienze sociali e antropologiche, ci permette di dire che il legislatore dell'Alto Medioevo, proprio mentre regola le questioni di magia, fa uso di alcune istituzioni basate su una mentalità magica. Il giuramento, il duello, l'ordalia, sono vissuti concretamente come affermazione del diritto: la parola giusta e il gesto giusto determinano e rigenerano in maniera immediata il diritto.

La regolamentazione della magia nei regni romano-germanici riflette i bisogni di una società fragile, in cui il mantenimento della popolazione e della proprietà sono al primo posto, e svela concetti di colpa e di pena improntati su principi di sobrio e razionale utilitarismo. Ma i capitoli dedicati alla magia lasciano anche intravedere i barlumi di un'autorità regale che miratamente informa a sua misura i delitti e le pene: al di là dei danni materiali prodotti dalla magia ai suoi sottoposti, questa autorità si sente offesa dalla magia, strumento di potere e di controllo sociale. Di conseguenza, punendo maghi e indovini, Liutprando rivendica per sé *medietate pretii sui*.

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OMAR KHALAF

ENCYCLOPAEDIC PRESERVATION
OR PERFORMATIVE ACT?
THE TRANSLATION OF LATIN CHARMS
IN THE OLD ENGLISH *MEDICINA DE QUADRUPEDIBUS*

The Old English translation of the *Medicina de quadrupedibus* belongs to the corpus of early medieval English *materia medica*. This small treatise brings together remedies for various diseases taken from parts of animals, often to be applied along with uttering a series of charms. Traditionally deemed as devoid of the originality that characterizes genuinely insular works of the same type as the *Lacnunga* and Bald's *Læceboc*, *Medicina de quadrupedibus* has not aroused particular interest among critics of early English medical lore, nor have the charms contained in it been object of close investigations. Nevertheless, the translation of these charms from Latin raises important linguistic and stylistic questions with regard to their reception and potential use. In this article I argue that the linguistic and rhythmic elements introduced in the Old English versions are recognizable as typically oral-formulaic and, consequently, suggest a rewriting based on their possible oral performance.

Introduction

Magic was a fundamental aspect of medieval European folklore, even though secular and ecclesiastic authorities fiercely condemned and tried to suppress it.¹ In the form of remedies for bodily or mental illnesses, magic formulae, often accompanied by natural and handcrafted amulets, were constantly employed along with orthodox Christian practices. The latter never succeeded in totally replacing what the Church Fathers labelled as demons' interventions aimed at driving humanity to eternal damnation. In his *Oratio ad Graecos* (ch. XVI-XVIII), Tatian strongly accuses those who put their trust in the power of herbs, amulets and other practices, since these elements do not have power in themselves, but are deceiving instruments in the hands of infernal creatures. Saint Augustine expresses a similar concern in his *De civitate Dei* (VIII, 18-19), even though he is here compelled to admit that some natural elements in fact have the power to heal from certain maladies or perform inexplicable wonders.

¹ The number of publications upon this subject is too vast to try to provide an overview here. Among the many, see Beccaria 1956. For the early English period, see Cameron 1993 and D'Aronco 1988.

As Kieckhefer pointed out,² the distinction between demonic and natural magic stemmed from a typically Christian interpretation of the world, whose sole driving force was to be found in Divine Providence. All that was conceived as an alternative to the believer's prayers and addresses to God was seen as the work of the devil and thus liable to condemnation. However, it is impossible to draw a distinct dividing line between Christian worship and less orthodox practices, which relied on the unknown power of particular herbs, amulets and spells. These two realities were inextricably interwoven and, sometimes, even complementary.

This mixture of mistrust and pious concern characterises the Christian approach to magic throughout the whole Middle Ages. The sheer number of textual references to magical practices testifies to a huge circulation of this matter, despite the continuous efforts by religious and secular authorities to impede its proliferation. Obviously, natural magic could spread more easily when hidden in pseudo-scientific texts, such as herbaries, as well as in collections of medical recipes and remedies. Early medieval England saw a widespread circulation of such texts. Some were original compositions derived from various sources, such as the *Lacnunga* and Bald's *Læceboc*. Others were translations from Latin texts, such as the Old English *Herbarium* (henceforth *OEH*). *OEH* is extant in four manuscripts, all of which are accompanied by a small treatise compiled from several Latin sources and known as *Medicina de quadrupedibus* (henceforth *MQ*). The scholarly interest in *OEH* contrasts with the general critical neglect of *MQ*, which has always been considered an extension of its more fortunate companion. The only critical edition of *MQ* appears next to *OEH* in both Cockayne and de Vriend's editions,³ while it has not been included in the more recent modern English translation of *OEH* by Anne Van Arsdall.⁴

1. *MQ and its manuscript tradition*

Medicina de quadrupedibus is the title attributed by Cockayne, the first English editor of this treatise.⁵ The text results from a conflation of three distinct works – the anonymous *Liber de taxone*, a small text on the therapeutic

² Kieckhefer 2014.

³ Cockayne 1864-66, I and De Vriend 1984.

⁴ Van Arsdall 2002.

⁵ Cockayne 1864-66, I.

powers of the mulberry commonly known as *De moro*,⁶ and a version of the *Liber medicinae ex animalibus*, traditionally attributed to Sextus Placitus.⁷ In all extant Latin manuscripts these texts are found next to other medical treatises, especially *De herba vettonica liber*, *Herbarium Apulei*, and pseudo-Dioscorides's *Liber medicinae ex herbis femininis*,⁸ which, in the Old English version, together form *OEH*. The compilation as a whole is nowadays generally referred to as the "Herbarium-complex".⁹

As a matter of fact, *MQ* does not consistently deal with the *materia medica*. In particular, the *Liber de taxone* takes the form of a letter written by Pharaoh Idpartus for Emperor Octavian, in which body parts of a badger are said to be useful as amulets against storms, evil people, misfortune, and bad luck in battle. The other two texts provide remedies for widely diverse diseases: the treatise on the mulberry for various kinds of bleeding and the *Liber de medicinae ex animalibus* for warts, oversleeping, blindness, pregnancy, etc.

MQ appears attached to *OEH* in all the four extant manuscripts:¹⁰ London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius C. iii (V), Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton 76 (B), London, BL, Harley 585 (H) and London, BL, Harley 6258B (O). A collation of the manuscripts reveals that VB and H constitute two distinct branches of the same tradition. O, written a century later, derives from the same *stemma codicum*. Both Cockayne and De Vriend chose V as base-text for their editions as its spelling is closer to the eleventh-century West Saxon standard.¹¹ If De Vriend is correct in dating the translation of the Herbarium-complex to the eighth century, we should conclude that the

⁶ Despite the new title provided to the text by Rodríguez 2009, *Ad profluvia sanguinis remedia tria*, I will continue referring to it as *De moro*, in order not to engender confusion with the previous studies.

⁷ For a description of the origin and circulation of these texts, De Vriend 1984, lxii-lxvi. For *De taxone*, see Schultze 2002, 106. For the *MQ* see also Keil 2004, 1246-1248 and Santos Paz 2009, 121-146.

⁸ See Beccaria 1956, 33 and Del Mastro *et al.* 2011, 23.

⁹ See D'Aronco 1988, 19. On the circulation of the Herbarium-complex in medieval Europe, see the census of manuscripts in Beccaria 1956. Cf. De Vriend 1984, I, note 1. No clues are available concerning the circulation of the Latin *Herbarium* in early medieval England, although "it seems to have been known" according to Cameron 1993, 32.

¹⁰ The list follows the order and taxonomy proposed in De Vriend 1984.

¹¹ Cockayne 1864-66, I, lxxvii; De Vriend 1984, xliv.

compilation began to be circulated very early in English monastic libraries and *scriptoria*,¹² probably starting from somewhere in Anglia.¹³

Scholarly interest in botanical terms and their treatment in the Herbarium-complex has resulted into an overall lack of attention for the presence of charms in the collection. The purpose of this paper is to shed light on the few but interesting elements of magic that can be discerned in *MQ*. In particular, three charms, all of them contained in the first part of this work, will be analysed in terms of their relationship with their Latin source. It will be determined whether the translator (and the scribes) considered these charms to have no evocative power and recorded them as mere encyclopaedic records, or whether they were treated as actual performative acts and, as such, subjected to interventions in their Old English rendering.

2. *The charms in MQ: translating magic and performance*

Marcel Mauss and Henri Hubert described charms as verbal acts “faites dans une langage spécial qui est le langage des dieux, des esprits, de la magie.”¹⁴ Primarily, charms must be effective in their performative function, i.e., in the implicit relationship they establish with an action to be taken at the same time of their verbal utterance. Austin introduced the concept of “illocutionary act”, which refers to the act of uttering rather than the content of the utterance itself (“locutionary act”). The performance of an illocutionary act determines the production of what he called “conventional consequences”, such as commitments, obligations, or promises.¹⁵ These features are also intrinsic in the oral utterance of charms: their goal is to provide an incantation or an amulet endowed with portentous curative or protective virtues, and, as such, they involve the creation of a set of rhetorical strategies (both locutionary and illocutionary) that depend on the cultural context in which they are created – or, in the case of *MQ*, re-created.

MQ contains three charms: two occur at the very beginning of the first

¹² Cf. Cameron 1993, 25, who refers to contemporary references to medical practices in Aldhelm of Malesbury’s *Enigmata*.

¹³ While an Anglian derivation for *MQ* is most probable on phonetic, lexical and syntactic grounds, these features are only partially shared by *OEH*. See De Vriend 1984, xli-xliii.

¹⁴ Mauss, Hubert 1902-3, 35-36.

¹⁵ Austin 1975, 108-119. A revised description of illocutionary acts is found in Searle 1975 and 1976.

section corresponding to the *Liber de taxone*, while the third is included in the chapter of the treatise on the properties of the mulberry with regard to blood flow. The two former charms share strong similarities in language, structure and content: both are formulaic invocations to God to be performed along with the sacrifice of a badger, from which two amulets are created. The first, obtained from the badger's tooth, protects the bearer from natural calamities or evil people; the second, which uses the power of the animal's right fore foot, assures victory over the enemy. The third charm is a typical example of *voces magicae* or gibberish – a semi-unintelligible string of pseudo-Latin words which is found quite frequently in magic literature and pseudo-medical treatises.¹⁶ While the two former charms have a preventive function, i.e., they protect from possible future calamities or situations, the third is curative and is part of a complex healing process. Each charm is linked to an amulet – a tangible object whose magical power is provided by the invocation associated to it and whose preparation is detailed in the recipes.

Similar charms are found in other Old English medical collections, though those found in *MQ* and *OEH* are not genuinely English but translations from Latin. Scholarly attitude towards this type of charms is generally dismissive. Considering the amuletic remedies in *OEH*, Cameron states that “the *Herbarium* is not an originally English compilation and it is impossible to decide which of its remedies actually entered the English repertory of treatments except where they are found in other Old English contexts as well.”¹⁷ In my view, this interpretation is vitiated by a general prejudicial consideration of translated texts as “second-hand” literature, characterised by a somewhat passive attitude from the translator who assumed the role of a mere recorder of distant, alien relics. A close investigation of the charms in *MQ*, instead, demonstrates that they contain all the typical features of “original” charms, i.e., formulaic elements, repetitions, and invocations which are provided with definite locutionary and illocutionary properties. More interestingly, however, they were not derived from the Latin source but have been added by the translator and, in some cases, even by the copyists.

3.1. *The badger charms*

The two charms with the badger occur in a context that may have sounded rather allusive to an early medieval English reader. The idea of Egypt as a

¹⁶ For an overview of the genre see, among others, Passalis 2012, 7-22.

¹⁷ Cameron 1993, 135.

land of magicians recalled by King Idpartus was well rooted in early medieval English imagery: the challenge posed by the Pharaoh and his priests to Moses and Aaron to turn their rods into serpents as told in Exodus 7:10-12 was certainly familiar to English readers. Quite notorious was the biblical legend of two Egyptian magicians, called Mambres and Iamnes, as recorded in the *Marvels of the East* and the translation of Orosius's *Historiae adversus paganos*.¹⁸ The attribution of a certain degree of *auctoritas* to Idpartus by early copyists might explain the conflation of *De taxone* with *De moro* in some Latin manuscripts,¹⁹ from which the English text derives. Consequently, also the charm contained in the latter text appears as part of the teachings provided by the Egyptian king.

Since they share a number of stylistic and thematic features, these charms are analysed together. They are presented below in their context of execution and are indicated in italics. The Latin passages are given in the footnotes.²⁰

Gefoh þæt deor [the badger] 7 him þonne of cwicum þa teþ ado þa þe he mæste hæbbe 7 þus cwæð: *'On naman þæs ælmihtigan Godes ic þe ofslea 7 þe þine teþ of abeate'*; 7 þonne hy syððan on linenum hrægle bewind, 7 on golde oþþe on seolvre bewyrc, þæt hio ne mægen þinum lice æthrinan. Hafa mid þe, ðonne ne sceððeþ þe ne tungol ne hagol ne strang st`o`rm ne yfel man ne wolberendes awiht, ne þe æniges yfeles onhrine dereþ. Oððe gyf hwæt yfeles bið, hraþe hyt bið tosliten, swa wæs Abdias gyrdels þas witegan.²¹

¹⁸ That version of the *Marvels* extant in London, BL, Cotton Tiberius B. v, ff. 78v-86v. The other texts that mention the two magicians are the Hexateuch, the sermon "On Auguries" by Ælfric, and the anonymous *Life of Saint Margaret*. See Biggs and Hall 1996.

¹⁹ De Vriend 1984, lxiv.

²⁰ Quotations from the Old English version are taken from V. The first two charms in Latin are taken from Brepolis' *Library of Latin Texts* <<http://clt.brepolis.net/ltb/pages/Toc.aspx?ctx=180379>> (last accessed April 9, 2021).

²¹ (Catch the animal and remove its biggest teeth while it is still alive, and say thus: 'In the name of God omnipotent I kill you and knock out your teeth.' Then wrap them up in a linen rail or garment and work them in gold or silver, so that they do not touch your body. Carry them with you and no heavenly body, nor hail, nor strong storm, nor evil man, nor pest, nor the touch of any evil will damage you; if it does, it will soon be torn into pieces, just like the girdle of Obadiah the prophet). The Latin source reads: "Hunc adprehendis et uiuo dentes exime, quos maximos habuerit et ita dicis: In nomine omnipotentis decollo te, et dentes pertundes et de lino brachio ligabis in auro aut in argento, sicut corpus tangat; ita neque sidus neque caniculae tempestas neque homo malus neque pestilentiae neque incursus mali nocere poterunt, et si quid fuerit mali, statim disrumpitur, sicut sonum audias" (Take him [the badger] and take off his biggest teeth while he is still alive and say thus: 'In the name of the Almighty I behead

Nim þonne þone swyþran fot þone furðran ðissum wordum 7 þus cwæþ; ‘*On naman þæs lifigendan Godes ic þe nime to læcedome.*’ Þonne on swa hwylcum geflite oððe gefeohte swa ðu bist sigefæst; 7 þu þæt gedigest gif þu ðone fot mid þe hafast.²²

As much as in the Latin source, the two charms are invocations to God to be uttered – *cwæðan* is a performative verb employed consistently in Old English charms²³ – along with a violent action against the badger. Although the translator did not change the opening found in the source (*in nomine* is regularly rendered with *on nama*), he intervened on the charms to make their formulaic structure more coherent through the use of the same genitive phrase *þæs [...] Godes*, with the sole variation due to the attributes given to the divinity (*ælmihigan* or *lifigendan*). Certain variation from the source is also visible in the contents. In the Latin version of the first charm the badger’s teeth ought to be pierced after the invocation as revealed morphologically by the second person singular form of the verb *pertundo* in *et dentes pertundes*; in the English version, instead, the action described relates to the removal of the teeth from the badger and, more interestingly, it is embedded in the verbal utterance itself (*7 þe þine teþ of abeate*) thus enhancing the vigour of the illocutionary act.²⁴ This affects profoundly the value of the magic action on its whole; performing not only the slaughter of the badger in God’s name but also the removal of its tooth implies the religious legitimation of the first act that characterises the production of the amulet. Thus, the tooth wrapped up in linen and worked

you’. Pierce the teeth and wrap them up with a cloth of linen in gold or silver, so that it touches the body; in this way no storm, no heat, no men’s evil, no plague, no wicked forces will harm you. And if one of them does, it will be immediately torn apart as when you hear a sound). De Vriend 1984, 235. My translations.

²² (Then take the right fore foot with these words and say thus: ‘In the name of living God I take you for leechdom.’ In this way, you will be successful in whatsoever dispute or fight you will find yourself involved in. You shall overcome if you have the foot with you). “*Pedes quoque eius dextrum priorem his uerbis tollis: In nomine dei uiui tollo te ad remedium; in quacumque contentione uel in pugna fueris, uictor euadis, dum pedem eius te cum habes.*” (Remove his [the badger’s] right fore foot saying these words: In the name of living God I take you for a remedy. In whatever contention or fight you might be you will be victorious, so have his foot with you). De Vriend 1984, 235. My translations.

²³ See, among others Tornaghi 2010. The fine line dividing charms and prayers, incantation and invocation, etc. is key to the argument. Two insightful studies on this matter are Liuzza 2007 and Liuzza 2008. See also Jolly 1996. A more recent monograph on Old English charms and their Latin antecedents is Salvador-Bello 2015.

²⁴ See Searle 1975, 20.

with gold and silver becomes an object sanctified by God whose effectiveness is guaranteed by divine power. The second charm underlines this religious legitimation already in the Latin source, where the performer addresses the badger's right forefoot announcing that through God's intercession he is turning it into an instrument of leechdom (*tollo te ad remedium*, rendered literally in *MQ* with *ic þe nime to læcedome*).

It has been frequently pointed out how Christian religious practices have strong connections with amuletic magic. The liturgy of Eucharist implies the same process of substantial modification or acquisition of supernatural powers which occurs in the production of the amulets. Medieval religious authorities were well aware of the risks of the close relation between these two practices. In *Poenitentiale Ecgberti* ii, 23, for instance, not magic *per se*, but only that which implies pagan lore was to be blamed: "Nis na soðlice alyfed nanum cristenum men [...] ne wyrta gaderunge mid nanum galdre, butan mid Paternoster and mið Credan, oððe mid summon gebede þe to Gode belimpe."²⁵ A religious influence seems to lie behind the translator's misreading of the Latin phrase *sicut sonum audias* at the end of the first charm. Understanding the (possibly corrupted) form of *audias* in the exemplar as a variant of the name Abdias (Obadiah), one of the minor Old Testament prophets, the translator might have connected the reference to the linen girdle (*on lineum hrægle*) mentioned a few lines earlier with another prophet, viz. Jeremiah. As de Vriend already observed,²⁶ this misreading (or deliberate transformation?) of the Latin text confirms the overall "religious" interpretation of the charm, which, in the version extant in B, takes on even more violent ritual traits. Here, the imperative *ofslea* has been rendered with *of aslea*, "strike off, remove violently".²⁷ Reading the preceding *þe* as a dative of external possession and *pine teþ* as the direct object of *of aslea*, the passage means: "I kill you and knock out your teeth" (literally "I you (acc.) strike off and you (dat.) your teeth knock out"). This results in a substantial change of the charm; not only does the rite assume more macabre connotations since the teeth are removed from

²⁵ (Truly it is not allowed for any Christian man [...] to gather herbs with any charm, except the Our Father and the Creed, or with some prayer that pertains to God). Raith 1933, 30. See also Grendon 1909, 140. Cf. Cameron 1993, 158. However, Kapaló 2013, 2 warns against the substantial indiscernibility of medieval Christian and pagan magic practices: "It seems that genres of verbal magic are so intertwined in the whole of Christian Europe, in terms of both context and form, with religious genres such as blessings, curses and prayers, that it is impossible to determine where Christian practice ends and lay magic begins".

²⁶ De Vriend 1984, 329.

²⁷ *Dictionary of Old English*, s.v. *aslean* A.2.a.

the badger when the animal is still alive, but also the rhythm of the invocation is modified, with the core elements of the amulet – the teeth – anticipated and followed by two synonyms related through assonance, both introduced by the adverb *of*. The repetition of the same syntactic structure in the charm has effects on its rhythm: “ic þe of aslea and þe þine teþ of abeate”. The changes introduced in this version of the charm cannot be dismissed as a mere variant to be recorded in the critical apparatus as it appears in standard editions. They are not the result of a careless scribal reading, but, rather, show the effort to enhance the performative effectiveness of the charm; as Weston claims, “the charm as such [...] is by nature performative and it is this performative aspect of charms that determines a certain rhetorical strategy.”²⁸ The driving rhythm of the charm caused by the preponderance of monosyllabic words and the harsh sound pattern created by the repetition of the fricatives verbally recalls the coarseness of the rite, whose actions are related to one another through the use of alliterating verbs.

3.2. *The mulberry tree charm*

The third charm differs from the previous two in that it is not written in Old English. However, the artificial language used, usually referred to as gibberish or *voces magicae*, is found in other Old English magic formulae. The words employed do not possess any apparent lexical meaning. Their power rests in their inscrutability, which is inherent to their performative function. As Malinowski maintains, such words are “archaisms, mythical names and strange compounds, formed according to unusual linguistic rules.”²⁹ The halo of mystery provided by archaic, exotic, or even incomprehensible words is intrinsic in the power of these charms. Often the words used loosely recall Latin forms imbuing the formula with an air of authority and prestige. At first sight the *voces magicae* in the charms might be explained as corruptions of the source-text or as mere inaccuracy and carelessness of translators and copyists. However, there are cases where translations of Latin charms assume new stylistic features, such as rhythmic patterns and alliteration.³⁰ A similar process of adaptation seems to be discernible in the version of the charm in *MQ*. Again inserted in its remedy context and signalled in italics, it reads as follows:

²⁸ Weston 1985, 176.

²⁹ Malinowski 1965, 432, cited in Passalis 1965, 6.

³⁰ See the case investigated by Olsan 2013.

Wið blodes flewsan, þonne eallum mannum sy seofontyne nihta eald mona, æfter sunnan setlgange ær monan upryne cyme to þam treowe þe man hateþ morbeam, 7 of ðam nim æppel mid þinre wynstran handa mid twam fingrum, þæt is mid þuman & mid hringfingre, hwitne æppel þe þonne gyt ne readige, ahefe hyne þonne upp, 7 upp aris. He bið brice to þam uferan dæle þæs lichaman. Eft do hyne adune 7 onlut, he bið behefe to ðam neoðran dæle þæs lichaman. Ær ðon þu þysne æppel nime, cweð þonne þas word: ‘*Aps, aps, aps, sparare rose prospasam emorragiam pantosani opum æmesstanes.*’ Þonne þu þas word gecweden hæbbe genim þone æppel 7 hine þonne bewind on weolcreadam godwebbe 7 seoð þonne eft mid sceate oþres godwebbes, 7 beheald þæt þæs læcedom ne hrine ne wæteres ne eorðan. þonne neadþearf sy & se ufera dæl þæs lichoman on ænigum sare oððe on earfeþum geswince, wrið on þone andwlitan. Gyf hyt sy on þam neoðran dæle, wrið on þa wambe.³¹

³¹ (Against a flux of blood: when the moon is to all men seventeen nights old, after sunset and before moonrise, come to the tree called mulberry tree and pick a fruit from it with your left hand using two fingers, that is to say with the thumb and the ring-finger – a white fruit, which is not yet growing red then. Then lift it up and arise. It will be beneficial to the upper part of your body. Put it down again and bend down over it: it will be useful to the lower part of your body. Before you take this fruit, say these words: ‘*Aps, aps, aps, sparare rose prospasam emorragiam pantosani opum æmestanes.*’ When you have said these words take the fruit and then wrap it up in a fine purple cloth and boil it then again in a piece of fine cloth, and beware that this medicine touches neither water nor earth. In need, when the upper part of the body suffers any pain or trouble, bind it on the forehead; if it is in the lower part, bind it on the belly). “*Ad profluvium sanguinis omni homini. Luna septimadecima post occasum solis ante ortum lunae uenis ad arborem mori et ex ea pomum tollis manus sinistrae digitis police et anulari, pomum autem album quod necdum cepit rubescere; elatum quidem et sursum uersus resurgens, ad superiorem partem corporis profuturum; demersum uero et declinatum, ad inferiorem partem corporis necessarium. Hoc autem pomum tenens digitis suprascriptis, antequam decarpas, dicis ter uerba haec: ‘Aps, aps, aps, ero ero se pros pasan emorragian pantos anthropum aemostagus.’ Haec uerba cum dixeris, auferis pomum, et cum abstuleris, inuoluis cocco Galatico, atque idem coccum inuoluis in fenicio et ligabis lino uere purpureo. Obseruabis autem ne hoc remedium aqua tangat aut terra. Alligabis cum necesse fuerit. Si superior pars laborauerit, in fronte ligabis; si inferior, in uentre.” (For flux of blood: in the seventeenth moon for all men, after sunset and before moonrise come to the mulberry tree and pick a fruit from it with the thumb and the ring-finger of your left hand – the fruit must be white and not yet have begun to get red. As you lift it up, arise: it will be useful to the upper part of your body. If you put it down and bend over it, it will be of help. As you hold the fruit with the abovementioned fingers, before you leave say these words thrice: ‘*Aps, aps, aps, rar eroseprospasane, moragian pantosani Hopum aemestanes.*’ When you have said these words take away the fruit and when you have taken it away wrap it up in a scarlet cloth and keep on wrapping it and then tie it with red linen. Be careful that the remedy does not touch water or earth. Bind it when necessary: for the upper part of the body bind in on the forehead, if for the*

The function of this charm differs from the previous two. Whereas the two badger amulets claim a preventive power, here the mulberry is invested with curative properties. Unlike the second charm, the *laedom* invoked here brings remedy to a physical disease, i.e. a flux of blood.³² Despite the ritual actions that must be performed – uttering the charm before handling the fruit, wrapping it up in a cloth of a specific colour and seeing to it that the amulet touches neither earth nor water – this charm comes closer to a medical recipe than the previous two. The charm’s affinity to natural magic makes it functionally similar to the remedies found in *OEH* and as such connects *MQ* with the preceding text in the manuscript. In this case, too, the modifications in the English version point to a conscious rewriting of the charm, which accommodates it to a more familiar performative context. As in several other examples of *vores magicae*, repetition of specific sounds – in this case the plosives /p/ and /t/ along with the sibilant /s/ – characterizes the incantation in a sequence of non-sensical but evoking words. In this regard, each of the three extant witness of *De moro* contains a version of the charm that is remarkably different from the others, and this, despite Rodríguez’s efforts,³³ hampers any attempt of critical reconstruction. A comparison of on the variants recorded in Rodríguez’s edition confirms that the charm extant in the Lucca manuscript, the one consulted by De Vriend, is the closer to *MQ*, as it reads: “Aps, aps, aps, rar erose prosa sane moragian pontosani Hopum aemestanes”.³⁴ Whereas the gibberish usually recalls elements related to religious elements and practices,³⁵ in this charm the translator’s rewriting seems to involve the sphere of natural medicine. This is shown by the transformation of *erose* with *rose* ‘roses’ and *prospa sane* (which recalls the Latin phrase *pro spasmus* or *spasma*, ‘for spasm/spasms’), the similarity of *sparare* with *parare*, ‘to prepare’, the emendation of Latin-ish words such as *moragian* with *emorragiam* (Latin *haemorrhagia*, ‘bleeding’), and *Hopum* with *opum* (‘work’, but also ‘labour’,

lower part of the body, bind it on the belly). Rodríguez 2009, 97. My translations. For the chromatic nuances of red implied by *coccum Galaticum* and *fenicium*, see *ibid.*, 101.

³² As the addressees are indistinctly female and male people (*omni homini*), it is not possible here to determine the nature and the causes of the flux of blood the charm was supposed to heal. For an investigation on the occurrence of the phrase *blod flewsan* in Old English translations of the Bible, see Weissenrieder 2017.

³³ Rodríguez 2009, 97.

³⁴ Cf. Vienna, Österreichische Nationalbibliothek 187: “Aps, aps, aps, rar eros se po spa sane moragian ponto sani hopuma emestanes”, and London, Wellcome Medical Library 573: “Apy, apy, pya soye, rar eros se tipoy pasanemo pagian patosa niopume mestanes”.

³⁵ See Olsan 2013.

which sounds more consistent with the context of the remedy). The English version thus acquires semantic elements related to disease (*hemorrhagiam*), botanics (*rosa*), and operational practices (*(s)parare* and *opum*), more typical of instructions than of invocations or incantations, thus suggesting a change in the locutionary function of the charm itself. Moreover, in the translator's hands the charm also assumes elements of rhythmic "domestication", which, especially in the redaction of V, results in the acquisition of an alliterative pattern. Although in de Vriend's edition *æmesstanes* appears as one word, inspection of the passage in V (f. 76r) shows it to be actually divided into two distinct parts: *æmes*, which appears at the end of the line, and *stanes*, which begins the following. The repetition of the sibilant at the end of the first element and the beginning of the second responds to two precise rhythmical instances: as both sounds contribute to the pattern of the charm, the first sibilant in *stanes* is part of a crossed alliteration (*sparare propasam / pantosani stanes*). Whether or not the result of a conscious reworking of the charm, this is a unique case within the tradition of *MQ*, as the other manuscripts contain different variants – B has *æmestanes* and H *æmestates*, while the scribe of O discarded the charm and substituted it for *Ic nime ꝥe et cetera*, closely recalling the opening of the two previous charms. This latter version raises some questions regarding the reception of the text and the hypothetical use of the charm. The repetition of the same incipit found in the two badger charms aims at connecting between those that had initially originated as two different texts, but which, at least in *MQ*, became one. Moreover, *et cetera* might mean that the reader was supposed to know how to continue the formula – probably in the same way as the second charm, *to læcedome*. In any case, the compiler of O did not acknowledge the performative function of the Latin incantation and decided to substitute it for a more familiar formulaic structure.

The various renderings of the charm represent two different attitudes towards the *voces magicæ* in the source-text. While in V they were adapted to suit a more familiar Latin vocabulary and a definite rhythmic structure, the scribe of O preferred to substitute Latin elements for that might be more easily recognised – or accepted – by late twelfth-century readers.

3. Conclusion

The analysis of the charms present in *MQ* reveals new insights into the reception of the *materia magica* in medieval England. As a matter of fact, we cannot

determine with certainty whether the amulets and charms included in non-native works like *OEH* and *MQ* were effectively employed. However, at least in the case of those found in *MQ*, the thorough re-elaboration carried out by both translator and copyists suggests all but a passive attitude towards them. The first two charms underwent a process of structural harmonisation and, in the case of the version found in B, the modifications in the second charm affected one of the key features of oral performative texts – rhythm and sound pattern. Concerning the third charm, the source’s *voces magicæ* were transformed into a sequence of words which a learned reader – or someone at least slightly familiar with Latin – might easily recognise.³⁶ As with the previous charms, its re-elaboration provides it with a more defined formulaic and rhythmical structure. Following Foley’s assertion that “the effectiveness of charms is incumbent upon their oral performance and sound pattern”,³⁷ these modifications can be explained as attempts to render these invocations effective from a performative standpoint. The “polymorphous diversity” that characterises the oral transmission of charms³⁸ is here reflected in the scribes’ reworking of the Latin source. However, it is impossible for me to determine whether these modifications record an oral-to-written transmission (presuming the charms had actually been performed prior to their recording in writing) or a written-to-oral transmission. In any case, the shape given to the charms in *MQ* suggests their actual use. Whereas the first two charms are invocations to God and thus set within a religious framework,³⁹ the third one, with the exception of O, relies its locutionary function to Latin and, in the case of V, it does so taking the form of an oral-formulaic feature, such as alliteration, which was easily recognised by the audience.⁴⁰ As this latter charm demonstrates, the reconstructive approach adopted by traditional critical editions such as de Vriend’s does not help reconstruct the *mouvance* of traditions similar to *MQ*. As with the study of the “original” English charms found in the *Lacnunga* in Bald’s *Læcebo*, an investigation focused on “performance-based approaches” rather than a “con-

³⁶ This case contradicts Passalis’s claim that “the incomprehensible words are subjected to multiple modification procedures and new words that have been adapted to the morphological linguistic system of the performers are created” (Passalis 2012, 11-12).

³⁷ Foley 1980, 86.

³⁸ Passalis 2012, 16.

³⁹ The tight relationship between magic and religion is expressed in liturgy, where elements, such as bread and wine, assume a different nature and divine powers through the utterance of a prayer. See Ong 1982, 138.

⁴⁰ The bibliography on orality and formulas in Old English is vast and is mainly related to poetry. An interesting discussion of orality in charms and prayers see Orchard 2009.

ventional text-based analysis and classification”⁴¹ has proven effective also in the case of the charms in *MQ*, a text which was not conceived as a container of doubtful magic remedies just worthy of a passive, encyclopaedic recording, but, possibly, an addition to early medieval English medical lore.

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⁴¹ Garner 2004, 20.

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MARIA CRISTINA LOMBARDI

MAGIC AND PRECIOUS STONES
IN THE OLD SWEDISH
EUFEMIAVISA HERTIG FREDRIK AV NORMANDIE

This paper focuses on *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* – one of the so-called *Eufemiavisorna*, three anonymous Old Swedish poems (*Herr Ivan, Flores och Blanzefflor* and *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie*) – and concentrates on a number of episodes where magic plays a significant role in the development of the narrative, in the aim of analyzing the kind of magic and why it is used in the text as well as to what extent it contributes to shape and spread the new idea of an aristocracy. Translated into Swedish from three continental European romances for Queen Eufemia of Norway at the beginning of the 14th century, *Eufemiavisorna* were designed to establish a common solid ideological background between Norway and Sweden by transmitting the new continental courtly ideas and norms to the Swedish court.¹ Later, further translated into Old Danish, under the Kalmar Union, they seem to have served the same purpose extended to Denmark, contributing to reinforce the political relationships among the three kingdoms.

In particular, their influence on the idea of natural magic expressed in some passages of *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* – spread with encyclopedic writings, specifically lapidaries, which had reached Scandinavia between the 11th and 13th century – will be highlighted.

I also intend to investigate whether magic could be regarded as an instrument for justifying the royal authority and defending the social order proceeding from it.

Finally, correspondences and differences with similar magic-related circumstances, objects and performers occurring in Old Norse texts, will be discussed in order to show how elements of the ancient Scandinavian heritage (familiar to aristocratic audiences) changed, acquiring new aspects, values and meanings aimed at making nobles avoid conflicts and comply with royal demands of political stability.

1. *The Text*

Hertig Fredrik av Normandie (Duke Frederik of Normandy) is an anonymous 3. 310-line Swedish translation presumably of a lost German romance, which,

¹ Since Eufemia's only daughter Ingeborg would marry the future King of Sweden Erik Magnusson, the Queen tried to create a common cultural background for the continuation of the Norwegian dynasty. Layher 2010, 91-130.

according to what the text itself states at the end, was first translated from French on behalf of Emperor Otto I, then into Swedish in 1308 (and subsequently into Danish):²

Denna bok I här hora
 henne lät Kejsar Otto göra
 och vända av valsco i tyskt mål;
 Gud nåde dess ädle furstes själ!
 Nu är hon annan tid gjord till rima
 nyliga innan stuntan timma
 av tysko och i svenska tunga,
 det förstånda gamla och unga.
 Honna lät vända på detta mål
 Eufemia drottning [...] (HF, 3279-3288)³

(This book you are listening to / was made for Kaiser Otto / who had it turned from French into / the German language / God be merciful to that noble prince's soul! / (Now it is set to rhyme a second time recently, after a brief process / from German into the Swedish tongue / - both old and young understand that. / It was put into such language / For Eufemia the queen [...])⁴

The text is preserved – with the other *Eufemiavisorna* in six Swedish versions, and a Danish one – at the Kungliga Biblioteket in Stockholm in the following 15th and 16th century manuscripts: Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket, D 4 (Cod. Holm. D4, ca. 1410) [Ivan, Fredrik, Flores]; Stockholom, KB, D 4a (Cod. Holm. D 4a, 1457) [Ivan, Fredrik, Flores]; Stockholm, KB, D 3 (Cod. Holm. D 3, 1476) [Ivan, Fredrik, Flores]; Stockholm, KB, Skokloster 115-16 (Cod. Skokloster 115-16, ca. 1500) [Fredrik]; Stockholm, KB, K 45 (Cod. Holm. K 45, ca. 1500) [Fredrik]; Stockholm, KB, D 2 (Cod. Holm. D 2, ca. 1523) [Fredrik]; and Stockholm, KB, K 47 (Cod. Holm. K 47, ca. 1500) [Ivan, Fredrik, Flores].

Hertig Fredrik av Normandie is published in the following editions: *Hertig*

² Holm 1993, 171-73. Likewise, Layher 2010, 70-81, examined the text, exploring the circumstances surrounding its cultural context and in particular the role of the North German courts.

³ All quotations from the text are from Henrik Williams's normalized edition. Williams 2018, 144-359. From now on *HF* will be used instead of the whole title of the work.

⁴ This, likewise all the other following translations from *HF*, are mine.

Fredrik av Normandie. Kritisk Upplaga på grundval av Codex Verelianus by Erik Noreen;⁵ *Herzog Friedrich von der Normandie. Der altschwedische Ritterroman Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* by Florian Bambeck;⁶ *Eufemiavisorna I. Flores och Blanzeflor, Hertig Fredrik av Normandie* by Henrik Williams.⁷

The poem's protagonist, Fredrik, Duke of Normandy, is presented as a knight of King Arthur's court. Indeed, the text connections with King Arthur's round table are few and far between: they only occur in two points – in the prologue and in a tournament scene at the midpoint of the epic. Normandy, a place with a special significance in the general romance context because of its renowned pilgrim site, Mont Saint-Michel, magically recalls both war and pilgrimage, the two fundamental aspects of crusading ventures.

The story starts with Herr Fredrik going out hunting one morning. In the woods he meets Malmrit, king of the dwarfs, who asks for his help in stemming a rebellion of his vassals and takes him to his castle in a mountain. Fredrik helps Malmrit regain his kingdom, restoring order and prosperity. In return, Malmrit gives Frederik a magic ring which protects its wearer from iron (weapons), water, and fire, as well as granting the power of invisibility. Fredrik uses it in later adventures, becoming invisible in order to kill a giant (which had captured and was cruelly beating a knight) and to protect himself. He uses the ring to conquer Floria, imprisoned in a tower by the King of Ireland and takes her back to Normandy with him. They marry and, at the end, after Fredrik's death, Floria enters a convent.

2.1. *The Encounter with the Supernatural*:⁸ place and time

After presenting Fredrik with all sorts of praises for his virtues and qualities, the text introduces his first adventure. It is said he goes hunting alone, after leaving his palace located near a forest called Asiant:

Arla om morgon dager var ljus
Han rider ene av det hus (83-84)⁹
[...]

⁵ Noreen 1927.

⁶ Bambeck 2009.

⁷ Williams 2018.

⁸ On the concept of Supernatural and Supernatural creatures, see Clunies Ross 1994, 42-56, Sävborg, 2017, 119-124 and Jakobsson 2005, 69.

⁹ *HF*, 150.

steg på sitt örs och dädan red
i Asiant den genaste led. (101-102)¹⁰

(Early in the morning the day was clear / He rides alone out of his palace / [...]
/ He mounted his horse and from there rode / into Asiant immediately it led.)

In the woods, the path he used to ride disappears and he no longer knows where he is:

Den väg han var riden på
hvarver honom brådeliga från,
så att han själver kändes där
han vet ej hvar han kommen är. (109-116)¹¹

(The path he was riding on / suddenly disappears / so that he himself felt that /
he didn't know where he had come.)

Then he sees a mountain in the woods:

Då den väg hvarv honom från
ett berg i skogen han för sig såg. (113-114)¹²

(When the path disappeared and he was lost / he saw a mountain in the forest)

He makes his way through thorns, brambles, and branches, it was at noon:

Genom torn och tjocka kvistar
det var rätt om middagstida (121-122)¹³

(Through thorns and thick branches / It was at noon)

Suddenly *Han såg en dvärg*¹⁴ (*HF*, 134) (He saw a dwarf) who takes him to his castle in the mountain. Although partially following a traditional pattern, the

¹⁰ *HF*, 152.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *HF*, 154.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

text does not show opposition between nature and civilization – common in popular Medieval sources (ballads, folktales) with the woods as a dangerous place where encounters with the Supernatural happen – reflecting the more general eschatological dichotomy between order and chaos typical of the Old Norse mythic world too.¹⁵ Unlike Old Norse mythological texts (which are less exhaustive in contextualizing such encounters) or popular tales and ballads (which put them in sinister atmospheres preparing for fatal consequences soon coming to affect the protagonists' lives), *HF* sets the meeting in the sunlight and describes it in detail. These dwarfs do not inhabit the vertical axis, as they would according to Jens Peder Schjødt's model¹⁶ that makes sub-terrestrial deities inhabit the vertical of the two axes on which the Old Norse mythological universe was arranged. Malmrit and his people live in an area that, albeit situated inside a mountain, is parallel and even horizontally communicating with that of humans. Even *bergtagning* 'mountain kidnapping', a frequent motif in European folklore, differs when compared with tradition. The abduction is generally carried out by a supernatural monster which comes across the hero and invites him to visit its abode: an experience that is usually fatal for the former. Instead, this version of *bergtagning* has a happy ending: Fredrik enters the mountain and can leave freely when he decides to go home after completing his enterprise to help Malmrit. Still a few details connect the dwarfs' king to the underworld: his palace is illuminated by shining stones and his name contains the term *malm* 'mineral', a word, present in Proto-germanic as **malmaz*, meaning 'mineral', 'ore', 'sand', in Old Norse with the significance of 'ore', 'metal' and in Old Swedish of 'ore', 'metal', (archaic: 'a hill or ridge consisting of sand or gravel').¹⁷

Other elements conflict with tradition. Ebbe Schön, who has analyzed the regularity of encounters with the Supernatural, dealing with their temporal dimension, observes how they usually happen at midnight, sunrise, sunset, on

¹⁵ Raudvere 2013, 59-98. Also in *HF* the chaotic dimension with its destructive forces is represented by giants: in fact, when Fredrik meets the giant he is mercilessly torturing a knight: *En rese omsider han före sig såg; han hade fått en riddare rik (HF, 976-977)* (A giant before him he saw; he had captured a powerful knight) [...] *Han slog den riddare utan pris/att blodet ran allt över hans liv (HF, 988-989)* (He struck him without mercy/so that blood ran all over him.) Dwarfs, on the other hand, have organized their society perfectly according to the feudal hierarchical order.

¹⁶ Schjødt 2008, 185.

¹⁷ <<https://etymologeek.com/swe/malm>> (last accessed September 30, 2020). De Vries 1977, 377.

holidays or on Thursday nights.¹⁸ In *HF* the time of day when the creature appears to the hero is midday, in the sunlight. Only the forest contributes to create an atmosphere of mystery, symbolizing an artificial darkness provoked by the intricate tree branches.¹⁹ Malmrit is described, stressing the splendor of his clothes and marvelous weapons. *Han skin som sol* (*HF*, 147) ‘he shines like the sun’. The entrance into Karlavint is illuminated by the gems set in his helmet: *honom tyckte berget allt bränna av de stenar dvärger förde i sköld och hjälm* (*HF*, 244-245) ‘the mountain seemed to him burning with the stones the dwarf had on his shield and helmet’. Surrounded by precious materials (the palace is made of marble: *Det var gjort av marmorsten* (*HF*, 365); the windows are of crystal: *De vindögon voro av kristall alla* (*HF*, 371); the furniture is made of exotic wood: *cypress* ‘cypress’ (*HF*, 372), the dwarfs drink *mjöd* ‘mead’, a typical drink of Old Norse gods, and *vin* ‘wine’ (*HF*, 374). However, it should be noted that, in Old Norse sources, dwarfs are associated with darkness and nocturnal light (cf. *Álvismál*), with the moon rather than with the sun. Even some of their *heiti* reported by the poetic *Edda* and in Snorri’s *Edda* allude to the moon.²⁰ In the *Völuspá*, stanza 11: the dwarfs’ names *Nýi*, *Niði*, and in stanza 12 *Nýr ok Nýráðr*, mean ‘waxing’ (Old Norse *Ný* n.) and ‘waning moon’ (Old Norse *Nið* n. pl.) respectively.²¹ This cosmologic lunar aspect is absent in *HF*’s dwarfs, where brightness is related to the sun and often mentioned in comparisons and similes.

2.2. Daylight and Rationality in the Supernatural

This Non-Human world has no obscure connotations and, apart from Malmrit’s and his people’s size, it is familiar and organized like the contemporary feudal system, based on a social pyramid with the king at the top and several descending degrees of vassals. Malmrit reigns over smaller landowners and enumerates: *Tre konungar, sex hertigar, tjugu grevar* (*HF*, 203-204)²² ‘Three kings, six dukes, twenty earls’ – which, after his enemies’ attack, are reduced to: *fyratio men, femtio riddare, tio svenner* (*HF*, 210-211)²³ ‘forty men and

¹⁸ Schön 2000, 11.

¹⁹ Cirlot 1962, 112.

²⁰ Faulkes 2005, 16.

²¹ The Eddic lay *Álvismál* is a clear example of dwarfs’ nocturne nature. Neckel 1962, *Álvismál*, st. 12. See also Motz 1993b, 100-117.

²² *HF*, 158.

²³ *Ibid.*

fifty knights and ten squires', a list reminding of a similar pattern in *The Letter of Prester John*, a source repeatedly quoted by the author.²⁴

Malmrit's disgrace had been caused by the betrayal of some relatives allied with a foreign king who had plundered his castle and possessions. Even this detail reflects contemporary feudal Europe, where the monarchs' power was often challenged by unfaithful vassals plotting to overthrow them together with raids from hostile neighboring states.²⁵ In reward of Fredrik's successful intervention, the dwarf-king gives Fredrik a magic ring (a complex object, with gems set in it).

The dwarfs' function as givers is well attested in Germanic mythology and folklore.²⁶ Traditionally, Old Norse gods have the dwarfs make all sorts of magic treasures: rings, swords, Þórr's hammer. Since the latter is essential for the gods' perpetual fight against giants in order to maintain the order of the cosmos (see *Þórsdrápa* by Eilifr Goðrunarson²⁷), dwarfs have a crucial cosmic duty as defenders. Through their craftsmanship, the end of the world is delayed. Such an aspect would probably make Scandinavian audiences associate Fredrik's adventures with those of the ancient Germanic myths,²⁸ although originating in different contexts and based on other power relationships. In fact, Fredrik's function as the dwarfs' helper introduces the idea of human superiority, offering a chivalric re-interpretation of the encounter with the Non-Human dimension. The episode speaks in favor of a more anthropocentric view reflecting a broader ideology that was developing from a mixture of chivalric war ideals and the values of Christianity.-

3. *Natural Magic in Lapidaries and Romances*

In order to understand the specific function of magic in our text, it is necessary to consider its position in the medieval world where it appears as a

²⁴ "Every month seven kings serve us, with each one of them in order, as well as sixty-two dukes. Three hundred and sixty-five earls" (Jackson 2010, p. 159, par. 73). Copies of *The Letter of Prester John* started spreading throughout Europe in the 12th century. It was an epistolary wonder tale supposedly written for the Byzantine Emperor Manuel I Comnenus by a certain Prester John, King of India and descendant of one of the Three Magi. The marvels and magic it contained fascinated the imagination of Europeans to such an extent that it was translated into numerous languages, circulating for centuries in hundreds of manuscripts.

²⁵ Vilhelmsdotter 1999, 40-44.

²⁶ Mikučionis 2014, 162-168.

²⁷ Faulkes 1998, 25-30.

²⁸ Albertoni 2015, 145-162; Hallberg 1982, 20.

significant topic, mixed with medicine and other pseudo-scientific subjects. During the Middle Ages, lapidaries offered information about jewelry, collecting remote traditions going back to ancient India, Egypt, and Mesopotamia, later adopted by Greek and Roman authors. Medieval scholars such as Isidore of Seville, Hraban Maur and Marbode of Rennes gave new life to this type of knowledge which further translations into different vernaculars contributed to spread all over Europe and up to Scandinavia.²⁹ In his comment to the well-known miscellany *Hauksbók*, containing translations and adaptations of Latin scholarly texts, among which a lapidary, Jón Helgason had noted that some of the texts are to be found in older manuscripts like Reykjavík, Arnarnagansk Institut, GKS 1812 4° and Reykjavík, AI, 673a 4° hosting parts about stones, and has reaffirmed their wide dissemination.³⁰ These early texts circulated in Northern Europe and converged into later encyclopedic literature in various ways.³¹

Lapidaries passed beyond the pseudoscientific borders of their genre to penetrate other types of literature. P.J. Heather's attempts to identify precious stones in medieval romances by making direct comparisons with Anglo-Norman lapidaries, are illuminating.³² He makes some interesting statements about several shared beliefs among lapidaries and courtly literature, indicating a crucial source in the widespread Bishop Marbod of Rennes's *Liber lapidum*,³³ whose information was regarded as almost canonical throughout the Middle Ages, and which, although especially devoted to medical applications, contained a good deal of magic.³⁴ In agreement with Heather, Patch points out the influence of these texts on medieval literature in general.³⁵ This view could presumably be extended to post-Viking Scandinavia, where a new mentality was developing. Rings and gems were not purely symbols of greed and an exhibition of wealth and power (as they were in the Old Norse and the Old Germanic worlds: an aspect observed by kennings like "giver of rings" for "chieftain" or "prince"). The greed for gold had been a founding value of the Viking Age, celebrated in the *Eddas*, in skaldic poetry, in sagas as well as in

²⁹ Mystics like the 12th century abbess Hildegard von Bingen make frequent use of stone symbolism (*Physica*, V, 18), as Birgitta of Sweden would do later.

³⁰ Jón Helgason 1960, xii-xiv.

³¹ Larsson 1913, 139-146.

³² Heather 1931, 217-264.

³³ *Ibid.* See also Riddle 1977.

³⁴ Bø 1982, 129-133.

³⁵ Patch 1935, 312-313.

runic inscriptions, and had caused bloody feuds among heroes and chieftains. Unlike Old Norse mythical rings, Malmrit's ring has much broader implications (loyalty, generosity, concern for those in need) than being merely a sign of richness and distinction.

Romances could communicate beyond the level of simple entertainment and, besides being amusing, they seem to have also had a didactic and moral intent.³⁶ According to the distinction made by J.E. Stevens among three categories of marvels in Medieval romances (1. the purely mysterious, 2. the strictly magical, 3. the miraculous) magic rings, magic swords and magic clothes belong to the second category, while stones, like herbs, are part of God's creation.³⁷ Presented as such in theological works (i.e., in Augustine and Thomas Aquinas), gems were regarded as natural magic as opposed to black magic and superstition rooted in old pagan beliefs. The significance of precious stones in romances is therefore worth further investigation in the light of their descriptions in lapidaries. Moreover, as we will see further on, *Eufemiavisorna* manuscript tradition presents interesting links between these two genres.

3.1. *Magic of Stones in Hertig Fredrik av Normandie (HF)*

I have tried to explore the geographical and historical contexts where *HF* circulated in the aim of understanding what functions the magic of stones might express in this *Eufemiavisa*: in particular, I examined the gems named in the poem – which, as can obviously be inferred, were owned by the aristocrats to whom the text was addressed – comparing them with their illustrations offered by lapidaries among which the author quotes a non-specified book of stones: *denna natura haver den sten,/som oss säger stenaboken en (HF, 389-390)*³⁸ (this nature has the stone,/as a certain stone book tells us). Although we cannot know exactly how widely lapidaries were read, Evans argues that Medieval chronicles show evidence of a widely held belief in the magical properties of

³⁶ Heather has shown how romance writers exploited the associations between magic and the new knowledge, also scattered throughout texts devoted to princes' and kings' education like the Norwegian *Konungs skuggsjá* (The King's mirror) almost contemporary to *Eufemiavisorna*, for introducing more serious issues into their texts. (Heather 1931, 217-236).

³⁷ Stevens 1973, 128-142. 1. Examples of 'the purely mysterious are: the storm stone in the Middle English romance *Ywain and Gawain* or talking animals; 2. the strictly magic is identified in anthropological terms as 'the marvellous' controlled by man; 3. while the miraculous is identified as 'the marvelous' controlled by God.

³⁸ *HF*, 170.

stones set in various objects, for example in table plates as means of detecting poison,³⁹ as can be seen in our text:

bordet själv av smaragder gjord
 därunder två stolpar av ametist ford;
 hvar därav äter för tolik saka
 av dryck får han ej omaka. (395-396)⁴⁰

(the table itself is made of emeralds / with two columns of amethysts under it;
 / and if one eats / and drinks there he will not be sick.)

According to Jessica Coke, medieval audiences would have recognized a great deal of subtextual interpretation in the specific use of magic tools mentioned in romances, based on the practices bound to them in their material forms.⁴¹ And Anne Wilson suggests that rings with gems are the most frequently used gifts in romances (far more than amulets, garments or necklaces) probably because they were unisex objects and because the gems possessed both concrete and symbolic qualities.⁴² She remarks that the magic in rings and gems frequently overlaps, as in the following passage of *HF* where Malmrit gives the Duke his gift. Just like Sigdrífa, in the Eddic *Sigdrífumál*,⁴³ the dwarf reveals some secret knowledge to the hero - three of the stones protect against fire, water and iron, while the fourth grants invisibility - and explains their virtues but without telling their names and recommends:

Om deras dygd då skolen I tigja
 och ingom manne därva säga
 [...]
 Gömmen det väl med mycket flit. (945-948)⁴⁴

(On their virtues you shall be silent / and to no man you must say / [...] / Hide it well and very carefully.)

³⁹ Evans 1922, 115. Also Sanders 2010, 116-140.

⁴⁰ *HF*, 170.

⁴¹ Coke 1998, 1-8.

⁴² Wilson 1988.

⁴³ Neckel 1962, 38-45.

⁴⁴ *HF*, 206.

Jag giver eder ett fingergull
som prisat för dygder full,
det är höga skatta värd
eder må skada aldrig svärd
de stund de stenar äro hus dig,
dess skolen I, here, tro mig;
den annan stens natura är så
– Forvisso må I det tro,
det sager jag eder uppenbar –
dock en man låge I tjugo år
under på havens grunda,
och hade han I den stunda
den sten på sig att bära, han torfte aldrig kära,
dock han hade hvarken kläder eller föda
vatten måtte han ej möda.
Den tredje sten haver den makt
– låten det för sanno eder var sagt –
dock det största hus i världen är
av trä och brunne och I varen där,
elden måtte eder intet skada
eller komma till någon våda.
att båda brunne hus och land
om I haden stenen I edra hand
det skade eder intet vätta
så stort have han sätta.
Den fjärde sten är bättre än de tre,
märken görla huru det må ske;
den sten är av India land;
var han bär på sin hand
dock at than för tusen män stander
och haver han stenen I sin hände,
– hvar hellre dem är väl eller ve –
ingen man får honom att se.
Då du vill driva tolik ting
vänd stenen I din hand omkring
och lyck han I den hand så! (891-928)⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *HF*, 203-204.

(I give you a fingergull / praised for virtues full, / it's high treasure worth / swords may never harm you / when the stones are with you, / and ye, here, believe me; / the other stone in kind is so / – For certain ye may in the faith – / I say that to you. / Although a man lay for twenty years / on the bottom of the sea, / and he had at the moment / the stone with him, he would never die, / although he had neither clothes nor food / he would not have any trouble with water. / – The third stone has the power / you truly were told – / although the largest house in the world was / of wood and burned, and you were there, / fire would not hurt you / or make you any harm. / That both the burned house and land / if you had the stone in your hand / it would not harm you at all / so great is its value. / The fourth stone is better than the other three, / note what may happen; / the stone comes from India land; / the one who bears it in his hand / although he before a thousand men stood / if he had the stone in his hand, / – whether for him it is good or bad. / No man can see him. / When you want to do such a thing / turn the stone round in your hand / and hold it fast!)

The fourth stone is the best, says Malmrit: it grants its owner the power to become invisible at will. Invisibility rings have a long history of tradition and are said to go back to the myth of 'Gyges's ring', mentioned by Plato in Book 2 of his *Republic*.⁴⁶ For Plato, the moral question is central, since magic is used as an instrument to judge one's honesty, but it appears of some importance even in our text, although in a different perspective:⁴⁷ that is, in the light of the new courtesy values and selfless generosity which inspire the main character's actions. Fredrik offers his help to those in need, independently of how much he can gain from it: *Jag är hemma väl så rik/ att jag torv inga gåvor av dig/ I guld och ädla stenar/både stora och klena* (HF, 853-856)⁴⁸ (I am so rich at home/that I do not need any gifts from you/in gold or noble stones/both big

⁴⁶ In Jowett (transl.) 1888, II, 2:359a-2:360d, an ancestor of Gyges was a shepherd at the service of the king of Lydia. After an earthquake, he entered a cave and discovered that it was a grave containing a corpse wearing a golden ring. He took the ring and discovered that it gave him the power to become invisible by adjusting it. Arriving at the king's palace, he used his power of invisibility to seduce the queen, and with her help he killed the king and became king of Lydia himself.

⁴⁷ Cf. Chrétien de Troyes's 12th century Arthurian romance *Yvain ou le chevalier du lion* (translated into the Old Norse *Ivens saga* and into the Old Swedish *Eufemiavisa Herra Ivan lejonriddare*), where also Yvain is given a magic ring by a maiden: this ring can be worn with the stone on the inside, facing the palm, and in this case it will make the wearer invisible. Kibler, Carleton 1991, 307.

⁴⁸ HF, 200.

and small). Indeed, ethic concerns guide Fredrik's behavior in using the ring to defeat evil forces and to conquer Floria (although through a not morally flawless action, behaving like a kind of trickster).⁴⁹

Invisibility is not a common patrimony of Old Norse sources. In the *Völsunga saga*, Sigurðr becomes invisible – a circumstance which is absent in the eddaic lays of his cycle – but it is well known that *Fornaldarsögur* are permeated by a huge quantity of new exotic motifs from French romances including a strong attraction for magic stones with their increasing textual importance as literary devices.⁵⁰ They were particularly appreciated not only because of the exotic origin, but also because of their association with the 12 mystical stones mentioned in the *Apocalypse* which turn up again in *HF*, establishing a connection between gems and their owner.⁵¹ The properties, virtues and allegorical meanings of gems were suggested by *The Letter of Prester John*: i.e., crystal would represent virginity or the angels, jasper faith or the apostles, diamonds the archangels, etc. By quoting this source, *HF's* author reinforces the authority of his statements and at the same time emphasizes the importance of a written testimony: *som oss säger stenaboken en (HF, 390)* 'as a certain stone book tells us':

Haven I hört där sagt ifrån
 Av den rike präst Johannes?
 han konung i India lande är.
 Man säger att i hans huse står
 bordsstolar, de äro av *filsben*;
 under hvarje disk star en sten
 den som heter *ametist*; (381-387)⁵²
 [...]
 denna natura haver den sten,
 som oss säger stenaboken en:
 han duger väl för druckenhet
 – de hava han värdig ho det vet;

⁴⁹ Lodén 2012, 262-264, points out 'the burlesque' as a central theme in *HF*, where even the conquest of Floria is carried out by Fredrik in a comic scene using funny trickery.

⁵⁰ Clunies Ross 2009, 317-330.

⁵¹ For example, in *Diu Crone* (The crown), an Arthurian romance written by Heinrich von dem Türlin around 1230, the castle is built from 25 different kinds of gems. See Lecouteaux 2012, 58. Thomas 1989, 146-165. Ap. 4:3; 9:17; 21:11; 21:18; 21:19; 21:20.

⁵² *HF*, 170.

bordet själv av *smaragder* gjord
 därunder två stolpar av *ametist* ford;
 hvar därav äter för tolik saka
 av dryck får han ej omaka. (389-396)⁵³

(Have you heard about / the rich Prester John? / he is the king of India land. / It is said that in his palace there are / Table chairs, with legs made of ivory; / under each dish there is a stone / that is called amethyst; / [...] / this nature has the stone, / as a certain stone book tells us: / it suits well for drunkenness / who knows it greatly estimates it; / the table itself is made of emeralds / including two columns of amethyst made; / the one who has the opportunity to eat there / has no bad consequence from drinking.)

The information about amethysts as a remedy for drunkenness (*HF*, 389-390)⁵⁴ is found in most lapidaries. They explained that stones protected against harm, lies, envy and witchcraft, pointing to them as polysemic symbols which referred to social rank and wealth, helped to heal diseases, detect poisons and become invisible. Some of them, such as Marbode's abovementioned book of stones, attributed such a power (invisibility) to heliotrope and ostolanus. But in Heather's view, based on Anglo-Norman lapidaries, the stone would have been agate (associated with an invisibility ritual in the London Lapidary⁵⁵) or hyacinth, to which Heather directly attributes this property for Lunet's stone in the Middle English *Yvain* (741-746).⁵⁶ Both Marbode's *Liber lapidum* and Harpenstreng's⁵⁷ lapidary, the latter belonging to a miscellany with an enormous diffusion in Northern Europe, the Netherlands and Northern Germany, describe heliotrope as an invisibility stone.⁵⁸ We cannot know which gem Scandinavian courtly audiences would guess to be the invisibility granter described in *HF* and in *Herra Ivan lejonriddare*, but the popularity of Harpenstreng's text might possibly have influenced them.⁵⁹

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Heather 1931, 215.

⁵⁶ Heather 1931, 230. *Yvain* (741-746). In the Old Swedish translation *Herra Ivan Lejonriddare* (848-850).

⁵⁷ Henrik Harperstreng lived in the 13th century and was the doctor of Erik Plovpenning.

⁵⁸ *Medieval Scandinavia. An Encyclopedia* 1993, 165-166. Larsson 1913.

⁵⁹ In Harpenstreng's lapidary it is stated that: xxvii. Eliotropia hetær en ærlyk steen. Han ær grøn æns smaragdus oc havær hwitæ spottæ. Of han latæs i et kaar mæth watn oc sættæs innæn solskyn, tha wældær thæt watn oc løpær yvær oc gør æns thokæ. Mæth thænnæ steen

3.2. *Harpenstreng's Book of Stones and Eufemiavisorna: contacts in manuscript transmission*

Henrik Harperstreng's *steinabok* is transmitted by two manuscripts: København, Kongelige Bibliotek, NKS 66 8vo, consisting of 147 folia, preserved at Copenhagen's Royal Library, and written in Old Danish (in the Jutland dialect variety) around 1300. It is a miscellany containing parts of the *Skånske Kirkelov* 'The ecclesiastical law of Skåne' (1-5), two herbaries (6r-75v, and 76r-114r), a lapidary (114v-139v) and a cookbook (140r-147v). The other testimony of the text is Stockholm, KB, K4 (Cod. Holm. K4) preserved at Stockholm's Royal Library, written around the middle of the 15th century.⁶⁰ I have examined the text in the edition by Marius Kristensen, where the lapidary occupies its folia from 114v to 139v, in the electronic edition contained in *Tekster fra Danmarks middelalder 1100-1515. På dansk og latin: "Håndskriftbeskrivelse"* [NKS 66 8vo].⁶¹

Under Margaret I's rule (1353-1412), the three kingdoms of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden officially united in the so-called Kalmar Union (1397-1523), during which efforts were made to cement the relationships among the three kingdoms by constructing a shared cultural background. The Union called for them to exist together in harmony and love, by helping each other and concretely providing a valid bulwark against the increasing German Hanseatic League's expansion in the Baltic Sea. But the Swedish nobility's dissatisfaction with the dominant role played by Denmark made the 15th century a socially turbulent period of wars. The translation of *Eufemiavisorna* into Old Danish further confirms their contribution to reinforce the ties among the countries and highlights

ma man spa oc han gøth frægh oc lanct liif, styllær bloth oc wrækær etær oc swik. Lykkær man hanum i sin hand mæth thæn yrt thær | swa hetær, tha ær han usynlyk. (116v) (Heliotropy is called a noble stone. It is emerald green and has white spots. If it is left in a container with water and put in the sunlight, the water boils, overflows and makes a kind of fog. With this stone you can divine; it brings good fame and long life, stops blood, and repels poison and deception. If you hold it closed in your hand with the grass that is called in the same way, you are invisible.) (My translation). Here a sort of ritual is adumbrated where an artificial fog would be created for making one invisible: *Of han latæs i et kaar mæth watn oc sættæs innæn solskyn, tha wældær thæt watn oc løpær yvær oc gør æns thokæ* (116v) (If it is left in a container with water and put in the sunlight, the water boils, overflows and makes a kind of fog) (my translation), giving a sort of rational explanation. However, the invisibility stone's name is not mentioned in *HF*.

⁶⁰ Kristensen 1908-20.

⁶¹ <<http://tekstnet.dk/manuscript-descriptions/koebenhavn-nks66,8-lang-beskrivelse>> (last accessed October 15, 2020).

their implementing role in the political and cultural project of unification.⁶² The Danish versions of the three poems are preserved in Cod. Holm K47 (dating back to ca. 1500) and only one, *Ivan løveridder*, appears in Cod. Holm. K4 (a composite code assembled at different times).⁶³ While all texts contained in K47 belong to the same genre, K4 is a compilation of heterogeneous works: it contains *Ivan løveridder*, a number of female saints' legends, the Annals of Ryd Abbey, and Harpenstreng's Books of Stones.

Trying to speculate what the intent behind the presence of both Harpenstreng's book of stones and the *Eufemiavisa* might have been in such a context, one hypothesis could be a basic idea of extending the edifying function from the virtuous exempla shown in the legendary to the chivalric poem: the spirit of selfless generosity which animates all the *Eufemiavisor* would have been promoted as a model to imitate. As Bullitta suggests in his article, the code might have been first designed for a female cloister⁶⁴ and later, by expanding its contents through the addition of the poem, in its new guise it might have been addressed to an audience of aristocratic women. Furthermore, female cloisters traditionally hosted women of noble families, who could have been acquainted with romances before entering the convent. Thus, a common means of transmitting the two genres would facilitate the reception of the divine nature of gems. They were not only valuable symbols of beauty and economic power, but also God's gifts, symbols of religious and divine qualities. Although *Ivan løveridder*, but not *HF*, is in question here, its occurrence in Cod. Holm. K4 nevertheless suggests a link between the two genres.

3.3. *Hertig Fredrik av Normandie and Harpenstreng's Book of Stones*

While the stones set in Malmrit's ring are not specified, the names of those adorning the chess boards (*HF*, 431-439), King Malmrit's (*HF*, 146-171) and Queen Geindor's clothes (*HF*, 352-358) as well as Karlavint's architecture (*HF*, 371), are revealed:-

⁶² Bampi 2017, 177-178.

⁶³ In his article, Bullitta hypothesizes that when Archdeacon Peder Lykkes was elected Bishop of Ribe in 1419, he could have taken a manuscript containing the Legendary with him, the Annals of Ryd Abbey, and the Book of Stones from Roskilde. Later when he became Archbishop of Lund, in Scania, "In that region the manuscript coexisted with secular literary material of Swedish provenance, such as the Old Danish *Yvein, The Knight of the Lion*, to which it was later bound to form a single composite codex" (Bullitta 2017, 23).

⁶⁴ Bullitta 2017, 22.

Den vapenrock han på sig bär
 Dyra stenar däri var
 Han skin som sol (146-148)⁶⁵
 [...]

 Hans remar voro rika borda
 Med *berillis* underlig gjorda
 Hans hosor hvita som filsben,
 Han var riker med ädla stenar;
 De listor voro av guldnet rena;
 som de stenar är fasta på
 både stora ock så små;
 framman i hans hjälme sken
 en stolter ljus *karbunkelsten*,
 på hans nacke en *jakant*
 som prisat var för stora pant,
amatister och *robiner*
 som skära voro och övrit fina,
safirer båda stora och små,
torkues man där och såg,
smaragder och *granatar*
 stood där väl till måtta
 och många dyra stena
 voro där satta med ämne. (153-171)⁶⁶

(In the armor he wears / there were precious stones, / he shone like the sun / [...] / His belts were richly hemmed / With beryls wonderfully made / His tights white as ivory, / He was rich with precious stones; / The (helmet) edges were of pure gold; / with stones fixed on it / both large and small; / in front of his helmet / a superb clear carbuncle stone shone, / on his neck a hyacinth / praised with high value, / amethysts and robins / which were clear and beautiful, / sapphires both large and small, / turquoise one saw there, / emeralds and garnets / were set in good proportion / and many precious stones / were there set with expertise.)

In Harpenstreng's lapidary all the stones in the quoted passage (*berillis*, *karbunkelsten*, *jakant*, *amatister*, *safirer*, *smaragder*, *granater*), in addition to

⁶⁵ *HF*, 154.

⁶⁶ *HF*, 156.

those mentioned above (*kristall, jaspis*) – except for garnet, which is considered as a type of hyacinth – occur as follows:⁶⁷

VIII. Berillus ær en ærlyk steen . Han hauær lyt æns hafs watn . ællær oli . [...] Thænne steen ær goth for . u . winæ . oc for wathæ . oc . i . strith . oc gør man .u. winnælyk . oc myld . han gør got næmæ . oc menær houæth wærk . oc lætæ . oc ær goth watæ øghn oc for hostæ . oc for thrang bryst . oc thæn thær hanum bær waldugh gør thæn | steen . oc tændær eld af syk of han wændæs oftæ geen sool. (f. 121v)

(8. Beryl is a noble stone. It is the color of the seawater, or of oil [...] This stone is good against enemies and harm and in battles and makes one invincible and mild. It brings good fame and makes headache and nausea pass, and it is good for watery eyes, cough and rickets, plus the stone makes powerful the one who bears it and throws out fire if you turn it around often in the sunlight.)⁶⁸

XV. Karbunkel. Carbunculus hetær en ærlyk steen . oc han ær røthær æn nokær annæn steen . Han giuær af syk lyus . i . myrky æns eld . (f. 123v)

(15. Carbuncle is a noble stone and it is redder than any other stone. It gives off light like fire in the darkness.)

XXXVI. Jakant: Iacintus: Iacinctus hetær en ærlyk sten . oc ær thrynnæ kyns . En hetær grenat oc ær røth . Annæn hetær citrin oc ær guul æns wax. Thrithi hetær venæt . oc hauær en bleklæ lyt . af thæssæ ær grenat bæst. Han styrkær lykum oc æltær burt ryghlik . oc ondæ wæntæ . Hauær man hanum um hals . ællær . a . fyngær. tha gør han man vryg . oc trygh. oc wærtugh mæth gæstæ . Han gør at souæ . oc giuær lymmæ styrky. oc styrkær sinær. Venæt giuær. at fangæ rykdom. oc star. i. mot etær. (f. 130r).

(36. Jacynth is called a noble stone and it is of three kinds. One of them is called garnet and is red, another is called citrine and is yellow like wax. The third is called venet and has a pale color. Of all three, garnet is the best: it improves complexion and drives back pain and bad spirits away. If you wear

⁶⁷ <<http://tekstnet.dk/manuscript-descriptions/koebenhavn-nks66,8-lang-beskrivelse>> (last accessed November 20, 2020).

⁶⁸ The translations of this as well as all the following passages from the Old Danish lapidary are mine.

it around your neck or finger, it keeps you sane and safe and kind with guests. It induces sleep, strengthens limbs, and strengthens senses. Venet makes one conquer riches and is good against poison.)

I. Amastist: Ametistus hetær en ærlyk sten oc hauær røthælyk bla lyt . æns ui-olæ . oc rosæ . summæ ær oc bløkær . Thænnæ sten ma grauæs . oc ær . i . mot drukænskap oc han kombær af india land . Han æltær burt ondæ hygælse . | oc giuær goth undærstandælse oc gør man at wakæ . (f. 118v).

(1. Amethyst is called a noble stone and has a blue-reddish light, and pink like violets and roses, some are paler. This stone can be engraved, and it is used against drunkenness and comes from India. It dispels evil thoughts and gives good understanding and keeps one awake.)

LII. Saphir: Saphirus hetær en ærlyk steen . Han hauær lius bla lyt . æns skær himmæn . Thæn fra medos kombær ær bæst . oc thæn thær hanum bærae . skal reen . i . syk wærae . oc han ær goth with øghn oc wisnæ limmæ . oc hanum skathær æi swik . oc æi auænd . oc æi ræzlæ . oc hanum wetæs bøn . oc ær guth thaklyk . oc han ær go|oth til frithmaal . oc sættæ . Han helær lykum oc styllær swet . rensær øghn . oc menær houæth wærk . of han thwas . i . miælk . oc lataes han . a . byld . thatha helær thæt (135r).

(52. Sapphire is called a noble stone. It is a light blue color like a clear sky. The one which comes from Medialand is the best and the man who bears it will be pure in himself and it is good for eyes, atrophied limbs. Treason and envy or fear will not harm you and it makes one pious and devoted to God and is good for reconciliation. It cures abscesses and stops sweat, purifies eyes and cures headache.)

LIII. Smaragdus hetær en ærlyk sten. Han havær grønæræ lyt æn nokæt annæt thær til ær, antygh yrtæ ællær færvæ. Oc han ær fleræ kyns, en ær sciticus oc en ær bactrianus oc en ær | niliacus. Scyticus ær bæst. Thænnæ steen takær fra gryp et kyns folc thær hetæ Eremaspi. Hanum hafthe Nero keysær til speghæl thæghær han skulde orlugh havæ. Thær i sa han at han skuldæ sighær fangæ. Thænnæ steen økær rykdom oc waldær got answar oc wrækær bur[t] ulyckæ oc helær brotfællnygh oc hwilær thrættæ øghn. Han skal thwas i win oc oli af oliuæ. (f. 135v)

(53. Emerald is called a noble stone. It is greener than any other existing thing, plant or color. It is of different types, one is scythicus, one bactrianus, one niliacus. Scythicus is the best. A people called Eremaspi took this stone from a griffin. The Emperor Nero had it as a mirror when he had to wage war, he saw inside it if he would win. This stone increases wealth, procures good response, drives away bad luck, heals epilepsy, and rests tired eyes. It must be washed in wine and olive oil.)

XVII Kristall. Cristallus: Cristallus hetær en ærlyk steen. Han warthær af enkyns gameliiz. oc thær af hauær han bathæ lyt oc kuld . Af thæn cristallæ thær trynd ær. læggæs han ællær haldæs han gen sool . mæth tundær . tha giuær han eld af syk . Han dughær for thyrst | oc for hetæ. [...]. (f. 124v)

(17. Crystal is the name of a noble stone. It descends from an ancient kind from which it derives its color and coldness. If that Crystal which is round, is put or held in the sunlight with sparks it throws out fire. It is good for thirst and hunger.) [...]

XXXV. Iaspis: Iaspis hetær en . ærlyk steen . Han hauær iæfn grøn lyt . gømæn skynænd . Bæræs han renlyk . i . sylf . tha ær han goth for rithæsoth . oc watnsot. [...] oc mæth hanum giuæs wald . oc trollæ se with hanum. (f. 129v)

(35. Jasper: Jasper is called a noble stone. It is a green color, a shining gem. It should be properly set in silver, then it is good for fevers and hydrophobia [...] and with its power is given and magic.)

4. Conclusions

Such a multicolored display of gems, embellishing clothes, furniture, weapons etc., undoubtedly played a functional role in the aesthetics of *HF*'s text, at the same time communicating deep and multifaceted implications bound to medical/magical powers and Christian symbolism spread by lapidaries, like Harpenstreng's work, the manuscript tradition of which shows interesting links with that of the *Eufemiavisor*, possibly being the mysterious unnamed *steinabok*.

In the light of what is stated in Harpenstreng's lapidary, several descriptions in *HF* seem to suggest information that goes beyond the stones' beauty:

crystal in windows would produce light and defend from outside (cold and enemies), amethysts set in tables would help against drunkenness and poison, sapphires in weapons would give courage in war, beryls set in armor would grant victory in battle, emeralds would bring luck and good outcomes and foresight, hyacinth would bring wealth and strength, jaspers in chessboards would help one to win.

Stones could capture audiences' imagination as defenders, healers, magic helpers, and even as Christian allegories (i.e. crystal: of angels and virginity, jasper: of faith and apostles). In addition, their hardness represented spirituality as well as faith and incorruptibility. This mixture of learning and natural magic is assumed to have had a powerful impact on the Scandinavian aristocracy's mentality,⁶⁹ combined as it was in Fredrik's enterprises with adventurous narratives in a genre which allows the protagonist to transcend reality and interact with supernatural agents.

In short, in *HF*, magic is substantially felt to be positive and positively interacting with the protagonist. Magical powers are attributed to gems, stressing their indestructible nature and manifold functionality: the stones' appeal reached beyond their visible surface, without arousing any form of heretical accusations. Even magical beliefs such as invisibility could still be used in a Christian context and not be condemned as black magic as was to happen later with the Reformation.⁷⁰ The poem delivered a momentous message, both in the relatively peaceful 14th century (even Magnus Eriksson possessed a copy of *Eufemiavisor*, proving their close and constant relationships with the Nordic royal houses), and later on, in a time of political instability caused by the continuous struggles between the monarch and the Swedish and Danish nobility under the Kalmar Union. Natural magic, described in *HF*, appears to be at the service of royal authority and the military aristocracy (formalized in the Scandinavian kingdoms in the 13th century): those who possessed such treasures were also called on by God to undertake noble enterprises, to collaborate and be loyal towards monarchs, respecting their duties as feudal lords and being faithful to the Church as Christian knights.

⁶⁹ Heng 2003, 24-28.

⁷⁰ Bonner 1950, 69-71.

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STEPHEN A. MITCHELL

MAGIC IN OLD NORSE-ICELANDIC LITERATURE: A TYPOLOGY OF MODES

Magic often plays a significant role in medieval European narratives, where it can be used in a variety of ways, including as a literary tool. In this essay, I briefly consider magic as a narrative device and propose a typology of modes of presentation (*general*, *detailed*, and *explicit*), and argue that Old Norse-Icelandic literature appears to engage in an especially wide array of narrative presentations of magic, especially when contrasted with comparable materials from elsewhere in northern Europe.

1. Introduction

As the editors of the recent *Routledge History of Medieval Magic* note, “The study of medieval magic has seen a great deal of important work in recent decades. Since the 1990s, scholars have demonstrated that a wide range of people were engaged in magical activities from all groups in society, and that a great variety of magical texts were in circulation”.¹ By contrast with this concern with the socio-historical ‘realities’ of medieval magic, the present essay, although broadly concerned with the same cultural phenomenon, is not so much focused on the existence of, and reactions to, magic *per se*, as with how magic is presented and used in narratives, specifically in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, texts that use and portray magic in a very wide array of narrative modes, wider, I believe, than do most other medieval literatures.²

Understandably, the question of the reliability, or ‘truth value’, of these presentations often overshadows the value the presence of magic itself offers the text. By way of example, let us consider the case of *Eiríks saga rauða* (chap. 4), which famously presents audiences with one of Old Norse-Icelandic literature’s seminal descriptions of the performance of a prophesying ceremony, what the author refers to as a *seiðr* ritual. So detail-rich with information (and, one might add, information that tallies well with other Old Norse-Icelandic

¹ Page, Rider 2019, 1-12.

² To illustrate this quality, I take the opportunity to contrast the Scandinavian data with the Celtic and Anglo-Saxon traditions, anything but a novel idea (e.g. Bonser 1926; Power 1987), but one I will press in a different direction than has usually been the case (cf. Chadwick 1953-57; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1957; Einar Ól. Sveinsson 1975; Gísli Sigurðsson 1988).

sources) is this episode's testimony that ignoring discussion of it in the context of medieval Nordic magic is essentially unthinkable. To earlier generations of scholars, the authenticity of its presentation of materials – and thus the scene's 'truth value' – was largely regarded as unassailable. Rudolf Meissner,³ for example, argued about this scene, "Zu diesem bilde hat sicher kein sagaschreiber, vor allem kein geistlicher, einen zug hinzugefügt. Zur echten, alten überlieferung gehört auch die weissagung, die Guðríðr als dank von der seherin empfängt" 'To this picture, no saga writer, no priest in particular, has added a stroke. To the genuine old tradition belongs as well the prophecy Guðríðr receives as thanks from the seeress'. A generation later, Dag Strömbäck wrote of *Eiríks saga's* description, "Sagans skildring [...] är sejdens *locus classicus*" 'The saga's depiction [...] is *seiðr's locus classicus*,'⁴ and concludes that it would not be inappropriate to regard the text as containing skilfully wrought presentations of antiquarian and legendary materials.⁵

Although few would argue with Strömbäck's characterization of the significance of this text, it is also true that scholarship in recent years has become more ambivalent about how to treat this scene than were earlier generations: Catherina Raudvere⁶ examines this case with an unusually perspicacious eye, but does so, as she writes, "med viss tvekan" 'with a certain hesitation', on the sensible grounds that this text is all too often used as though it were a detailed ethnographic description of a contemporaneously observed ritual. Similarly, in his treatment of shamanism in Old Norse myth and magic, Clive Tolley⁷ cautions against reading this scene too literally on the grounds of what he elegantly labels "the deceptive allure of verisimilitude."

Yet despite these sensible cautions, any number of scholars (the present writer included) continue to parse the text for possible traces of Scandinavia's pre-Christian magical traditions: thus, for example, although François-Xavier Dillmann rejects the purported shamanic connections of this episode, he nevertheless reasonably accepts the possibility that some of the details might have survived within Guðríðr's family as "récits oraux qui auront été transmis de génération en génération" 'oral stories that have been passed on from

³ Meissner 1902, 82.

⁴ Strömbäck 1935, 50.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁶ Raudvere 2003, 122-124.

⁷ Tolley 2009, I, 487.

generation to generation'.⁸ Many other students of Nordic magic⁹ have similarly placed a degree of faith in this important section of *Eiríks saga rauða*, especially where its testimony harmonizes with other thought-to-be reliable sources.

Of course, the matter of this text's possible contributions to our understanding of magic in the Old Norse world will always be with us: my purpose in this essay is neither to re-evaluate the basic information in such texts as *Eiríks saga rauða* nor in the case of that episode to revisit the substantial bibliography its thousand or so words have generated, but rather to raise the issues that surround it and similar texts as epistemological problems within the study of Old Norse-Icelandic cultural history. My questions are less about 'truth value' as such, at least not in the first instance, but rather about how magical materials are presented and used in Old Norse-Icelandic narratives and narrativizations, and what further conclusions these observations might allow.

2. Magic as a literary tool

Although I fervently believe there is much to be learned about pre-Christian beliefs from this section of *Eiríks saga rauða*, it is also undoubtedly true that we deprive our understanding of magic's other dimensions if we do not fully appreciate the many ways medieval authors employ and deploy magic as a strategy, as, for example, Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir has successfully demonstrated.¹⁰ For saga writers, magic offered numerous narrative possibilities: it was, for example, a special sort of chronotope, a reliable and productive marker of the passage of time and the changes in culture and religion: i.e., our ancestors lived in that world, but we live in this one. After all, in the Old Norse-Icelandic lexical inventory of terms related to "magic", words that variously refer to concepts like "heathenism", "old lore", and "witchcraft", such as *forneskja*, *fornfræði*, *fornfróðr*, *fyrnska*, and *fornspjöll*, are relatively common. In these cases, the first element in the compounds, *forn*, meaning 'old', 'ancient', 'former', itself implicitly conjures images of something from the past.

Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar offers an excellent opportunity to see the thinking of a fourteenth-century Icelander in this regards in his presentation

⁸ Dillmann 2006, 293.

⁹ E.g. Price 2019; Mitchell 2011, 2014.

¹⁰ Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2009.

of magic and witchcraft. Incapable of being defeated by normal means, Grettir has survived internal exile on Iceland for years, and in desperation, his enemies look for magical assistance from a known ‘wise woman’, Þuríðr. When the old crone is introduced, she is described as very old and useless; moreover, it said that when she was young and men were heathens, she had been both *fjolkunnig* and *margkunnig* (terms denoting the manifold knowledge associated with the witchcraft), but it was generally thought she had now forgotten it all. The author further notes that although the country was by then Christian (i.e., in the early 11th-century setting of the story), there remained nevertheless many heathen sparks, and although it was punishable with the so-called minor outlawry to publicly worship in the old way, doing so in secret was still possible:

[...] hon var mjök gømul ok til lítils fær, at því er mǫnnum þótti. Hon hafði verit fjolkunnig mjök ok margkunnig mjök, þá er hon var ung ok menn váru heiðnir; nú þótti sem hon myndi ǫllu týnt hafa. En þó at kristni væri á landinu, þá váru þó margir gneistar heiðninnar eptir. Þat hafði verit lög hér á landi, at eigi var bannat at blóta á laun eða fremja aðra forneskju, en varðaði fjörbaugssøk, ef opinbert yrði. (*Grettis saga*, ch. 78).

([Þuríðr] was very old and not considered capable of doing much. She had been well versed in magic and knew many secret arts when she was young and people were heathen, but by this time it was thought she had lost all her powers. Yet although Christianity had been adopted in Iceland, many vestiges of paganism remained. It had been the law in Iceland that sacrifices and other black magic were not forbidden if they were practised in private, but were punishable by lesser outlawry if done publicly.)¹¹

Of course, portraying Þuríðr in this way underscores one of the central ideas of this saga, i.e., that Grettir too belongs to a different sort of world, one where his strength and unique talent for dispatching supernatural enemies belongs to an imagined ‘Heroic Age’, a world of the past.

One might argue that a similar evocative mood infuses one of the most famous scenes of a magical performance in all of Norse literature, and certainly

¹¹ Scudder 2005, 173. The published translations used here are cited in the bibliography following the edition of the original text; additions and emendations are noted in square brackets.

one of the most discussed,¹² namely, the story of Þorbjörg lítilvölva [‘little sibyl’] in *Eiríks saga rauða*, which, as noted above, describes in considerable detail a so-called *seiðr* ceremony. The saga was written in the 13th century and preserved in 14th-century manuscripts, but purports to tell of events from around the millennium in the then-recently established Greenlandic colony. In this much-discussed case of a soothsaying ceremony, following lengthy descriptions of the dress and behaviour of the seeress, Þorbjörg, at the point when she is to begin the ritual,

[...] var henni veittr sá umbúningr, sem hon þurfti at hafa til at fremja seiðinn. Hon bað ok fá sér konur þær, er kynni fræði þat, sem til seiðsins þarf ok Varðlokur hétu. En þær konur fundusk eigi. Þá var at leitast at um bæinn, ef nokkurr kynni. Þá segir Guðríðr: ‘Hvárki em ek fjölkunnig né vísendakona, en þó kenndi Halldís, fóstura mín, mér á Íslandi þat kvæði, er hon kallaði Varðlokur. (ch. 4)

([...] she was supplied with the preparations she required for performing the witchcraft [*seiðr*]. She asked for the assistance of women who knew the spells needed for performing [lit., had that ‘knowledge’ which was necessary to] the witchcraft, known as Warlock-songs [*Varðlokur*]; but there were no such women available. So inquiries were then made amongst all the people on the farm, to see if anyone knew the songs. Then Guðríðr said, ‘I am neither a sorceress nor a witch, but when I was in Iceland my foster-mother Halldís taught me spells which she called Warlock-songs.’)¹³

Guðríðr then performs the songs to the seeress’s evident satisfaction and is praised highly for them by Þorbjörg, who then offers Guðríðr a prophecy about her future: “Þú munt gjaförð fá hér á Grænlandi, þat er sæmiligast er, þó at þér verði þat eigi til langæðar, því at vegir þínir liggja út til Íslands, ok mun þar koma frá þér bæði mikill ætt ok góð...” ‘You will make a most distinguished match here in Greenland, but it will not last long, for your paths all lead to Iceland; there you will start a great and eminent family line [...]’.¹⁴

The performance of these special pagan songs and their powerful magic¹⁵ – and especially the reluctance shown by Guðríðr, whose descendants will

¹² See, e.g. Price 2019, 39–41 *et passim*, and the cited literature.

¹³ Magnusson, Hermann Pálsson 1965, p. 83.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ See Mitchell 2001.

include several Icelandic bishops, to engage in these pagan survivals – are, as already Strömbäck points out,¹⁶ used by the author as a means of favourably underscoring Guðríðr’s piety, and by extension praise her progeny. This reading does indeed fit with the overall scheme of the saga, yet at the same time, the scene also evokes a strong sense of nostalgia, a feeling already implicit in the comment by Guðríðr that it is back in Iceland that her stepmother had taught these songs to her – “I am neither a sorceress nor a witch, but when I was in Iceland my foster-mother Halldís taught me spells which she called Warlock-songs”.

Guðríðr’s performance and Þorbjörg’s subsequent prophecies thus look both back to the past – to Iceland, to the pagan world of which the characters were recently a part with it reassuring ritual, recently lost in the Conversion – and to the future, that is, to the eventual resolution of the current famine, to the fate of the colony, and to Guðríðr’s own future and her lineage. Thus, Guðríðr’s performance of a magic song of this sort, as I have written elsewhere,

seen within the framework of the tiny tenth-century famine-plagued Greenlandic colony at Herjólfssnes reflected in the saga, can also be understood to be a special kind of performance, a performance of things past, of a world far away, of nostalgia, of memories. By singing these special sings, the settlers connect, not only, as presented in the saga, with the spirit world, but, through the *seiðr*’s ritual form, with the memory of the world and the people these colonists living on the edge of the world had left behind them.¹⁷

In addition to this feel for the past, one could argue that episodes of this sort also represent an early iteration of magical realism, with artfully interwoven presentations of reality, irrationality, and the supernatural. That is surely the case in *Egils saga Skalla-Grimssonar* (ch. 59), when the eponymous hero finds himself in serious difficulties at York and is advised by his friend, Arinbjörn, that he should compose a poem in the king’s honour overnight. Arinbjörn warns Egill, however, that Queen Gunnhildr will do what she can to spoil his case (*at Gunnhildr mun allan hug á leggja at spilla þínu máli*). When later that evening Arinbjörn checks on Egill’s progress, he is told that the twittering of a swallow sitting at the window has distracted Egill. When Arinbjörn goes to look, he sees *hamhleypta nokkur* (a shape changer of some kind) flying away. Arinbjörn keeps watch through the night and all goes well for Egill’s com-

¹⁶ Strömbäck, 1935, 56-59.

¹⁷ Mitchell 2013, 296.

position. There can be little doubt but that that the swallow is indeed Queen Gunnhildr in avian form, even if this point is not expressly made – modern audiences, like their medieval predecessors, one expects, leave the episode with a degree of awe, respect, and a bit of a shiver.

These few examples must suffice here to make the point that although Old Norse-Icelandic literary presentations of magic may serve well as sources for understanding this topic (as exemplified in Price, for example),¹⁸ scholars have also increasingly begun to explore the value of these materials when directed towards other ends, where magic is also a means to an end and not just an end in itself.¹⁹

3. *Modes of presentation*

Drawing on the consideration of typologies in which both literary criticism and ethnography (especially among those scholars concerned with ethnographic writing) have engaged over the decades, I want to tentatively – *very* tentatively – suggest a simple typology which would, I believe, allow us to make more exact comparisons among our surviving medieval magical texts; moreover, such a typology appears to result in a surprising finding about the unique nature of narratives and medieval ethnographic writing in the West Norse world.

Of course, the comparison of Old Norse-Icelandic literature to (and as) the work of pre-modern ethnographers, and the potential reliability of these documents, has had a long life within scholarship.²⁰ One particularly intriguing aspect of what the sagas can offer the student of magic and related topics, such as witchcraft, is that, as I wrote some year ago, “Whereas in some tradition areas, the student of medieval witchcraft is largely confined to statutes and trial documents, for the Nordicist there exists an important opportunity beyond what can be gleaned from legal statutes: exceptionally among medieval European vernaculars, Old Norse boasts remarkable literary treasures from which glows the patina of ethnographic realism, *viz.* – the Icelandic sagas”.²¹

The search for schemes of various sorts – templates, taxonomies, and typologies – has a very long history in all disciplines that are concerned with

¹⁸ Price 2019.

¹⁹ E.g. Jóhanna Katrín Friðriksdóttir 2009, 2013; Meylan 2011. Cf. Mitchell 2011, 74-116.

²⁰ E.g. Lindow 1973; Durrenberger 1990; Clunies Ross 1994.

²¹ Mitchell 2003, 138.

narratives, whether folkloristics, literary criticism, or anthropology.²² Torfi Tulinius,²³ for example, has applied Tzvetan Todorov's concepts of "étrange," "merveilleux" and "fantastique" to Icelandic saga writing and its position in the history of the European novel with good results. One especially influential scheme of this sort is the "theory of modes" proposed by the Canadian literary critic, Northrop Frye,²⁴ aspects of which have played important roles in modern discussions of, among other areas, ethnographic writing,²⁵ particularly as the field came to grips with the strategies, realities, and rhetorical devices – both hidden and overt – in such writing.²⁶

In a brief essay, titled *A Short Typology of Ethnographic Genres: Or Ways to Write About Other Peoples*, John Gatewood²⁷ suggests nine categories of such writing. Not all of these categories map directly onto the questions I am raising here, but they do provide helpful insights into how we might begin. If we include all sources of data on Nordic cultural traditions, and not just Old Norse-Icelandic saga writing, some of Gatewood's types resemble, even mirror strongly, our resources, such as the personal narrative (e.g. Ibn Faḍlān's *Rūsiyyah*), the chronicle (e.g. *tänkeböcker*; *tingsbøger*), and the ethnographic biography (e.g. *Vita Ankarii*). On the other hand, the vast majority of our surviving materials (especially with regard to the Old Norse-Icelandic world) would, it seems to me, fall into the category of what Gatewood refers to as "ethnographic fiction". According to Gatewood's scheme, two hallmarks of this category are that: 1) "coherence of text is based on a story line, plot structure, or vivid characters", and 2) "not all of the statements made are intended to be regarded as factual reporting, but factual details are an integral part of the text".²⁸

In considering what might constitute a typology of such presentations in medieval Scandinavia,²⁹ what is striking is how comparatively wide – that is, in comparison to other Nordic traditions and to other North European traditions – is the range of styles used in the Old Norse-Icelandic corpus to repre-

²² See, e.g. Honko 1979-80; Marcus, Cushman 1982; Mitchell 1991, 8-32.

²³ Torfi Tulinius 2013.

²⁴ Frye 1971 (1957).

²⁵ Cf. Marcus 1980.

²⁶ A large and growing literature exists on this topic (e.g. West 2007); I cite here only a few important items that have helped shape my thinking.

²⁷ Gatewood 1984.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁹ Although with a quite different set of goals and schemes, Bragg 1992 has taken a similar approach to charm magic.

sent the production of magical charms, as the examples below will, I believe, demonstrate. A scale, or typology, of these representations of charm magic might, I suggest, consist of the following, with an emphasis in all cases on the operational component of the magical act: 1) scenes where magic and/or verbal spells are referred to or play a role in the plot, but are not otherwise narrowly described (*general*); 2) scenes where the use of magic is minutely detailed by the narrator with considerable attention to performance practices, but without the charm texts themselves being expressed (*detailed*); and 3) scenes which in other ways resemble treatments at the *detailed* level but which additionally include all or parts of the charm texts themselves (*explicit*).

3.1. *Modes of presentation: general*

At one extreme, texts, those I believe have a general mode of presentation, refer to magic in useful but relatively laconic and unspecified way. Many medieval literatures contain texts of this sort, presentations that on the whole point to the *results* of the action, generally avoiding detailed engagement with the *process* of enacting magic. In such a case, a text might, for example, explain events as the result of magic, or note no more than that a character is capable of magic or, very frequently in the Old Norse-Icelandic tradition, refer to the fact that an individual is said to be knowledgeable, especially about many different types of things (e.g. *kunnigr*, *fjolkunnigr*, *margkunnigr*, *margfróðr*), something of a trope in the sagas.

Thus, when Queen Gunnhildr is described in *Haralds saga hárfagra* (Saga of Harald Fairhair), Snorri says merely that she, the most famous evil woman in all of saga literature, was ‘the fairest of women, intelligent and of wide knowledge [*margkunnig* i.e., skilled in magic], cheerful in speech and a very deceitful person and the fiercest’³⁰ (“kvinna fegrst, vitr ok margkunnig, glaðmælt ok undirhyggjumaðr mikill ok in grimmasta”, ch. 43). In fact, Gunnhildr appears frequently in saga literature, and what Snorri means by her being *margkunnig* we see on a larger scale elsewhere, although with her magic presented in relatively general terms. In *Njáls saga*, this same Queen Gunnhildr lays a curse on her Icelandic lover, Hrútr, saying, as she puts her arms around his neck and kisses him, “Ef ek á svá mikit vald á þér sem ek ætla, þá legg ek þat á við þik, at þú megir engri munúð fram koma við konu þá, er þú ætlar þér á Íslandi, en fremja skalt þú mega vilja þinn við aðrar konur” (ch. 6)

³⁰ Finlay, Faulkes 2016, 87.

‘If I have as much power over you as I think, the spell I now lay on you will prevent your ever enjoying the woman on Iceland on whom you have set your heart. With other women you may have your will, but never with her’.³¹ We do not hear more about the nature of the curse or its intended consequences from Gunnhildr at this stage, but in the subsequent sections of the saga, we learn a great deal about the effectiveness of the curse from Hrútr’s frustrated wife, Unnr.

And as we have seen (above), Gunnhildr’s magical talents are very slyly, and obliquely, woven into *Egils saga* (ch. 59), when she turns herself into *hamhleypa nokkur* ‘a shape changer of some kind’ in order to distract Egill as he attempts to compose a *drápa* in order to flatter King Eiríkr. Even though the treatment of Gunnhildr’s magical talents varies considerably in these three instances, I would regard all of them as examples of a general mode of presentation: that is not suggest that the role of magic is unimportant to the stories (anything but!), only that we do not get much of an impression of the operational aspects of the magic, only its impact on the plot and on the characters. It is important too to bear in mind that the sheer amount of detail piled on does not itself shift the texts with *general* modes of presentation into other categories.

The Old Norse *Þiðriks saga af Bern*, based on continental traditions, provides a case in point: here we are told in a vivid and detail-rich description of a queen who exercises remarkable powers, but with a description that lacks focus on the nature and constituent elements of the queen’s conjuring:

[...] ostacia fær út oc rærði sinn gand þat kollom ver at hon færi at sæiða sua sem gort var i forneskio at fiolkungar konor þær er ver kollom volor skyldo sæiða honom sæið. Sua mikit gerði hon af ser i fiokynge oc trollskap at hon sæiddi til sin margskonar dyr leona or biorno oc flugdræka stora hon tanði þa alla þar til at þæir lyddo hænnæ oc hon matti visa þæim a hændr sinom uvinom (Þiðriks saga, II:271)

(Ostasia went out and stirred up her magic. We would say that she was casting a spell, as the women who knew magic in the old times, the ones we would call *vala*, would do. She carried out such great spells of magic and trollship that she conjured up many kinds of beasts, lions and bears, and great flying dragons. She tamed them all so that they obeyed her and she could turn them against her enemies.)³²

³¹ Magnusson, Hermann Pálsson 1966, 49.

³² Haymes 1988, 216.

Again, the thick catalogue of beasts Queen Ostasia controls may be impressive and lengthy (facts useful in other contexts, of course), but as regards the point here, the descriptions remains operationally general.

3.2. *Modes of presentation: detailed*

Icelandic presentations of magic will, in fact, specify many different aspects of the process, but stop short of detailing the specific means and wording of the charm. In other words, the composition of the scene can be quite detailed, but lacks the charm text itself. A well-known if simple example of this kind of reference comes in *Laxdæla saga*, when we are told that: “Síðan lét Kotkell gera seiðhjall mikinn; þau færðusk þar á upp ǫll; þau kváðu þar harðsnúin fræði; þat váru galdrar. Því næst laust á hrið mikilli” (ch. 35) ‘Then Kotkel erected a large ritual-platform and they all climbed onto it; there they chanted potent incantations – these were magic spells. And presently a tempest arose’.³³

A much more detailed scene of malefic magic is related in *Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar* (Saga of Grettir the Strong), when in frustration at not having killed Grettir, his pursuers turn to magic and the help of the old witch (mentioned above), Þuríðr:

[...] er hon kom til strandar, haltraði hon fram með sænum, svá sem henni væri vísat til. Þar lá fyrir henni rótatré svá mikit sem axlbyrðr. Hon leit á tréit ok bað þá snúa fyrir sér; það var sem sviðit og gniðat ǫðrum megin. Hon lét telgja á lítinn flatveg, þar gniðat var; síðan tók hon kníf sinn ok reist rúnir á rótinni ok rauð í blóði sínu ok kvað yfir galdra. Hon gekk ǫfug andsælis um tréit ok hafði þar yfir mǫrg rǫmm ummæli. Eptir þat lætr hon hrinda trénu á sjá ok mælti svá fyrir, at þat skyldi reka út til Drangeyjar, ok verði Gretti allt mein at. (*Grettis saga Ásmundarsonar*, ch. 79)

([...] when she reached the shore she hobbled along by the sea as if following directions until she came to a tree lying there, a stub with the roots on, big enough to have to be carried on a man’s shoulders. She looked at the tree and asked the men to turn it over for her. The underside looked burnt and rubbed down. She made them scrape a flat surface where the tree had been rubbed, then took her knife and carved runes into the root, smeared them with her blood and recited spells. Then she walked backwards and wither-shins around

³³ Magnusson, Hermann Pálsson 1969, 129.

it, and spoke many mighty pronouncements upon it. After that she had the tree put to sea, pronouncing that it should drift out to Drangey – ‘and may it harm Grettir in every way’.)³⁴

Here is not only a minutely described presentation of charm magic in performance, but also one that maps well onto a charm scenario noted in *Ljóðatal* (List of Magic Spells), when Óðinn says (*Hávamál* 151), “Þat kan ec it séttá / ef mic særir þegn / á rótom rás viðar” ‘The sixth I know / if me someone wounds / with runes on gnarled root written’.³⁵

A similarly tactile image of magical practices comes in *Færeyinga saga*, when Þrandr apparently works magic that causes three dead men, or their apparitions, to appear in order to discover the reasons for and places of their deaths. The description of his preparations includes setting a large fire in the fire pit, making four trellises or frames, drawing nine squares, and requesting that no one speak to him: “Þrandr hafde þa latit gera ellda mykla j ellda skala ok grindr fiorar lætr hann gera med fiorum hornnum ok íx ræíta ristr Þrandr alla uega vt fra grindunum en hann setzst astol mille eldz ok grindanna hann bidr þa nu ekki vid sig tala ok þeir gera suo” (ch. 40) ‘Thrand had had big fires made in the hearth-room, and he had four hurdles [*frames*] set up with four corners, and he scratches nine squares all around out from the hurdles, and he sits on a stool between the fires and the hurdles. Now he gives orders that nobody is to talk to him, and they do as he says’.³⁶

Whether or not any of these scenes offer insights into the lived world of ritual magic in earlier periods, it is apparent that the authors want audiences to believe they are being treated to scenes of such activities. Specialists will continue to debate how much and what, if anything, from these episodes is to be taken as factual, but there can be little doubt but that the writers found minutely described activities such as we see here – carefully wrought images of individuals engaged in precisely charted behaviours – to be of value to their narratives: such descriptions offer audiences something more than would a simple reference to magic. Perhaps the details themselves are stylistically desirable, or help set a mood, or preserve data, or impart information, or in some

³⁴ Scudder 2005, 176-177.

³⁵ Hollander 1986, 38.

³⁶ Johnston 1975, 81. Placing this scene among the detailed modes assumes that there were, in fact, also verbal elements which go unmentioned. In theory, if the entire magical act was to be carried out in silence, perhaps this scene ought to be considered an explicit mode.

other way are preferable to simpler references to magic and give the reader something a mere passing reference would not.

3.3. *Modes of presentation*: explicit

The examples above are suggestive, of course, yet such episodes can often stop short of a full vision of what has supposedly transpired in their scenes. Among the Old Norse-Icelandic texts, however, there are some very special marked presentations, where the curtain is drawn back more fully and we are able to witness significant portions of the full range of the magical performance, including charms texts (although even in these cases, the authors sometimes appear to shy away from providing truly full descriptions).

The eddaic *För Skírnis* (Skírnir's Journey) is a case in point. The poem is preceded by a prose prologue in which the god Freyr, the son of Njörðr, sits in Óðinn's throne, Hliðskjálf, and looks over all the worlds. In the land of the giants, Freyr sees a beautiful maiden and is immediately seized by *hugsóttir miclar* 'great sicknesses of mind'. The poem itself opens with Njörðr's wife, Skaði, calling for Skírnir, Freyr's servant, and asking why Freyr is so glum. After Freyr reveals the cause of his *móðtregi* 'moodiness, heart's grief' to Skírnir, and after having exacted from Freyr his magical steed and sword as payment, Skírnir agrees to undertake a journey to woo Gerðr. Skírnir travels to Jötunheimar, where he first offers Gerðr a variety of gifts, then threatens Gerðr and her family with violence and death. When these means fail, he deploys a magical incantation expressed in twelve very explicit verses detailing his actions and the words of the charm.

Skírnir describes his acquisition of a magic wand (*tamsvöndr* 'taming rod' in v. 26; *gambanteinn* 'magic wand or rod' in v. 32) and, employing a verse form known as *galdralag* 'magic spell meter', he speaks the words of an imprecation, including a passage where Skírnir says that Gerðr will be like the pressed thistle at harvest time (*ver þú sem þistill, / sá er var þrunginn / í önn ofanverað* [v. 31]). Skírnir also makes reference to his ability to wield power when he declares *hvé ec fyrirbýð, / hvé ec fyrirbanna / manna glaum mani, / manna nyt mani*, v. 34 'how I forbid, / how I debar / men's mirth to the maid, / men's love to the maid'.³⁷ Although Gerðr had pushed aside Skírnir's earlier offers and threats, when he concludes the sexually malefic charm, Gerðr suddenly changes her tune – quite literally in a performative sense, or so one

³⁷ Hollander 1986, 71.

imagines – offering him a cup of mead and accepting her fate to be with one of the Vanir. On hearing the news, Freyr laments the period he must wait until he and Gerðr will meet.

As the key example of this sort of magic in medieval Nordic poetry, and the one eddaic poem that explicitly dwells on matters relating to the Vanir, *För Scírnis* has received more than its share of attention, including the charm around which the poem concludes.³⁸ Here we have one of the most specific and detailed presentations in all of Old Norse-Icelandic literature of magic being performed, but it is far from an isolated case, although among the most discussed. Indeed, we have several other opportunities to ‘witness’ Old Norse magic at work, or at least as the authors wanted us to imagine would have been the case centuries earlier.

Another very detailed description, one that seems to include at least part of the verbal charm being used, is exemplified by the case in *Egils saga Skalla-Grímssonar*, when the saga’s eponymous hero performs an elaborate curse, in consequence of which King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr – the same Queen Gunnhildr noted above – are driven from Norway into exile. Written in the 13th century about events that would have taken place in *ca.* AD 935, reads:

[...] búask þeir til at sigla, ok er þeir váru seglbúnir, gekk Egill upp í eyna. Hann tók í hönd sér heslistöng ok gekk á bergsnos nokkura, þá er vissi til lands inn; þá tók hann hrosshöfuð ok setti upp á stöngina. Síðan veitti hann formála ok mælti svá: ‘Hér set ek upp níðstöng, ok sný ek þessu níði á hönd Eiríki konungi ok Gunnhildi dróttningu’ – hann sneri hrosshöfðinu inn á land – ‘sný ek þessu níði á landvættir þær, er land þetta byggva, svá at allar fari þær villar vega, engi hendi né hitti sitt inni, fyrr en þær reka Eirík konung ok Gunnhildi ór landi.’ Síðan skýtr hann stönginni niðr í bjargrifu ok lét þar standa; hann sneri ok höfðinu inn á land, en hann reist rúnar á stönginni, ok segja þær formála þenna allan. Eptir þat gekk Egill á skip; tóku þeir til segls ok sigldu á haf út [...] (ch. 57)

([...] they prepared to sail, but when they were ready to set out Egil went ashore onto the island, picked up a branch of hazel and went to a certain cliff that faced the mainland. Then he took a horse head, set it up on the pole and spoke these formal words: ‘Here I set up a pole of insult against King Eirík and

³⁸ E.g. Reichardt 1939; Harris 1975; Larrington 1992; Gunnell 1993; Mitchell 2007. Cf. the many bibliographic entries in von See et al. 1997.

Queen Gunnhild’ – then turning the horse head toward the mainland – ‘and I direct this insult against the guardian spirits of this land, so that every one of the them shall go astray, neither to figure nor find their dwelling places until they drive King Eirik and Queen Gunnhild from this country.’

Next he jammed the pole into a cleft in the rock and left it standing there with the horse head facing towards the mainland, and cut runes on the pole declaiming the words of his formal speech. After that he went aboard, and they hoisted sail and made for the open sea.)³⁹.

In a famous versified imprecation, Busla lays a curse on the sleeping King Hringr in *Bósa saga*: it begins by calling on the forces of the supernatural world to harass the king, and then on the natural world to do unnatural things. The saga writer notes of the curse that “[...] hefir hún víðfræg orðit síðan, ok eru þar í mörg orð ok ill, þau sem kristnum mönnum er þarfleysa í munni at hafa [...]” (ch. 5) (It has become famous everywhere, and contains many wicked words unfit for Christian mouths).⁴⁰ As the final verse of the first section of her curse, Busla intones,

Sé þér í hvílu
sem í hálmeldi,
en í hásæti
sem á hafbáru;
þó skal þér seinna
sýnu verra,
en ef þú vilt við meyjjar
manns gaman hafa,
villist þú þá vegarins;
eða viltu þulu lengri? (ch. 5)

(You’ll rest no more/ Than on burning straw/Your throne will be/Like a swollen sea;/And what a shame/ When you play the game,/ When she’s on her back/ But you’ve lost the knack:/Would you like some more?)⁴¹

The king threatens the old woman but finds that he can neither rise from his bed nor stir his servants, and the narrative continues,

³⁹ Hermann Pálsson, Edwards 1976, 148.

⁴⁰ Hermann Pálsson, Edwards 1995, 205.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 206-207.

Busla lét þá frammi annan þriðjung bænarinnar, ok mun ek láta þat umlíða at skrifa hann, því at þat er öllum þarfleysa at hafa hann eftir, en þó má svá sízt eftir hafa hann, at hann sé eigi skrifaðr. En þó er þetta þar upphaf á:

“Tröll ok álfar
ok töfranornir,
búar, bergrisar
brenni þínar hallir,
hati þik hrímþursar,
hestar streði þik,
stráin stangi þik,
en stormar æri þik,
ok vei verði þér,
nema þú vilja minn gerir.” (ch. 5).

(Then Busla recited the second part of her prayer, but I’d better not write it here, as people repeat it only at their peril. If it’s not written down, the prayer is less likely to be repeated. All the same, this is how it starts:

Sorceresses,/ Elves and Trolls,/ Goblins and giants/ Will burn your halls:/ Frost giants fright you,/ Stallions ride you, [in a sexual sense; *streða* = penetrate, have intercourse with]/
Straws shall sting you,/ Tempests bring you/ To madness and Hell/ If you break my spell.)⁴²

Busla concludes by challenging the king to interpret a passage in runes, saying, “Ráðnú þessi nöfn, svá at rétt sé, elligar hríni allt þat á þér, sem ek hefi verst beðit, nema þú gerir minn vilja” ‘Interpret these names correctly or all my worst curses will bite you, unless you do as I ask’.⁴³ Although at some pains to note that much of this charm is being intentionally hidden from the audience, this saga nevertheless offers a detailed sense for what we can assume the narrator believed his audiences would accept as a ritual performance of magic, and, of course, a scene critical to the saga’s plot.

Similar, albeit somewhat less graphic, portraits are painted in other Old Norse-Icelandic texts as well (e.g. *Örvar-Odds saga*, *Orms þátr Stórolfssonar*, *Grógaldr*), although these explicit scenes are not nearly so common as are episodes with detailed modes of presentation: in addition to their presentations of actual charms in action, so to speak, what makes the explicit scenes so

⁴² *Ibid.*, 207.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 208.

very special, however, is the degree to which these are virtually without parallel in neighbouring and cognate vernacular traditions in northern Europe.⁴⁴

4. *Comparative perspectives*

The treatment of magic in Old Norse-Icelandic literature, and the possibility that magic is presented in this tradition in unique ways, is clearer when considered in a comparative perspective, and I offer here a few select – possibly not entirely representative – examples, beginning with several Old Irish cases.⁴⁵ We have, in fact already been treated to an explicit comparison of how magic is treated in the medieval literatures of Scandinavia and Ireland in the comments by Richard Kieckhefer.⁴⁶ There Kieckhefer distinguishes between the use of Norse magic in eddaic and saga sources, arguing that the sagas generally present readers with dark images of magical practitioners, “almost always thoroughly sinister characters, surly and unpopular”.⁴⁷ The sagas, he writes, should be viewed as reflecting popular opinion about magic and how it was thought to work as presented by authors “writing stories about a particular kind of social turmoil, and the magic they depicted was part of the shading they used in painting this canvas”.⁴⁸ Given the mythological content of the eddaic materials, Kieckhefer suggests that their source value for understanding magic as it was employed in human society should be seen as inferior to the sagas.

Turning to the Irish situation, Kieckhefer notes that “the vestiges in Irish literature come more from mythology than from popular conceptions of how magic was actually performed; in this respect the Irish materials resemble the

⁴⁴ How these scenes might relate to ecclesiastical traditions in Latin is, of course, a fair question, and something I hope to address in detail in a subsequent essay, but which I take up at present only in passing.

⁴⁵ The comments here are based on my best efforts to access the use of magic in Irish traditions, a field I approach with much humility and accept that experts may be aware of examples that have escaped my attention. On all matters related to the Irish materials, I am indebted to colleagues from Harvard’s Department of Celtic Languages and Literatures, especially Joseph Nagy, Elizabeth Gray, and Katherine Leach, for their helpful advice, but, of course, any flaws here are clearly my own.

⁴⁶ Kieckhefer 1989.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 52.

eddas more than the sagas”.⁴⁹ Rather than what might be called the phylogenetics of magic presentations in the literature of northern Europe, the current essay, like Kieckhefer’s, has promoted as its central concern the manner with which such acts are framed and presented in literary contexts, as distinct from the sorts of presentations of magic one encounters in court records, medical texts, amulets and other sources.

As it happens, the plot of the Old Norse-Icelandic *För Scírnis* (discussed above) parallels in important ways a famous Old Irish text and a comparison of the two provides a useful basis for assessing modes of presenting magic. As we have seen, *För Scírnis* carefully presents its audience with a charm being worked, with Skirnir’s acquisition of a magic wand (*tamsvöndr*; *gambanteinn*) and his uttering elements of a spell employing *galdralag* ‘magic spell meter’, with wording, it should be noted, that closely parallels runic charm magic archaeologically excavated *in situ*.⁵⁰ This Old Norse-Icelandic narrative resembles in a number of ways the Old Irish *Echtrae Chonnlai* ‘The Adventures of Connla the Fair’, dated by McCone to as early as the eighth century.⁵¹ The similarity between *Echtrae Chonnlai* and *För Scírnis* was noted already in 1928 by Jöran Sahlgren, an idea later endorsed by Konstantin Reichardt.⁵² Yet despite the similarities between these texts, the parallels between them do not seem not to have attracted much attention in recent decades.

In *Echtrae Chonnlai*, Conle, standing on the Hill of Usnech together with his father, Conn of the Hundred Battles, sees a woman. Conle asks where she is from and she explains that she is from the land where there is neither death nor sin. As only Conle can see the woman, Conn asks his son with whom he is speaking. The woman describes her own high station and her home and asks Conle to follow her, claiming that neither his youth nor beauty will fade if he does. Although they cannot see her, the others can hear her and Conn asks his druid for help, to prevent the woman’s magic from stealing his son. Corann, the druid, sings an incantation against the woman, who disappears, but before doing so, she throws an apple to Conle, food which uniquely sustains Conle over the course of a month. Longing for the woman seizes Conle, and at the end of this period, she approaches him and his father at Mag Ar-chommin. Conn calls for his druid again, but the woman admonishes Conn not to depend on the magic of druids, whose ‘wicked learning’ she condemns.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁵⁰ Cf. Mitchell 2007.

⁵¹ McCone 2000, 29-30.

⁵² Reichardt 1939, 494.

Conle leaps aboard the woman's crystal ship and they sail away, never to be seen again.

The section of *Echtrae Chonnlai* that specifically touches on the druid's use of magic reads:

Do:cachain iarum for suidiu inna mná co-nna:cóle nech guth inna mná co-nna:haccae Connle in mnaí ind úair sin. In tan luide in ben ass re rochetul in druad, do:corastar ubull do Chonnlu (122)

(Then the druid sang a charm against the woman's voice, so that no one heard the voice of the woman and Conle did not see the woman at that time. As the woman went away before the overpowering song of the druid, she threw an apple to Conle.)⁵³

For all of the broad similarities between the plots of *För Scirnis* and *Echtrae Connlai*, the presentation of magic in the Irish case is one that most of us recognize, that is, a broad and general, rather than detailed, reference to the use of magic. The phrasing here strikes me as very much in line with what for Old Norse-Icelandic literature I call a *general* mode of presentation: the use of magic is integral to the plot, as is the presence of the druid, a powerful practitioner of magic, but operationally, we learn about the singing of the charm and its consequences, but little else.

This general mode of presentation seems to me (and I emphasize *seems*) fairly typical of the use of magic in Irish tradition: so, for example, Lug's charm in *Cath Maige Tuired* 'The Second Battle of Mag Tuired'; the blind druid Mug Ruith's use of spells against the forces of the Irish high king Cormac mac Airt in *Forbuis Droma Damhghaire* 'The Siege of Druim Damhghaire'; Macha's curse on the Ulster men; and the raising of Fergus in the recovery of the Táin. Magic is a serious matter in these texts and its presentation can sometimes appear to be detailed, but as far I have been able to determine, none of them appear to engage in an *explicit* mode of presentation. Every tradition will naturally be subject to special considerations, and it may be that such is the case in Irish, for as Johnson-Sheehan and Lynch argue in their inspection of such presentations, "the Irish maintained a mythopoetic rhetoric based in narrative".⁵⁴ It is perhaps a similar view that inspires Chadwick,⁵⁵

⁵³ Jackson 1971, 144.

⁵⁴ Johnson-Sheehan, Lynch 2007, 233. Cf. Mees, 2009, 147.

⁵⁵ Chadwick 1953-57, 165-66.

who, in discussing the tales believed to descend from the lost *Cín Dromma Snechtai* ‘The Book of Drumsnat’, comments, “Here are stories of magical voyages, of knowledge acquired in lands outside normal geography, of *geis* or unavoidable, unescapable magical doom (*tabu*), of supernatural visions, of fairy visitors, of dress rehearsals for the afterlife, or trial trips to the land of immortals, the Land of Promise. *But of realistic normal experience never a word!*” (emphasis added).⁵⁶

In the case of Old English, the record appears to be substantially more mixed: after all, the Anglo-Saxon materials can certainly boast some of the most stunning and explicit charm texts anywhere – 146 of them in total in Grendon’s anthology,⁵⁷ with 86 metrical charms in Storms⁵⁸ – yet these texts are mostly culled from specialized manuscripts and do not as a rule form part of embedded narrative traditions within Old English literature. Indeed, references to vernacular magic in that world are most frequently excerpted from sermons, medical texts, laws, and other normative but generally non-narrative sources. To say so perhaps does not give Old English literature its full due, but it seems that although Christian miracles abound in *The Life of St Guthlac*, for example, and although there is much that we understand to be supernatural in *Beowulf*, there is little in such texts that directly relates to the performance of magic in the sense used here.

A similar situation prevails in the East Norse materials: apart from actual charm texts, often preserved as runic inscriptions or as entries in early medical texts, the Old Danish and Old Swedish corpora, like the Old English, generally do not engage magic in anything like the explicit fashion we see in the Old Norse-Icelandic materials. What emerges from the substantial body of Old Swedish narrative materials, including religious narratives, native historical works, and translated works of art, are tantalizing but imprecise general images – Nectanabus as a necromancer in *Konung Alexander* (‘King Alexander’), the various witches in *Sagan om Didrik* (‘Thidrek’s saga’), and so on.⁵⁹ In fact, there are a surprisingly large number of such materials in the Old Swedish corpus, but almost everywhere they exhibit presentations on the *general* and *detailed* levels, both of which might be thought of as common European images of magic and sorcery.

Similarly, the *Gesta Danorum* of Saxo Grammaticus makes frequent use

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ Grendon 1909.

⁵⁸ Storm 1948.

⁵⁹ Cf. Mitchell 2011, 112-116, 136-145, *et passim*.

of magic, but typically only in a most unmarked manner, lacking the explicit character of the Old Norse-Icelandic materials. Famously, *Gesta Danorum* opens with a euhemeristic discussion of three kinds of ‘wizards’ (*mathematici*) – giants, magicians, and their offspring. There are as well many other scenes of magical acts – e.g. skin-changers, weather magic, prophecy, love philtres – but as important and revealing as they often are, these uses of magic do not generally reveal exactly how magic is employed.

In the case of Othinus’s (i.e. Odin’s) rape of Rind, it is the craftiness of Othinus that is dwelt on, with Othinus only described as touching her with a charm-inscribed piece of wood (*cortex carminibus adnotatus*) (3.4,4). Occasionally Saxo offers more elaborate, even relatively fine-grained, discussions about possible magical practices, such as the description in *Gesta Danorum* of Harthgrepa’s re-animation of a corpse (1.6,4), but even here, we are only told, “Desiring to probe the will of the gods by magic (*magicę*), she inscribed most gruesome spells (*diris admodum carminibus*) on wood and made Hading insert them under the corpse’s tongue [...]”. What, if anything, either Haddingus or Harthgrepa intone at this point goes unmentioned (although the reanimated corpse has plenty to say about his being thus awakened!). Here again we have a dramatic scene of magic in action but without the author giving us any portion of the charm text itself.

5. Concluding remarks

If the conclusion being drawing here is correct – that is, that the Old Norse-Icelandic tradition, although similar in most ways to other literatures, sometimes goes beyond and engages more deeply with its traditions of magic than do the other literatures – what might be the source of this interest on the part of these authors? Several possible interpretations present themselves: one could imagine, for example, that ecclesiastical sources, especially in the form of saints’ lives or miracle collections, may have been especially important as models for the *explicit* representation scenes. Yet although these Latin scenes are often *detailed*, there is typically little by way of *explicit* presentation of charm magic. Thus, looking for models within the Latin tradition of the Church is a logical step but efforts to find likely templates for similar reporting of charms within the hagiographical materials and collections of *exempla* have as yet to reveal any obvious pattern that might have served as the blueprint for what we see in the Old Norse-Icelandic case.

Which returns us to the weighty question of whether Iceland treated its narrative (and especially its magical) patrimony differently than did other traditions, even in other Nordic traditions, especially in something of an ethnographic manner, a question that has attracted much discussion over the years.⁶⁰ Not surprisingly, opinions differ on this point: one view of the matter argues that it takes no more than a quick review of the country's settlement history, its economic, demographic and political circumstances in the Middle Ages, and its unique and important contributions to world literature to answer in the affirmative – Iceland was indeed profoundly different. The opposing view suggests that to employ these isolated data points without giving due consideration to the larger picture, including the need to acknowledge the degree to which Iceland was fully incorporated into western Christianity and the broader European cultural orbit, is to unfairly and inaccurately paint the nation as a merely quaint and colourful ethnic “other”.

Some years ago, I suggested that literary and cultural conditions in medieval Iceland differed in key ways from other areas in the Nordic world, ways that helped explain the popularity of the heavily folkloric late medieval legendary sagas, or *fornaldarsögur*, and their seemingly nostalgic recollection of the heroic past. Employing an ethnosymbolic approach to cultural memory, that book builds on the view that the *fornaldarsögur* texts were understood (or agreed upon to be understood) by their audiences to be “traditional” – storied tales based on orally-transmitted memories, or purported cultural memories, from the past.⁶¹ These written texts, I suggested, offered valuable and real cultural goods – consolation, pride, status, relief – to late medieval Icelanders, especially to elites within the emerging Nordic political picture and that they thus represent a specific use of tradition.⁶²

One must wonder whether or not this same interpretive framework would not also suggest a fruitful approach to the use of magic in Old Icelandic narratives as well? The very same issues raised then – *Was Iceland different?* and, if so, *How?*, *Why?* – are relevant with respect to the presentation of magic in the eddas and sagas as well. Pushing back against a mono-dimensional view of magic as ‘mere’ survival, a kind of dumb and unthinking form of continuity (cf. the views of nineteenth-century anthropologists and folklorists such as Edward Tylor and Andrew Lang) is a different view, namely, that the magic we find portrayed in explicit ways in the Icelandic texts – showing conser-

⁶⁰ E.g. Lindow 1973; Durrenberger 1990; Clunies Ross 1994; Mitchell 2003.

⁶¹ Mitchell 1991.

⁶² Cf. my comments in Mitchell 2018.

vative, preservationist tendencies, to be sure – was itself an empowering resource elite Icelanders found useful.

Such portrayals offered agency to those in a position to shape historical consciousness. Such portrayals of magic thus also represented a means of contesting political and cultural realities, parallel situations well-known from other cultures.⁶³ They are similar to, if also more than, what Roger Sanjek has termed “the ‘salvage ethnography’ of ‘memory cultures’”,⁶⁴ and offered their authors and patrons what would have been powerful tools in the saga writer’s toolkit. Perhaps in this regard too the proposed typology of *general*, *detailed*, and *explicit* narrative modes of presenting magic might assist specialists consider how magic is used in other traditions. And, after all, whatever one’s view, one inescapable consideration that should be underscored is that overwhelmingly the magic in these *detailed* and *explicit* scenes is not shown as being thwarted by Christian faith, but rather is consistently presented as actually working in the context of their narratives – Gerðr agrees to meet Freyr; Bósi is released by King Hringr; Grettir is finally killed by his enemies; Þrándr discovers how the men have died; King Eiríkr and Queen Gunnhildr are driven from Norway; Þorbjörg correctly prophesies Guðríðr’s fate. To the characters within the narratives, magic was a powerful tool, and so too it was to the authors and audiences of these works.

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⁶³ E.g. Abercrombie 1998.

⁶⁴ Sanjek 2002, 194.

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CARLA RIVIELLO

CIRCE'S MAGIC: FROM BOETHIUS'
DE CONSOLATIONE PHILOSOPHIAE TO THE
OLD ENGLISH AND OLD HIGH GERMAN VERSIONS

In the Old English and Old High German versions of *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, Circe's character (co-protagonist with Ulysses in Book IV, Metre 3) substantially reflects the description Boethius gave of her. According to Boethius, the sorceress was not particularly powerful as she had no influence over the minds of her victims. Analysing the translation strategies adopted, we can see how, in both cases, despite a declared unfamiliarity with magic, the representation modalities reveal an otherwise obvious familiarity with its procedures. And yet, the different cultural-historical contexts in which the two translations were carried out, and the different demands and purposes under the impulse of which they were promoted and brought to life, define a different approach to the re-writing of the myth. On the one hand, if devaluing the power of magic was a manifest political need at King Alfred's court, on the other, in the conventual school of Saint Gall, the stigmatisation of magic made way for the educational necessity of translating Boethius' work in order to explain its complexity with precise and perspicuous lexical choices.

In Book IV Metre 3 of *De Consolatione Philosophiae* (*DCP*), Boethius tells the story of Circe, the sorceress who transformed Ulysses' men into pigs. Among the complex and multifaceted representations of Circe's character in classical texts up to Late Antiquity and Christian Middle Ages,¹ King Theodoric's ill-fated counsellor chooses this episode as an exemplification of the vices that make men similar to animals. More specifically, the ineffectiveness of the sorceress' enchantments serves to demonstrate how transforming the body has no power over the mind, while the real dangers are the 'poisons' that cloud the mind without affecting the body.²

¹ For the classical *topoi* built around the myth of Circe, see Kaiser 1964, 200-206; for an accurate Christian reinterpretation, see above all, Rahner 1957, 164-196; finally, for an overview of the dissemination and re-elaboration of Circe's character in the European culture in Late Antiquity and Middle Ages, see Bettini, Franco 2010.

² All *DCP* references and quotations are from Moreschini 2005. For a more comprehensive analysis of this metre, see Gruber 2006, 333-335 and O'Daly 1991, 207-220, as well as Crabbe 1981 and Lerer 1985, 166-202.

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The two translations in vernacular, the Old English one (OEB), generally attributed to King Alfred the Great,³ and the Old High German one (Nb), redacted by Notker III of Saint Gall,⁴ both belong to a larger-scale translation program and seem to be re-elaborations, transpositions *ad sensum* rather than *ad verbum*, proposing Boethius' metres in prose,⁵ and not dismissing extensive additions or omissions.

Although it is impossible to identify the codices and/or redactions of the Latin texts employed, the translators obviously worked on the basis of manuscripts accompanied by glosses and commentary material.⁶ However, the re-

³ In recent years, the Alfredian authorship of the OEB has been questioned by Busse 2001 and, with an even more articulated argument, by Godden 2007a, and Godden, Irvine 2009, 140-146. However, a different theory has been sustained in other 'Alfredian' studies, among which Pratt 2007b; Bately 2009 and 2015; Szarmach 2012; for other bibliographical references, see Phillips 2016, 221, note 6, who aptly argues: "the Alfredian authorship question remains unresolved".

⁴ For the critical editions that provide the quotations contained on the following pages, see Godden, Irvine 2009 with Modern English translation, and Tax 1986-90.

⁵ As is known, the OEB was transmitted as a whole in two codices, conventionally identified as B (Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley 180), in which the entire text was translated in prose, and C (London British Library, Cotton Otho A.VI), in which most of the metres were rendered into verse. This analysis will be carried out on the prose text, given that in the complex debate on the possibility of identifying the exact relation between the two versions, many critics argue that the verses were a re-worked version of the Old English prose rather than a translation from Latin. In this regard, see Szarmach 2005 and 2008, Godden, Irvine 2009, 80-105 and 146-150; Irvine 2018.

⁶ The critical fortunes of Boethius' work, started in the Carolingian Age only to continue over the following centuries, are further attested by the vastness and complexity of the related manuscript tradition. See Courcelle 1967, Nauta 2009, Love 2012 and 2015 for the Latin commentary tradition, as well as Wetherbee 2009 and the papers included in Hoenen, Nauta 1997 and in Kaylor, Phillips 2016 for an overall idea of the dissemination of the Latin text and its translations into different languages. For an evaluation of Boethius' influence in Anglo-Saxon England, see Bolton 1977 and Szarmach 2012, as well as Cornelius 2016, Phillips 2016, and the papers collected in McMullen, Weaver 2018, Donaghey *et al.* 2019, concerning later periods. For an *excursus* on the reception in the German area from the earliest glossed copies until 1500, see Hehle 2012, as well as Hehle, Kaylor 2016 for "an inventory of Translations with Extracts from the Texts". In fact, since the earlier stages of its transmission, *DCP* seems to have been accompanied by various types of glosses, which progressively built a tradition in which "ideas accumulated and were variously recast and recombined [...] by many individuals, and in many centres of learning" (Wittig 2007, 183). In Tax 2008-2009, xxxix, Tax rendered this process with the effective image of a *Glossentanz*: "die Partner treffen sich, gehen zusammen, dann trennen sich, treten in einer anderen Kombination oder Reihenfolge auf, werden gegen andere ausgetauscht, um neue ergänzt". This extensive material is about to

sults appear to be fundamentally different, since the needs and finalities that promoted and justified their genesis were different.

Indeed, at the end of the ninth century, the King of Wessex promoted a nationwide project of cultural rebirth in order to train the future ruling class. The translation was part of this educational reform. Considering the decline of learning, the texts in vernacular were to allow laymen and clergymen to acquire the *sapientia*, the *wīsdōm*, contained in “some books which may be most necessary for all men to know”.⁷ Hence, the translation aimed at providing them with a text which could replace the original, especially for those who would never learn Latin – and which could also be ascribed among those activities contributing to outline the idealized figure of a king capable of providing not only for the material, but also for the spiritual needs of his subjects.⁸

At the beginning of the eleventh century, on the other hand, a well-read teacher of the German conventual school of Saint Gall decided to *vertere et elucidare* some *ecclesiastici libri*,⁹ not so much to create an independent work com-

be published, edited by Godden, Jayatikala, Love with the assistance of Paolo Vaciago, whom I thank for the information; see also Godden, Jayatikala 2018, 377, note 1. For some relevant contributions concerning the critical debate around the sources of the OEB, which go beyond the commentaries on Boethius, see above all Otten 1964; Donaghey 1964; Wittig 1983; Bolton 1986; Brinegar 2000; Godden, Irvine 2009, 49-79; Fox 2014; Hobson 2017. For the sources most likely employed by Notker, see Naaber 1911; Naumann 1913; Dolch 1952, but also Hehle 2002, 38-58 and above all Tax 2008-2009, which includes an interesting comparison between the translated text and the related Latin glosses identified in the manuscripts examined.

⁷ As is known, the sentence “sumæ bec, ða ðe niedbeðearfosta sien eallum monnum to wiotonne”, Sweet 1871, 7, 6-7, is included in the prose *Preface* to the translation of the *Regula Pastoralis* by Gregory the Great, one of the most important Alfredian paratexts, in which the above-mentioned cultural project was described and justified. For an introduction to the so-called Alfredian canon, see Bately 2009 and 2015, while the actual existence of a project of translations promoted by Alfred has again been questioned by Godden 2007b and 2013.

⁸ It should be noted that the dramatic lack of competences and texts from which the future ruling class could learn, as reported in the above-mentioned *Preface*, might not have offered a fully realistic picture of that society; see, among others, Bately 1988; Kelly 1990; Gameson 1995; Keynes 2003. On the deliberate political value of the Alfredian production, see Davis 1971, as well as Nelson 2000 and Pratt 2007a, who, alongside Discenza 2001, also focus on the intended audience of the Alfredian translations (in particular, Nelson 2000, 327-330; Pratt 2007a, 50-60 and 262-272).

⁹ These words are taken from the famous letter that Notker wrote to his Bishop Hugo von Sitten to inform him and explain his actions. See the diplomatic edition edited by King, Tax 1996, 347-349, also commented in King, Tax 2003, 195-200. The vast bibliography dedicated to Notker is collected by Scherabon Firchow 2000; for an introduction to Notker and his works, see Glauch 2013a.

pared to the original, as to provide his pupils with useful didactic tools.¹⁰ Thus, the translation of the Latin text was intended for a limited audience of learners who were already familiar with the Latin language, but needed to improve even further to be able to fully understand the text.¹¹ Following the established glossing practice of the Alemannic cloister,¹² Notker proposed what, *de facto*, were commentaries in vernacular: in his translation, he simplified the most complex concepts, signalled the various figures of speech, uncovered the tropes, and reconstructed the related references to their cultural-historical context.¹³

In this perspective, it is not surprising that the two versions in Germanic vernacular present a different approach to the representation of the myth of Circe, even though they both substantially respect Boethius' moralizing interpretation.

1. *The magic of Circe in the 'Alfredian' version*

In the OEB several elements of the story are significantly different from its source. Indeed, in the 39 verses of the Latin poem, the narrative is told in a brief, non-detailed form, followed by the comment. More precisely, in the tale by Boethius, the protagonists are never called by their names, probably because the intended audience was already familiar with this myth: 'the Neritian leader', *dux Neritii*, 1,¹⁴ lands on the island where 'the beautiful goddess of the Sun's bloodline', *pulchra [...] dea / Solis edita semine*, 4-5, lives and where the sorceress turns men into beasts with potions and magical herbs; Ulysses,

¹⁰ As is known, Notker's dedication to his students is celebrated by his disciple Ekkehart, who recalls and comments his activity as a teacher with the words *Teutonice propter caritatem discipulorum plures libros exponens*, see Egli 1909, 230. In this regard, see Kalkofen 2009, 83-86; Hellgardt 2010; Sonderegger 2015, 3-4.

¹¹ On the modalities of reception and fruition of the Notkerian production, see in particular, Green 1984 and 1996, 183-186; Müller 2010.

¹² Among the studies contributing to present the story of the monastery of Saint Gall and depict the lively cultural contest in which Notker worked, see in particular, Sonderegger 1970; Vogler 1992; Ochsenein 1999; Grotans 2006; Härter 2009, 1-118; Glauch 2013b. On the relation between the practice of glossing and Notker's works, see Sonderegger 1971, Glauch 2000, 57-69.

¹³ The bibliography dedicated to the analysis of the translation strategies adopted by Notker is exceptionally large. As regards the translation of *DCP*, see Luginbühl 1933 and Schröbler 1953, but also the volume by Hehle 2002, as well as Lühr 2009.

¹⁴ Ovid already called Ulysses *dux Neritii* (*Tristia* I, 5,57; *Fasti* IV, 69); Nerito is both the name of a small island near Ithaca, mentioned by Virgil (*Aeneide* III, 271), and the name of one of Ithaca's mountains.

protected by Mercury, is unharmed by the curse. His fellow sailors, however, are turned into pigs and suffer terribly due to their new physical condition, having maintained their intellectual abilities (1-28). At the end of the narration, Philosophy explains to its interlocutor how ineffective Circe's magical herbs are for the mind, and how terrible are those poisons that affect the body without affecting the mind (29-39).

In the Alfredian re-worked version, the tale is recounted in the first part of chapter 38 (1-49) and can be divided into an introductory section, followed by the narration of the episode, and finally the comment. The translator is concerned with reporting the previous events. Ulysses is the king, *cyning*, who supports his emperor Agamemnon, *kesere*, in the Trojan War; after the victory, while travelling back home with a fleet reduced to only one ship, Ulysses is driven by a storm onto the Mediterranean island where the sorceress lives (1-22). This is where the narration of Circe and Ulysses' love starts, an element Boethius does not even mention: the two instantly fall in love, and are overwhelmed by a wild, absolutely unrestrained, *swiðe ungemetlice* 24, passion. The hero forgets his duties as king, the bond he shares with his people, *forlet his rice eall and his cynren* 25, so much so that his men decide to abandon him. However, resorting to witchcraft, the sorceress transforms all the sailors into various species of animals, except for Ulysses (23-40). The following passage contains the comment, which basically presents the same assumption made by Boethius (41-49).

The sequence of narrative events is ostensibly different from the other narrations of Ulysses and Circe's story.¹⁵ But what is particularly interesting here

¹⁵ Among the interpretations aimed at identifying the *ratio* behind the structure of this narration – the modalities via which various elements drawn from different sources were distributed – Irvine's study appears to be particularly plausible (Irvine, 1996). By underlining the originality and autonomy of the Old English re-worked version, the British scholar speculates that the author wanted to insist on the need for moderation – a moderation the lovers abandon in favour of an unleashed passion – as well as on the importance of the king's duties which Ulysses, identified more than once as *cyning*, completely disregards, neglecting his kingdom and family so he can stay with Circe. Other hypotheses are less persuasive: overlooking the theory by Otten 1964, 133-134 and 262-264, based on an erroneous understanding of the text – apropos of which, see Grinda 2000, 237-238 –, the hypothesis made by Brinegar 2000, 87-99, is also hardly embraceable. Although offering an interesting and detailed comparison between the motifs of the Alfredian retelling of the Circe-myth and those we can appreciate in the Latin tradition between Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, the scholar believes that the Old English paraphrase considers the sailors guilty of betraying Ulysses, and their transformation into animals would have come after an already complete degeneration of their minds. Similarly, for the opacity that accompanies the re-elaboration of Homer's

is that, in this free re-writing of their story, references to the sorceress' powers appear in three different passages – introduction, narration, and comment –, using compounds with a common root *drycraeftig*, *drycraeft*,¹⁶ and the whole episode is always considered untrustworthy.

As a matter of fact, the whole story is presented as false from the very beginning:

B. 38, 1-2 Ic þe mæg reccan of ealdum leasum spellum sum swiðe anlic spell þære spræce þe wit nu ymbe spræcon.

(I can recall for you from old false tales a most excellent story relating to the discussion that we have just had.)

This declared indifference corresponds to the unfamiliarity the good medieval Christian professed to the truthfulness of the myth and can be ascribed to the modalities with which allusions and quotations of classical myths are presented, also in other passages of this work. These stories are used as positive or negative exemplifications, but all in all they are still extraneous to the Christian doctrine due to being produced in pagan times.¹⁷ However, in the

works and the instability of the narrative motifs in medieval rewritings, it is hard to believe in potential connections with the episode narrated in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, XIV, 457-512, when Diomedes' friends, who asked him to put an end to their endless wandering, are turned into birds by Venus (Bately 1990, 57), or with the story of Calypsos in the *Odyssey*, V, even though, in this case, similarities between Circe and Calypsos' stories have been underlined and discussed by other scholars (see Bettini, Franco 2010, 101-118 and 144-149, as well as Kaiser 1964, 197-213).

¹⁶ While the adjectival form was only transmitted on one other occasion, also in prose, *Exodus* 7,11 (Marsden, 2008), the noun is one of the most common in Old English within the semantic field of magic. Frequently used in prose, it also occurs in poetry, as well as in the corresponding *Meter of Boethius* 26, 54,98,102, and in *Andreas*, 785 (North, Bintley 2016); see *DOE, DOEC s.v.*; Jente 1921, 284-290. The noun defines 'sorcery' as 'competences, skills of the sorcerer'; more precisely, *dry*, which entered Old English as a borrowing from Celtic, refers to 'the wizard, the warlock', while *craft*, as aptly noted by Clemons 1995, 78: "denoted an innate talent which spanned both active being and narrative living. It signified an ability to control action from potential to performance, and so combined the generality of the former with the latter's particularity".

¹⁷ This falls into the euhemeristic interpretation of classical mythology already expressed by Augustine, *De civitate Dei* VII,18 (Dombart, Kalb 1955), – in particular, as regards the myth of Circe, XVIII,18 – as well as in other Anglo-Saxon documents in both vernacular and Latin (see Grinda 2000, 243). In the OEB, the translator frequently refers to the right attitude to approach mythology. He clearly explains it when presenting Orpheus and Eurydice's story

re-worked version of Metre IV, 3, the didactic indication aimed at guiding the audience towards the right interpretation acquires an even deeper value, for it assimilates *de facto* magic to falsehood and lies.

In the ample back story, Circe is identified as Apollo's daughter, even though the text does not forget to clarify that the divine nature of these figures is only accepted by fools, by those who are defined as *dysige folc*, who have not acquired *sapientia*, *wīsdōm*:¹⁸

B 38,11-15 þa wæs þær Apollines dohtor, Iobes suna. Se Iob was hiora cyning, and licette þæt he sceolde bion se hehsta god, and þæt dysige folc him gelyfde forþam ðe he was cynecynnes and hi nyston nænne oðerne god on þæne timan, buton hiora cyningas hi weorþodon for godas.

(The daughter of Apollo, son of Jove was there. This Jove was their king, and pretended to be the highest god, and the stupid people believed him because he was of their royal line and they knew no other god at that time, but honoured their kings as gods.)

Thus, overlooking the reference to beauty,¹⁹ in the detailed presentation of the female protagonist we read:

B 38, 17-20 Þæs Apollines dohtor sceolde bion gydene; þære nama wæs Kirke. Sio hi sædon sceolde bion swiðe drycræftigu, and sio wunode on þam iglonde þe se cyning on fordrifen wearð þe we ær ymbe spræcon. Hio hæfde þær swiðe micle werode hire ðegna and eac oðerra mædena.

(This Apollo's daughter was supposed to be a goddess; her name was Circe. She, they said, was very skilled in magic, and she lived on the island to which the king whom we mentioned before was driven. She had a very big troop of thegns and also other maidens.)

(B 35, 185-189). As regards the adoption of this translation strategy listed by Discenza 2005, 51-56, among those employed to provide Boethius' text with "a Christian art of reading", see also Otten 1964, 125-14; Irvine 1996, 389-390; Grinda 2000, 238-239 and 242-243.

¹⁸ On the correspondence between the Old English *dysig* and the Latin *stultus*, that is, those who do not aspire to acquire *wīsdōm* because of ineptitude or lack of willingness, see Tinaburri 2018, and as regards the frequent occurrences in OEB, Discenza 2005, 90-95.

¹⁹ On the value that Circe's beauty was to acquire in the narration by Boethius, see also Crabbe 1981, 322-323; O'Daly 1991, 210.

The competences supposedly possessed by Circe, *drycraeftig*, are mentioned without any particular emphasis, almost blurred, and overshadowed by other information; and anyway, the use of *sceolde*, next to *hi sædon*, ascribes all the elements of this short list to the sphere of unreality.²⁰

A similar construction, *sædon þæt hio sceolde*, is also employed while describing the different spells and effects of this witchcraft, *drycraeftas*, always specifying that it is a tale reported by liars, *lease men*:

B 38, 27-31 Ða ongunnon lease men wyrcan spell and sædon þæt hio sceolde mid hire drycraeftum þa men forbredan and weorpan hi an wilde deora lic and siððan slean on þa racentan and on cospas. Sume hi sædon þæt hio sceolde forsceoppa to leon [...].

(Then liars made up stories and said that with her magic skills she transformed the men and cast them into the bodies of wild animals and afterwards put them in chain and fetters. They said that she changed some to a lion [...].)

Finally, in the explanatory comment, it is argued that the supremacy of mind over body cannot be denied even by those who believe in false stories:

B 38, 40-44 Þæt gewit was swiðe sorgiende for þam ermðum þe hi drogan. Hwæt þa menn þe ðisum leasungum gelefdon, þeah wisston þæt ho mid þam drycraefte ne mihte þara monna mod onwenden þeah hio þa lichoman onwende. Eala þæt hit is micel craeft þæs modes for þone lichoman.

(The mind was greatly grieving for the miseries that they endured. So, those men who believed these lies nevertheless knew that she could not change the mind of those men with that magic though she changed the body. O that is a great virtue of the mind compared with the body.)

Circe's powers, *drycraeftas*, that Boethius already qualified as rather ineffective,²¹ seem to be almost useless, insubstantial, in the OEB – paradoxically, also for those who lied and professed their existence.

²⁰ On the value of these constructions, see Wittig 1983, 67, note 32; Grinda 2000, 243.

²¹ In Boethius, the ineffectiveness of Circe's potion reflects a rather widespread *topos* in the classical tradition; see Kaiser 1964, 200, as well as Crabbe 1981, 324-325, and O'Daly 1991, 217 as regards Boethius' passage.

Except for the occurrences of the noun *drycræft* or the adjective *drycræftig*, no further space is devoted to the subject, despite the significant expansion the story presents in the OEB compared to the original. While considering how difficult it must have been to reconstruct the sources and identify the paths followed in the re-elaboration of the text to explain such blatant deviations from the original text, the translator obviously chooses not to linger on potential details and limits the references to this field.

Boethius describes Circe while she is focused on making her potions:

4-9 pulchra [...] dea [...]
 miscet hospitibus novis
 tacta carmine pocula.
 Quos ut in varios modos
 vertit herbipotens manus,

The potions, *pocula*, are mentioned again here because Ulysses' companions drink them and are later turned into pigs:

21-24 iam tamen mala remiges
 ore pocula traxerant,
 iam sues Cerealia
 glande pabula verterant

By contrast, the Old English version does not mention any potion or magical herb, nor any tool or gesture that evokes their preparation or use. The vague allusion to generic magical skills, B 38, 19, is later made explicit in the ability to turn men into animals, B 38, 29. Mercury's intervention, that saves Ulysses, is completely omitted. Finally, in the comment, the metaphorical 'poisons', *venena* 35, correspond to their references, the 'vices', *unþeawas*.²² See the related passages:

35-39 Haec venena potentius
 detrahunt hominem sibi,
 dira quae penitus meant
 nec nocentia corpori
 mentis vulnere saeviunt

²² *Avaritia*, *ira*, etc. are exactly the vices Boethius listed in the previous prose passage, able to turn men into beasts (IV, 3p, 16-18).

B 38,44-49 Be swilcum and be swylcum þu miht ongitan þæt se cræft þæs lichoman bið on þam mode, and þætte ælcum men ma deriað his modes unþeawas þonne his lichoman mettrumnes. þa unþeawas þæs modes tioð eallne þoone lichoman to him and þæs lichoman mettrumnes ne mæg þæt mod eallunga to him getion.

(By such you can see that the virtue of the body is in the mind, and that every man is more injured by his mind's vices than by his body's weakness. The vices of the mind draw the whole body to it, and the body's weakness cannot draw the mind wholly to it).

The ambiguity of the Latin word, which means both 'poison' and 'potion',²³ is resolved by eliminating the metaphor and, with it, a further potential reference to magic.

Whether the translation draws from a lost source or is an original re-worked version of elements drawn from various sources, the translator seems to make coherent and conscious choices while talking about magic: he insists on the magic-lie association and omits elements that would evoke a concrete representation of well-known magical acts. This approach shows how careful and attentive the translator was in dealing with this subject: it seems evident that resorting to these practices was considered an issue to address, a custom to eradicate from the cultural *milieu* in which the translation was commissioned, designed, and carried out.

2. *The magic of Circe in Notker's version*

In the Old High German version, the didactic value that guides additions and omissions does not go beyond the content of the text, but rather, aims at representing Boethian assumptions as clearly as possible.

Notker ultimately follows the original text and adds explicative sentences containing elements drawn from the commentaries. By inserting information omitted by Boethius, Notker allows pupils to acquire useful elements to reconstruct the context of the narrated events: the characters are called by names

²³ The polysemy of the term *venenum* reflects the fine line between the concepts of 'poison' and 'potion' in medieval culture. Lewin 1920, 58, underlined how, in some Germanic legal codes, the crime of poisoning was often equated with the crime of witchcraft; in this regard see also Wesche 1940, 20, as well as Niederhellmann 1983, 94-96 and Elsackers 2010.

and the reference to Mercury's help, only hinted at in Boethius, is unconcealed and accompanied by a brief digression (17-20 vs Nb 199,24-30/200,1-3). Similarly, some elements of the description – probably considered irrelevant – are omitted in order to focus more effectively on the fundamental meaning of the exemplifying tale. Thus, the description of the animals surrounding Circe's home is much briefer than in the original (8-16 vs Nb 199,19-24). Moreover, some unnecessary figures of speech are unravelled; for example, *brôt* 'bread' is used to render *cerealia* 'the products of Ceres, goddess of grain crops' (23 vs Nb 200,3-4).

As for Boethius, also in Nb the 'magic' mentioned in this episode has nothing to do with the contingent reality. Relegated to a mythical past, it is a mere metaphorical, functional element in the economy of the narration. In this perspective, the re-worked version in vernacular seems to be designed through conscious lexical choices that make the narration at once both solid and easily understandable.

It is interesting to highlight the repetition of the noun *egeso*: in Old High German *egeso* refers to something ugly, horrific, monstrous; in the corpus of glosses, we can find it in correspondence with the Latin *horror*, *terror*, *monstrum*.²⁴

Notker uses it in the introduction to this passage: after the first section in Latin, *DCP* 1-7, the translation in Old High German is preceded by a foreword that seems to have no connection with any of the sources:²⁵

Nb 199, 10-14 *Vela neritii ducis* [...] Jh mág tíh mánon mícheles égesen . tэр dóh tísemo égesen gelíh neíst. Uuáz íst tэр? Tô Ulixes [...]

(I will tell you something monstrous, that is unmatched among monstrous things. What is this? Thus, Ulysses [...])²⁶

While defining the story about to be narrated as the most horrific and hideous, the audience is provided with an explicit negative connotation on the content about to be conveyed. As in OEB with regard to the 'false stories', the *incipit*

²⁴ See AWB; Lloyd *et. al.* 1988-2017; Starck, Wells 1972-90.

²⁵ Here and in the next passages, the potential correspondences between Notker's translation and the glosses or commentaries on Boethius' work are evaluated on the basis of the repertoire collected in Tax 2008-2009, 184-185.

²⁶ Here and elsewhere the translation (by the author of this paper) only refers to the Old High German text.

of this translation also oriented the reception of the tale.²⁷ Here, though, it is not about declaring the necessary unfamiliarity with the myth. In this case, the preliminary indication aims at facilitating the fruition of the text and reading, listening, and learning Circe's story as an exemplifying representation of how horrific and monstrous it can be when men abandon themselves to vices, and therefore to evil.

In the following instance, *egeso* translates the Latin word *monstrum*:

Nb 200,6-7 *Sola mens stabilis gemit . super monstra quae patitur. Éinêr der sín stûont ze stete . léidegêr dés égesen . dés ímo geskéhen uuás.*

(The mind alone is unchanged and suffers the monstrous prodigy that happened to it.)

Boethius' verses 27-28 close the narrative section, and *monstrum* indicates the horrific prodigy that physically turns Ulysses' men into animals.²⁸ The first two occurrences of the noun *egeso* directly refer to this third instance, where the central item of the narration is defined: the monstrous transformation that occurs to these men's bodies and works as an exemplification of the negative value of human vices. The repetition of the noun *egeso* creates a frame within which the entire event is to be placed and interpreted.²⁹

Before representing an event somehow connected to magic, the story is aberrant because it represents the potential distortion of the human being. In this perspective, despite the richness of the vocabulary used by Notker, it is not surprising to observe how the use of words closely connected with magic is rather limited in the re-worked version in vernacular.³⁰

²⁷ Similar analogies can be found in other metres dedicated to mythical themes (II,5 vs Nb 83,23: the Golden Age; III,12 vs Nb 179,21: Orpheus' myth; IV,7 vs Nb 227,23: Agamemnon, Ulysses and Hercules).

²⁸ The complex semantic value acquired in the European medieval culture by the Latin *monstrum* – a manifestation that breaks common rules and acts as a divine warning – can be retraced in Cicero, *De Divinatione* XLII,93, and above all in Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XXI,8 (Dombart, Kalb 1955), as well as in Isidore's *Etymologiae* IX,3 (Lindsay 1911).

²⁹ *Egeso* translates *monstrum* in other Nb passages to indicate something negatively extraordinary, and therefore regrettable, Nb 26,14 and 184,1; in the translation of *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, see King 1979 (Nc), the noun is employed to denote something that deviates from normality in a negative sense, and is therefore scary, Nc 75,6, or *egeso* is also used in correspondence with *horror*, Nc 159,7.

³⁰ Notker's lexical contribution to Old High German is estimated to be around 7,000

In adherence to the Latin text, Circe is never explicitly called a 'sorceress'. While Boethius introduces her as *pulchra* [...] *dea* / *Solis edita semine* 4-5, Notker (Nb 199,17) only substitutes *dea* with the proper noun: "diu scôna circe dero súnnûn tóhter", the beautiful Circe, daughter of the Sun.

Further on, the appellative *hospes*, 20, is rendered with *wirtin* Nb 199,28, a generic noun that Notker also uses to translate *uxor*, *iugalis*.³¹

The explicit connotation of magic only appears in the vernacular edition in two adjectival forms with the same root word as the noun *zoupar* 'magic, spell'.³² The first is a preterit participle used in reference to Circe's potions:

Nb 199, 12-18 [...] *pulchra dea* [...] *miscet hospitibus nouis* . i . noiuter supe-
ruenientibus . *pocula tacta carmine*. diu scôna circe [...] pezóuuerôt lîd tîen
sêlbên gésten scángta.

(the beautiful goddess [...] poured enchanted potions for her own guests.)

The lively dynamism of the Latin phrase *pocula tacta carmine*,³³ 'touched'

words, as opposed to 2,200 words of *Tatian* or 3,500 of *Otfrid*; see Splett 2000, 1197. Among these, some terms have been attested once or more than once only in Notker's translations. Sometimes, as we shall see, they can be considered hapax specifically coined for translational needs; in other cases, though, they seem to be unattested words, because of lacunae in the manuscript transmission, see Riviello 2007, 23-24.

³¹ In Nc, this term is frequently used in reference to goddesses-wives of other gods, e.g., Juno (12,10, 41,12,47,21) or Isis, wife of Osiris (140,3) etc., while in Nb 29,9 the expression *min uuirtin* indicated Boethius' wife, *uxor*.

³² In Old High German, *zoupar* and other terms with the same root – except one occurrence in *Jüngere bairische Beichte*, Steinmeyer 1916, xliii and 314-315, are only attested several times in Notker's works and in the corpus of glosses; in particular, the noun translates *praestigia*, *necromantia* in Nb29,6, and *veneficium* in Tax 1979-83 (Np), 197,12, while it is used in correspondence with *fascinum*, *praestigium*, *maleficium* in the glossographic material, see Schützeichel 2012 and Starck, Wells 1972-90, s.v. Wesche 1940, 7, aptly noted that *zoufar* and other similar forms with the same root already covered "das ganze Gebiet des Zaubers und auch der Weissagung: von veneficium und sacrilegium bis zur divinatio, alles fällt unter der Begriff des Zaubers. [...] So bequem es für die Glossatoren war, mit *zoubar* alle diese Begriffe unter einen Hut zu bringen, ebenso schmerzlich ist es für uns, die wir doch viel lieber statt des einen *zoubar* für diese verschiedenen lateinischen Worte und Sachen auch verschiedene deutsche Übersetzungen hätten". For an analysis of the occurrence of this *Wortfamilie*, see *ibid.*, 5-17.

³³ It is worth noticing that compared to Boethius' verse 7 *tacta carmine pocula*, Notker changes the word order, mostly likely for didactic purposes. On the use of this procedure, see Näf 1979, 79-80.

potions, turned ‘magical’ by the spell,³⁴ seems to fade in the German construction. In *pezouuerôt lîd* ‘enchanted potions’, the prefix *be-* is the only element entrusted with the task of evoking the process through which the drinks become magical.³⁵

A similar simplification is also identifiable in the use of *zouferlich* in the following sentences:

Nb 199, 18-21 *Quos in uarios modos uertit herbipotens manus* . [...] *Sô dô dîu zôuerliche hânt ueruuêhselôta in mîsseliche uuîsâ.*

(So the enchanted hand turned them in various ways.)

The evocative construction *herbipotens manus* corresponds to *dîu zôuerliche hânt* in Old High German. The Latin adjective, a hapax by Boethius,³⁶ concretely refers to elements which, skillfully handled, will have a magical function. The Old High German *zouferlich*, on the contrary, is only attested more than once in Notker, but its frequency and variety of contexts suggest that it might have been a word of common usage.³⁷ The translation is less vivid and

³⁴ O’Daly 1991, 212, aptly argued: “*tacta* [...] is clearly used in this verse in the metaphorical sense ‘sprinkled’: the incantation is added to the drink like an extra ingredient. But *tacta* may also reveal the trace of the magical touch of the word in Ovid (*tetigit*, *Met.* 14,278). Circe’s incantations have the same effect of the magical touch”.

³⁵ See Pfeifer 1993, s.v.: “*be-* drückt meist Einwirkung auf einen Gegenstand aus, wobei es entsprechend der ursprünglichen lokalen Bedeutung ‘um ... herum’”; Kluge 2011, s. v.: “Die Funktion des Präfixes war ursprünglich rein örtlich und wurde verallgemeinert zu einer Verstärkung und zur Transitivierung ursprünglich intransitiver Verben.” The verb *pezouuerôn* is only attested in the corpus of the glosses, where it translates the Latin term *fascinare*.

³⁶ Critical contributions argue that it is indeed a compound coined on Virgil’s verse *dea saeva potentibus herbis*, *Aeneid* 7,19, see Gruber 2006, 334.

³⁷ In particular, this adjective is used in Nb 29,21, when Boethius tells Philosophy the reasons of his imprisonment and claims to have been accused as *affinis malificium*, that is, *zouerlich*. The term conveys the fact that the prisoner is charged of being able to perform an evil act with the help of demons, a sacrilegious act of witchcraft (in this case, *malificium* is equivalent to *sacrilegium*, see Bettetini 2010, 262 annotations to the text I,4,41). However, the other two instances are rather different: in Nc 45,6, *zouerlichiu seltsani* translates *mirabile prestigium* as referred to Mercury’s prodigious ability to paint or carve seemingly alive figures; in Nc 100,10, finally, *zouerlichiu carmina* corresponds to *incantationes magicæ* with reference to a spell carved by Philosophy with the same competence attributed to the people of Colchis who, by embracing the information contained in the commentary by Remigius of Auxerre, 46,18, (Lutz 1962-65) share their homeland with Medea, explicitly defined as *handega galsterara* (*potentissima maga*).

not as articulated as the original, but it is therefore more direct and suitable for its intended audience: the magical herbs are not mentioned and the ability to perform the spell is directly attributed to the hand that prepared the potions.

Indeed, in the Latin text, Circe's competence and familiarity with these practices is conveyed by a twofold reference to her hands that create and dispense potions, activating the effects of magic. After this passage, which corresponds to the above-mentioned verses 6-8, the image of the skillful hands is used again at the beginning of the comment, when we discover that this power is indeed ineffective (29-30). Notker identifies and respects the linguistic and conceptual connection between the two sections of the metre and in the second instance as well, clarifies its function. See the passage:

Nb 200,7-10 *O leuem nimium manum . nec potentia gramina . quæ licet ualeant uertere membra . non ualent corda*. Iâ uuîo héuig taz uuás. Uuáz kemáhtôn sâr díu chriuter . únde díu gift-hánt . tíu dien líden dáretôn . sínne nemáhtôn?

(Oh, how important this is. What do the herbs, and the hand that prepares and distributes magical potions, really affect if they are not able to bend the limbs to the intellect, the body to the mind?)

As for the *incipit*, at the beginning of the second part of the metre, the translator includes another indication for the audience: what is about to be said is fundamental, and this information marks the passing on to the final section with the comment. Therefore, the invocation to Circe's hand and the herbs of the Latin text turns into a rhetorical question that conveys Philosophy's words more effectively. But, above all, the *levis manus* is rendered thanks to a compound hapax, *giftgant*, which substitutes the adjectival connotation, *levis*, with a noun that refers to the object produced by the hand, *gift* 'potion, magical filter'; while the construction only hinted at the previous instance in the Latin text, in the translation we have an explicit reference that recovers the concreteness of the adjective *herbipotens*. In Notker's version, the connection between the 'enchanted hand' and the 'hand that prepares and dispenses the potions'³⁸ appears more cogent compared to the original.

³⁸ Sehrt 1962 proposed 'die gift-mischende und beibringende Hand der Circe', AWB and Schützeichel 2012, s. v. 'Hand der Giftmischerin'. Sehrt's translation that identifies a reference to the act of dispensing in the compound is linked to the etymology of the noun referable to the same root of the verb OHG *geban* 'to give'. Hence, in the other Old High German writings, *gift* means 'present, offering, mercy', and it translates *donum*, *datio*, *gratia*, in the corpus

After all, the noun *gift* had already been used to define Circe's potion which has no effect on Ulysses, protected by Mercury (17-22):

Nb 199,24-29 *Sed licet numen arcadis alitis . miserans obsitum ducem uariis malis . soluerit peste hospitis . iam tamen remiges ore traxerant mala pocula.*
 Únde dóh tér in fógeles uuís fligendo mercurius . [...] . tén nôh-háften hérezó-
 gen úmbe irbármeda lósti . fóne sínero uuírteno gifte . ío dóh tie férien . dîe
 hábeton úbel líd getrúnchen.

(And so, even though Mercury who flies like a bird [...], moved to pity, had freed the struggling leader from the filter of his host, yet his mariners had drunk the horrible potion.)

Here, *gift* translates the Latin *pestis* 'plague, disease', used figuratively as 'curse, torment'. Conversely, the term used by Notker puts the potion on the same level of tangibility, ineffective on Ulysses but devastating for his men; *gift* is used as a synonym of *úbel líd*, which renders the equally tangible *mala pocula* (21-22 vs Nb199,29), already mentioned as *tacta carmina pocula* or *pezóuuerôt líd* (7 vs Nb199,17). The choice was probably guided by the Latin glosses, as in this case pointed out by Tax: "*peste: ipsa incantata pocula appellat pestem*".³⁹

Finally, the same noun in the plural form is used to render the Latin term *venena* in the closing verses (35):

Nb 200,11-12 *Hæc uenena . i . vitia . detrahunt potentius hominem sibi.* Tîe
 gifte . dîe íh ságo . dîe getûont ten ménnisken sín ungeuuáltigôren.

(The poisons I am talking about are those which weaken human intellect.)

Here, the metaphor is made explicit by inserting the specification *i. vitia* in the Latin text, while *gifte* is sufficient in the German one. Once again, the commentaries to *DCP* present meaningful correspondences; see, for example, the gloss: "*Haec venena (# i.#pocula #circae): i. supradicta vicia*".⁴⁰

of glosses, see Starck, Wells 1972-90, s.v. In particular, in Notker, this word also appears in Np 393,13, where it was used in the phrase *die frúosten gifte* to translate the Latin term *primitiae*. See also *infra*.

³⁹ See Tax 2008-9, 185.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

Therefore, in the re-worked version of Metre IV, 3, Notker proposes the noun *gift*: to clarify the underlying allusion to the Latin *pestis*, to give concreteness to the adjective *levis* in the hapax *handgift*, and, finally, to establish an equation between the *venena*, the *vitia* and the *gifte*. The metaphorical value of the narration is progressively clarified by using the same word to convey the image of the potions prepared by Circe.

Elsewhere, indeed, Notker resorts to different solutions to convey the Latin nouns *pestis* and *venenum*, though used with a translated value. In Nb, for example, *pestis* used as a 'plague, negative event' is rendered with *suht* 'plague, disease'.

Nb 132,23-24 [fine III,5] *Quae uero pestis efficacior . ad nocendum . quam familiaris inimicus? Uuélih súht íst tánne scádoháftera . dánne der gesuâso fient?*

(And which plague is more dangerous than a familiar enemy?)⁴¹

Similarly, *venenum*, which identifies the pointless flattery of the Muses, is rendered with *eitar*:

Nb 10,2-4 *Quae non modo nullis remediis fouerent . dolores eius . uerum in-super alreunt dulcibus uenenis. Tîe ímo sîn sér nîeht éin nehéillent . núbe íoh mêront . mít súozemo éitere íro uuórto.*

([the Muses] who not only cannot alleviate his pain, but amplify it with the sweet venom of their words.)⁴²

Gift seems to guarantee continuity to the narration, preserving the meaning of 'potion, magical filter' also in the last instance, as suggested by the interpretation of the gloss. The specific meaning of 'poison' in Modern German appears to be a later acquisition. According to Arcamone, this passage seems

⁴¹ In another passage, Nb 20,28/21,1, *pestis* is first glossed in Latin with *scandal*, and then translated with *scado*. In the corpus of glosses, both with a translated and literal value, *pestis* is mostly rendered with the noun *balo*, see Götz 1999 s.v., *pestis*, as well as Starck, Wells 1972-1990.

⁴² For the analysis of other instances in Notker, see Arcamone 1967, 24-26; for the solutions identified in other Old High German translations, see Götz 1999, s.v., *venenum*. Finally, in the corpus of glosses, *venenum* in the sense of 'magical filter', is rendered with *luppi*.

to help demonstrate that “l’evoluzione semantica di *gift* è avvenuta per questi gradi: ‘somministrazione – preparato, filtro magico – veleno’”.⁴³ Reconstructing the diachronic evolution and the etymology of this noun is outside the scope of this paper.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, what is interesting to observe is how, in this passage, this word is always used with the meaning of ‘magical filter’, which seems to be unattested in other Old High German works. As already mentioned, the fragmentary manuscript transmission hinders a thorough evaluation of the degree of originality of some of the solutions adopted by Notker. It goes without saying, however, that the didactic intentions of his work, as well as the semantic transparency of his translation solutions, seem to suggest that his choices were made on the basis of a clear and shared vocabulary.

All in all, the topic of magic seems to have been developed like any other topic, with the precision of the pedagogue concerned with *vertere et elucidare* the content of the Latin works. After presenting Circe’s magic as an aberrant exemplification, *egeso*, the topic does not require any further explanations. It is only necessary to convey it with clarity, making allusive locutions explicit (*herbipotens manus* 9 vs *díu zóuuerliche hánt* Nb 199,21) and simplifying complex constructions (*pocula tacta carmine* 7 vs *pezóuuerôt lid* Nb 199,17).

The occurrences of *egeso*, the adjectival forms connected to *zouber*, the coherent correspondence between *pocula* and *lid*,⁴⁵ and the repetition of *gift* in different contexts, all create the frame within which Notker organizes and builds his own re-worked version of Boethius’ metre, offering his students clear indications for fully understanding the Latin text. After all, the deliberate ease and skillful perspicuity used to employ these terms,⁴⁶ as well as the lack of explicative additions, seem to suggest that practices linked to magic were common and well-known in the context where the teacher and his pupils worked and lived.

⁴³ Arcamone 1967, 29.

⁴⁴ For a more comprehensive analysis, see Arcamone 1967; Pisani 1972; Bosco-Coletsos 1983; Meineke 1998.

⁴⁵ Elsewhere (Np 71,1, Nc 124,2), Notker translates *poculum* with *trang*, while in the corpus of glosses *lid* is used to signify a drink, in correspondence with *latex*, *liquor*, *Lyaeus*.

⁴⁶ We could not ignore an analogous ease elsewhere in Notker’s production, when talking about magic. See the exemplifications in note 37.

3. *Conclusions*

In Boethius' translations of Metre IV, 3 in Germanic vernacular, the character of Circe substantially respects the image outlined in *DCP*, according to which the sorceress' power is rather weak since it cannot affect the mind. While negotiating between the necessary *adequacy* of the source and its unavoidable *acceptability* for its audience, the two translators embrace a rather different approach to the stigmatization of magic already proposed by Boethius. In OEB, in a text most likely commissioned by a far-sighted king and aimed at educating the future ruling class, magic – while belonging to a mythological past extraneous to the Anglo-Saxon culture – is deliberately annihilated, relegated to a condition of un-truth and therefore non-existence. In Nb, in a translation most likely produced for the practical didactic needs of a teacher and his pupils, for an intended audience belonging to the upper class but more limited in number, the attention is mostly focused on identifying effective translation solutions.

And yet, albeit for different reasons, the strategies identified show that both the court of King Alfred and the monks of the cloister of St Gallen were not lacking in a certain familiarity with magic, which despite everything, permeated so many aspects of medieval culture.

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CLAUDIA ROSENZWEIG

ELYE HA-NOVI AND THE VAMPIRE
IN OLD YIDDISH (AND JUDEO-ITALIAN).
A *HISTORIOLO* AND ITS HISTORY*

There are a number of Yiddish manuscripts – some also with Hebrew or Judeo-Italian – and printed books that evince the existence of magical practices among Ashkenazi Jews in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. In this paper, I wish to present the development of a particular *historiola* attested in Yiddish from the 15th-16th centuries. The narrative, in which Elijah the Prophet adjures a vampire not to harm a human being, has parallels both in ancient traditions of magic, attested notably in Aramaic and Greek, and in Medieval European culture, and has a broad tradition in the Jewish world, in collections of recipes, in prayer books and in material culture. In this paper, I wish to present some extant examples of this *historiola* in Yiddish and Judeo-Italian in their different contexts, such as collections of charms and medicaments, and books of prayers.

L'unico materiale evidentemente sincretistico è quello degli amuleti e delle formule magiche
[Arnaldo Momigliano, *Pagine ebraiche*, a cura di Silvia Berti, Torino, 1987, 59]

The field of Old Yiddish philology is constantly changing as unknown or unstudied manuscripts come to light. Such is the case with the manuscripts discussed in this paper. The texts preserved in them represent several different genres, some of which have a long history. Here I shall focus on a text of popular magic which has survived in manuscripts – some of them already known and partially studied, others recently discovered or newly accessible for research – as well as in printed versions, and which belongs to the genre of the *historiola*, a short narrative that serves as a magic spell.

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1. *The story*

One of the stories that is included in an anthology of Yiddish tales edited by Joachim Neugroschel, *No Star Too Beautiful*, reads as follows:

The Prophet Elijah was walking along when he suddenly ran into a demon.¹ Elijah asked him: “Where are you going?” “I want to go to X, son of X.” And he approached the sick man and his father. “I want to eat his flesh and drink his blood.” Elijah thereupon said: “I forbid you to do so by the God of Abraham, by the God of Isaac, by the God of Jacob: you are not to eat his flesh or drink his blood or harm him in any way. Let this be true in the Name of God and in the Name of Holy Israel.”²

The story has been translated into English from the Yiddish version published by Maks Erik in his seminal history of Old Yiddish literature, *Di geshikhte fun der yidisher literatur fun di eltste tsaytn biz der Haskole-tkufe* in a chapter on *folksmeditsin* and *folksmeditsinische literatur*, popular medicine and its literature. He regarded this as a unique field in which traces of Jewish Medieval folklore have survived and are thus available for research.³ This is the Yiddish version recorded by Erik:⁴

אליהו הנביא גינג; דאָ באַגעגנט אים איין שטריגה (א מין דעמאָן); דאָ זייט (זאָגט) אליהו הנביא: וואָ ווילטו היין? איך וויל אין דעם פלוני בר' פלוני הויז - (און נענט דער דאָ קראַנק איז און זיין פאָטער) - און וויל עסן זיין פלייש און וויל טרינקען זיין בלוט. דאָ זייט אליהו הנביא: דאָס פארבייט (פאַרבאָט) איך דיר ביי גאָט אברהם, ביי גאָט יצחק, ביי גאָט יעקב, דאָס דו נישט זאָלסט עסן זיין פלייש און דאָס דו נישט זאָלסט טרינקען זיין בלוט און זאָלט אים קיין שאַד זיין. דאָס זיי וואָר אין גאָטס נאָמען בשם אלהי ישראל.

¹ The Yiddish text has the word *strega* ‘witch’, which Erik interprets as ‘demon’; Neugroschel 2002 translates it into English accordingly. The term appears in several versions of the same story. See below.

² Neugroschel 2002, 54-55.

³ Erik 1928, 45-46. Erik took this passage from a Hebrew-Yiddish manuscript in the Gaster Collection, which he believed to date from around the 12th-13th century, though it is probably later. He refers to a *Sefer refues* (Book of medicaments) “now in the British Museum”, without giving its shelf mark. At the present state of research, I have not been able to identify with certainty the manuscript in question.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Although included by Neugroschel in a collection of narrative stories, this is no ordinary story but rather a magical tale, or spell. In the version cited by Erik, the reciting of the story is in itself considered to be a *refue*, a remedy,⁵ and it has to be read out three times in order to get rid of a headache or the evil eye. It is part of a rich, widespread tradition in Yiddish of collections of herbal recipes and other natural remedies, and magic spells and charms.⁶ Some of these “books of secrets”, as they were known, circulated in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern period, one example being the famous *De secreti del reverendo donno Alessio Piemontese* (1555), which had a number of printings and was translated into several languages.⁷ In Yiddish manuscripts spells sometimes appear together with medical recipes, sometimes in separate collections. In Yiddish texts the terms used for this kind of magical utterance are *sgule*, *refue* and *opshprekhenish*.⁸ These charms reflect the ancient and

⁵ This paper contains Yiddish terms relating to magical practices. The most common are *sgule*, *refue*, *hashboe*, *shprukh* and *opshprekhenish*. The first three are part of the Hebrew component of Yiddish (denoted as ‘Merged Hebrew’ by Weinreich 2008, esp. II, 351-353), deriving from (but not identical to) the tradition of Ashkenazic Hebrew (see *ibid.*, *passim*). Here they are given in Latin letters according to the transcription rules established by the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, commonly used for Modern Yiddish. *Segullā*, plur. *segullot* (in Yiddish *sgule*, *sgules*) means ‘possession’, ‘property’ in Biblical Hebrew (see Brown *et al.* 1951, *s.v.*), and later came to assume, in our context, the meaning of ‘property or special power to cure diseases’ (see Ben-Yehuda 1908-46, *s.v.*), and thus ‘charm having magic powers’. In Modern Yiddish it has the meaning of ‘remedy’ (see Niborski *et al.* 2012, *s.v.*). The term *refuā* is already attested in Biblical Hebrew with the meaning of ‘remedy’ (Brown *et al.* 1951, *s.v.*), ‘medicine’. It enters Yiddish with the same meaning (Niborski *et al.* 2012, *s.v. refue*). *Hashba’ā*, attested in Medieval Hebrew, means ‘magic adjuration’, ‘conjunction’, ‘spell’. The Yiddish *hashboe* has the same meaning. On the tradition of this term in Jewish magic, see esp. Lieberman 1958 and Leicht 2006 and the rich bibliography quoted there. *Shprukh* and *opshprekhenish*, from the German component, are generally used as synonyms of *hashboe*.

⁶ In his classic *Geschichte des Erziehungswesens*, Güdemann devoted a long chapter to *jüdische Aber-, Zauber- und Hexenglaube* in France and Germany in the 12th and 13th centuries. See Güdemann 1880-88, I, 199-227. For the Yiddish tradition, see in particular Grunwald 1900; 1906; 1907, esp. 122 and 145; Schulman 1913, 212-216; Grunwald 1923 and 1927; Bernshtayn 1953; Bernshtayn 1973. While a comprehensive study on magic practices in Yiddish remains a desideratum, two seminal studies by Erika Timm serve, I believe, as the basis for any future research: Timm 2004 and 2013. See also Turniansky, Timm 2003, 142-147 and Neuberg 2016.

⁷ On this genre see the seminal work by Eamon 1994.

⁸ Cf. Germ. *Segen* (from Latin *signum*), *Beschwörung* and *Zauberspruch*. See Ohrt 1987, esp. 1590-1591; Timm 2004.

persistent superstitious belief that illness is a demon,⁹ that, in order to recover, the sufferer has to be freed by means of an adjuration or spell, and that “the description of the rite, or even the mention of its name, was enough to conjure it up and produce effect.”¹⁰ In the text in question, the person reciting the story has to remind the demon of the entreaty made by Eliyahu ha-Navi. This is quite different from a prescription detailing the use of ingredients from nature. It is a formula in which the tale itself is magical, namely a *historiola*: “*Historiola* is the long-standing term for an abbreviated narrative that is incorporated into a magic spell”.¹¹ A broader definition has been formulated as follows:

historiolae as forms of religious speech involve a ‘mythic’ dimension of action; a ‘this-worldly’ or human realm of problems and needs; and the speech act itself, which draws from the mythic dimension to apply to the human dimension. One might also note that *historiolae* most often are employed in healing spells (as opposed to love or curse spells), perhaps because situations of illness, accident, and childbirth [...] require more dramatic invocations.¹²

In fact, what we have here is an example of a sub-genre within the genre of folk-medicine: spells, charms, or “*adjurations* or *exorcisms*, which have the form of commands and are directed to the sickness itself or to the worm, demon, elf, or other agent responsible for it.”¹³ The pattern has been described by Ferdinand Ohrt:

- [1] Begegnung mit der bösen Macht, d. h. mit der personifizierten Krankheit oder sonst einem bösen Geist. [...]
- [2] Gespräch: Wohin? Hin, den NN zu plagen. [...]
- [3] Schluß: Verbot (“Nein”), oft noch Bannung des Bösen.¹⁴

This structuring of the spell is noted by Richard Kieckhefer in his classic study, *Magic in the Middle Ages*:

⁹ See Beth 1987. I am grateful to Effie Shoham-Steiner for having brought this entry to my attention. On this belief in Talmudic Judaism, see, among others, Trachtenberg 2004, 204.

¹⁰ Mauss 2001, 68.

¹¹ Frankfurter 1995, in particular 458. For *historiola* see also Ohrt 1987, 1590f.

¹² Frankfurter 1995, 461.

¹³ Kieckhefer 1990, 69-70.

¹⁴ Ohrt 1987, 1593. On the structure of charms, see also Swartz 1990.

A common variation [...] is the blessing or adjuration woven into an apocryphal story, with a character in the legend actually speaking the healing words. In these cases the legend itself becomes the charm, and the words ascribed to the holy person are the operative portion. [...] A charm that derives from early Jewish and Byzantine sources is that of three angels who, while walking on Mount Sinai, encounter a demon. They ask where he is going, and he says he is off to inflict pain on a certain person. The angels then adjure him by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, all the patriarchs, prophets, apostles, martyrs, confessors, virgins, and all saints of God, not to harm that person. The earliest Western version of this charm is a Latin text from the 10th century.¹⁵

The tradition is much older than this, however. According to Kieckhefer in his above-mentioned work on magic in the Middle Ages, it goes back to Biblical and post-Biblical times. Indeed, an instance of our spell appears among the Aramaic incantations researched by Shaul Shaked:

The R. Hanina ben Dosa story with its different variants recalls a very popular *historiola* of later Jewish magic, where the person who goes out and meets a terrifying female demon is the Prophet Elijah, who enquires of the demon's business and when he finds out that she is going to kill a woman in childbirth and strangle her baby, he casts a spell against her. [...] The *historiolae* in these spells can be regarded as foundation-myths, giving as they do the mythical precedents for the procedure followed by the spell. Narrating them is part of the spell itself: the narration is supposed to bring about the desired effect. The act of reciting these stories causes them to be re-enacted, it re-establishes the power that was brought to bear on a difficult situation by a mighty saint, a great hero of magic, like R' Hanina ben Dosa.¹⁶

In our text, it is through the agency of 'Elijah the prophet', Elye haNovi, who thus has the role of rescuer, an attribute already established by earlier stories, that the demon loses his/her strength.¹⁷

In fact, the story featuring Elye haNovi and the *strega* (in other versions, the angel or demon Astrebo) is a variant of an earlier story – attested in sev-

¹⁵ Kieckhefer 1990, 72. See also Hampp 1961, 163-182. I am grateful to Prof. Kieckhefer for bringing this study to my attention.

¹⁶ Shaked 2005, in particular 15. See also Yassif 1984, 63-71 (on Lilith), esp. 68-69; Naveh, Shaked 1985, 118f.

¹⁷ Cf. Silverman Weinreich 1964, in particular 224; Shacham-Rosby 2018.

eral versions¹⁸— in which Elye haNovi meets Lilith, which is itself a variant of the story of Lilith and the three angels. Furthermore, according to Scholem, the story is also a variant of a Byzantine Christian formula against a female demon named Gyllo,¹⁹ or Abyzou.²⁰ A Greek inscription from the 3rd century “against migraine”, which has been studied by A. A. Bard, presents the same structure; here the “headache-demon” is called Antaura.²¹ An enumeration of all the *historiolae* that have this structure would be beyond the scope of this contribution. The point worth noting is that the charm remained in circulation. There are two later Hebrew manuscripts of the incantation against Lilith, one from the 14th century in Byzantine semi-cursive script, and the other from around 1400 in Sephardic semi-cursive script; both are in the Vatican collection and were published by Umberto Cassuto in 1934. In these, it is the ‘minister’ Michael (*Michael ha-Sar*) who meets Lilith on Mount Sinai.²²

2. The Yiddish versions

The same *historiola* appears in several other Yiddish versions and is included in most of the manuscripts and prints of books of *refues* and *sgules*, some of them only in Yiddish, others in Hebrew and Yiddish. A comprehensive discussion of these would exceed the scope of the present paper. It is worth noting that some of the versions are essentially similar, with minor variations. At the present stage of research, the following list of versions/sources may be proposed:

I. Ms. Frankfurt, Universitätsbibliothek, Qu. 12, c. 166v (probably added in the 16th century), a. 1404.²³

¹⁸ See Montgomery 1913, 258-264.

¹⁹ Scholem 2007b; Scholem 2004, 63-64.

²⁰ See Spier 1993, 25-62, and the rich bibliography quoted there. On the association between the blood-sucking *strega* and the vampire, see Braccini 2011, 172-177.

²¹ Bard 1966, 1-23.

²² Cassuto 1934a. The manuscripts are: Città del Vaticano, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vat. ebr. 277 and Vat. ebr. 42. For a new description of the manuscripts, see Richler 2008, 205-206 and 28. It is worth noting that in the same volume (*Rivista di Studi Orientali*, pp. 265-266) Cassuto published a review of the seminal study by Hans Alexander Winkler, *Salomo und die Karina*, which presents, among others, Jewish versions of the same *historiola*. See Cassuto 1934b.

²³ I am grateful to Prof. Erika Timm for the dating of the text. For the description of the manuscript, see Róth, Prijs 1993, no. 298, 26-29.

II. A manuscript in the Gaster Collection, London, British Library, published by Maks Erik in 1928, 16th or 17th century (Yiddish).²⁴

III. Ms. New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary, 1959, c. 100r, Venice? 1614.²⁵

IV. Ms. Bologna, Biblioteca Universitaria, 3574H (Modona 26), *passim*, 17th century (Yiddish).²⁶

V. *Lenekyve* [For the woman]. *Lezokher* [For the man], Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg H61/Wagenseil VK 209b, ca. 1690 (Hebrew and Yiddish).²⁷

VI. Zevi Hirsh Ben Jerahmeel Chotsh, *Seyfer sgules verefues [...] oyz sifrey kabole un sifrey refues [...] far manen unt vayber, yung un' alten [...] gezunt tsu erhalten*, ch. 22, 7v,²⁸ Amsterdam? 1720.²⁹

VII. Yehuda Yitshak ben Yaakov (Zausmer) mi-Khanchin (Darshan de Chęciny), *Matzil nefashot* (Saver of Lives), Amsterdam: Judah ben Mordecai & partners, 1651, ch. 36 - a book of remedies and spells known as *Seyfer sgule lehatsil nefoshes* (Yiddish).³⁰

²⁴ See above.

²⁵ The manuscript can be accessed on the following site: <<https://digitalcollections.jtsa.edu/islandora/object/jts%3A231039?search=1959>>.

²⁶ This Yiddish manuscript was discovered in the Biblioteca Universitaria in Bologna by Giacomo Corazzol. See Corazzol, Perani 2013, no. 30, 111-112. In the first part of the manuscript, comprising 117 folios, there are prayers from the Ashkenazi rite and the Passover Haggadah. In the last part, 7 folios (ff. 111r-116v), we find an addition in Yiddish: a collection of 26 recipes for several kinds of illnesses, such as fever, inflammation, heart pain, epilepsy, nosebleeds. The manuscript is not dated, but the catalogue suggests it may be from the 17th-18th century.

²⁷ Here the *historiola* has to be recited in Hebrew, but it is introduced in Yiddish, as follows:

דאז איז דיא (השבעה פֿון אליהו הנביא ז"ל) ווי ער האט (משביע) גיוועזן דיא (מכשפות) ביז זיא האבן אים מוזן צו זאגן וואו מן ווערט (מזכיר) זיין אירי נעמן וועלן זיא פֿון דאז הויז וועק לויפֿן :

(This is the adjurement of Elye Hanovi of blessed memory about how he adjured the witches till they had to promise that wherever one mentioned their names they would run out from the house). This print, comprehending only 2 leafs, was part of the collection of the Hebraist Johann Christoph Wagenseil and is now in the collection of the Universitätsbibliothek Erlangen-Nürnberg, H61 Wagenseil VK 209b. It is digitalized on the site <http://digital.bib-bvb.de/view/bvbmets/viewer.0.6.4.jsp?folder_id=0&dvs=1611759278648~824&pid=6794307&locale=it&usePid1=true&usePid2=true>.

²⁸ <https://www.nli.org/he/books/NNL_ALEPH002924622/NLI>.

²⁹ Zevi Hirsh Ben Jerahmeel Chotsh (ca. 1700) was a kabbalist who also published a translation into Yiddish of parts of the Zohar – *Nahalat Zevi* (Frankfurt, 1711). See Scholem 2007a, IV, 672, s.v.

³⁰ See Erik 1928, 46. Erik refers to the text printed in Amsterdam in 1651. He quotes from

VIII. Shimon Frankfurt, *Sefer ha-Khayim*, Amsterdam: Moses Mendes Coutinho, 1703, repr. several times (Yiddish).³¹

IX. David b. Aryeh Leib of Lida, *Sod H'* [God's Secret], Berlin, 1710, f. 17r, section 66.³²

X. Manuscript in a private collection with a collection of magic recipes from a Hassidic setting, 18th century (Hebrew and Yiddish).³³

XI. *Tkhines* [Prayers], Wien, Schmidt, 1805, 8r (Yiddish).³⁴

XII. Amulets from Germany, 18th century,³⁵ and Eastern Europe, 18th-19th centuries.³⁶

XIII. *Interrogatorium* of Jacob Frank in 1760, transcription from Jakob Frank's Trial.³⁷

simen 36 a on *shprakh far eyn-hore*. On *Matsil nefoshes* see Bass 1680, No. 291; Steinschneider 1849, no. 204, 12; Gutschow 2007, no. 29, 18.

³¹ On the *historiola* in this work, see also below, section 2.2.

³² See Schulman 1913, 214-215.

³³ I am grateful to Prof. Gideon Bohak and Roni Cohen for having brought this codex to my attention.

³⁴ See Scholem 2004, 72, note 28.

³⁵ See, for example, the amulet for a woman giving birth to a son, written in Yiddish and Hebrew, Shachar 1971, 19, No. 2. See also Sabar 2019, s126 (here the *historiola* – in Yiddish – is written and framed to form an amulet, printed on paper by Isaac Leib Buchbinder in the 18th century). Other interesting examples are the amulets from the collection in the Bibliotheca Rosenthaliana, published by Margaretha Folmer. See Folmer 2007. An amulet with the *historiola* of Elijah in Hebrew, but with instructions in Yiddish (18th century) has been published by Lenka Uličná. See Uličná 2020, esp. 71 and 73-75. Here the spell is titled *hashboe fun Elye HaNovi z"l*.

³⁶ For East European amulets with the same charm, see esp. Kaspina 2014, 184-206.

³⁷ “Whenever someone addressed me with a headache asking me to remove a bewitchment, I put my hand on his forehead, traced a line with my finger and removed the evil spirit, saying a prayer over him, ‘Almighty God who heals all disease, make this person healthy against the evil eye, as well as against an evil juncture, from old as well as young.’ *Elohi Elohim* met Asztur, the Angel, who in turn met Elijah. Asztur asked Elijah, ‘Where are you going?’ Elijah replied, ‘I go to visit the sick and want to sit on their hands, heads and extremities, I want to drink their blood, and eat their bodies.’ God responded to Elijah, ‘In the same way that you cannot drink the sea, you can’t give him a disease with the evil eye, as you can’t now count to nine, so let God heal you!’ I used to say this prayer when the bewitchment was very strong. I used to remove bewitchment not only from followers but from others who asked me”. See Kraushar 1895, vol. 1, 114, and the English translation: 2001, 113. See also Scholem 2004, 72, note 28. At the present stage of this research, I am not able to establish if the spell was originally in Yiddish, Jacob Frank’s mother-tongue, Hebrew or Polish.

XIV. *Sefer lakhasim u-segullot*, 9r, spell no. 42, Jerusalem, s.n., 1881 (Hebrew and Yiddish).

XV. *Eyne zeyer sheyne yidishe und grosgheshribene tkhine fun eyner ishe khosheve fir shabes und fir rosh khoydesh bentshn*, Budapest, Sternberg & Comp, 1896.³⁸

XVI. S. An-Ski (Shloyme Zaynvl Rapoport, 1863-1920) included a Yiddish version of the same *historiola* in his study on the popular literature of Polish-Lithuanian Jews during the 16th and 17th centuries.³⁹

XVII. Regine Lilienthal (1877-1924), in her pioneering anthropological research on the evil eye, refers the same *shprokh* as she heard it from an informant, Mrs. Nayhoysz in Kazimierz Dolny (Poland) in 1913.⁴⁰

Notwithstanding the resemblance between the versions, noted above, it is instructive to consider in their entirety two versions (nos. I and VIII) that deserve particular attention.

2.1. איין שורם פֿער עין הרע

The first of these, Frankfurt, Universitätsbibliothek, Qu. 12 (no. I in the list above), c. 166v, seems the best to start with, since it presents most of the elements that appear in the others. As noted above, the spell was added in the 16th century to the manuscript composed in 1404. The text reads as follows:

איין שורם פֿער עין הרע

בשם ה' אלקי ישראל . גאט דער גרוש אונ' זיין / נאמן דער גרוש . אונ' זיין תּוֹרָה דיא הייליג / אַלְיָהוּ הַנְּבִיא ער גינג אין וועג דא ביגגיניט / אים דיא לילית אונ' ער זאגט צו איר וואו אין איר וועלט גין . אונ' זיא זאגט צו אים / איך וויל גין אין הויז דש פֿלֹנִי בן פֿלֹנִי אונ' זיין בלוט וויל איך טרינקן אונ' זיין פֿלייש וויל איך עשן אונ' זיין ביין וויל איך פֿר / דערבן אונ' דז מארק פֿון זיינן ביינן וויל / איך אויך זויגן . אונ' איך בישווער דיך אונ' גיביט דיר בייא נאמן גאט . גאט אברהם גאט יצחק אונ' גאט יעקב / אונ' בייא נאמן זיין שטול אונ' מיט נאמן ניינר [sic] תּוֹרָה דיא הייליג אונ' מיט נאמן צִיָּהֵן מְלַאָכִים אונ' ציָּהֵן אופנים אונ' ציָּהֵן שְׂרָפִים אונ' ציָּהֵן גיבירט / אונ' ציָּהֵן ספֿרֵי תּוֹרָת אונ' בייא גאט הַצְּבָאוֹת דז דו ניט זולשט / קינגן זיין בלוט טרינקין אונ' זיין פֿלייש עשן אונ' זיין לייב צו

³⁸ This *tkhine* is included in Klirs 1992, 108-109. The 'angel' here is called Ashtribuda (אַשְׁטְרִיבּוּדָא).

³⁹ S. An-ski [Shloyme-Zanvl Rappoport] 1909, 2-80, in particular 78.

⁴⁰ Lilienthal 1924, 266-267.

פֿר דערבן / אונ' זיין מאַרק אויז זיין ביינר צו זויגן / ניט פֿון וועגן כישוף אונ' ניא פֿון
 וועגן עין הרע אונ' ניט פֿון וועגן / דיא שידים אונ' רהזות אונ' לילין / אונ' מניקין אונ' ניט
 פֿון וועגן / קיינר לייא זאלשטו אים קינן שאדן / אז וניניג אז דוא קאנשט דיא / שטערן
 דש הימלש צילן אונ' דש / וואשר פֿון ים טרינקן אז וניניג / זולשטו קינן אים שאדן אמן :

(A protection⁴¹ from the evil eye

In the name of HaShem the God of Israel. God the Great and his Name the Great. And his Torah the Holy. Elye haNovi was walking along when he met Lilith. Elijah asked her: “Where are you going?” She says to him: “I want to go to the house of X son of X and his blood I want to drink and his flesh I want to eat and his bones I want to destroy and the marrow of his bones I also want to suck [and Elye haNovi said]: I adjure⁴² you and I ask you in the Name of God, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob and in the Name of His Throne and in the name of His holy Torah and with the name of ten angels and ten wheels and ten *serafim* and ten births [or ten commandments?] and ten books of the Torah and by the God of Hosts that you should not have the power to drink his blood and eat his flesh and destroy his body and suck his marrow away from his bones – not by means of incantation and not by means of the evil eye and not by means of demons and spirits and *lilin*⁴³ and *mazikin* and not by any means should you harm – no more than you can count the stars in the sky and drink the water of the sea, should you be able to harm him. Amen.)

Here, as in other versions, the spell is remedial against the evil eye. In some manuscripts it is prescribed for headaches and other ailments. Apparently, the evil eye is perceived as the cause of most illnesses, so that protection against it offers a comprehensive safeguard.⁴⁴

In this version the demon adjured by the prophet Elijah is Lilith; in others it is the angel Shtreb (מלאך שטרעב),⁴⁵ the angel Astrebo (מלאך אשטריבו), or a striga (איין שטריגה).⁴⁶

⁴¹ See MHG *schurm*, s.v. *schirm*, “was zur deckung, zum schutze dient: schild” (Lexer 1992, s.v.).

⁴² MHG *beswern* (Lexer 1992, s.v.), “beschwören, *verbis compellere*” (Grimm 1854-1961, s.v.).

⁴³ Lilin, according to Rashi, possess a human form and have wings. See Patai 1964, 296.

⁴⁴ There is a rich literature on this subject. Specifically, on protection from illness inflicted by the evil eye, see Seligmann 1910.

⁴⁵ This is probably a modification of *Astrebo*. Gershom Scholem suggested that the name might be “a misspelling of אשטריגא [*astriga*] or אשטריגא (*striga*, a sorceress)”. See Scholem 1965, 72-73, note 27.

⁴⁶ The term שטרייא and שטריא (*stria*, both instances occurring in conjunction with ‘were-

The final *ἀδύνατον*, a characteristic element of magic charms, also appears in many versions of this Yiddish historiola.

While some of the first attested versions of this historiola in Yiddish are found in manuscripts of *refues* and *sgules*, medicaments and magical practices, others appear in different contexts, inserted in books of different genres, as in the following instance.

2.2. *The version in Shimon Frankfurt's Sefer ha-Khayim.*

Sefer ha-Khayim by Shimon ben Israel Frankfurt (or Frankfurter, 1634-1712) is a work of *musar*, of ethical guidance. It was printed in Amsterdam in 1703 and again in 1715-16.⁴⁷ The first part of the book is in Hebrew, the second part in Yiddish. In ch. 69, on f. 131r of the 1715-16 print, a list of *refues* is added in the final part of the Yiddish section.⁴⁸ The following is presented as a cheap “tested and proven” remedy for people who live where there are no doctors or apothecaries:

[higher, quadrat letters] דען (אליהו הנביא) האט ביגעגנט דע (מלאך) אשטור!בו
 דא שפראך (אליהו הנביא) צו אים וואו ווילשטו איין היין גיאן דא זאגט ער איך וויל
 גיאן בייא דען (פלוגי בר או בת פלוגי) אונ' וויל זיטצן צו זיין קאפ[נ]ש אונ' אין זיין
 גהערן אונ' אין אלי זייני גלידר אונ' פלייש אונ' אדרן אונ' וויל טרינקן זיין בלוט דא
 שפראך (אליהו הנביא) צו אים אזו וואול אז דוא ניט (רשות) האשט אויש צו טרינקן
 אלי וואשר אויש דען מער אזו זאלשטו ניט (רשות) האבן צו שעדיגן אים אן זיין לייב
 נאך ניט אן איינם פון זיין גלידר אויף קיינר לייא מניאר פון דער גאנצי וועלט . האט
 אים איינר געבן איין ביז אויג זאל עש אים ניט שאדן בייא נאכט נאך ניט בייא טאג . אזו
 וואול אז דיא קינדר פון (יוסף הצדיק) האט מן זיא קיין ביז אויג קענין אויף לאדן . אזו
 זאל עש דיר אן ניט שאדן . אונ' איער מן ניין קן צילן זאל דיר (הש"י) היילן . אונ' צו
 דיזר שטונד זאלשטו ווערן פריש אונ' גיזונד . דאש זייא וואר אין גאטש נאמן אמן סלה :

wolf”), is already attested in Medieval Hebrew. See in particular Yehuda he-Hasid 1993, 318 (here, exceptionally, the *stria* is also a vampire, see para. 464), and [Yehuda he-Hasid] 1998, 355. See also Güdemann 1880-88, I, 203, note 4 and Trachtenberg 2004, in particular the section “*Foreign*” demons, 37-43 and note 34, 278. In the Yiddish version from the ms. Gaster mentioned above, the form *strega* is used, as in Italian (from Latin *strīga*, der. as a variant of *strīx*, *-igis* ‘owl’). In Medieval Latin the forms *stria*, *strīx*, *strīga* are also attested (see DuCange 1954, s.v. *stria*), as well as in Middle High German.

⁴⁷ See Gutschow 2007 no. 149, 47; no. 210, 62. The book has been reprinted several times. The spell appears only in the Yiddish section. On this work, see Bar Levav 1997, 294 and 370-379, especially 372; Bar Levav 2003; Bar Levav 2013.

⁴⁸ As far as I have been able to ascertain, this Yiddish passage does not appear in the reprint from Sulzbach 1790-91.

(The Prophet Elijah met the angel ASTREBO. The Prophet Elijah asked him: Where are you going? He answered: I want to go to X son or daughter of X and I want to sit on his head and in his brain and in all his limbs and flesh and veins and I want to drink his blood. The Prophet Elijah told him: In the same way that you have no permission to drink all the waters of the sea, so you do not have permission to harm him in his body nor in any of his limbs in any way in all the world. Has someone given him the evil eye? It should not harm him neither by night nor by day. Just as upon the children of Yosef the Just nobody has been able to cast the evil eye,⁴⁹ to that extent can it harm you and your husband [*not clear*]. And at this very moment you should be fresh and healthy. And this shall be true in the Name of God amen sela.)

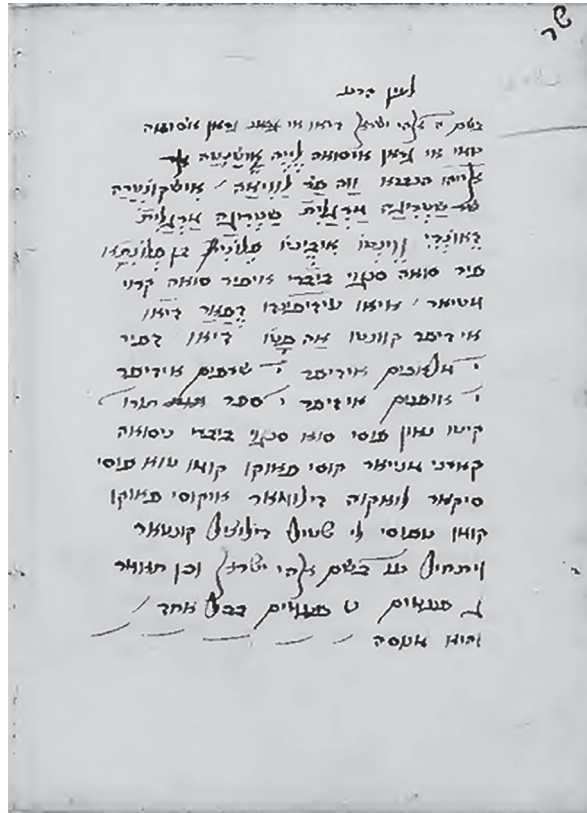
The fact that the spell appears only in the Yiddish part suggests that the author perceived a need for such ‘practical’ remedies among the readers for whom it was intended; this is likewise indicated by the presence of other *hashboes* and *sgules* in this work.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ On this belief, see Talmud Bavli, Berakhot 55b: “Another began and said: One who enters a city and fears the evil eye should hold the thumb [*zekafa*] of his right hand in his left hand and the thumb of his left hand in his right hand and recite the following: I, so-and-so son of so-and-so, come from the descendants of Joseph, over whom the evil eye has no dominion, as it is stated: ‘Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a fountain [*alei ayin*]; its branches run over the wall’ (Gn. 49:22). Do not read it as *alei ayin*; but rather, read it as *olei ayin*, who rise above the eye and the evil eye has no dominion over him.” [The English version is from the William Davidson Talmud, based on the translation by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. See: <<https://www.sefaria.org/Berakhot.55b.12?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>>]; and Talmud Bavli, Bava Metzia 84a: “The Rabbis said to Rabbi Yoḥanan: Isn’t the Master worried about being harmed by the evil eye by displaying yourself in this manner?...Rabbi Yoḥanan said to them: I come from the offspring of Joseph, over whom the evil eye does not have dominion, as it is written: ‘Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a fountain [*alei ayin*]’...; and Rabbi Abbahu says: Do not read the verse as saying: ‘By a fountain [*alei ayin*]’; rather, read it as: Those who rise above the evil eye [*olei ayin*] ...Joseph’s descendants are not susceptible to the influence of the evil eye.” (The English version is from the William Davidson Talmud, based on the translation by Rabbi Adin Even-Israel Steinsaltz. See: <https://www.sefaria.org/Bava_Metzia.84a.10?ven=William_Davidson_Edition_English&lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en>); see also Ginzberg 1909-38,II, 74 (notes: vol. V [1925], 344-345) and the bibliography quoted there.

⁵⁰ See Bar Levav 1997, 370-379. I am grateful to Avriel Bar-Levav for the generous sharing of his publications and thoughts on the role of Yiddish in Shimon ben Israel Frankfurt’s work.

3. *The Judeo-Italian versions*

While I was researching this spell, Benjamin Richler brought to my attention a Yiddish manuscript of *segullot*, now part of the Columbia University Judaica collection. The watermarks indicate that the manuscript is from the third quarter of the 15th century.⁵¹ On f. 7v, among various Yiddish charms and incantations, we find the following:



New York, Columbia University Libraries, General 262, f. 7v
 By courtesy of the Rare Book & Manuscript Library,
 Columbia University in the City of New York

⁵¹ I am grateful to Benjamin Richler and Chaim Stepansky for the reproduction of this page and for the description of the manuscript. The manuscript is now New York, Columbia University Libraries, General 262 <<https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/catalog/cul:cvdncjt0m9>>.

לעין הרע

בשם ה אלהי ישראל דיאו אי גראַנ גראַן איסו[א]ה / נומי אי גראַן איסואה לִיָּהּ אִישָׁנְטָה
אל / אלייהו הנביא ונה פר לוויָאָה / אִישְׁקוֹנְטָרָה / שַׁר שְׁטְרִיגָה מְרַגְלִית שְׁטְרִיגָה מְרַגְלִית
/ דֹּאָנְדִי וַיִּנְטוּ אִיבִינִי פֿלוֹנִי[ת] בן פֿלוֹנְטָא / פֿיר סואה סנגוי ביברי איפֿיר סואה קרני
/ מניאר. איאו טידיפֿינדו דֿפֿאַר דיאו / אי דיפֿר קוונטו אַה פֿטוּ דיאו דפֿיר / י מלאכֿים
אידיפֿר י שרפֿים אידיפֿר / י אופנים אי דיפֿר י ספֿר תּוֹרָה תּוֹרָה / קיטו נאון פּוֹסִי
סוא סנגוי ביברי ניסואה / קארני מניאר קוסי פּאָוקו קומו טוא פּוֹסִי / סיקאר ליאקוה
דילומאר אוקוסי פּאָוקו / קומו [ט]פּוֹסִי לִי שְׁטִיל דִילִיצִיל קונטאר / ויתחיל [עו] בשם
אלוהי ישראל וכן תאמר / ג פעמים [ט] פעמים בכל אחד / והוא מנוסה

The manuscript awaits a comprehensive linguistic analysis. An approximate, non-phonetic transcription of the Judeo-Italian part (with the Hebrew component in italics) would be as follows:

le-‘en ha-ra’

Be-Shem Ha-Shem Elohe’ Yisrael Dio è gran e Suo Nome è gran e Sua Legge è santa. Eliyahu ha-Navi’ va per la via iscontra satrega [strega] *Margalis*. “Satrega *Margalis* deonde vien tu?” “Io vegno *plonit ben plonita* per suo sangue bere e per sua carne mangiar.” “Io ti difendo⁵² da per Dio e di per quanto è fatto ciò da per dieci *mal’akhim* e di per dieci *serafim* e di per dieci *ofanim* e di per dieci *sefer torot* che tu non possi suo sangue bere [bebere?] né sua carne mangiar così poco como tu possi seccar le acque dello mar o così poco como tu possi li stelli del ciel contar. [Hebrew part]

(Against the evil-eye

In the Name of the Name God of Israel, God is great and His Name is great and His law is holy. Eliyahu ha-Navi goes on his way and meets the witch *Margalis*.⁵³ “Witch *Margalis*, whence do you come?” “I come to drink the blood of X son/daughter of X and to eat his/her flesh.” “I forbid you for God’s sake and for what is done by ten *mal’akhim* and by ten *serafim* and by ten *ofanim* and by ten *sefer torot*, that you shall neither drink his/her blood nor eat his/her flesh,

⁵² It. *difendere*, ‘to forbid’. See Battaglia 1994-2002, s.v., 9 ‘proibire, vietare, impedire, interdire’. Engl. ‘to prohibit, to forbid’, ‘to hinder’.

⁵³ The Hebrew *Margalit* (spelled in the Yiddish text *Margalis*) appears in Post-Biblical Hebrew as a loan-word from Greek, with the meaning of ‘precious stone’, ‘diamond’, ‘pearl’ (Levy 1876-89, s.v.). At the present stage of research, I have not been able to find any reference to a demon with this name. Might *Margalit* be a tabooistic deformation of the more common *Lilith*?

no more than you can dry the waters of the sea and count the stars of the sky.
[Hebrew part: (he who says this) shall start with the Name of the God of Israel
and you shall say so three times (nine) times for each one and it is proven.]

This version has particular significance, I believe. Firstly, because the manuscript is mostly in Yiddish, and the Judeo-Italian spell that it contains is written by the same hand, in Ashkenazi script. The Judeo-Italian part is vocalized, suggesting that the scribe wanted to instruct the reader as to the exact pronunciation of the spell. Secondly, this version is very similar to another, also from a Yiddish manuscript, which was copied in Italy during the late 16th century (New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, 2780, f. 18v).⁵⁴ In this second version, the charm has to be recited in ‘Italian’ (אין וועלשין) *in welschen*). Moreover, in this version the adjuration ([...] איטי קונזור[ו])⁵⁵ names the witch as *Margalis*.⁵⁶

Another variant of this spell in Judeo-Italian is included in a manuscript – mostly in Hebrew, with some Judeo-Italian – of magical writings, part of the collection of the Bodleian Library, Oxford. The script is Ashkenazic, and the manuscript was probably copied in Italy during the 16th century.⁵⁷

At the present stage of research, it may be posited, albeit solely on the basis of the above-mentioned versions of this charm in Judeo-Italian sources, that Italian Jews had a number of popular practices, such as the one reflected in these manuscripts, which were carried out in their vernaculars, and, in addition, that for the most part they were transmitted orally. This could also explain the scarcity of written evidence.⁵⁸

⁵⁴ On this manuscript, see Turniansky, Timm 2003, no. 71A, 144-145.

⁵⁵ On this term in Italian charms of the Middle Ages, see Barbato 2019, xxii-xxiii.

⁵⁶ MHG *welsch* can mean ‘Romance language’, ‘French’, ‘Italian’. The same word is used in Yiddish, but here, as in other Yiddish texts from Italy, its meaning is ‘Italian’.

⁵⁷ Oxford, Bodleian Library, Arch. Selden Sup. 107, f. 66v. See Neubauer 1886, no. 1959, 638; Steinschneider 1898, 362-365, and in particular 364; Cassuto 1934a, 261; Beit-Arié 1994, no. 1959*, 353. Here, instead of Margalit the witch is Lilith. While this text still awaits a linguistic analysis, an initial hypothesis locates it in the area of Lombardy and Veneto. See for example the use of the term *strigaria*, which appears as the translation of the Hebrew and Yiddish term *kishuf/kishef*, ‘magic’, ‘enchantment’, as it also does in the Venetian translation of a Yiddish letter by Mandolino di Sacile Processo di Mandolino di Sacile, in 1585. See Ioly Zorattini 1980-99, VII [1989], 31-68, in particular 52v, 64.

⁵⁸ One of the first texts in Judeo-Italian is the ‘beautiful prayer’ or ‘good prayer’, the *Tefillà yafà* (14th century, ms. London, Sholem Asch, no. 3. Now lost. The number of the microfilm in the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, is F 8470). This prayer, in Judeo-Italian and Hebrew, was composed by a woman and attests to a belief in charms and enchantments. A

Furthermore, several questions arise in connection with this Judeo-Italian version, transcribed in Ashkenazi script in Yiddish manuscripts. Did the copyist understand the Italian? Did the reader? It is also possible that the Judeo-Italian words were not understood, thus enhancing their magical aura.⁵⁹ Such an explanation would not be completely satisfactory, however, since there is substantial evidence that Ashkenazi Jews in Italy understood and could speak the local dialects wherever they lived (esp. Padua, Venice, Mantua, Cremona, Verona), and that they used Judeo-Italian Languages as well.⁶⁰ Moreover, the same Yiddish manuscripts of popular medicine also contain numerous Italian loan-words, a fact that might lend weight to the idea that they were copied in Italy.

4. *Final remarks*

Comprehensive research on the magical beliefs and practices attested in Old Yiddish remains a desideratum. Of particular note is the fact that, aside from the collections of *refues* and *sgules*, that is, of charms and natural recipes, several of these texts appear in books of ethical guidance as well as in collections of prayers (*tkhines*), so that it would be difficult to detach them from the other genres of Old Yiddish literature. They are simply part of it.

The *historiola* on the prophet Elijah and Lilith (*di hashboe fun Elye Hanovi*), presented here, is a striking example of a *longue-durée* practice which, from a diachronic perspective, stretches from Aramaic inscriptions on ancient magic bowls to 20th-century versions that can be found from Eastern Europe to the Sephardic Levant.⁶¹ On the synchronic level, it is clear that what we

critical edition of this outstanding text is without doubt a desideratum. See Sermoneta 1976. In addition, a short ‘medicament’ (רפואה) against the evil eye is included in a book of precepts found in a manuscript that is now Turin, Archivio Ebraico Terracini 68, c. 23r. See 23r. I am grateful to Rav Somekh and Chiara Pilocane for enabling me to have access to this text. For an introduction to the study of magic practices among Italian Jewry, see Weinstein 2019.

⁵⁹ On the unintelligibility of magic healing formulae, see Tambiah 1968. The phenomenon is also attested in Yiddish manuscripts where some spells are in a corrupted Latin.

⁶⁰ Apart from the presence of several loan-words and expressions from Italian dialects in Yiddish texts from Italy, there are bilingual texts in Yiddish and Judeo-Italian. See, for instance, the bilingual text on the ages of man from a Yiddish manuscript copied in Venice in the middle of the 16th century: Oxford, Bodleian Library, Canonici Or. 12. See Rosenzweig 2021 (forthcoming).

⁶¹ See for example Avraham Shalom Hai Hamai, *Sefer heah nafshenu*, Izmir 1870, 62v;

find in the manuscripts reflects a widespread attitude to illness that is shared by Christians and Jews alike, and is attested in Western Europe in Latin, Old German (from the 9th century),⁶² Old French, Old Italian.⁶³ The Yiddish and the Judeo-Italian versions can be seen as “oikotypes”.⁶⁴ Moreover, the fact that the texts presented here are in Jewish vernaculars of the Middle Ages and the Early Modern era indicates a shared knowledge that was common to Jewish families in their everyday life and concerns: the fact that the texts are in Yiddish – and in Judeo-Italian – suggests that the *shprukh* was used by men and women in the domestic sphere, an idea confirmed by the books of *tshines*, which were usually intended for use at home. The texts cited here reflect a practice of domestic magic and were often collected because of their “practical” application.⁶⁵ The diffusion of Kabbalistic ideas during the 16th and 17th centuries, and of Hasidism in the 18th, probably furthered the adoption of some of these practices and beliefs, contributing to – though not exclusively accounting for – their continuation.

I shall conclude with a short quotation from the first *teil* or *canto* of *Pariz un' Wiene*, the Yiddish romance composed by Elye Bokher (Elijah Levita) in Italy in the first half of the 16th century and printed in Verona in 1594.⁶⁶ Here the queen, Vienna's mother, is having a difficult labour:

[02]

[...]

דיא וויאה קאמן איר גרוש אויז דער מושן
אבר דו קינד וואלט זיך ניט פֿון איר לוסן :

Refael ben Haim Oḥana, *Sefer mar'e hayeladim*, Jerusalem 1914, 59v. In both sources the spell is cast against *Mal'akh Astrebo*. On the Judeo-Spanish tradition of charms, see esp. Alexander, Papo 2006, 7-58.

⁶² See Ohrt 1987.

⁶³ See esp. Barbato 2019, and the bibliography quoted there.

⁶⁴ The term “oikotype” – cognate of Engl. “ecotype, n.” OED Online. March 2021. Oxford University Press. <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59404?redirectedFrom=ecotype>> (last accessed May 2, 2021) – was transplanted from the field of biology to the study of folklore by Carl Wilhelm von Sydow to denote specific local versions of a folktale in a particular culture. See Clements 1997.

⁶⁵ Erik 1928, 43; Timm 2013, 142*. For non-Jewish sources, see in particular Bozoky 2001.

⁶⁶ See Timm 1996.

[12]

נון ווארן דורט דער וראוון וויא פֿיל
 דיא מיט אירן קוינשטן אן הובן
 דיא ורוגיש נוך איין וויישן צוויביל
 דיא אנדר נוך זומן בון רובן
 דיא נוך איין לינקן שוך דיא נוך איין שטיביל
 אונ' דרייא לייז זיא אין איים אייא ביגרובן
 די וולט ריימן אין אורן די שרייבן אויף נביל
 איין איטליכי וואלט דריין שטוסן איר שנאביל :

(The labour came, greatly out of proportion
 but the child did not want to come out from her

Now, there were there so many women,
 who started with their superstitious practices⁶⁷
 One asks for a white onion
 the second wants turnip seeds
 another one a left shoe, and another a boot,
 and they immersed three lice in an egg
 one wants to utter a rhymed spell in [her] ears,
 one wants to write it on [her] navel;
 each one wants to poke her nose in it.)⁶⁸

Here the practices of *refues* and *opshprekhenishn* are used to create a lively, parodic picture in which the main actors are women. The magical acts do not produce the desired result, however, and it is only when the queen makes a *neder* according to a Talmudic teaching that a beautiful, plump baby emerges.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Here the Yiddish *künsten* means 'aberglaubische Praktik'.

⁶⁸ Timm 1996, ll. 20.7-8 and 21.1-8, 10.

⁶⁹ Timm 1996, stanzas 22-23, 10-11. See in particular footnote 10 on p. 10, which refers to Talmud Bavli, Niddà 31b, to a *halakhà* of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai, and to *Tsenerene* in the passage on Gn. 3.16.

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VERIO SANTORO

THERE IS NO MAGIC IN THE OLD SAXON *HELIAND*

Although the Old Saxon poem has been thoroughly investigated for two centuries now, the issue of the possible traces of pre-Christian Germanic magical traditions within it has not been sufficiently investigated. The only study specifically devoted to the (alleged) magical elements in *Heliand* belongs to G.R. Murphy (1991), whose opinions are in line with the studies already undertaken by the Lutheran theologian A.F.C. Vilmar in 1845, a few years after the publication of J.A. Schmeller's *editio princeps* (1830). According to Vilmar, the Old Saxon poem was "das Christentum im deutschen gewande, eingekleidet in die poesie und die sitte eines edlen deutschen stammes". The purpose of this work is to subject to a careful textual analysis the six passages of the *Heliand* in which, according to the American scholar – who emphasizes the characteristics of what has now long been a misunderstood, stereotyped and obsolete idea of "Germanism" – Christ's acting as a sorcerer would be obvious; it will be shown, on the contrary, that the image of Christ resulting from the poem is far removed from that of a sorcerer.

"Neque enim et litteras discere non debuimus
quia earum repertorem dicunt esse Mercurium".
St. Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, 2,18, 28.

1. *Two short preliminary remarks*

1) Magic designates a varied and multifaceted type of ideas, operations, practices and situations that differ in time and space. A number of studies have carefully explored general and specific aspects in the most diverse ages and cultural realities. In the face of an immense production on the subject – a *mare magnum* that is difficult to navigate and of which it is difficult to even attempt a summary –¹ there is no unambiguous and final definition of the term "magic", and it remains elusive and insidious, while it is not infrequently used in a superficial and haphazard manner to indicate a variety of different phenomena. 2) In that long period of history traditionally known as the Middle Ages – but ultimately also in the contemporary world and various cultural spheres – it could be very difficult to discern the boundary between religion and magic.

¹ For an overview and bibliography see Kieckhefer 1989.

Today, as in the past, the only criterion for conclusively discriminating between a religious action and a magical action does not concern a specific use of formulas, symbols, objects, or behaviours that are perfectly distinguishable, but rather it must be reduced to the nature of the power to which religion and magic respectively appeal. The religious person offers his adoration to the divinity with humble submission; wizards, on the contrary, try to force the hand of supernatural powers to obtain what they want and avoid what they fear.²

If the distinction between genuine religious devotion and magic art does not lie in the behaviours or symbols of the religious or magical action, one can well understand the concerns of Tertullian who, in his work *Ad uxorem* (II, 5), felt the need to warn a Christian woman against the risks she would face by marrying a pagan: “Latebisme tu, cum lectulum, cum corpusculum tuum signas, cum aliquid immundum flatu explodis, cum etiam per noctem exurgis oratum? Et non magiae aliquid uideberis operari?”³ The behaviour of Christians and their symbols could therefore inspire understandable distrust in the eyes of the pagans. Not only could prayer or even the Eucharist have an ambiguous character, but Jesus himself, by virtue of his miraculous works, could, in the eyes of a population that had only recently and still superficially been touched by the Christian message, seem to only possess a superior form of magic. Scholars should therefore be extremely cautious with the terms “magic” / “magical” when analysing a text such as the Old Saxon poem *Heliand*, a life of Christ in traditional Germanic alliterative verse, composed after the forced Christianisation of the Saxons by Charlemagne’s army.

So: *Heliand* and magic. Although the Old Saxon poem has been thoroughly investigated for two centuries now, the issue of the possible traces of pre-Christian Germanic magical traditions in it has not been sufficiently investigated. The only study specifically devoted to the (alleged) magical elements in *Heliand* belongs to G. R. Murphy;⁴ the views expressed in this short essay must be framed within what can be called the basic idea of the American reverend’s entire production, which is also reflected in his (in some passages, tendentious) English translation of the Old Saxon poem: the idea that the poem “can be accurately interpreted both as a *saxonization* and as a *northernization* of the Gospel”.⁵

² See Barb 1975, 114.

³ Munier 1980, 138.

⁴ Murphy 1991. The study was published again as an appendix to his translation of the poem into English (Murphy 1992, 205-220), whence the quotations in the present essay.

⁵ Murphy 1989, 4.

Murphy's approach to *Heliand* clearly moves within well-known research coordinates, which more generally concern the plurality of paths and models of adaptation – starting from the Apostolic Age, not only in the Near East and then in Europe, but also in broad regions of the world – of the fundamental values and dogmas of Christianity to non-Christian peoples (not always necessarily “pagans”: consider the Jesuit mission to China and Japan in the 16th century); plurality which, if it takes into account recurring problems, obstacles and challenges which can be usefully confronted – think, for example, of the problems of translating and “inculturating” the Bible into the different periods and cultural and religious realities (as witnessed by the version in the Tzotzil language completed in 2015, only the latest of the many translations of the Christians' sacred text into the many different Mayan languages⁶) – presents, in the different historical situations, unrepeatably distinctive characteristics.

From this point of view, therefore, Murphy's approach to the Old Saxon poem is not new, but is in line with the studies already undertaken, a handful of years after J.A. Schmeller's *editio princeps* (1830), by the Lutheran theologian A.F.C. Vilmar, according to whom the Old Saxon poem was “das Christentum im deutschen gewande, eingekleidet in die poesie und die sitte eines edlen deutschen stammes”.⁷ Since then, and without interruption, the so-called “germanisation” of the Gospel text – by which Vilmar's thesis was perhaps reductively but effectively summarized – has had inevitable repercussions in every field of study prompted by the Saxon poem, so as to become a stable presence in research on *Heliand*. The theory of “germanisation” intersects, in fact, all the endless internal and external, linguistic, literary, legal and historical problems of the Old Saxon poem: manuscript tradition, sources, time and place of composition, identity and status of the poet, patronage and fruition.

If in the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century Vilmar's thesis exerted a great influence on studies (not least because of the effects that the “theory of germanisation” could have in research fields with clear ideological interests: think of the marked political uses to which Saxon studies were subjected under the Third Reich), the research has then gradually moved away from it, bringing out the more genuinely Christian traits of the Old Saxon poem. It should be noted, however, that since the beginning of the 1990s and in the first years of this millennium, there has been a decisive return to the “theory of Germanisation”; a return for which, we believe, Murphy's own studies are

⁶ See *L'Avvenire*, 13th October 2015, 27. About the problems concerning the transmission and adaptation of the Bible in the Middle Ages, see Quast, Spreckelmeier 2017.

⁷ Vilmar 1845, 1.

largely responsible; he, albeit with some distinctions, has, for the most part, expressly referred to Vilmar's fundamental thesis, one that Murphy himself recalled being "largely rejected by the scholarship of the present day".⁸

Now, if it is not even possible to attempt to summarise the question of the "Germanisation" of the Gospel text in the *Heliand* in all its known aspects, the subject, to which this issue of the periodical of the Italian Association of Germanic Philology is dedicated, offers the opportunity to focus on Murphy's statements regarding the magical element in *Heliand* (only one of the possible developments, according to the American scholar, of the "Saxonization and northernization" of the poem). Murphy examines six passages of the text. Of these six, only the first one, the well-known episode in which Satan wears a "magic helmet", is "quite clearly" identifiable as relevant to the discussed topic; in the other five cases there would be a somewhat greater difficulty in the identification of the magical practice because of the (deliberate) "careful use of ambiguous language and his [the poet's] preference for an indirect and suggestive method in conjuring up the aura of magic".⁹ Moreover, according to the scholar, the anonymous author "forces the reader to surmise the presence of magic by surrounding the event with dramatic secrecy, or he refers to 'powers' in the description of the event or object".¹⁰ This magical presence would be clear in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, in the consecration of bread and wine at the Last Supper, in the first miracle performed by Jesus with the transformation of water into wine at Cana, in the presentation of the *Pater noster* and finally in the depiction of the creation of the world and the writing of the gospels.

2. Murphy's examples

First example: in fitt 65 Satan, distressed and worried ("ser an muode, / tulgo harm an is hugie" vv. 5435b-5436a),¹¹ makes, through Pilate's wife, a last desperate attempt to save Jesus's life in order to prevent the fulfilment of the divine plan of salvation and redemption of the human race through the condemnation and death of Christ. Matthew, the accurate reporter of divine com-

⁸ Murphy 1989, 3.

⁹ Murphy 1992, 205.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ The Old Saxon poem is cited according to manuscript C in the edition curated by Sievers 1878.

munications through dreams, is the only one among the evangelists to tell of this woman, (possibly) named Procula or Procla or Claudia Procula, who, because of a dream that has disturbed her, hastens to send a message to her husband in an attempt to intercede so that the “iustus” Jesus may be freed (Mt. 27:19). The author of *Heliand* elaborates and expands this short note – only one verse long, but of considerable theological and polemical importance – on the basis of Hrabanus Maurus’s *Commentary on Matthew*. The element that can be ascribed to the sphere of magic lies, as is well known, in the fact that Satan presents himself to the woman in the light of dawn (“an dages liohte” v. 5451b), but hidden by a headgear that has made him invisible (“an helith-helme bihelid” v. 5452a), unjustifiably and tendentiously translated by Murphy as “hidden by a magic helmet”.¹²

The desire for invisibility – which has found expression in ancient and medieval literature from the story of the Ring of Gyges, narrated by Plato alone, to the *Liber incantationum, exorcismorum et fascinationum variarum*, a 15th century manual of demonic magic, a chapter of which (*Tracto eciam de arte invisibilitatis, hodie quasi ab omnibus ignorata*) teaches how to become invisible –¹³ is also notoriously present in the Germanic tradition. A philologically committed analysis of the OS compound *heliðhelm* on the basis of careful linguistic comparisons with similar evidence in the remaining Germanic languages (Anglo-Saxon, Old High Germanic and Old Norse), which differ in chronology and literary genre, has been recently carried out by A.M. Guerrieri and M. Buzzoni.¹⁴ The two essays stand out for their more careful use of magical categories and offer useful comparisons with the Indo-European tradition. For the purposes of this essay, it will be profitable to recall Buzzoni’s statement: OS *heliðhelm*, OE *hæleðhelm/ heoloðhelm* 1) “è comunque sempre utilizzato con riferimento al diavolo, oppure a una creatura dell’inferno” ‘it is always used with reference to the devil, or to a creature of hell’ 2) “l’ipotesi che esso [il composto *heliðhelm*] sia necessariamente da intendere come un ‘elmo/cappuccio con proprietà magiche’ risulta spesso una forzatura rispetto ai dati desumibili dal contesto linguistico e dal contesto culturale” ‘the hypothesis that it [the compound *heliðhelm*] is necessarily to be understood as a ‘helmet/hood with magical properties’ is often a forcing with respect to data inferred from the linguistic and cultural context’.¹⁵

¹² Murphy 1992, 180.

¹³ Kieckhefer 1998.

¹⁴ Guerrieri 2011; Buzzoni 2015.

¹⁵ Buzzoni 2015, 107. See also Ilkow 1968, 192-193.

Murphy, on the other hand, establishes a hasty connection between this “hiding-helmet” worn by Satan and the “Tarnkappe of later medieval literature”, arguing that the intention of the author of *Heliand* would therefore have been “to use this harmless device from Germanic mythology to make the devil seem more at home, as it were, in Germanic Christianity!”¹⁶ The short note to its translation is equally general: “This magic helmet may have been a commonplace of Germanic folklore”.¹⁷ The American professor dedicated his translation with commentary to his students, and A. E. Wright pointed out that it is above all students “in undergraduate courses on Germanic culture and mythology who will profit by Murphy’s translation and commentary”.¹⁸ It is our opinion, however, that precisely a text intended not for a specialist audience, but for those who are approaching the Germanic languages and literatures for the first time, must be able to simplify, but that the legitimate effort towards simplicity, however necessary for didactic reasons, must never be made at the expense of scientific correctness.

Therefore, in establishing an automatic identity between the OS *heliðhelm* and the MHG *tarnkappe* – the well-known headgear taken from Alberich by Siegfried, as narrated by Hagen in the third *adventure* of the *Song of the Nibelungs* (stanza 97) – one must proceed more cautiously, avoiding transferring *sic et simpliciter* linguistic and cultural data from one period to another, from one linguistic and literary sphere to another. A more in-depth analysis, in fact, “lascia trapelare un’evidente soluzione di continuità tra la nozione di *heliðhelm* e quella di *tarnkappe/tarnkvot*” ‘reveals a break in continuity between the notion of *heliðhelm* and that of *tarnkappe / tarnkvot*’.¹⁹

Second example. The episode of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes: the reference is to the first miracle recounted by all four evangelists, not to the second miracle, only reported by Matthew (15:32-39) and Mark (8:1-10). According to Murphy this would be “another fairly obvious and charming example of a magic description of a miracle”,²⁰ which the disciples would attend, to the delight of W. Goethe and P. Dukas, as “sorcerer’s apprentices”. It is worth quoting the entire short passage from the scholar’s essay:

¹⁶ Murphy 1992, 207.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 180, note 283.

¹⁸ Wright 1993, 538.

¹⁹ Buzzoni 2015, 107.

²⁰ Murphy 1992, 207.

As the thanes/disciples go among the huge crowd with their paltry five loaves they, like sorcerer's apprentices, are described as becoming aware that the bread *undar iro handun uuohs* 'that the bread between their hands was growing' (2859). Matthew's gospel, on the other hand, is prudently silent on this point!²¹

Now, if it is frankly inadmissible to infer the idea of a prudent silence of the four evangelists (and in any case not only of Matthew!) from an addition of the Saxon poet, the whole of Murphy's interpretation of the episode arouses dismay. The supposed display of magic by Jesus would be based on the insertion in the Saxon poem of the semi-verse "*It undar iro handon uuohs*" (v. 2859b), an addition which would allegedly change the whole scene into magic;²² magic even capable of causing Jesus's disciples a shock²³ of which there is no trace in the text.

We will usefully observe that Otfrid, too, introduces a similar addition: "So thaz héri tho gisáz, / thaz brot giségonotaz áz: // iz wúahs thar thera férti / in múnde joh in henti" (III, 6, 35-36).²⁴ A quick look at the studies on the sources of the Saxon poem and of Otfrid would have prevented the American scholar from drawing hasty conclusions: as early as 1868 Windisch had already suggested as a source of this "hübscher Einfall" Hrabanus's *Commentary on Matthew*: "Beide haben vielmehr im Hraban nachgeschlagen und nachgelesen".²⁵ We confess, moreover, that we cannot see anything in the addition introduced by the poet ("*It undar iro handon uuohs*") that forces us to point in the direction of magic: compare the comment of St Augustine "*Ille multiplicavit in manibus [emphasis added] frangentium quinque panes, qui in terra germinantia multiplicat semina*" (*Sermones* 130, 1).

But it is the whole reworking of the passage that distances the Saxon Christ from the image of the wizard suggested by Murphy. In the Gospel of John the narration is dominated by the idea of Christ as the bread of spiritual life; according to the evangelist, those who had witnessed the miracle recognised

²¹ *Ibid.* See S. Matzner's sober explanation: "The feeding of the 5000 in its Heliand version shows the characteristic tendency to explicitly narrate processes and not only their results in the unbiblical insertion *undar iro handun uuohs*" (2008, 125).

²² "This charming addition by the author turns the scene into magic!", Murphy 1992, 93, note 128.

²³ "They are shocked as they become aware that the bread [...] between their hands was growing!", Murphy 2004, 276.

²⁴ Erdmann 1882.

²⁵ Windisch 1868, 63. See also Grein 1869, 93 and Weber 1927, 30.

in Jesus the prophet who was to come into the world, in accordance with their messianic expectations (“Illi ergo homines cum vidissent quod fecerat signum, dicebant: quia hic est vere propheta qui venturus est in mundum” 6:14); to the news, again according to John, that Jesus, upon learning that the men were about to come and get him to make him king, withdrew (“Ihesus autem cum cognovisset quia venturi essent, ut reperent eum et facerent eum regem, fugit” 6:15), the Saxon poet adds an interesting extension on the basis of Bede’s commentary, taken by Alcuin:²⁶

that Criste ni uuas
 uuihtes uuirdig, huand hie thit ueroldriki,
 ertha endi upphimil thuru es enes craft
 selbo giuuarahtha endi sithor biheld,
 land endi liudscipi – thoh thes enigan gilobon ni dedin
 uuretha uuidarsacon – that all an is giuueldi sted,
 cuningriko craft endi kesarduomas,
 meginthioda mahal. (vv. 2884b-2891)

(That was something not at all worthy of Christ, since He had created the kingdom of this world, earth and heaven up above, by His own power, and had afterwards preserved the earth and its population – though some people did not believe this, angry enemies – so that everything is already under His rule: the power of kingdoms and of the empire, the assembly of all mankind).

Now, in a passage that praises the glory of Christ, the origin and Lord of all created things (almost a transposition into words of the Christ Pantocrator of Byzantine art), to translate as Murphy does with “a wiser wizard” OS *uuisara uuarsaga* is a choice that leaves one bewildered:

Thuo sia hebancuning
 thia liudi lobodun, quathun that gio ni uurði an thitt lioht cuman
 uuisera uuarsaga, eftha that hie giuuald mid gode
 an thesaro middilgard merun habdi,
 enuualdan hugi. (vv. 2874b-2878a)

(They, the people, praised the Heaven-King, they said that never would a wiser

²⁶ See Windish 1868, 63-64 and Grein 1869, 93-94. On the matter of the sources, see Belkin, Meier 1975, 91-96.

prophet ever come to this light who would have more power through God here in the middle world, a more sincere mind.)

Although the history of the formation and diffusion in the continental Germanic area of the compound may be complex, there is no doubt that the poet consistently uses *wārsago* to refer to Jesus and the biblical prophets (11 occurrences, as opposed to 3 for the synonym *forasago*).²⁷ The choice “a wiser wizard” is determined by the American scholar’s obsession with magic: “In view of the beautifully magic depiction of the miracle, it seems to me that ‘prophet’ is inadequate as a translation for the *Heliand’s* magic-working *uuarsago*”.²⁸

In another case Murphy once again chooses “wizard” to translate OS *wārsago* (instead of Engl. *soothsayer* used in the other passages): in the episode narrated by Luke alone (7:11-17) of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain (fitt 26, vv. 2175-2220), the first of the three miracles of resurrection from the dead attributed to Jesus. Among the challenges – “*da far tremar le vene e i polsi*” – that the Saxon poet had to face in his transposition of the Gospel message, the resurrection from the dead certainly needed the greatest care. In the inevitable re-elaboration imposed by the translation into alliterative verse of the evangelist’s already vivid description of the episode, the anonymous Saxon poet wanted and was able to emphasise the more properly divine features of the miraculous event performed by Jesus, starting with the words, the poet’s invention, that “*thie guodes suno*” (v. 2192b) addressed to the widow and which, from the beginning, establish the essence of Christ’s power over death: “*Thu scalt hier craft sehan, / uualdandes giuuerc:*” (vv. 2195b-2196a). Then, after Jesus has touched with “*helagon handon*” (v. 2200a) the body of the boy, in the chest of the young man returns “*thie gest thuru godes craft*” (v. 2204a). The woman thus understands that Jesus “*uwas thie mahtigo drohtin / thie helago thie himiles giuualdid*” (vv. 2210b-2211a) and the many people present, too, begin to be aware of the miracle (*wundar*) they have witnessed:

Thuo bigunnun that ahton managa
that uunder that under them uueroda giburida, quathun that uualdand selbo
mahtig quami tharod is menigi uuison, endi that hie im so marean sandi
uuarsagon an thero uueroldes rikie, thie im thar sulican uuillieon frumidi.
(vv. 2212b-2215)

²⁷ On OS *warsago* see Wesche 1940, 101-102, De Boor 1948, 71, Ilkow 1968, 392-393.

²⁸ Murphy 1992, 93, note 129.

(Many began to be aware of the wonder that had happened among the people; they said the Ruler Himself had come in power to make many wise, and that He had sent a great prophet to them in the kingdom of the world who had done such a favour for them there.)

Again, the eagerness to trace magical elements in Jesus' actions at all costs pushes Murphy towards a questionable interpretation: the Ruler Himself ("uualdand selbo" = God the Father) would have sent to mankind "a great wizard".²⁹ Nor is it clear why touching the boy's body (OS *ina*, acc. sg., v. 2199a), unlike the original Gospel in which Jesus touches the coffin (Latin *loculus*), in accordance with the *Book of Numbers* (19:16), would give "a much more magical tone to the scene".³⁰

Third example. The consecration of bread and wine at the Last Supper. With this example, "and one of much greater importance", as Murphy himself states,³¹ we move, if possible, onto even more treacherous ground, since we have to establish the possible presence of a magical factor in the main sacrament of the Christian religion, the very basis of the religious life of the Church since the first Christian generation. And not only that: with this third example the debate on the presence of pre-Christian magical elements in the Saxon poem intersects with other important themes of the "Heliandforschung", perhaps even beyond the conscious intentions of the American scholar: the theme of the congruence of the doctrinal contents of *Heliand* – and more generally of Old Saxon poetry (including the *Genesis*)³² – with the foundations of the theology of the Carolingian Age and the theme of the active participation of the poet in the religious controversies of the time, particularly in an anti-adoptionist perspective. J. Rathofer has strongly emphasised this aspect: "Bestimmte Züge (Betonung der metaphysischen Gottessohnschaft und der Souveränität des göttlichfreien Willens in allem Tun und Leiden) scheinen noch als Nachwirkungen des Streites mit den spanischen Adoptianisten gedeutet werden zu können".³³ But not only the destiny of man in the afterlife was at the centre of the theological-philosophical debate: the nature of the Eucharist, of the real presence of the body of Christ in the Eucharistic sacrament, (affirmed by Pas-

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 73.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 73, note 106.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 207.

³² For the involvement in the Christological controversy of the Old Saxon *Genesis*, see Doane 1991, 106-107.

³³ Rathofer 1971, 255. See Pelle 2010.

chasius Radbertus in 831 in the treatise *De corpore et sanguine domini*), too, was at the centre of a controversy that saw many theologians already involved in the dispute on predestination.

According to Murphy, the *Heliand* is “an instructive instance of the need, among the Saxons at least, for the concept of magic in order to come to a serious understanding of the ‘powers’ Christians possessed”.³⁴ Magic would be a sort of necessary passage to make the mystery of the Eucharist understandable

in terms of Germanic religion. Had the poet not described the bread and wine as possessing magic power, his hearers would have very likely treated the bread and wine of the sacrament as merely being un-magical things, objects containing no real performative power and therefore incapable of producing of themselves the desired theological effects they depict.³⁵

We shall return on the concept of “performative power” frequently employed by Murphy in the last example, and we shall also leave out the inappropriate reference, when speaking of the ninth-century Saxons, to “Germanic religion”; let us now focus on the crucial reason for the magical interpretation of the institution of the Eucharist in *Heliand*: the alleged magical value attributed to the OS adj. *mahtig* in the semiverse *thit is mahtig thing* (v. 4645b), which Murphy claims to derive from a study by S. E. Flowers and which, according to him, would confirm “the use of **mah-tiz* in the sense of ‘having magic power’”.³⁶ To be precise, however, in the cited passage Flowers just attributes to Germ. **mah-tiz* a broader meaning: “[this] can be understood in a physical, or in numinous or psychic sense”.³⁷ However, according to Murphy, once the OS adj. *mahtig* is assigned a magic coefficient,

by pointing to the bread and wine, and saying ‘that is [a] power-thing,’ the Christ of the *Heliand* locates [...] the Eucharistic elements among the familiar Germanic world of intrinsically powerful magic objects, such as the ‘hiding-helmet’, things that possess in themselves the secret power to accomplish what they depict.³⁸

³⁴ Murphy 1992, 210.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

³⁷ Flowers 1986, 127.

³⁸ Murphy 1992, 208.

Murphy's entire magical speculation is therefore based on a premise (even misquoted: the meaning of OS *mahtig* "having magic power") which constitutes the basis for what is to be demonstrated, as per the most classic circular logic of the *petitio principii*.

As already pointed out by E.H. Sehrt, the OS adjective *mahtig*, can indicate something "Mächtiges, Wundervolles, Ausserordentliches". See, for example, verses 863b-865a, where *mahtig* qualifies the word of God, synonymically varied "godlic stemna godes", which descends on John the Baptist from Heaven (on the basis of the verse Lc. 3:2). It is even more useful for us to look at the occurrences of the syntagms "that sea magtig thing" (v. 423a) and "That uuas so mahtig thing" (v. 5674b) for their substantial correspondence with the semi-verse mentioned by Murphy. In the first case *mahtig thing* (synonymically varied in *blithi gibodscepi*) summarises the whole of the "good news" (i.e. Christ's birth) announced to the shepherds (transformed, in *Heliand*, in *ehuscalcos*) by the angel: "Thia herdos forstuodun / that sea mahtig thing gimanod habda, / blithi gibodscepi." (vv. 422b-424a). In the second case, the extraordinary signs that accompany Jesus' death on the cross are understood – with an addition that is difficult to interpret and does not seem to be reflected in any source – even by those who (and this is what constitutes an "extraordinary fact") had never uttered a single word in this world:

That uuas so mahtig thing
 that thar Cristes doð antkennian scoldun
 so filo thes gifuolian thie gio mid firihon ne sprac
 uuord an thesaro uueroldi. (vv. 5674b-5677a)

(That was a powerful thing that Christ's death should be felt and acknowledged
 by so many who had never before spoken a word among people in this world.)

And the meaning of "fact, extraordinary, prodigious event" of the cited examples, far from any suggestion of magic, we also ascribe to the example discussed by Murphy. The narrative in *Heliand* does not differ in its essential elements from the narrative (albeit with their verbal divergences) of the Synoptics. Jesus takes the bread and, having pronounced a blessing, distributes pieces of it to the disciples, then picks up a cup of wine and, having also given thanks, hands it to all ("uualdand uuin end brod uuihida bethiu, / helgoda hebancuning, mid is handon brac, / gaf it under them is iungron endi gode thancodā" vv. 4633-4635). Bread and wine are offered as the body (*lichamo*)

and the blood (*bluod*) of Jesus as a sacrifice for the salvation of mankind (“Thit ik an erthu scal / geban endi giotan endi iu te godes rike / losian mid minu lichamen an lif euuig, / an that himiles liocht” vv. 4640b-4643a). There follows an invitation to the disciples to renew this action in His memory (“Gi-huggiat gi sinnon / that gi thi u fulgangen thia ik an theson gomon duon, / marient thitt for thero menigi”, vv. 4643b-4645a). All this, Jesus summarises, constitutes a fact, a prodigious event: “thit is mahtig thing” (v. 4645b). Murphy’s tendentious translation, in the essay as in his translation, “*this body and blood* [emphasis added] is a thing which possesses power”³⁹ finds no justification in the text.

Fourth example. The miracle performed by Jesus with the change of water into wine at Cana (Io. 2:1-11) which, despite its apparent simplicity, and even dubious and disorienting usefulness (what sense can there be in Jesus providing an overabundance of wine for a private party?) is rich in complex symbolic meanings.⁴⁰ According to Murphy in this other episode “the presence of magic is strongly suggested to the reader/hearer but done almost entirely by indirection”;⁴¹ the intervention of magic, he argues, would easily emerge from a comparison between the narrative of John (the only witness to this first miracle of Jesus) and its reworking in *Heliand*. According to John (2:6-10), Jesus asks the servants to fill six empty stone jars with water and bring their contents to the master of feast (Latin *architriclinus*), who tasted the drink and was amazed at the quality of the wine. Vilmar had already pointed out that in the Old Saxon poem, the feast was re-elaborated and adapted according to the traditional Germanic banquet setting (“zusammensein der deutschen helden”)⁴²: everything takes place in a large room (“that hoha hus” v. 2001a), men are cheerful and in a good mood (“blithoda”, “gladmuoda” vv. 2005b and 2007a), great is the joy in the banquet hall (“uwas thar erlo drom / fagar an flettie” vv. 2009b-2010a”), so much so that we would hardly be surprised if, instead of Jesus, it was Beowulf to enter the hall.⁴³

³⁹ Murphy 1992, 153 and 209.

⁴⁰ See Ratzinger 2007, I, 291-296.

⁴¹ Murphy 1992, 210.

⁴² Vilmar 1845, 37; also see Cathey 2002, 187: “The Marriage at Cana is elaborated with phrases descriptive of Saxon drinking”.

⁴³ If you really want to let your imagination run wild, you might even find in the order Jesus gave to the servants to bring the drink to the most important person first (“hiet it thero gestio the at them gomon uwas / them herosten an hand geban” vv. 2045-2046), a distant reference to the ritual of the offering of the cup in a strictly hierarchical order (although, as we know, this is a strictly female task, which in *Beowulf* is performed by Wealhtheow).

In this case, too, – as in the course of his entire oeuvre – the poet wisely moves between two extremes, to which the enormous complexity of the phenomenon of translation can be reduced: “foreignizing” translation and “domesticating” translation, according to the terminology introduced by Venuti.⁴⁴ This interplay between “Germanic tone” and the rigorous safeguarding and mediation of the central contents of the Christian message and its dogmas constitutes the true character of the poem and the reason for the fascination that *Heliand* has held for two hundred years.⁴⁵ Among the linguistic and cultural adaptation strategies (some of which are more “neutral”, such as the image of Jesus who, after spending forty days in the desert, OS *wostunnia*, however, re-emerges from the shelter of a forest “uualdes hlea” v. 1124b) are gladly recalled those that in some way would constitute proof of the Saxons’ persistent paganism (such as the well-known episode of the dove landing “on” Jesus’s shoulder at his baptism, “endi sat im uppan usses drohtines ahsla” v. 988b, and that would automatically make Jesus “a new Woden”).⁴⁶ It is worth, also for the purposes of our study, just mentioning the results of the excellent historical researches carried out by I. Rembold, which resize and demythologise many of the commonplaces circulating about Saxon paganism (including the interpretation of the Stelling uprising in the years between 841 and 843, so dear to the socialist studies of the German Democratic Republic).⁴⁷

In Murphy’s opinion, the whole scene of the miracle at Cana would be surrounded by an aura of magic through the addition

of the element of secrecy. Mary goes around to all the servants, both the ones who are serving the wine and the ones in charge of the wine barrels and tells all of them not to let out a bit of what they see Christ do or hear Him say. Christ is then described as giving His orders quietly; He does not want a lot of people knowing the words He uses to change the water into wine. Even Christian ritual is brought anachronistically into the scene as Christ is made to make *the sign of the cross* [emphasis added] over the water and with His own

⁴⁴ See Venuti 1995.

⁴⁵ Against the idea of a “mere surface embellishment with the purpose of making the Gospel more palatable to the heathen Saxons” argues Prisca, according to whom “the formulas and themes that identify a Germanic tradition in the *Heliand* are far too robust to be considered merely an overlay” (2004, 33).

⁴⁶ Murphy 1989, 80. A substantial adherence to Murphy’s interpretation in Cathey 2002, 170.

⁴⁷ See Rembold 2018, 2017a and 2017b. Also, Karras 1986.

hands work the water into wine. This scene is implicitly a magical one, Christ is shown working in the manner of a wizard who knows which spells and gestures to use, and who is most anxious to restrict this secret knowledge as much as possible.⁴⁸

A first remark concerns Murphy's translation, according to which Mary addressed the servants in charge of distributing the wine so that "they were *not let out* [emphasis added] a whit of the words or actions that the holy Christ would tell them to do for the people" ("that sia thes ne uuord ne uuerc uuiht ni forlietin / thes sia thie helago Crist hetan uueldi / lestian for them liudeon" vv. 2034-2036a). Yet, by OS *farlatan* plus negation is meant that Mary is asking the servants not to fail to do anything, word or deed, that Jesus would have ordered them to do (and not: not to let out), in substantial agreement with what the Johannine verse states "quodcumque dixerit vobis facite" (Io. 2:5). It is useful to compare the identical words with which the centurion of Capernaum, wishing to justify his deference to Jesus, describes the command he always successfully exercised over his own soldiers: "thia mi so gihoriga sind / that sia thes ne uuord ne uuerc uuiht ne forlatat / thes ik sia an theson landscipie lestian hetu" (vv. 2115b-2117), verses that this time Murphy himself correctly translates "who are so obedient to me that they *do not fail* [emphases added] to do a whit of the words or activities which I order them to do in this territory".⁴⁹

We shall not, however, neglect to mention the addition, at this point in the narrative, of a few verses that do not seem to be justified by any of the poem's known sources⁵⁰ and which, by distancing the narration from the contents of the Gospel text, actually seem to point in the direction of "secrecy": "Thuo so stillo gibod / mahtig barn godes, so it thar manno filo / ne uuissa te uuarun, huo hie it mid is uuordu gisprak" (vv. 2037b-2039), which Murphy translates 'God's mighty Child gave His orders very quietly so that a lot of people would not know for sure how He said with his words'.⁵¹

It is also from Jesus' behaviour, described in these verses, that Murphy derives the magical interpretation of the entire episode: Jesus, he maintains, while performing the miracle on the one hand, on the other wants to jealously guard the gestures and spells used for it; according to Murphy, the spells had to be kept secret in consideration of "Germanic belief in secret spells and

⁴⁸ Murphy 1992, 213-214.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁰ See Windisch 1868, Grein 1869, Jellinek 1892.

⁵¹ Murphy 1992, 68. See on this verse Behaghel 1897, 319.

in their intrinsic performative ability”⁵² because otherwise, he ironically concludes, there would be no lake or river left in Germany whose waters would not have been changed into wine.

The interpretation of the passage is not, however, devoid of difficulties, not so much because of its general meaning (note, however, the lack of explicit syntactic references for the OS verb *gibiodan*), but rather for its positioning within the episode which inexplicably precedes Jesus’ request to the servants to fill the empty stone jars with water and the subsequent transformation of the water into wine after a silent sign of blessing (“endi hie thar mid is fingron thuo / segnoda selbo sinon handon, / uurahta it te uuine” vv. 2041b- 2043a).⁵³

A quick remark concerns gestures, an addition by the poet that is not found in the verses of John, but which is evidently inspired by the hand gesture that Jesus frequently performs to bless or to work miracles, as also occurs in the recalled episode of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain or again in the healing of the blind men of Jericho (Mt. 20:29-34, see *Heliand* vv. 3578b-3583a). In our case, if Jesus “blesses” (OS *segnon*) the water, he certainly does not make a sign of the cross on it, as Murphy, with an anachronism which is difficult to understand, translates: ‘He made the sign of the cross over with His fingers, with His own hands—He worked it into wine!’.⁵⁴

While we have no difficulty in recognising the presence, however controversial, of a vague atmosphere of secrecy, nothing drives us to consider the unknown words of Jesus as “secret magic words”, “performative words”, “powerful runes”.⁵⁵ Rather, we can observe that the *Heliand* poet wanted to clarify the divine features of the miraculous event performed by Jesus from the very beginning, expanding on the words with which John closes the episode at Cana (“Hoc fecit initium signorum Ihesus, in Chana Galileae, et manifestavit gloriam suam” 2:11) and, above all, anticipating them at the beginning of the narrative. These are words that – as in the episode of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Nain – underline the far from magical origin of Jesus’s power and are intended to serve as a guide for the interpretation of subsequent events.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 214.

⁵³ Buzzoni’s (2005, 152) criticism of Murphy is not applicable in this case. The scholar, in fact, does not use John’s text (in which, as we know, “implete hydrias aqua” and “haurite nunc et ferte architriclino” are the only words uttered by Jesus) as the reference for his interpretation of the passage under the banner of secrecy, but the additional verses 2037b-2039.

⁵⁴ Murphy 1992, 68.

⁵⁵ Murphy 1992, 68, note 102.

hie im oc at them gomon uuas,
 iac hie thar gicuthda that hie habda craft godes,
 helpa fan himilfader, helagna gest,
 uualdandes uuisduom. (vv. 2002b-2005a)

(He, too, was at the wedding, and there He made known that He had God's strength, help from the heavenly Father, Holy Spirit, wisdom of the Ruler.)

Fifth example. The interpretation of the *Pater noster* "as secret runic mystery". In the Old Saxon poem the poetic paraphrase of the teaching of the Christians' primary prayer follows *Tatian* (74), then with Luke's introduction – according to which one of the disciples asks Jesus to teach them to pray "Tunc dixit unus e discipulis eius ad eum: domine, doce nos orare, sicut Iohannes docuit discipulos suos" (11:1) – which, however, is followed by Matthew's version of the prayer (6:9-13) reworked in thirteen verses (vv. 1600-1612) with significant innovations.⁵⁶ In the *Heliand* too, therefore, the teaching of prayer is provoked by a request in direct speech of the disciples.

'Herro thie guodo,' quathie 'us is thinera huldi tharf,
 te giuuirkeanne thinan uuilleon endi thinero uuordo so self
 allero barno best, that thu us bedon leras
 iungron thina, so Iohannes duot
 diurlic doperi dago gihuilkes
 is uuerod mid is uuordon, huo sia uualdand sculun
 guodan gruohtean. Duo thina iungron so self:
 girihti us that giruni.' (vv. 1588-1595a)

('Good Lord,' he said, 'we need Your grace in order to carry out Your will, and we also need Your own words, best of all born, so that You teach us, Your disciples, how to pray, just as John, the dear Baptist, teaches his people with his words every day how they are to speak to the ruling God. Do this for Your own disciples: teach us the mystery.')

On this occasion the term, a sort of "little magic word", on which Murphy's entire interpretation lies, is OS *giruni* 'secret runes', which "transforms the

⁵⁶ On the versions of the *Pater noster* in the Germanic area see Pàroli 2008; Cammarota 2018; on the reworking in the *Heliand* see Sipione 2014 and, in particular on the fourth prayer, Cathey 1995.

‘Our Father’ into a spell of great performative ‘power’, and locates prayer among the Germanic religious categories along with charms and spells”.⁵⁷ It seems to be understood that for his translation of the semi-verse “girihti us that giruni” (‘teach us the secret runes’ v. 1595a) the scholar hastily relied on theses that were still oriented towards the pioneering (and largely outdated) positions of J. Grimm, even though, due to the extreme scarcity of bibliographic references made available by the scholar, it is difficult to trace the secondary literature he used. Certainly, Murphy could not, for a matter of few months, have had access to Ch. Fell’s excellent 1991 essay, which traces the history of the influence of Scandinavian antiquarianism since the 17th century on English meanings of “rune” and “runic” – and its consequences in the first dictionaries of the Anglo-Saxon language, up to its effects in the best known and most widely used of these: the famous dictionary started by J. Bosworth, continued by T. Toller and A. Campbell – and which submits the occurrences of the OE *run* and *geryne* to a precise analysis, undistorted by the meanings offered by modern dictionaries, following their development up to the Middle English period and with useful comparisons with the ancient Gothic and High German (but not with Saxon) traditions. Fell’s is only one of a number of essays that for decades had begun to question many of the common places that had accompanied the “runic question” since Grimm’s time.

Obliged as we are to remain focused on the meaning of OS *giruni* and its presumed runic-magic implications, we recall at least two studies of the 1980s, which, if read, would have advised Murphy to be more cautious in the magical interpretation of the *Pater noster*: the first by R.L. Morris (1985), dedicated to an interesting and documented review of the whole etymological issue of Germ. **rūn-*, the second one by R.D. Eaton (1986), who, in a wide-ranging re-examination of the semantic meaning of OE *rūn* in the Anglo-Saxon tradition, starts from its occurrence in the episode of the encounter between Christ and the Samaritan woman in the Lindisfarne Gospels (John 4) and dwells, like Fell, on the errors caused by the meanings proposed by Bosworth’s dictionary. Finally, it should be remembered that the meaning to be attributed to OE *geryne* was inevitably encountered by R.I. Page in a well-known essay published in 1964, in which he addresses the whole *vexata quaestio* of the relationship between runes and magic in the Anglo-Saxon context (a “slight” relationship, more “assumed” than “definitely demonstrated”).⁵⁸

Now, all the studies mentioned have unanimously excluded for OE *geryne*

⁵⁷ Murphy 1992, 215.

⁵⁸ Page 1964, 22.

(or for its *run* base) the meaning of ‘secret’, recorded by Bosworth, specifying, instead, the meaning of ‘mystery’ in a theological-Christian sense. This is how Fell expresses herself, on the basis of the examination of the numerous occurrences of OE *geryne* / *gerynelic* made available in the meantime by the *Microfiche Concordance to Old English* of the University of Toronto:

The words are used of Christian mysteries or of disciplines learned within Christian scriptoria. Religious poetry and prose are the most common contexts and these contain plenty of reference to pagan thought. But the various forms of *geryne* are not used for pagan belief. They are used consistently throughout the Anglo-Saxon period of the “mystery” of Easter, of baptism, of the sacrament, of the Trinity, the Incarnation [...] The adjectives most often qualifying the noun are *halig* or *gæstlic*, ‘holy’ or ‘spiritual’. The *geryne* are those of God or the Saviour.⁵⁹

Precisely the same meaning we attach to the OS *giruni*, which occurs four times in *Heliand*, always as sing. acc., and which is variously translated by Murphy: ‘that giruni / geruni’ vv. 3, 1595 = ‘secret runes’, ‘himilisc geruni’ v. 2437 = ‘the secret mystery, the runes of heaven’ (sic!) and ‘so manag helag geruni’ v. 4603 = ‘so many holy mysteries’. We will return to the occurrence of v. 3 in the last point, but we will now focus on the two other occurrences of OS *giruni* (vv. 2437 and 4603). The first occurs in the context of the explanation to the disciples of the parable of the sower, where “that gi uuitan muotun / an iuuuon hugisceftion himilisc giruni” (vv. 2436b-2437) renders rather faithfully “quia vobis datum est nosse mysteria regni caelorum” (Mt. 13:11), as also done by the Old High German translator of Tatian: “iu ist gigeban zi uui-zanne giruni himilo rihhes” (74). While it is given to the disciples to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, to others this is not given: “them oðron scal man be bilithon that gibod godes / uuordon uusean” (vv. 2438-2439a), which translates “illis autem non est datum” (Mt. 13:11). Sipione observes that “*himilisc gerûni* in this passage is matched with *that gibod godes* ‘God’s commandments’: while the latter implies an elementary religious knowledge, the former suggests a superior degree of spiritual awareness”.⁶⁰

The second occurs in the context of the denunciation of the traitor Judas during the Easter dinner and constitutes an evocative extension by the poet of the verses of the evangelist: “Erat autem recumbens unus ex discipulis eius in

⁵⁹ Fell 1991, 206.

⁶⁰ Sipione 2014, 213.

sinu Ihesu, quem diligebat Ihesus [...] Itaque cum recubisset ille supra pectus Ihesu” (Io. 13:23 and 25); in the *Heliand*, John is not only bent over Jesus’s chest, but in a very beautiful scene, absorbs “holy mysteries, deep thought” from Christ’s body.

endi muosta thar *thuo* an thes mahtiges Cristes
barne restian endi an is brioston lag,
hlinoda mid is hobdu: thar nam hie so manag helag giruni,
diopa githahti. (vv. 4601b-4604a)⁶¹

(He was allowed to rest on the lap of mighty Christ, and he was lying with his head leaning on His chest. There he acquired so many holy mysteries, so many deep thoughts.)

One almost seems to recognise in the Saxon verses “manag helag giruni, diopa githahti” what Eaton stated about OE *rûn*:

The word *rûn* in the Lindisfarne Gospels does not characterize something as secret, magic or purely mystical, nor does it represent something purely mysterious and incomprehensible. Rather, it signifies a deeper understanding and is associated with acuteness in interpreting language and signs.⁶²

The variation *diopa githahti* has the task of better specifying the meaning of *helag giruni*, i.e. that set of new and more complex meanings of the Christian faith unknown to the Saxons’ religiosity: precisely ‘the mystery’, rendered with OS *giruni*, a term that, however, has undergone a process of resemanticisation – thus ‘mystery’, but in a theological-Christian sense – as already happened for the Gr. *mystērion*, where the term used in the *New Testament*

specifically referred to the secret thoughts of the Judeo-Christian God which are hidden from human reason and must therefore be revealed to those for whom they are intended. Furthermore, the Gk. *mystērion* is a theological term of the early Christians who each used it in a slightly different sense, but none of them seem to use the word in the old pagan sense, meaning secret cult rites of initiation.⁶³

⁶¹ On the sources of this addition see Windisch 1868, 71 and Grein 1869, 102.

⁶² Eaton 1986, 20.

⁶³ Morris 1985, 349.

And it is in this sense that Gr. *mystērion* and *mystēria* will be respectively rendered in Gothic by *runa* and *runos* (with *garuni* translating Gr. *symbolion*).⁶⁴ Nothing to do with “runic mysteries”, however, so much so that in this single case even Murphy resigns himself and, contradicting his previous translation choices, translates ‘so many holy mysteries’. Nor should it be overlooked that OE *geryne* is, in the glossographical tradition, the most common interpretation of Latin *sacramentum*.⁶⁵ Thus, if in the Saxon setting of the teaching of the *Pater noster*, prompted, according to Luke, by the request of one of the disciples, the explicit reference to the teaching of John the Baptist (“so Iohannes duot”, v. 1591b) is maintained, R. Fahey can legitimately suggest that “*geruni* as ‘sacrament’ is a better semantic fit in this context than defining *geruni* simply as ‘mystery’”.⁶⁶ Lastly, the comparison established by Murphy to support his interpretation of the *Pater noster*, with the runic letters in the Anglo-Saxon composition known as *The Dialogues of Solomon and Saturn I* – where Solomon, a champion of the Christian faith, expounds to his adversary Saturn the qualities of the prayer taught by Jesus – is also implausible. Already K. Sisam, in his review of R.J. Menner’s edition, observed how “the runes in Ms. A have nothing to do with the original poem. They were added beside the Roman capitals in one branch of the MS. tradition”.⁶⁷

Sixth example. The representation of the creation of the world and the writing of the Gospels “as instances of word magic ordained by God”.⁶⁸ The creation of the world (vv. 38-43) would have been described by the Saxon poet “as taking place through a performative word” and this would have allowed the connection of “two types of magic words: the magic words of Germanic religion and the creative, i.e. performative and therefore magic, word of God”.⁶⁹ In the concluding lines, the scholar summarises the essential points of what he has argued in the course of his essay:

It is not too far a jump then to seeing the written gospel itself as God’s spell; and finally, even Christ as a performative word, the magic Word, of God [...] This Germano-Christian synthesis of magic words, God’s words, and Christ

⁶⁴ See Buzzoni 2004, 143.

⁶⁵ See Page 1964, 24 and Fell 1991, 206.

⁶⁶ Fahey 2019, 110. “Moreover, there are no extant examples of *geryne* in non-Christian context, within the corpus of Old English literature”, 103.

⁶⁷ Sisam 1944, 35; sharing the same opinion, Page 1964, 27 and Derolez 1954, 420.

⁶⁸ Murphy 1992, 205.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 218.

who knows the secret word-spells, is one that makes the whole of the Bible a book of charming performative magic in the vision of the *Heliand*.⁷⁰

Concepts, Murphy concludes, that the anonymous poet would not have concealed from the opening lines of his work, where OS *giruni* is rendered once again as ‘secret runes’: “Manega uuaron the sia iro mod gespon, / that sia uuord godes uuisean bigunnon, reckean that giruni” vv. 1-3 ‘There were many whose hearts told them that they should begin to tell the secret runes, the word of God’.⁷¹ Murphy’s judgment is lapidary: “The word [*giruni*] not only implies that the gospel is a secret mystery, but that it is of the power of the magic spells and charms written in the runes of the Northern world”.⁷²

We have already highlighted the emphasis that the American scholar placed on the term “performative”. At the end of this excursus, it is worth recalling what we said at the beginning about a certain carelessness in the use of terminology in the field of magic studies, recalling the words with which Buzzoni correctly underlined Murphy’s misunderstanding of the term “performative”:

Murphy [...] identifies the idea of ‘performative speech’ with ‘spell, runes, curses’, that is with magic. This is not true from a linguistic point of view and therefore can be considered as an overinterpretation. Legal formulae, for example, are often endowed with performative value and yet have little to do with magic. Furthermore, talking of ‘performative speech’ in general is indeed an oversimplification. There are, in fact, many different kinds of performatives; to mention only a few: implicit vs. explicit performatives; ontopoietic (linked to magic) vs. deontopoietic (linked to legal formulae) performatives.⁷³

3. Conclusions

Among the examples given by Murphy, only the first one, with Satan as protagonist, can be ascribed, with appropriate caution, to the vague sphere of magic, while we cannot find any clue, not even the most magically occult, to suspect the poet’s intention to attribute to Jesus wizard’s traits. Certainly,

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 220.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 3, note 2.

⁷³ Buzzoni 2005, 156.

the essay on magic must be framed within the basic vision of the entire production of the American scholar, aimed at emphasising the characteristics of what has now long been a misunderstood, stereotyped and obsolete idea of “Germanism”; such a vision is also clear in some details of its translation: OS *drohtin* inexorably rendered without exception ‘Chieftain’ (not only Jesus, but also God the Father = ‘Lord-Chieftain’), OS *gisiðos* ‘warrior-companions’, OS *rincos* ‘fighting men’, OS *burg* ‘hill-fort’, the names of the cities *Rumuburg*, *Nazarethburg*, *Bethlemaburg* systematically ‘Fort Rome’, ‘hill-fort Nazareth’, ‘Fort Bethlehem’. An idea of “Germanism” that can lead to fanciful interpretations, in which even Zachariah, – who, as we know, made mute, writes on a tablet the name of his son John (Lc. 1:63) “Iohannes namon / uuislico giuuret” (vv. 236b-237a) – would be depicted by the *Heliand* poet “as carving runic letters on beechwood, in the Germanic manner”,⁷⁴ on the basis of a misuse of the etymological investigation (in this case of OS *giwritan*), which, while it has heuristic value, does not necessarily have hermeneutical value.

If we have decided to engage in what may appear to be a belated review of Murphy’s writing, it is not only because the scholar has reiterated this magical view in 2004 and then again in 2010, but above all because this single essay on the alleged magical element in *Heliand* has become a constant point of reference for critics, predominantly English-speaking, a sort of “Standardwerk”, as a quick search on “scholar-google” will testify. And so, to remain exclusively on the topics dealt with, F.G. Bosman decided to tackle the study of the *Pater noster* in *Heliand* (“a synecdoche for the entire poetic masterpiece”)⁷⁵ based, as he states, on Murphy’s opinions: between references to “Nordic mythology” and Jesus (“a rough warrior chief, who moves from fortress to fortress together with his band of vassals [...] a ‘soothsayer’ who teaches his followers secret runes and works spectacular miracles”)⁷⁶ the *Pater noster*

becomes a ‘rune’, a sacred word that gives direct access to the gods, and to the wisdom of Wodan, the ‘god of the runes’ in Nordic mythology. The poet does not mention Wodan, but by using the word *gerûni* he turns ‘Our Father’ into an incantation that can be used to ward off evil and invoke divine grace.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Murphy 1992, 11, note 17.

⁷⁵ Bosman 2016, 40.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 48.

Furthermore, based on the erroneous assertion that the term *drohtin* “is reserved *exclusively* [emphasis added] to Jesus in the *Heliand*”⁷⁸ – assertion refuted by vv. 418, 681, 1790 where the term is referred to God the Father – “the second part of the *Fadar úsa*”, according to Bosman, “is not addressed to the heavenly Father, but to Jesus himself”.⁷⁹ Jesus, in short, would be committed to teaching the disciples how to pray to him and not to the Father!

C. Zurla also interprets the teaching of the *Pater noster* on the basis of Murphy’s view: “He [Jesus] is petitioned by the apostles to reveal His mastery of runes, which he does, in the form of the Lord’s Prayer”;⁸⁰ again on the grounds of Murphy’s translation, the interpretation of the miracle of the wedding at Cana (of course: ‘Fort Cana’), also “tinted with magical elements”.⁸¹ G. Mierke also unhesitatingly endorses Murphy’s translation of the first lines of the poem (“reckean that girûni” = ‘the secret runes’, v. 3a).⁸² Incidentally, the influence exerted by Murphy’s opinions on magic, and more generally by his approach to the Saxon poem, will also be noted in those studies which, far from more strictly philological concerns, address contemporary problems of adaptation of the Gospel in missionary contexts⁸³ or the history of the liturgy.⁸⁴

It seems to us, paraphrasing what has long been known about the poet’s linguistic and cultural accommodation strategies to make the Gospel “more appealing” to the newly converted Saxons, that in part of the *Heliandforschung* – to the detriment of linguistic and historical study and, above all, of respect for the text – a desire to make the Saxon poem itself “more appealing” to the less demanding modern reader is prevailing. All the more reason to reflect on the future of philological studies, on the tasks of philology and on the role that the Italian school of Germanic philology is called upon to play in the international context.

This investigation of ours – limited to the presumed presence of the magical element – also confirms that in *Heliand*, to say it in the words of W. Haubrichs, “in keinem Fall zentrale Glaubensinhalte des Christentums geopfert wurden”.⁸⁵ The image of Christ that emerges is far removed from that of a

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸⁰ Zurla 2004, 42.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁸² Mierke 2010, 95.

⁸³ See Hayward 1994.

⁸⁴ Francis 2014.

⁸⁵ Haubrichs 1995, 285.

wizard; and so, even if Murphy winks at Tolkien, calling Christ “The Lord of the Runes”, the Christ of *Heliand* is not Gandalf!

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MAGIE IN DEN ÄLTEREN UND JÜNGEREN
RUNENINSCHRIFTEN?
– ZUM STATUS MAGISCHER KONZEPTE
IN DER RUNOLOGIE

To what extent can individual runic inscriptions or inscription groups of the older and younger period be classified as ‘magical’ or ‘profane’? The present article scrutinizes Elmer Antonsen’s anti-magical approach to the older runic inscriptions and offers a more nuanced view, which rejects the basic assumption that inscriptions are solely profane, devoid of sacred and/or magical functions. Magical inscriptions are defined in this paper as those runic artefacts which deliberately exert influence on higher or lower powers, such as gods, helping spirits or evil spirits. Methodologically, three examples of the older and younger runic inscriptions are selected, which combine several functional elements that can be interpreted as magical: the Kylver stone (KJ 1), the Vedslet sandstone amulet (DR 57), and the gravestone of Gørlev (DR 239). This last has at least three such functional elements: a *fupark* inscription, a grave formula, and the so-called *thistle-mistle* formula. This article addresses not only the allegedly magical functions of the *fupark* as a whole, but also the magical use of individual runes and runic names; compare the ideographic use of positively charged runes such as 2 j (= *jāra n. ‘year, good harvest’) and F f (= *fehu n. ‘cattle, wealth’). On the basis of these case studies, the question of rune magic in the North will be further pursued.

1. *Zur Magie des Futharks und zum Kylverstein*

Bis heute stehen sich in der Runologie zwei Lager gegenüber: das säkular-profane, das von Anders Bæksted¹ begründet wurde, und das religiös-magische, das Magnus Olsen und andere Runologen profilierten. Der Problemkreis der Magie nimmt in der Runenforschung auch heute einen zentralen Stellenwert ein, was die Vielzahl von Beiträgen und Monographien zu diesem Thema eindrucksvoll bestätigt.² Demgemäß liefert Harald Kleinschmidt (1996) ein Plädoyer für einen historischen Magiebegriff, dessen Entwicklung er wenigstens

¹ Bæksted 1952.

² Siehe beispielsweise Liestøl 1960, Nedoma 1998, Düwel 1997, MacLeod & Mees 2006, sowie Düwel, Heizmann 2006 zu den Wirkungsmöglichkeiten des älteren Futharks und Pereswetoff-Morath 2019 zu den Amulett-Inschriften.

bis ins Frühmittelalter zurückverfolgt. Kleinschmidt bestätigt den zentralen Status der Magie in vor- und frühmittelalterlichen Gesellschaften:³

Magie war im Sinne des frühmittelalterlichen Wortgebrauchs eine Kommunikationsweise, die sich dem Inhalt der kommunizierten Lehren und der Form der praktizierten kultischen Handlungen nach vom Christentum unterschied, aber kein Kommunikationsprozeß *sui generis* [...] und schon gar nicht irrational oder unkritisch oder sozial auffällig. (Meine Hervorhebung; M.S.)

Dementsprechend erscheint es angemessen, von einem Kontinuum zwischen Magie, Kult und Religion auszugehen.⁴ Der Stellenwert der Magie in vor- und frühmittelalterlichen Gesellschaften wäre somit aus wissenschafts-theoretischer Sicht aufzuwerten und ihre soziale Existenz als Interaktionsform mit nicht-menschlichen Mächten anzuerkennen. Ob diese Interaktionsform zwischen menschlichen und nicht-menschlichen Mächten sprachlich, d.h. schriftlich/mündlich, oder nicht-sprachlich, zum Beispiel durch Bilder und Figuren, realisiert wird, dürfte dabei eine untergeordnete Frage sein.

Allerdings ist in der Runologie – etwa bei Elmer Antonsen (1980; 2002) – auch die gegenläufige Tendenz festzustellen, magische Elemente bei der Inschriftendeutung weitgehend auszuklammern oder ganz und gar zu negieren. MacLeod und Mees monieren diese Extremposition in ihrer Monographie *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*:⁵

Runic studies today evince a tendency to seek to deny any magical element whatsoever in runic inscriptions, an extreme and unnecessary reactive approach to the failings of earlier investigators.

Doch wie sollen überhaupt ‚magische Runeninschriften‘ definiert werden? Als magische Runeninschriften werden in diesem Beitrag solche Runeninschriften ausgewiesen, die in der Sprech- und Schreibhandlung mit Hilfe des Inschriftenträgers höhere oder niedere (das heißt nicht-menschliche) Mächte oder übernatürliche Kräfte involvieren, sei es in der Form von Flüchen, Beschwörungsformularen (*besvergeser* bzw. *forbannelser*), Schutzformeln oder Segenswünschen (*signingar* bzw. *velsignelser*). Mit Homann⁶ liegt das magische

³ Kleinschmidt 1996, 184.

⁴ Vgl. Frankfurter 1994, 189-190 mit Anm. 6.

⁵ MacLeod, Mees 2006, 12; vgl. dazu Schulte 2007a.

⁶ Homann 1976, 306.

Element von Fluch- und Beschwörungsformularen darin, dass sie Handlungen begleiten, „durch die der Mensch eine ihm überlegene Macht oder Geisteswesen [...] entweder herbeiruft, bannt (Bannung, Epiklese) oder verscheucht und fernhält“.⁷ Magisch-apotropäische Wirkabsichten können aber auch auf menschliche Missetäter projiziert werden.⁸ Zentral erscheint in diesem Licht zunächst die Unterscheidung zwischen ‚Beschwörung‘ und ‚Segen‘. Während Flüche und Beschwörungen als Versuche zwanghafter spiritueller (d.h. nicht-menschlicher) Einflußnahmen zur Bewältigung einer aktuellen Aufgabe definiert werden können, wird der Segen aus pragmatischer Sicht durch Schutzfunktionen, das heißt Aspekte der Prävention oder Protektion, gekennzeichnet.⁹ Hiermit werden apotropäische und protektive Wirkabsichten als magisch eingestuft.

In diesem Licht ist die Annahme einzelner Runologen relevant, dass das Futhark (mit seinen Varianten der älteren und jüngeren Periode) *in toto* und wohlgerneht in der richtigen und festen Anordnung der Runenreihe magische Wirkabsichten ausdrückte. Diesen Umstand heben sowohl der norwegische Runologe Magnus Olsen – Schüler und Nachfolger Sophus Bugges – als auch der Göttinger Runologe Wolfgang Krause hervor. Magnus Olsen drückt dies folgendermaßen aus (meine Hervorhebung): ‚Das Futhark ist die Konzentration der magischen Kraft sämtlicher Runen, und um wirksam sein zu können, muss eine bestimmte *unverrückbare* Reihenfolge beachtet werden‘.¹⁰

Damit hat Magnus Olsen eindeutig eine *feste magische Formel* im Visier.¹¹ Traditionell wird der berühmte schwedische Kylverstein (KJ 1 = G 88), der erstmals im Jahre 1901 auf der Insel Gotland (Stånga socken, Gotlands södra härad) registriert wurde, als Paradebeispiel einer magischen Runeninschrift identifiziert.¹²

Die Inschrift zitiert das ältere Futhark in Gänze, d.h. (f) **uparkgwhnijpīRstbeml̥do**, und läßt darauf ein tannenbaumartiges Zeichen

⁷ Altnordische Fluchdichtung im Sinne eines Genres behandelt Thorvaldsen 2010; siehe außerdem Bø 1974 und Ebel 1995, 243. Zur Funktion des Schadenabwehrzaubers in älteren Runeninschriften siehe Düwel 1997 und Nedoma 1998. Bereits Kock 1922 stellte die Beschwörungsformulare in den älteren Runeninschriften zusammen.

⁸ Vgl. Düwel 1997.

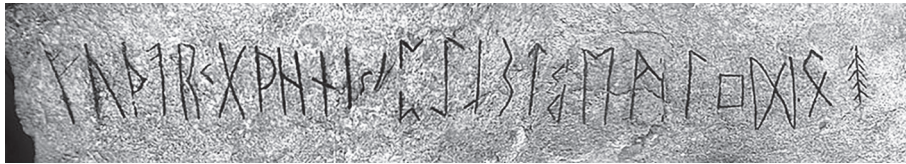
⁹ Vgl. aus komparativer Sicht Frankfurter 2005.

¹⁰ „Futharken er koncentrationen af samtlige runers magiske kraft, og for at denne skal være virksom, maa en bestemt *ufravigelig* rækkefølge iagttages“ (Olsen 1916, 228). Zu weiteren Kommentaren und Analysen dieser wichtigen Passage siehe Nielsen 1985, 79, Düwel 1992, 92 und Seim 1998, 173.

¹¹ Siehe ausdrücklich Seim 1998, 177, mit einem Forschungsreferat.

¹² Vgl. Olsen 1916, 227; siehe Ill. 1.

und das Palindrom **sueus** folgen.¹³ Heizmann (1986) deutet dieses baumartige Zeichen in enger Beziehung zur Eibe als Symbol des Weltenbaumes und als *axis mundi*, die unterschiedlichen Sphären des Kosmos verbindet und damit den Zugang zum Jenseits eröffnet. Die Reihenfolge des Kylver-Futharks mit der eröffnenden **f**-Rune und der schließenden **o**-Rune wird als die ursprüngliche angesehen, da sie eine thematische Klammer mit dem Grundthema ‚Habe‘ schafft. Am Anfang steht **f** = **fehu* ‚beweglicher Besitz‘, während **o** = **ōþalan* ‚ererbter Besitz‘ den Abschluss der Runenreihe bildet; vgl. den Schlussbuchstaben *Omega* im griechischen Alphabet.¹⁴



Ill. 1. Die urnordische Futhark-Inschrift auf dem Kylver-Stein (KJ 1 = G 88).
Photo: Antikvarisk-topografiska arkivet, Riksantikvarieämbetet.

Magnus Olsen kann als Begründer einer magischen, genauer gesagt, einer zahlen-magischen, Deutung des Futharks gesehen werden. Ihm zufolge gehören die Zahlen 16 und 24 (und möglicherweise die Basiszahl Acht) vorzugsweise Inschriften an, die als magisch zu bezeichnen sind.¹⁵ In seinem klassischen Aufsatz „Om Trolldruner“ führt Olsen¹⁶ dieses Argument aus: ‚Das Futhark ist weit mehr und wichtiger als ein Leitfaden für den Unterricht im Schreiben. Das Futhark ist etwas an und für sich, es besteht kraft seines eigenen Inhalts‘.

¹³ Zu weiteren Einzelheiten dieser Inschrift siehe Düwel, Heizmann 2006, 9-10. Palindrome (zu griech. *palindromos* ‚zurücklaufend‘) sind schriftliche Ausdrücke, die vor- und rückwärts gelesen werden können (siehe Dornseiff 1925). In den älteren und jüngeren Runeninschriften finden sich einige Beispiele, so auf dem Stab von Frøslev (**RiliR**), wobei es sich möglicherweise um einen Zauberstab handelt (KJ 26), und auf dem Flemløse-Stein (DR 193), wo **sis** als magische Zauberformel gedeutet wird (DR 193).

¹⁴ Zur Reihung des älteren Futharks unter Annahme lexikalisch-semantischer Begriffsrunen-Paare siehe auch Straubhaar *et al.* 2020.

¹⁵ Siehe Olsen 1909, 21; vgl. dazu Nielsen 1985, 77, Schulte 2006, 49-51 und Düwel, Heizmann 2006, 35). Zu kritischen Einwänden gegen zahlenmagische und gematrische Deutungen älterer Runeninschriften siehe Schulte 2006 und ders. 2007b.

¹⁶ „futharken er noget langt mere og vigtigere end en ledetråd for undervisningen i skrivning. Futharken er noget i og for sig, den bestaar i kraft af sit eget indhold“ (Olsen 1916, 227).

Dagegen entwickelte Wolfgang Krause einen Ansatz der *Runennamen-Magie*. In der Erst-edition der *Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark* stellt er am Anfang von Kapitel „I. Das Futhark“ ausdrücklich fest:

Barg schon jede einzelne Rune in sich eine magische Kraft, deren Sphäre in erster Linie durch ihren Namen angedeutet war, so mußte die gesammelte magische Runenkraft dann wirksam werden, wenn man sämtliche 24 Runen in einer eigenen Reihenfolge hintereinander anbrachte.¹⁷

Kennzeichnend für diese Position ist der Terminus der Runennamenthese, der die Bedeutung von Begriffsrunen hervorhebt. Zwei zentrale Beispiele sind 2 j (= *jāra n. ‚gutes Jahr, Ernte‘) auf dem Stein von Stentoften KJ 96 und dreifach-verstärkendes FFF **fff** (= *fehu n. ‚Vieh, Habe‘) auf dem Stein von Gummarp KJ 95.¹⁸ Das Deutungsmoment der Runennamen und Begriffsrunen steht dem zahlenmagische Ansatz Olsens gegenüber, der die Magie primär im Zahlensystem 8-16-24 verortet. Auch in der zweiten Edition der *Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark* findet sich der Passus zu den Begriffsrunen, wobei Krause präzisiert, dass das Futhark „die gesammelten Kräfte“ aller 24 Runen aktiviert.¹⁹ Auf dieser Grundlage argumentiert Krauses Schüler Sigurd Sierke (meine Hervorhebung),

daß das Futhark in seiner Gesamtheit eine *stehende Formel* bildet, die in ihrem Charakter zwischen Begriffsrunen und Formelwort steht und deren Wirkung eine schutzverleihende war, ähnlich der von *alu* [...] Das Futhark ist eine Zusammenstellung aller Begriffsrunen, von denen jede einzelne einen Namen- und Bedeutungskreis innehat.²⁰

Sierke (1939) rechnet also mit einem protektiven Synergieeffekt des Futharks als fester Formel kraft seiner inhärenten 24 Begriffsrunen. Es verdient Beachtung, dass das Konzept der *stehenden Formel* in Verbindung mit dem Futhark sonst in der Runologie selten angewendet wird. Er begegnet allerdings auch in der norwegischen Runenforschung: Karin Fjellhammer Seim stellt in ihrem Forschungsreferat zu Magnus Olsens zahlenmagischer Deutung des

¹⁷ Krause 1937, 7.

¹⁸ Dabei tritt die Bedeutung der Dreizahl nicht nur in den älteren Runeninschriften, sondern auch in der Struktur des Futharks selbst zutage (vgl. Schulte 2015, 178).

¹⁹ Vgl. Düwel, Heizmann 2006, 39.

²⁰ Sierke 1939, 112-113.

Futharks²¹ fest, ‚dass das Futhark als magische Formel wirksam sein soll‘ [‚at futharken skal være virksom som magisk formel‘].²²

Im weitesten Sinne ist hier die vielfach in der Wikingerzeit und im Mittelalter belegte *Distel-Mistel*-Formel zu vergleichen, die allerdings im Unterschied zum Futhark oftmals fast bis zur Unkenntlichkeit verschlüsselt, man könnte auch sagen entstellt, auftritt.²³ Gemeinsam ist beiden Formeln, dass sie in stark verkürzten Varianten auftreten, in jüngeren Inschriften werden teils nur die ersten drei Runen *fuþ* zitiert, um das Futhark zu aktivieren, so zum Beispiel in einer der Felsritzungen auf dem norwegischen Skutestein (Storhedder, N 205).²⁴ Bei solchen Kurzformeln, sei es das Futhark oder die *Distel-Mistel*-Formel, ist von komprimierten und konzentrierten Formeln auszugehen, die sich als Ellipsen deuten lassen.

Erik Moltke²⁵ spricht in diesem Sinne von zwei magischen Formeln, der *pistill-mistill*-Formel und dem Futhark, ‚which all things considered, must also be connected with pagan gravemagic‘. Die *Distel-Mistel*-Formel tritt typischerweise als Grabbannungsformel auf, mit der Funktion, den Grabhügel zu beschützen und den Wiedergänger im Grab festzuhalten.²⁶ Die Grabbannungsformel des Gørlevsteins, die übrigens deutliche Parallelen in anderen Runeninschriften hat, so zum Beispiel auf dem Nørre Nærrå-Stein in Fünen, kann als Euphemismus betrachtet werden: *niut ual kum[b]ls* ‚genieße (gebrauche) das Grabdenkmal wohl‘, mit anderen Worten: ‚bleibe bloß im Grab und gehe nicht wieder!‘ Düwel und Heizmann²⁷ deuten dies im Sinne einer magischen-apotropäischen Runeninschrift als ‚Zeichensatz und sprachlich realisierte[n] Befehl an den Toten‘.

²¹ Olsen 1916, 228.

²² Seim 1998, 177.

²³ Siehe unten Teil 2; vgl. Schulte 2020a, ders. 2021.

²⁴ Auf dem Skutestein treten insgesamt 7 Varianten des Futharks auf (NIyR 3, 66). Die Annahme magischer Inschriften wird auch hier durch verschiedene Begleitfaktoren bestätigt, unter anderem den auffälligen epigraphischen Gebrauch der dreifachen þ-Rune (NIyR 3, 48-49).

²⁵ Moltke 1985, 99.

²⁶ Siehe Brøndum-Nielsen 1933, 122-123, Olsen 1957 [= NIyR IV], 176-181, dazu Moltke 1985, 167ff. Moltke (DR, 811) kommentiert ausdrücklich die Funktion dieser *gravbindingsformler*: ‚den Toten dazu zu zwingen im Grab zu bleiben und die Lebenden nicht durch Wiedergängerei zu stören‘ [‚at tvinge den døde til at blive i hans grav og ikke forulempe de levende med gengangeri‘].

²⁷ Düwel, Heizmann 2006, 34.

Ein gemeinsamer Grundgedanke bei Magnus Olsen und Wolfgang Krause ist die feste Ordnung des Futharks. Bestimmend ist die Leitidee Dieterichs,²⁸ „daß der Buchstabe die älteste Zauberformel ist und daß die feste Zeichenreihenfolge der nächste Schritt in der Entwicklung von Magie ist“. In seiner Runenedition führt Krause²⁹ diesen Leitgedanken anhand des Kylversteines weiter aus, indem er besonderen Wert auf Aspekte der Ganzheit, Vollständigkeit und Ordnung legt.³⁰ In seiner eigenen Formulierung:

Die Hauptinschrift [auf dem Kylverstein; M.S.], das Futhark, soll vermutlich *alle Runenkräfte insgesamt* mobilisieren, um den Frieden des Grabes zu sichern, sei es gegen einen Störenfried von außen, sei es gegen den etwaigen Widergänger. [meine Hervorhebung; M.S.]

Gegen diese religiös-magische These hat wiederum Elmer Antonsen vehement opponiert und dabei den Kylverstein gewissermaßen zum Testfall der Runenmagie erhoben.³¹ Aus seiner Sicht bekundet die Magiedeutung einen Mythos der imaginativen Runologen, die sich den Prinzipien der strengen Wissenschaft widersetzen: „The myth of the older runes as a means of fixing the dead in the grave is an invention of modern-day runologist without any substance whatsoever“.³²

Diese scharfe Kritik muss als Versuch gewertet werden, den Status der Runologie als Wissenschaft nach den gängigen Prinzipien der Reliabilität und Überprüfbarkeit aufzuwerten.³³ Es ist aber durchaus typisch, dass dieses Wissenschaftsideal des Positivismus – wie andere naturwissenschaftlich orientierte Diskurse innerhalb der Linguistik – dem Wesen der humanistischen Tradition nicht unbedingt gerecht werden.³⁴ Die Position des amerikanischen Linguisten Elmer Antonsen ist denn auch deutlich geprägt von den rigiden

²⁸ Dieterichs 1901, 103.

²⁹ Krause 1966, 13.

³⁰ Zu dieser Diskussion siehe im weitem Düwel, Heizmann 2006, 36, 42-43. Zur Ganzheitssymbolik des Alphabets sind die drei *alpha-omega*-Belege im *Buch der Offenbarung* zu vergleichen, wo es heißt: *Ap.* 1:8 Ego sum alpha et omega, principium et finis, dicit Dominus Deus, qui est et qui erat et qui venturus est, omnipotens; *Ap.* 21:6 Factum est: ego sum alpha et omega, initium et finis. Ego sitienti dabo de fonte aquae vitae gratis, und *Ap.* 22:13: Ego sum alpha et omega, primus et novissimus, principium et finis.

³¹ Vgl. Antonsen 1980.

³² Antonsen 2002, 177.

³³ Siehe aus norwegischer Sicht beispielsweise Befring 2020.

³⁴ Zur Mediävistik vgl. Van Nahl 2020.

methodischen Forderungen amerikanischer Strukturalisten und Behavioristen, die der führende amerikanische Strukturalist Leonard Bloomfield – durchaus im positivistischen Verständnis – als „materialistische (bzw. mechanistische) Theorie“ vorführte.³⁵ Bloomfield³⁶ formulierte dies kurz und prägnant so (meine Hervorhebung; M.S.):

The *materialistic* (or, better, *mechanistic*) theory supposes that the variability of human conduct, including speech, is due only to the fact that the human body is a very complex system. Human actions, according to the materialistic view, are part of cause-and-effect sequences exactly like those which we observe, say in the study of physics or chemistry.

Doch kommen wir in diesem Kontext auf die Anti-Magie-These zurück. Antonsen³⁷ betont, dass fünf von insgesamt sechs Futhark-Inschriften auf Brakteaten angebracht sind; hierbei handelt es sich um den Vadstena- und Motala-Brakteaten (die beide mit einem Stempel angefertigt sind), den Grumpan-Brakteaten und die Brakteaten von Lindkær und Overhornbæk (beide mit ein und derselben Vorlage). Zum Inschriftenträger Brakteat stellt Antonsen nüchtern fest, dass die Brakteatenschmiede unzureichende Kenntnisse der Runenschrift hatten, so dass es sich hier wahrscheinlich um reine Schriftimitation von Illiteraten gegenüber der ‚echten‘ runischen Schriftkultur handelt, deren Essenz mit dem altnordischen Begriff *rynni* (*īn*-Stamm zur Wurzel *urnord. *rūn-* ‚Rune‘) bezeichnet wird.³⁸ Antonsen zieht Erik Moltke³⁹ heran, der diesen Umstand ebenfalls bestätigt: „many meaningless bracteate runes [...] were frankly a pure swindle, aimed at hoodwinking credulous customers (‘you’ll get the strongest spell going!’)“.⁴⁰

Auf dieser Grundlage fordert Antonsen, den Kylverstein methodisch getrennt von den anderen Brakteaten auszuwerten, um dem Funktionsunterschied von Brakteaten (d.h. Amuletten) und Gedenksteinen (*memorial stones*) gerecht zu werden. Aber Antonsens Argumentation gegen das Konzept ‚magischer Runeninschriften‘ geht noch einen Schritt weiter, indem er – entgegen

³⁵ Vgl. Robins 1997, 242.

³⁶ Bloomfield 1933, 33.

³⁷ Antonsen 2002, 177.

³⁸ Vgl. Olsen 1932.

³⁹ Moltke 1985, 99.

⁴⁰ Siehe auch die weiterführende Diskussion in Düwel, Heizmann 2006, 33.

Magnus Olsens Stellungnahme – auf die Annahme einer profanen Schreibübung zurückkommt:⁴¹

In case of the Kylver stone, we are not dealing with a commemorative stone, but most probably simply a tool for instructing or learning – with the help of this futhark, a runemaster provided instruction in writing, or a beginner practiced it.

Leider lassen sich in den Humanwissenschaften eindeutige Falsifikationen in Anlehnung an Poppers Wissenschaftstheorie nur selten durchführen.⁴² Wie die folgenden Ausführungen zeigen, kann Antonsens positivistische Kritik gegen die Runenmagie aber aus textlinguistisch-typologischer Sicht entschärft werden. Damit versteht sich der vorliegende Beitrag als Plädoyer *für* magische Runeninschriften: der Kylverstein dient uns dabei nicht als einziges Fallbeispiel.⁴³

2. Methodisches

Sollte ungeachtet aller Einwände von der Existenz magischer Runeninschriften ausgegangen werden, so kann die Kombination verschiedener ‚magischer Funktionselemente‘ einen wichtigen Anhaltspunkt geben. Dies bedeutet, dass einzelne Runeninschriften mehrere Elemente mit *magischen Wirkabsichten* verbinden.

Wie gesagt argumentiert Antonsen,⁴⁴ dass der Kylverstein als rein didaktisches Werkzeug zum Erlernen des Futharks fungierte. Schon der aufwendige Gebrauch der Steinplatte als Teil des Grabmonuments spricht meines Erachtens in diesem Fall eindeutig gegen die Annahme einer profanen Schreibübung. Ein entscheidendes Argument für die magischen Wirkabsichten liefert die strukturelle Textlinguistik mit der modulären Analyse einzelner Textsequenzen. Der Kylverstein weist wie gesagt neben der Futhark-Inschrift noch ein Baum-Symbol und das Palindrom **sueus** auf, das vorwärts und rückwärts gelesen werden kann. Interessant ist die Annahme, dass Pa-

⁴¹ Antonsen 2002, 179.

⁴² Vgl. Popper 1982.

⁴³ Zu Kylver siehe die ausgewogene Besprechung von Düwel, Heizmann 2006, 31-45, besonders 45, die magische Wirkabsichten anerkennt.

⁴⁴ Antonsen 2002, 179.

lindrome als eine Form von labyrinthischen Endlosschleifen verstanden werden können, in denen sich die bösen Geister verirren und verlieren sollen.⁴⁵ In diesem Licht erscheint auch das *Ephesia grammaton* auf dem Vedslet Sandstein-Amulett (DR 57; Jütland, um 1200) motiviert, zumal es höchstwahrscheinlich direkt in einer *Distel-Mistel*-Formel auftritt: **þmkrhli i iklmrþh i A?hþa**.⁴⁶



Ill. 2. Das Vedslet Sandstein-Amulett DR 57
Photo: Erik Moltke, Nationalmuseet.

Die Frage, ob es sich bei diesem Amulett um eine magische Inschrift handelt, ist in der Tat definitionsabhängig und isoliert betrachtet kaum eindeutig zu entscheiden. Im Gesamtkontext häufen sich aber die Indizien, so dass die eingangs vorgeschlagener Definition ‚magischer Runeninschriften‘ mit Inhalt gefüllt wird. Ein wichtiges Indiz für den magischen Status der Amulett-Inschriften im Sinne von „evil-averting spells“ liefert die Altphilologie und die vergleichende Religionsgeschichte. Zur Funktion von *Ephesia grammata* auf Amuletten im vor- und früh-klassischen Kontext bemerkt Kotansky:⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Vgl. Blau 1898, 147.

⁴⁶ Vgl. Moltke 1838, 140; siehe Ill. 2. *Ephesia grammata* sind magische (mündlich artikuliert oder schriftlich fixierte) Formeln, die in verschiedenen, besonders mediterranen Kulturkreisen belegt sind, zum Beispiel *lix*, *tetrax*, *damnameneus*, *ablanathanalba*, etc. Ihr vornehmliches Ziel ist der Abwehrzauber, das heißt die apotropäische Magie (siehe Kotansky 1991, Jordan 2000; dazu Frankfurter 1999, 195-196).

⁴⁷ Kotansky 1991, 111.

The *Ephesia grammata*, mystic letters allegedly incised on the famous cult statue of Artemis of Ephesus, were often used in apotropaic rituals, both verbally and as parts of inscribed texts.

Kotansky⁴⁸ diskutiert weiterhin die Frage, ob diese ‚Ephesischen Wörter‘ auch im verschrifteten *Inschriften*-Kontext verwendet werden, und bestätigt dies anhand verschiedener Fallbeispiele. Die griechische Tradition berichtet von einem Ephesischen Boxer, der beim Kampf stets ein Amulett am Knöchel trug und seinen Milesischen Rivalen besiegte. Als man das Amulett mit dem *Ephesion grammaton* entdeckte und entfernte, wurde der Kämpfer besiegt.⁴⁹ Ohne auf weitere Beispiele einzugehen, kann festgestellt werden, dass die alt- bzw. vor-klassischen Traditionen des Mittelmeerraumes das Konzept ‚magischer Inschriften‘, in Sonderheit Amulettinschriften, mit Inhalt füllen. Mit Frankfurter: „It cannot be denied that *Ephesia grammata* express a pronounced sense of the written word as sacred in a continuing sense – carrying power in its fixed and amuletic state“.⁵⁰

In diesem Licht erscheint es übrigens plausible und konsequent, dass Sofia Pereswetoff-Morath in ihrer Untersuchung *Viking-Age Runic Plates. Readings and Interpretations* (2019) die Amulett-Inschriften der Wikingerzeit insgesamt als Gattung des ‚magischen Zaubers‘ definiert (siehe unten).

Im nordischen Kontext der Wikingerzeit kann zumindest ein zentrales Beispiel aus dem Korpus der dänischen Runeninschriften angeführt werden, wo eine Grabinschrift mit einem Futhark und einer eindeutig magischen Formel kombiniert wird: der Stein von Gørlev.

Auf dem Runenstein von Gørlev, Seeland (DR 239), der um 800-850 n.Chr. datiert wird, tritt das jüngere Futhark zusammen mit der sog. *pistill-mistill*-Formel nebst weiteren textuellen Ergänzungen auf (siehe die Runendatenbank DK):

[...] **fuparkhniastbmlR : niutualkums :**

pmkiiisssttiiiill : iak sata ru[na]ri[t]

[...] *fuporkhniastbmlR. Njót vel kumbls.*

Pistill, mistill, kistill. Ek setta rúnar rétt.

fuporkhniastbmlR. Nutze/genieße dieses Monument gut!

Pistill, mistill, kistill. Ich setzte die Runen richtig!‘

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Zu den Quellen siehe Kotansky 1991, 111, mit Fußnote 25.

⁵⁰ Siehe Frankfurter 1994, 195-196, vgl. auch Dornseiff 1925.

Wichtig ist in diesem Zusammenhang die *pistill-mistill*-Formel, die in zahlreichen jüngeren Runeninschriften, möglicherweise in Kurzform aber auch in den älteren Runeninschriften (auf dem Stein von By und dem Brakteaten von Halskov) belegt ist.⁵¹ Es ist naheliegend, die Runeninschrift auf dem Gørlevsstein ebenso wie den *Syrpuvers* in der *Bósa saga* als apotropäisch-protective Formel bzw. Beschwörung zu deuten: die *pistill-mistill*-Formel soll den Adressaten (im Falle der *Bósa saga* den bösen König Hringr) daran hindern, das Bett bzw. das Grab zu verlassen.⁵² Es handelt sich somit im weitesten Sinne um eine apotropäisch-protective Formel, die vor Wiedergängern schützen soll. Literarisch und kulturhistorisch ist das Wiedergängermotiv weithin bezeugt.⁵³ Gewöhnlich wird die *pistill-mistill*-Formel mit Runen verschriftlicht und als Rätsel kodiert, so zum Beispiel in der *Bósa saga*. Die Runensequenz, welche die Ziehmutter dem König Hringr als Rätsel aufgibt, ist folgendermaßen zu lesen und aufzulösen:

r.»q.k.m.u iiii. ßßßßß: tttt... iiii... llll...
r.o.p.k.m.u.iiii. sssss. tttt. iiii. llll:
ristill, oistill, pistill, kistill, mistill, uistill

Dabei handelt es sich ähnlich wie beim *Abracadabra* um eine rhythmisch-reimende Aufzählung von *-istil*-Wörtern, die Thompson (1978) als „sonorous nonsense“ bezeichnet. Die Grundwörter der Formel sind *pistill* ‚Distel‘, *mistill* ‚Mistel‘ und *kistill* ‚kleine Kiste‘, möglicherweise auch in der Bed. „säugende, milchgebende Brust“.⁵⁴ Weniger klar ist die Bedeutung der übrigen Sequenzen. Interessanterweise kann der Begriff *ristill* drei Bedeutungen haben: 1. Ritzwerkzeug bzw. Pflugschar, 2. eine tatkräftige Frau bzw. Riesin, und 3. eine gefährliche Hauterkrankung, *Zona herpetica*.⁵⁵ Wahrscheinlich trug diese Mehrdeutigkeit des Lexems *ristill* dazu bei, die Wirkung der Formel zu verstärken.⁵⁶ Die Saga betont ausdrücklich die Kraft dieser magischen Formel,

⁵¹ Siehe Christiansen 1974, Kusmenko 2017, dazu Schulte 2020a, ders. 2021.

⁵² Siehe Thompson 1978.

⁵³ Siehe etwa Lecouteux 1998, dazu Lecouteux 1987, Grambo 1991, Nilssen 1992 und Gjessing 2007.

⁵⁴ Vgl. Schulte 2020a.

⁵⁵ Siehe Falk 1921, 68-72.

⁵⁶ Zum Bedeutungsansatz an *ristill* (auch: *náristill*) ‚schwere Hauterkrankung, *Zona herpetica*‘, vgl. auch neunorwegisch *risle* und *nárisle* (siehe Aasen 2003, 494b und 563a, unter *naarista, risla*).

die als *Syrpuvers* bezeichnet wird:⁵⁷ *hóf hun þat er Syrpuvers heitir ok mestr galdr er folginn ok eigi er lofat at kveða eftir dagsetr* ‚sie begann das vorzutragen, was Syrpuvers heißt und was den stärksten Zauber (*galdr*) in sich birgt und nicht nach Anbruch der Dämmerung vorgetragen werden darf‘.

Im Kontext der nordischen Überlieferung kann die *pistill-mistill*-Formel als eine der mächtigsten magischen Formeln identifiziert werden, die Schutz vor Wiedergängern im weitesten Sinne bot. Wiedergänger in der Wikingerzeit und im Mittelalter schließen nicht nur *draugar* (‚Tote, Geister‘) und *aptrgöngumenn* (‚Wiedergänger‘) ein, sondern auch Fehlgeburten und Abtreibungen; *útburðir* (eigentlich ‚Hinausgetragene, bes. ungetauft verstorbene und an ungeweihter Stätte begrabene Kinder‘).⁵⁸ Das Thema Abtreibung eröffnet ein dunkles und wenig erforschtes Kapitel der späten Wikingerzeit und des nordischen Mittelalters. Dies erklärt unter anderem den Gebrauch der *pistill-mistill*-Formel in der Kirche von Borgund (N364-367; zu Einzelheiten siehe NIyR IV: 176-181).

Dass die Schutzfunktion vor Wiedergängern eine zentrale Rolle spielt, signalisiert auch das oben angesprochene Vedslet Sandsteinamulett (DR 57) mit der dreiteiligen Inschrift: **þmkrhli i iklmrph i A?hþa**.⁵⁹ Hier kommt die apotropäische Funktion in der nordischen Überlieferung unmittelbar durch das Lexem an. *hlé* n. ‚Schutz‘ (< urnord. **hlewa-*) zum Ausdruck. Wiederum wird die Annahme bestätigt, dass die *pistill-mistill*-Formel, hier wahrscheinlich in abgekürzter Form: **þmkr** = *pistill*, *mistill*, *kistill*, *ristill* und kombiniert mit dem Signalwort *hlé*, ebendiese Schutzfunktion versprachlicht und magische Wirkabsichten auf dem Amulett umsetzt.

Daß dabei gleichzeitig ein *Ephesion grammaton* mit spielerischer Umstellung der Runen vorliegt, macht die magische Funktion dieser Inschrift umso mehr wahrscheinlich (vgl. die Argumentation zum Palindrom **sueus** in Teil 2). Gleichzeitig treten direkte Parallelen im Funktionsbereich der Futhark-Inschriften und der Amulettinschriften auf dem Inschriftenträger ‚Brakteaten‘ zutage.

3. Schluss: Magie oder nicht Magie?

Der *Syrpuvers* der *Bósa saga* proklamiert ausdrücklich den magischen Gehalt der *Distel-Mistel*-Formel in der altnordischen Tradition. Wie es in der Saga

⁵⁷ Zitiert nach Guðni Jónsson 1954, 295; meine Übers.

⁵⁸ Vgl. Baetke 1983, 686, unter *út-burðr*.

⁵⁹ Vgl. Moltke 1938, 140.

heißt, ist diese Formel mit dem stärksten Zauber (*galdr*) verbunden und darf des Nachts auf keinen Fall zitiert werden. Nach der obigen Definition handelt es sich eindeutig um eine ‚magische Formel‘, die in der Schrift verankert ist.

Die schon angesprochene Verschlüsselung und Entstellung der Formel im Schriftbild geschieht wohl gerade mit der Absicht, so die zentrale Argumentation, böse Mächte zu bannen, indem ihnen äußerst schwierige oder unlösbare Rätsel aufgegeben werden. Schon in der klassischen Schriftmagie altägyptischer und griechischer Prägung war eine der Hauptfunktionen der Schrift die *Täuschung*; Frankfurter⁶⁰ formuliert dies in Anlehnung an Marcel Détienne (1986/1987) so: „writing in its origins was thus also an instrument of deceit“. Zu vergleichen ist die apotropäische Funktion der vor- und früh-klassischen Amulettinschriften im Kontext der Palindrome und *Ephesia grammata*, die als „letters of power“ bezeichnet werden, indem sie den Lesenden in endlosen Schleifen – vorwärts und rückwärts – gleichsam gefangen nehmen.⁶¹ Mit anderen Worten: Magie kann helfen, die bösen Mächte zu besänftigen und zu beschwichtigen, oder sie zu überlisten und zu täuschen. Die gründliche Untersuchung Sofia Pereswetoff-Moraths⁶² zielt ebenfalls auf den Funktionsbereich des Magischen. Ihre Arbeitshypothese wird in ihrer Arbeit durchaus untermauert (Hervorhebung der Verfasserin):⁶³

My working hypothesis assumes that the inscriptions on the different runic plates belong to the same genre and can therefore be placed in a single corpus and investigated using the same methods. [...] The relevant genre is *magic spells*.

In dem vorliegenden Beitrag wurde das Vedslet Sandstein-Amulett (DR 57) als potentiell magisch ausgewiesen, da es wahrscheinlich zwei diagnostische Kriterien einer magischen Runeninschriften aufweist: 1. eine *Distel-Mistel*-Formel und 2. die spielerische Umstellung der Runenfolge nach Art eines *Ephesion grammaton*.⁶⁴ Außerdem wurde der übergreifende gattungsmäßige Zusammenhang verschiedener Inschriftenträger im Funktionsbereich des Magischen betont. Das Ergebnis wurde in einem wesentlichen Punkt von Erik Moltke programmatisch vorformuliert und kann aus diesem Blickwinkel bestätigt werden: „[...] it must be reasonable to interpret all these [both amulets

⁶⁰ Frankfurter 1994, 190.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 195-196.

⁶² Pereswetoff-Moraths 2019, 25.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Vgl. Moltke 1938.

and futhark inscriptions; M.S.] in the same way: the futhark itself must have been among the most powerful of protective charms“.⁶⁵

Kehren wir abschließend zum gotländischen Kylverstein zurück. Wenn wir die historische Kontinuität *aller* älteren und jüngeren Futhark-Inschriften von der urnordischen Periode zur Wikingerzeit auch in den Wirkabsichten der Runenreihe voraussetzen, erscheint es angängig, die Grabinschrift auf dem Kylverstein mit dem immerhin vierhundert Jahre jüngeren Runenstein von Gørlev zu vergleichen. Bei dieser Argumentation dürfte es keine unmittelbare Rolle spielen, dass das ältere („germanische“) Futhark in seiner historischen Entwicklung von 24 auf 16 Runen reduziert wurde.⁶⁶ Aus numerologischer Sicht betont Olsen,⁶⁷ dass die numerische ‚magische‘ Struktur des älteren Futharks auch im jüngeren Futhark fortlebte. Zentral erscheint hierbei die Feststellung, dass der Schrumpfprozess des Runeninventars in keiner Weise die innere Struktur und Ordnung des Futharks – und damit seine Autorität und magische Kraft – einschränkte oder kompromittierte. So bleibt die Dreiteilung und Reihung der Runen auch nach dem Übergang zum jüngeren Futhark im Wesentlichen erhalten.⁶⁸ Zwei wesentliche Indizien bestätigen diese Annahme. (1) Die punktierten Runen des Mittelalters werden nicht in das ‚alte‘ Schriftsystem integriert und modifizieren seine Struktur *in keiner Weise*.⁶⁹ (2) Das ‚alte‘ Schriftsystem bildet auch die Grundlage für alle numerischen Geheimrunen, d.h. kodierte Runen.⁷⁰ Ein Untersystem bilden die sog. *Zelrunen*, isländisch *tjaldrúnahópurinn*.⁷¹ Die **t**-Rune ist die erste Rune in der dritten Abteilung des jüngeren Futharks, die **b**-Rune die zweite Rune in der dritten Abteilung, usw. (diese insgesamt drei Abteilungen des Futharks werden auch *ættir* genannt).



Ill. 3. Die sog. Zelrunen (isländisch *tjaldrúnir* nach Sæmundsson 1992: 95)

⁶⁵ Moltke 1985, 167-168.

⁶⁶ Siehe hierzu Schulte 2006, 2009 und 2011.

⁶⁷ Olsen 1909.

⁶⁸ Siehe zum älteren Futhark: Düwel, Heizmann 2006, 42-43 mit Verweis auf Flowers 1986, 348; dazu Schulte 2006 und Schulte 2007b. Vgl. die Argumentation Magnus Olsens zur Grundzahl des Futharks ‚acht‘ mit den Multiplen 16 und 24 Olsen 1909.

⁶⁹ Vgl. Schulte 2020b.

⁷⁰ Zu einem Überblick siehe Barnes 2012, 144-152, Düwel 2008, 182-188 und Nordby 2018.

⁷¹ Siehe Sæmundsson 1992, 95.

Damit blieben Struktur, Ordnung und Autorität des Fuparks auch in der Wikingerzeit und im Hochmittelalter unangetastet. Bemerkenswerter Weise kann dieses System bis ins 17. Jahrhundert weiterverfolgt werden.⁷²

Doch kommen wir zum urnordischen Kylver-Stein zurück. Dieser Runenstein weist, wie wir sahen, noch weitere diagnostische Kriterien im Rahmen einer magischen Deutung auf: 1. ein Palindrom, gedeutet als magisches Formelwort, und 2. ein tannenbaumartiges Zeichen, das möglicherweise die *Axis mundi* bzw. den Weltenbaum symbolisiert. In diesem Licht ist die magisch-apotropäische Deutung der Runeninschrift auf dem Kylverstein durchaus plausibel, wogegen ein anti-magischer Deutungsansatz im Gesamtkontext gezwungen wirkt.

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⁷² *Ibid.*

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LETIZIA VEZZOSI

CODE-SWITCHING IN MIDDLE ENGLISH HEALING CHARMS¹

Medieval discursive healing charms share a lot of features with medical recipes, in that both charms and recipes generally have the same organizational structure, entail “rituals”, have an oral and a written component, use foreign words, prayers and formulas, and both aim to cure diseases or to prevent perils. However, intuitively, charms do not coincide with recipes. The present paper intends to analyse the use of foreign words in Middle English healing charms, in particular, whether language shift involves simple nouns or verbs, or verbal or noun phrases or whether they coincide with clause units, in which external structural component of the charm it occurs and what functional role(s) language shift plays. The study will mainly concentrate on Latin shift and show that some generalisations about code-switching in Middle English healing charms are possible, and significant for their categorization as a separate text-type from medical remedies. In fact, unlike medical remedies, code switching in healing charms occurs as formulaic language and in ritual formulas, which are those two features that place them closer to prayers.

1. *Introduction*

In the introduction of the second volume (1066-1476) of the *Cambridge History of the English Language*, Blake made clear that, while there was a great deal of work on Middle English phonology and spelling, much less attention was devoted to morphology, vocabulary and syntax. This is no longer the case, as in the last decades scholars have focused their studies on these topics, especially on vocabulary, which remains one of the most remarkable features of Middle English, given its intertwining with the external linguistic history of England. It is well known that the Middle English period experienced a gradual redistribution of the roles played by Latin, the vernacular and French, that is the language introduced with the Norman Conquest. As a result of the change in the ruling class, the written languages became Latin and French, while English was *sensu lato* used as a spoken medium, thus enduring an inev-

¹ I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and helpful suggestions which helped me improve the text. Any remaining errors are my own.

itable process of fragmentation.² French, as the language of the new rulers of England, gradually acquired a role as a written language for literary and legal as well administrative purposes,³ while Latin regained much of its importance as a supra-regional language for church and state instead of Late West Saxon,⁴ in alignment with what was happening in the rest of Europe. Consequently, one can claim that in Medieval England there was an asymmetrical trilingual contact situation, characterized by a superstrate⁵ military and economic French-speaking élite, a substrate consisting of English mother tongue speakers who were not part of this élite and a prestrate, represented by the culturally prestigious Latin. One of the linguistic processes evolving from such a social setting was language shift, i.e. the adoption of the language of another stratum,⁶ in the form of linguistic borrowing and importation.⁷ This trilingual system⁸ also led to phenomena of reciprocal influence⁹ such as multilingualism and code-switching (henceforth CS), to such an extent that monolingual purity is the exception in any medieval text type.

Written CS in medieval texts is not a phenomenon peculiar to the British Isles, but is spread throughout Europe,¹⁰ and concerns a huge variety of text types, such as legal and administrative texts,¹¹ religious writings of various

² The decay and fragmentation of Late West Saxon as a written medium and as the language of the ruling class is regarded a partial explanation for the emergence of Celtic and Old Norse features in Middle English varieties (see Lutz 2012 and 2013).

³ See Sharpe 2013.

⁴ Late West Saxon was a sort of standard form generally used as written medium, even by the Anglo-Norse elites during Cnut's reign (cf. Keynes 1994, Treharne 2012).

⁵ I use the terms 'superstrate', 'prestrate' and 'substrate' according to Vennemann 2011, 218-219. In particular, "the term prestrate refers to a language that influences another language on account of its cultural prestige or 'appeal', possibly only in certain cultural domains" (*ibid.*, 219).

⁶ See Weinreich 1953, 68-70.

⁷ See Winford 2003, 12,16 and 79 for a thorough discussion on the term 'importation'.

⁸ After a period of supremacy of Latin, by the late fourteenth century, an orderly mix of the three languages was routinely being used for records-keeping nationwide, see Catto 2003.

⁹ For example, it is justifiable to regard the Latin of civic documents written in England as a form informed by Anglo-Norman French and Middle English. Moreover, for the same reason, changes in the Anglo-Norman written medium appear to be accelerated in comparison to that on the Continent.

¹⁰ For more details and description of the phenomenon in different language traditions, see Stolt 1964; Lüdi 1985; Lazzarini 1971; Kämmerer 2006; Braunmüller, Ferraresi 2003.

¹¹ Including wills, court procedures, judgements and testimonies, ordinances and proclamations from royal, civic bureaucracy and civic bodies, just to mention a few, see Wright 2012.

kind, business writings,¹² and scientific texts¹³ besides literary texts and didactic works and materials, such as glosses and multilingual commentaries. So far, research on language mixing has particularly focused on the micro-level, that is the different motivations and textual functions of switching.¹⁴ More research is still needed regarding how CS has been used in similar or comparable text-types, whether the switching to another language pertains more to certain sections of a text than others, or finally whether the way how CS is employed can help feature distinctive characteristics proper to a certain text-type.

The present paper intends to analyse the use of CS in Middle English healing charms. Healing charms are charms used to cure diseases or to prevent perils, and thus healing charms and medical remedies share a common end. As a matter of fact, medieval healing charms often mixed in with medical remedies.¹⁵ But their similarities go further: they are both instructive texts like medical recipes, in that they provide instructions on how to perform a “ritual” through which they effect the healing. However, intuitively, charms do not coincide with recipes. One can claim that they differ from each other in that healing charms invoke the intervention of the supernatural, much like prayers, through ritual formulas and ritual language, and their efficacy depends on both the practitioner’s and the patient’s unconditioned trust in their power, power which explicates through the formula or *voces magicae*.¹⁶ But classical medicine, from which medieval medicine arose, did entail magical elements too, and as a consequence *incantamenta* occurred together with medical recipes. Even from a formal or structural point of view the distinction between healing charms and medical remedies is difficult to pinpoint, since they have the same discourse organization, imply similar constitutive elements, and even invocations or prayers occur in either.

Given this premise, the investigation will concentrate on the occurrence of language switching in a group of texts which can be considered unambiguously healing charms and medical recipes respectively, to individuate: a. the internal structure of language CS – i.e. whether it involves simple nouns or

¹² Including accounts, inventories, journals and day-books.

¹³ Including both translations, reworked as well as original versions of technical works concerning medicine, anatomy, astronomy and botany, but also cooking recipes.

¹⁴ Just to mention a few, I quote Davidson 2005 for medieval Year Books, Schendl 2002a and Nurmi, Pahta 2004 for medieval and early modern letters, and Hunt 2000 and Pahta 2004 for medieval and early modern medical texts.

¹⁵ See Carroll 1999.

¹⁶ See Lenker 2002.

verbs, or verbal or noun phrases or whether they coincide with clause units; b. the external structural component in which foreign languages – *in primis* Latin, but not exclusively – occur; and finally, the functional roles CS plays. The study will show that some generalisations about the typical functions of CS in Middle English healing charms are possible, and that they will be particularly significant for their categorization as a separate text-type from medical remedies. In fact, unlike medical remedies, CS in healing charms occurs as formulaic language and in ritual formulas, which are those two features that place them closer to prayers.

2. Code-switching, language shift or multilingualism

Code-switching¹⁷ is a term coined first in sociolinguistics to refer to a linguistic phenomenon which occurs in multilingual speech communities and consists of “the alternation of codes in a single speech exchange”.¹⁸ In other words, it is the process in which a communicatively competent multilingual speaker alternates or switches between two languages or language varieties or codes during the same conversation. This should not be confused the process in which a perfect bilingual chooses one of the two or more languages she/he is competent of according to the communicative situation, as it is the case with diglossia. Language switching within the same utterance can occur from sentence to sentence or within a single sentence. According to the *locus* in which the switch occurs, the CS is defined as extra-sentential, inter-sentential, and intra-sentential.¹⁹ *Extra-sentential* switching is “inserting tag elements from one language into an otherwise monolingual discourse”²⁰ (ex. 1.a.) and occurs between a clause and usually an extra-clausal element attached to it (e.g. discourse markers). *Inter-sentential* switching consists of language switches at sentence or discourse boundaries (ex. 1.b.) and accordingly happens between two separated sentences or two coordinated clauses that belong to the same utterance. *Intra-sentential* switching involves a switch from one code to another code across the clause or phrase boundaries (ex. 1.c.), that is, it occurs within a clause.²¹

¹⁷ The term ‘code’ is here used to refer to “any kind of [linguistic] system that two or more people employ for communication” (Wardhaugh 2010, 86). See also Gardner-Chloros 2009.

¹⁸ Bailey 2000, 165.

¹⁹ See Poplack 1982.

²⁰ Koban 2013, 1175.

²¹ See Muysken 2011.

- (1) a. Porque estamos en huelga de gasolina, *right*²²
(Because we are on a gas strike, right?)
- b. Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English *y termino en español*²³
(Sometimes I'll start a sentence in English and finish in Spanish)
- c. This morning I *hantar* my baby *tu dekat* babysitter *tu lah*²⁴
(This morning I took my baby to the babysitter)

To be precise, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic approaches to this phenomenon tend to distinguish “code-switching” and “code-mixing”, identifying the latter with what is here called “intra-sentential” CS following the more strictly structural or grammatical approach.²⁵ Sociolinguistic theories associate CS with particular pragmatic effects, discourse functions, or associations with group identity, pointing out how language switching relates to class, ethnicity, and other social positions of speakers and how it represents a means of structuring speech in interaction and even creating social situations. Code-mixing as “the transition from using linguistic units (words, phrases, clauses, etc.) of one language to using those of another within a single sentence”²⁶ differs from CS in that it does not fulfil the pragmatic or discourse-oriented functions. Since such a distinction is not relevant for our topic, I'll stick to Muysken's treatment of code-switching and code-mixing as synonymous and simply distinguish between intra-sentential and inter-sentential CS.

The terminological debate is however of some interest for the case in point inasmuch as the type of CS depends on the speaker's competence in both languages, on the similarities of the language at stake and on the speaker's conversational strategy. As a matter of fact, intra-sentential switches indicate

²² Zentella 1997, 94.

²³ Poplack 1982, 594.

²⁴ Romaine 2000, 55. It is worth spelling out that while *hantar* and *tu dekat* substitute *took* and *to the*, *lah* has no English direct correlate, being a particle marking solidarity. As noted by an anonymous reviewer, these instances could be rather understood as ‘extra-sentential’. Actually extra-sentential are the switchings which are added to a sentence, as in (1a), over which their scope extends and which have discourse-functions, but do not constitute part of the period itself.

²⁵ Linguistic debate has often focused on a more fine-grained distinction between “code-switching”, i.e. the change of the codes occurs inter-sententially, code-mixing, when it occurs intra-sententially, and borrowing (Bokamba 1988).

²⁶ See Sridhar, Sridhar 1980.

a greater degree of competence in the two grammars involved, because the felicity of the sentence depends on the satisfaction of two constraints, the Equivalence and the Free Morpheme constraints,²⁷ whereas inter-sentential switches do not generally require grammatical competence in both languages and so do single-word and tag switches. So the more proficient the speaker is in both languages, the more he/she is able to code-switch from one language to another within a single sentence or clause.²⁸ The type of CS also interacts with language typology. It has been noticed that, if the two languages are syntactically very different, switches often occur between major constituents, such as noun phrases or clauses, but, if the two languages are typologically similar, switches can occur almost anywhere.²⁹

Another important grammatical approach is Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame Model, according to which in any interaction in which CS occurs, one language is more dominant than the other. Such a different hierarchical status of the two languages involved in the switching is particularly patent in intra-sentential CS, where the dominant or matrix language provides the morphosyntactic frame³⁰ for the insertion of elements from the so-called Embedded Language.³¹

The type of CS also depends on the speaker's conversational strategy. As mentioned above, CS was first investigated among the phenomena of language contact as a conversational strategy, in other words the stress was on the performance of the communicative act. According to Gal, CS "is a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights and obligations".³² Accordingly research has focused both on its linguistic properties and on its

²⁷ See Sankoff, Poplack 1981. As noted by an anonymous reviewer, actually those constraints have been controversially discussed in the literature.

²⁸ Cf. Poplack 1982.

²⁹ Cf. Gumperz 1982.

³⁰ Myers-Scotton suggested two principles: The Morpheme Order principle, which specifies that the Matrix Language determines the order of elements and the System Morpheme Principle, which requires that system morphemes that have grammatical meaning come from the Matrix Language (cf. Myers-Scotton 1993).

³¹ I specially thank an anonymous reviewer for having pointed out that it is actually quite debate whether Myers-Scotton's model can be applied to historical data. Some scholars (for example Gardner-Chloros 2009) have thoroughly rejected it. The concept of matrix language is functional if applied to cases of intra-sentential CS (or 'code-mixing'), much less to cases of inter-sentential CS. However, I use it to distinguish the language of the frame of the charm or its metatext, that is the language in which the instructions are given. See below § 3.2.

³² Gal 1988, 247.

role as a conversational strategies, on its motivation and functions. In conversation CS is motivated by various social and pragmatic factors related to the context of interaction, the setting and the participants of interaction. It signals the speaker's attitude, communicative intentions, and emotions,³³ amplifying a point,³⁴ and attracting the attention of the listeners. It often used either to show identity with a particular social group, hence as a strategy to get the approval by converging the speaker's speech with that of the other speaker (i.e. convergent speech) or to keep the social distance between the speaker and the other participants by using speech with linguistic features characteristic of his own group (i.e. divergent speech). But it can also be triggered by the speaker's emotional states, lack of facility or lack of registral competence, as well as it can be dependent on the use of fixed phrases of greeting and parting, commands and requests, invitations, expressions of gratitude and discourse markers.³⁵

Since CS has primarily been regarded as characteristic to spoken language, most studies have concentrated on present day bilingual speech. In spite of that, instances of "the skilful manipulation of two language systems for various communicative functions"³⁶ are also common in writing,³⁷ although to a lesser degree. Moreover, it is not peculiar at all to present time. On the contrary there is abundant evidence that it was likely to occur whenever and wherever there was a situation of multilingualism, including diglossia, and language contact.

2.1. *Code-switching in medieval England*

If research on present day CS has predominantly been based on speech analyses, all direct evidence for CS in earlier periods stems necessarily from written sources. This inevitably raises the theoretical question whether CS in these texts should be regarded as a phenomenon of the written medium only, or whether it reflects multilingual speech somehow or other. In the case of "macaronic sermons" their conventions are not highly likely to adhere to those of natural speech and the same may hold good for inventories, business accounts, and the like because of their formulaicity. The theoretical debate regarding the

³³ See Gumperz 1982.

³⁴ See Anderson 2006.

³⁵ See Malik 1994.

³⁶ Bullock, Toribio 2009, 4.

³⁷ See Gardner-Chloros 2009.

status of formulaicity in historical written texts is complex, and goes beyond the topic of the present paper. However, concerning that point, i.e. the relation between CS, formulas and natural speech, I'd like to quote Schendl and Wright's opinion, according to which "[q]uite apart from the fact that such "formulae" and "limited constructions" have their own linguistic histories, it is only when such texts are married up to their scribes (who wrote monolingual texts – for other pragmatic purposes – too) that we get some sense of the linguistic conventions of the day".³⁸

Medieval England is a good example of multilingualism, being characterised by trilingual diglossia and having a multilingual, though not homogeneous speaking community. This triglossic situation in medieval Britain is reflected in the great number of mixed-language texts, which are the norm in some text-types. In spite of earlier studies which saw them either as a result of insufficient or non-native linguistic competence of authors/scribes or artificial (though possibly artistic) products, in the last decades scholars have variously proved that they are the outcome of competent multilingual authors/scribes who adopted CS to express a range of functions, including the multilingual identity of both their readership/audience and themselves. As a matter of fact, research into historical CS is predominantly within the sociolinguistic approach, including functional pragmatic³⁹ and in spite of an increasing number of structural studies, a comprehensive macro-linguistic analysis of medieval CS is still lacking.

Multilingualism is witnessed by the huge production of both monolingual texts in Latin, French and Middle English and mixed-language texts. As for the former, their range crosses various genres, none of which appears to be categorically linked to any specific language. On the contrary, quite often the distribution of these three languages changed over time. A good example of this are the Rolls of Parliament: in 1422, 76% of the Rolls were in French, 13% in English, 11% in Latin; by 1444, the percentage of French Rolls had dropped to about 18%, while that of English had risen to 64%, and that of Latin to 18%.⁴⁰ Throughout the Middle English period we observe the appearance of language mixture even in those text-types which have previously been

³⁸ Schendl, Wright 2011, 18. I must say that the attitude of dismissal of historical CS is still common. Gullberg [, Indefrey, and Muysken] claim that code-switching in "archival material, e.g. trade registers [...] often quite formulaic, [...] only represent[s] a limited range of constructions" (2009, 23).

³⁹ Schendl 2002a and 2002b.

⁴⁰ Fisher 1977, 880 note 37.

more or less monolingual. An example of that has been thoroughly investigated by Schendl in semi-official letters, which were typically in French or Latin up to the end of the fourteenth century, but which from the end of that century show a clear increase of English and also some CS.⁴¹ The same phenomenon has been detected in sermons⁴² and medical texts.⁴³ There also are text types where CS is more or less regularly attested in medieval Britain ranging from literary to non-literary genres, from formal to informal texts, from letters to manuals, from legal to business texts, from scientific works to sermons, from poems to dramas. Among the studies on CS in historical English data, I would like to single out Wright's pioneering studies on macaronic writing,⁴⁴ on trilingual mixed-language business documents,⁴⁵ and on the multilingual origins of Standard English,⁴⁶ which all point to a striking correlation between the increasing vernacularisation of certain text types where either French or Latin had previously dominated and the increasing use of CS and language mixing. However, the story is much more complex, since in some text-types CS increased after their complete vernacularisation: the first two letters showing extensive CS between French and English date from as early as 1403, i.e. less than two decades after the first attested monolingual English letter.⁴⁷ Moreover, certain text types throughout the Middle English period showed CS more or less regularly with specific syntactic patterns and pragmatic functions.⁴⁸ Recently, an idea is indeed making its way, that "different text types show different conventions of language mixing, and that there were different systems in operation at different dates".⁴⁹

In this line of argument, an inquiry of CS in healing charms may bring to light interesting results: it's a text-type which has so far been almost ignored, unlike medical recipes, despite that CS is extensively attested with different matrix languages.

⁴¹ Schendl 2002a and 2002b.

⁴² See Wenzel 1994.

⁴³ See Voigts 1996.

⁴⁴ Wright 1992, just to mention her first paper on this topic.

⁴⁵ Just to quote few references out of the rich and detailed production on this subject by Laura Wright, see Wright 2012 and 2013.

⁴⁶ Wright 2020.

⁴⁷ Schendl 2002a.

⁴⁸ For the role of text types as "catalysts" of linguistic change see Kohnen 2001.

⁴⁹ Schendl, Wright 2011, 23.

3. *Healing charms*

How to classify healing charms is not a straight-forward issue. If we agree on the main definition of the *RECIPE* genre as a “well-defined procedural genre with a clear writing purpose [...] give[s] instructions on how to prepare medicine, a dish, or some household utility like ink”,⁵⁰ if we agree that medical and cooking recipes belong to this same genre, as their main function is to provide instructions both on *how to make things* and *how to do things*, then we should also include healing charms in it, because they are likewise instructive text-type in that they contain the information one has to follow to get the desired result. Healing charms share with medical and cooking recipes the practitioner’s and the patient’s unconditioned trust in their power and in their validity.

Formally they are also very similar, having in common language external and language internal features. On the level of language external features, they all show the same text organisation in three fundamental (or ‘macro’-) components: introduction – instruction – evaluation, which may include further components. Between healing charms and medical recipes, the similarity is even tighter, given they share the ultimate end: the solution to the disease, the problem or the disorder. Thus, the introduction section often consists of a heading followed by the introduction of the patient’s initial state. The instruction section includes the description of the remedy ingredients, the preparation of the remedy and the application procedure. Finally the evaluation section can either simply coincide with the assessment of the efficacy of the remedy, or be amplified by comments on it and a closing formula.⁵¹ With regard to some constituents, however, there is variation. Not all of them are always there, their order is not always the same, and some of them can, but need not be repeated (for example, opening or closing formulas).

Healing charms differ from recipes in the necessary occurrence of ritual formula⁵² and of ritual language in some or all macro-components. In the Middle Ages, the intervention of supernatural power was considered as a fundamental part of the cure as the herbal remedy itself, inasmuch as diseases were believed to be caused by supernatural as well as natural forces. The type

⁵⁰ Taavitsainen 2001, 85-86

⁵¹ As for culinary recipes, the following schema has been proposed: “(Title) ^ Ingredients ^ (Preparation) ^ (Application) ^ (Storage) ^ (Efficacy) ^ (Number of serving) ^ (Reference to source) ^ (Further additional information)” (Alonso-Almeida 2013, 71). Here the circumflex indicates fixed order and the parenthesis optional stage.

⁵² Cf. Alonso-Almeida 2008, Olsan 2009.

of formulaic expression often make healing charms closer to prayers⁵³ than to medical recipes.

Looking at language internal structure, healing charms show formal linguistic features typical of medical and culinary recipes, characterised by: “form of a heading”, “full sentences or telegram style”, “use of imperative or other verbal forms”, “use of possessive pronouns with ingredients and implements”, “deletion of objects”, “temporal sequence and possible adverbs used”, “complexity of sentences”, and “marked use of loanwords and of genteel diction”.⁵⁴

The last item of the linguistic-features list encompasses the occurrence of borrowing as well as any expression in a language different from the matrix language of the text.⁵⁵

3.1. *Corpus and methodology*

Middle English healing charms were devoted both to healing and to protecting humans and livestock from diseases or serious medical conditions as well as perils, such as thieves. They could appear either as addenda or as main texts, both in remedy books and in manuscripts with miscellaneous contents. There is still a great amount of them to be edited, but due to the current pandemic, the present investigation is based on edited material, taken from several edited sources.⁵⁶

The text corpus contains 230 texts, out of which 120 healing charms – instructions concerning how to perform a charm, including what to say or write on objects (formulas or *historiolae*), and what to do with amulets –, (corresponding to about 15600 words) and 110 medical recipes ranging from the thirteenth to the end of the fifteenth century. Every text with a foreign element has been selected independently of the matrix language, which is, for healing charms, predominantly Middle English, although there are instances in Anglo-Norman French and Latin. It is worth spending few words on how the term ‘matrix language’ is used in the present paper. ‘Matrix language’ refers to the notion of base language as opposed to guest language.⁵⁷ In our corpus length can vary considerably, to such an extent that just in terms of number of

⁵³ Cf. Fisher 2016.

⁵⁴ Görlach 2004, 124. As for measurements, see Bator, Sylwanowicz 2017.

⁵⁵ See Taavitsainen 2001.

⁵⁶ Ogden 1938, Sheldon 1978, Hunt 1990, Olsan 1992 and 2009, Alonso Almeida 2014.

⁵⁷ Grosjean, 1988.

words it would be difficult to decide on the matrix language or base language. Therefore, I will consider as matrix the language of the metatextual frame of the charm, that is the language in which descriptions and instructions on the performance are given.

Monolingual texts have obviously been excluded. In order to detect similarities as well as differences between healing charms and medical recipes, the corpus includes texts consisting of no ritual formulas nor prayers nor invocations, classified as medical recipes. In this first classification, the basic criterion has been the occurrence of ritual formulas and ritual language, that is the feature regarded as the most typical of this text-type.⁵⁸

The analysis is mainly qualitative, although supported by figures, because it is relevant to identify the types of CS as much as their frequency of occurrence. It might be worth specifying that I have counted the occurrence of types, and not tokens. Moreover, in the case of repeated formulas of the same kind in the same charm, I considered it as one instance of this specific type.⁵⁹ The investigation first focuses on the insertion of foreign material into the matrix language text, on its grammatical structure and on its relation with the linguistic material it is inserted into. Then the position of the CS will be taken into consideration, i.e. in which macro-components of the texts, whether in the introduction, in the instruction or in the evaluation. The result drawn for healing charms are finally compared with CS in medical recipes in order to determine their closeness or distance in terms of the use of CS.

3.2. *Code-switching in healing charms*

In our corpus the languages involved in CS are predominantly Middle English and Latin and only at a very reduced rate Anglo-Norman French (only 4 instances of Anglo-Norman French switching into a Latin matrix and 16 instances of Latin switching into an Anglo-Norman French matrix) as far as healing charms are concerned, while medical *receptaria* also have significant instances with Anglo-Norman switching with Latin, Middle English or both. In particular, CS in healing charms predominantly takes place in texts where Middle English is the matrix language with frequent switches into Latin. The opposite is only attested in a very strictly constrained context.

⁵⁸ Alonso-Almeida 2008, Fisher 2016.

⁵⁹ Form a pure statistical inquiry this procedure is incorrect, but since the present paper does not aim to give any statistical result, but analyses the distribution of CS types in charms, such a quantification may give a quicker, though blurred, picture.

3.2.1. *Types of code-switching in healing charms*

Intra-sentential switching is highly frequent in contemporary spoken CS and is also quite well attested in Middle English mixed-language texts such as letters or sermons,⁶⁰ but it very rarely occurs in healing charms, with a mere score of 14 instances. Proper names have been excluded as not pertinent nor significant, because they are limited to the field of religion – e.g. *Dismas* and *Gismas*, *Melchior*, *Agnus* – or to famous historical or scientific personalities – e.g. *Macrobius*, *Charlemagne*.

Unexpectedly, single-word switch randomly introduces technical denominations (6 instances), as in (2a) where a botanical name is used, or as in (2b) where the Latin names of prayers are used, although in most cases the charms of our corpus present the adapted form of the borrowed word, especially in the latter case. In the case of scientific terms, as in (2a.), Middle English phrases such as *is clepyd* marks what follows as a switch into Latin.

- (2) a. Take an erbe is clepyd **bursa pastoris**⁶¹ & [Stockholm, Kungliga Biblioteket X. 90, p. 33]
- b. & say a **Pater** & a **Aue/** &a **Credo** [London, BL, Harley 1600, f. 41r]
- c. & sey .v. Pater nesters .v. aves and a Crede [London, BL, Sloane 122, f.113v]

With both single words and single phrases from either language as in (2), it is controversial how to distinguish between borrowing or switching. In 4 case out of 14, there are some other factors indicating that it is a word-switch: for instance, the occurrence of the foreign definite article as in (3), where *fevre* cannot possibly be regarded, but as a borrowing, being itself modified by the French definite article *le*.⁶²

⁶⁰ See Schendl 2000, 2002a, and 2002b.

⁶¹ *Bursa pastoris* is defined as “i. sanguinarie, i. blodwurt” [a1300 Hrl.978 Vocab.(Hrl 978)556/27].

⁶² For a detailed discussion on the function and occurrence of the French article *le* to mark a following CS, see Wright 2010. The noun *fevre* by itself could be from Old English *feofor/fefer*, but given its form and the article, the analysis as a borrowing from French (OF *fièvre*) is more plausible.

- (3) Medicina pro morbo caduco et **le fevre**. In nome Patris et Filis et Spiritus Sancti
What manere of evil thou be, / In Goddes name I counjure thee [...] [London,
BL, Sloane 747, f. 57r]

In the remaining two intra-sentential CS, the switching element is a function word, a manner deictic adverb. In the following example, the foreign element is *thus*, which functions as V-anaphor, that is, it anaphorically refers to the verb *fert* ‘brings’. This is the only instance which could be considered as a trace of colloquialism or spoken language.

- (4) for the fallynge evill/
[...] hange it abowt his necke// Iasper, fert mirrham, **thus**, melchior, balthasor,
auruitr [...] [London, BL, Harley 2389, f. 42r]

Quite surprisingly, it is not unusual to come across CS within the phrase boundaries, as in ex. 5, where the head of the phrase is in a different language from the rest of it. Such an intra-sentential CS occurs in healing charms where the matrix language is Latin, at least as far as I could see from my corpus. In (5) *bon* could also be interpreted as the ME word for ‘bone’, but it is as possible as it is unlikely, when one considers the co-text in which it occurs: it is the text which should be written on the piece of paper and then staked into the earth. Given the wide-spread attestation of formulas with *gratia* which also ends the present instructions – *amen philosophum gratia* – I suggest it is the Old Norse borrowing *bon* corresponding to ‘mercy’.⁶³

- (5) A faire experiment þat wylde foule schalle noght strew þe corne
[...] and mak foure squarre [...] and do write in a corner + / In nomine patris
bon + and in a-noþer corner + filii **bon** + And in þe þird corner + spiritus sancti
+ **bon** + and in þe fourt amen philosophum gratia [...] [London, BL, Add.
34131, f. 168r]

⁶³ As an anonymous reviewer noticed, *bon* is also recorded in MED with the meaning of ‘prayer’ which fits the context. Given that *bon* ‘prayer’ is still a ON borrowing, it does not alter my argumentation. Nevertheless, it is worth explain why I prefer the first meaning of ‘mercy’, recorded in MED especially in the phrase *hys bon* ‘God’s mercy’. Formulaic language in charms is often structured in parallelisms, and in this case it is patent that *in nomine patris bon*, *filii bon* or *spiritus sancti bon* are parallel to *philosophum gratia*. Moreover, there is not reference to an act of praying, but only to how to create the amulet.

The last example illustrates the far most frequent switching type in healing charms, namely inter-sentential CS. As a matter of fact, only 4 charms out of 120 do not show it. In the majority of cases, Latin passages alternate with Middle English ones, in such a way that in terms of length, i.e. number of words, it is almost impossible to decide whether the matrix language is Latin or Middle English. This is not restricted to bilingual Latin-Middle English charms (cf. ex. 5), but it is also observable when the languages are different, as in ex. (6), where the Latin text is longer than the Anglo-Norman French one. Therefore, as mentioned above, I have applied a functional criterium: independently from the length, the language of the metatext is regarded as matrix language. A good case in point to explain how we have proceeded is the charm in (6): the syntactically independent unit coinciding with the functional unit of the *historiola*⁶⁴ is classified as a switch, while the language of the heading and the instruction on what the performer⁶⁵ has to do is regarded as the matrix.

- (6) Ici commence un autre bref qui bon est a fevres e a ces qui sunt travaillez de nuit. [f. 29v] **In montem Elion in civitate Effesiorum dormierunt .vii. dormientes + Malthus + Martianus + Dionisius + Johannes + Maximianus + Sarafion + Constantinus + Et sicut Dominus requievit super illos, sic requiescat super hunc famulum tuum .N.** Pus die .iii. Pater Noster el noun del Père e del Piz e del Seint Esperit. [Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby 86, f. 29r]

In quantitative terms, inter-sentential switching into Latin in charms which are predominantly in Middle English (to a lesser degree in Anglo-Norman French) is mainly restricted to formulaic material, consisting of either single sentences or single clauses as well as list of words. It functionally coincides with either the formula to be uttered (7a.-b.) or the *historiola* (cf. ex. 6).⁶⁶ In more details, inter-sentential CS occurs in our corpus: 49 instances in *historiolae* and 85 instances CS in either simple or complex formulas, which can be either a call for supernatural powers' intervention to solve the problem (ex. 6:

⁶⁴ Lit. 'little story'. This term refers to a kind of short narratives built into magic formulas, that provides the mythical precedence and paradigm for the desired magical action. For details, see Waller 2015.

⁶⁵ I use this generic term, because there are charms where the performer is the healer/practitioner and charms where instructions are addressed to the patient, as it is the case of amulets.

⁶⁶ Lit. 'little story'. This term refers to a kind of short narratives built into magic formulas, that provides the mythical precedence and paradigm for the desired magical action. For details, see Waller 2015.

sic requiescat super hunc famulum tuum) or for the disorder to stop (ex. 9), or an invocation to the divine authority to be uttered or written (ex. 7b. vs. 8) or a simple mention of God's and saints' names (ex. 7a.).

- (7) a. An-oper. Take þe knotte of as tre & wete it in þe blod & make .v. crosses in þe forhed.
& sey þese wordes at euery crosse borain **noster rex Christus.**// [London, BL, Sloane 2584 f. 103v]
- b. **Agyos. Otheos Sancte deus Agyos Iskiros Sancte Fortis. Agyos athanatos Eleyson. Ymas Sancte et immortalis. Miserere nobis.**⁶⁷ **Pater noster. Aue maria. Credo in deum patrem.** And þow moste say this same, thre tymes with gude deuocione [London, BL, Sloane 2584, f. 103v]

In the above-listed examples, the switched passages correspond to the oral texts to be uttered by the performer. In terms of CS-type, the written medium shows no remarkable difference, but for the choice of Latin in intervention call formulas: here (ex 8a.) the *adiuro*-formula always appears in Latin, while in oral charms it is often in the dominant language English (ex. 9). On amulets, Latin switching pertains to invocations, short *historiolae* (ex. 8b.) or formulas which can even be reduced to lists of names, or magic sequences such as the *sator*-square⁶⁸ (cf. ex 8b.). There are no instances of CS in the metatext.

- (8) a. for hym þt may not slepe for seknes • Write þes wordes on a lorey lef + **ysmayel + ysmayel + Adiuro vos per angelos sanctos dei vt s[o]poret homo iste** .N [.] the ley þt lef vnder his hed þt he know the nozt þer-o[f] & lete hym ete letus after & drinc popised ybete to powder • þen drinc hit wt clere ale.// [London, BL, Sloane 3160, ff. 157v-158r]
- b. ffor þer as a woman þat is travelyng of childe write þise wordes in perchemyn, and bynde hit about hir body and she shall be deliuered hastlich wt-outen eny perile + **maria + peperit Christu + anna mariam + Elizabeth**

⁶⁷ This first part of the prayer is the Trisagion, proper to the Byzantine Rite, but also used by the Latin Church. The present charm shows the typical formulation of the Trisagion in the Latin Church, where the sequence in Greek is followed by a corresponding translation in Latin. Such a Greek-Latin mixture is recurrent in healing charms.

⁶⁸ The sequence SATOR AREPO TENET OPERA ROTAS is a palindrome often arranged in a form of a square. As for the magical use, see Moeller 1073.

Iohannem . Rymigne + sator + arepo + tenet opera + Rotas + [London, BL, Add. 37786, f. 43r]

Besides Latin switching expressing what to say or what to write in order to solve the medical problem, special attention is to be given to the Trinitarian formula in Latin, which could also function as a sort of embedding frame or conclusion for the *historiola* or the enchanting words in Middle English or in Anglo-Norman French (ex. 9).

- (9) **In nomine patris et filij et spiritus sancti. Amen/** When oure Lorde Ihesu wos don on þe / cros þan com longius þider & smat hym w^t hys / spere in þe syde [;] blud & / water com out at þe wounde & wpyd hys / eghene & saw onnone / throgh þe haly- vertew þ' god dyde þare I coniure / þe blude þ' þu com nocht / out of þis crystyn man[.] **In nomine patris & etc.** / say þis thrys[.] [London, Wellcome Medical Library 225, f. 143r-v]

An essential part of the Instruction section in charms informs on what to do/say and how to do/say the necessary rituals and formulas in order to make the charm be effective. Those instructions are usually in a vulgar language. Less frequently, though not rarely, they are Latin: this is well exemplified by ex. 10, a long charm where the *historiola* and the performative formula (þe *holy goste be hem to-forn & make hem for to leette*) are in Middle English, but the language switches into Latin for the instructions to follow.

(10) **Carmen pro latronibus**

Oure lord ihesu crist in bethleem was born / I-baptized he was in þe watire of flom I[or]dan [...] In the myght of marke mathewe Luke & Iohanne / Alle foure euangelrstes [...] 3if any thewes hedire come my good away to fette / þe holy goste be hem to-forn & make hem for to leette / **Et dicat quinquies pater noster & Aue maria in honore / domini nostri ihesu Christus matris eius & iiiij^{or} / euangelistarum.** [London, BL, Sloane 56, f. 100v]

This last example shows another position where CS occurs, namely the heading. As a rule, a Latin-dominant or Latin monolingual charm may have a heading in Middle English or in Anglo-Norman French (ex. 11). This is easily justifiable as a strategy to facilitate the identification of the purpose for such a charm in a Middle English (or Anglo-Norman French) speaking community. However, it also possible to come across the inverse, where a Latin heading

introduces a Middle English or Anglo-Norman French dominant charm (cf. ex. 10).

(11) **Here is a charme for þe bloody flux**

In nomine + Patris + et Filii + et Spiritus Sancti + Amen. Stabat + Ihesus contra flummen Jordanis et posuit pedem suum et dixit : Sancta aqua per deum te coniuero. Longinus miles latus Domini nostri + [...] Sic restet sanguis sicut restat Jordanis quando + quando Christ in ea baptizatus fuit. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen. [Cambridge, Trinity College Library, O.1.13, f. 48v]

The evaluation section is predominantly in the matrix language. When CS occurs, it involves those typical closing formulas assessing the efficacy of the remedy – in this case, of the charm –, which are recurrent in medical recipes too. The language of the switch is invariably Latin in a Middle English or Anglo-Norman French text: e.g. *probatus, consummates est* or *probantur, fiat* etc. (cf. ex. 12).

(12) To Stanche bloode

ffirst axe the N. of him that dothe bleede & thenne Saye / Thus #. Jhesu that was in Bedleem borne and Cristenyd [...] So stooode / So stonde þe floo [d] / <So stond> Thow bloode & put your ffyngers vponne hit and hit wille stopp /and then say in the worsthepp of Jhesu Crist a pater noster and an aue maria[.] **probantur Est per solidi** Edwarde Crost knyghte. [London, BL, Sloane 3160, f. 172r]

To complete our overview, one should mention that there are very few instances of extra-sentential CS. These instances are not canonical, that is they are not discourse markers nor interjections, but they could be described as translation following the original charm as in (13), whose function is comparable to comments on previous information: for instance, *Ihesu henge heme be-twene dismas / & Iesmas* makes explicit the action implied in *Dismas et Iesmas medio diuina potestas* retraceable from the previous sentence *Inparibus meritis pendent tria corpora ramis*.

(13) *Inparibus meritis pendent tria corpora ramis / Dismas et Iesmas medio diuina potestas / Alta petit dismas infelix infima Iesmas / hos versus dicas si furto tua deperdas / Irruat super eos formido et pavor in magnitudine / brachij tui:] ffiant immobiles quasi lapis donec pertransiat / populus tuus domine donec pertransiat populus iste quem possidisti[.]*

On bowes of tre of gret myght hengene thre bodys / be day light. Ihesu henge heme be-twene dismas / & Iesmas & þ^t was sene./ Bonus Dismas to Ihesu he / gane calle & Iesmas in wanhoppe anone gonne falle / this wordis þ^u shal say **be þ^u in towne wodde or way** / If any þeffe þe robbe or reve of any goode þ^t ben / þe leve./ **Ne stirre he no mor þan the stone stot on / footte motte þer ferrere goone Til Ihesu have done his / wrethe þ^t sorowe is best leche[.]** [London, BL, Sloane 56, f. 100r]

3.2.2. *Types of code-switching in medical charms*

CS in medical charms have already been studied thoroughly. Therefore, in the following *excursus* I'll simply summarise the main characteristics found for this text-type. My observations are mainly based on the results of the exhaustive study by Pahta,⁶⁹ from which all the examples of this paragraphs are taken. Unlike healing charms, the proportions of languages and patterns of switching in mixed-language materials vary. First of all Latin materials contain parts in English or Anglo-Norman French, French materials include Latin and/or English passages, and English materials incorporate Latin and/or Anglo-Norman French. Thus the use of different languages in medical texts speaks for a polyglot tradition of writing, as witnessed by polyglot manuscripts such as the trilingual British Library, Sloane 5, and polyglot *receptaria*, such as Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 388.

According to Pahta's study, medical recipes predominately show intra-sentential CS, mostly involving either functional elements or formulaic expressions such as adverbials (14a.-b.), which signals the writer's competence in Latin *usus scribendi* and accordingly appurtenance to the "educated Latinate social strata".⁷⁰ As above shown, this type of CS occurs in healing charms, but at a very low frequency.

- (14) a. zif þe uryñ be mare thyn upward þan downward, it is takyn of lyf; zif it be **eiusmodi**, of deth.⁷¹
- b. Tak Wormot & þe white of an egge **vt supra** for poudir for dede flesche.⁷²

⁶⁹ Pahta 2004.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*,

Like healing charms, intra-sentential switches into specialised terminology are common, but even more common are indications of intertextuality in the form of references and quotations, which indeed are lacking in charms. Mentions and quotations of medical works are explicit reference to the medical profession, and thus establish a group membership, contributing to the identification with a precise discourse community (exx. 15a.-b.). The code-switched special term contributes to the preciseness required in scientific discourse, but it also meets requirements of style and prestige: the Latin term enriches the text with technicality.

- (15) a. A litwhat of **colera** oþir of anoþir humour imedled with pure blood infec-tiþ þe blood and drawiþ him to the liknes of his owne qualite. **Huc vsque Constantinus in Pantagni libro 24º capitulo 1º . Aristoteles in libro de animalibus 3º capitulo** [setteþ] oþir propirtees of blood.⁷³
- b. Eges.tion [S] is in schytynge, ingestyoun [S] is etyngge, & degestyon is.defyngge, as says þe vers: **qui bene degerit, ingerit, egerit, est homo sanus.** 3yf yu wyll ete, defy, & schyte, yu art hale whare yu gas or sittys.⁷⁴

Latin inter-sentential CS in medical recipes could be motivated by the need of avoiding any explicit expression on socially inappropriate topics: “[t]he concept of secrecy on another level is relevant in switches apparently motivated by decorum or taboo in connection with topics that were regarded as socially inappropriate”.⁷⁵ Thus the Latin CS examples (16a.) and (16b.) are explained, referring to the healthy effect of sexual intercourse and women’s period respectively.

- (16) a. For full many for defaute of gud gouernance in dietyngge falles in þis se-kenes, therefore þat tyme vse none excesse nor surfete in mete & drynke nor bathes nor swete noghte gretly þan, for all thies opyns þe pores of þe body & makes venemous ayere to entre & þat febles þe body, **et super omnia alia nocet coitus & accelerat ad hunc morbum quod maxime aperit poros & destruit spiritus vitales**, also vse littill froyte or none & ett littill or noghte of garleke or lekes and slyke þat brynges a man in-to a vnkyndely hete

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 85

⁷⁴ Jasin 1983, 142.

⁷⁵ Pahta 2004, 87.

- b. And in amporismorum particula vio. it is iscide: **mulieri deficientibus menstruis** it is good to blede atte nose.⁷⁶

Inter-sentential CS often occurs as rubrics (17a.), incipits (17b) and explicit or closing remarks, whose function as text boundaries. Much alike healing charms, medical recipes often show inter-sentential CS as a strategy to comment on the efficacy of the medicine or treatment to assert (17b.-c.).

- (17) a. **Pro passionibus stomachi.** Tak ache seed, lynseed and comyn ana, stampe hem to gedre wel, and 3ef þe seek wyþ hote watur.
- b. **Hic incipiunt bonas medicinas.** Here begynne medicyns þat good lechys haue made.
- c. For lees and netys in þe heued and opir maner of wermys in what place so euere þei been: tak quyklym and tempre it with þe ious of walwort as wasch þe place, and þei xuln sone deye **probatas**.

To conclude this brief overview, one cannot forget the switching related to religious discourse which consists of short fixed expressions for formulaic pious wishes and titles of familiar prayers or hymns. As shown in Pahta's study, they often have either a text-organising function in signaling the end of a treatise (18a.), or they also serve as indicators of time or measure and as such they are related to the professional language of medicine (18b.).

- (18) a. And yff the cure tarye þat nature helpe not, yeve them fleshe of yong gootys gelded, soden and not rooste, tyll they be recouerede. **Deo gracias**.
- b. When it haþ boiled ynou3 sette it fro þe fire and late it stande stille without mouyng by þe space of a '**pater noster**' - & '**aeue maria**', þat þe litarge of þe lede þat is in it may descende to þe grounde

3.3. *For a functional analysis of CS in healing charms*

From this brief overview of CS in medical recipes the difference with healing charms turns out to be remarkable. As far as CS types, medical recipes show

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 87.

a similar behavior to other text-types and genres in that CS occurs intra-sententially more frequently than inter-sententially. Its main function is either to signal text-organization or establish group membership, related to the medical profession: in particular, while it increases the preciseness and the authority of the text, the use of Latin terminology and phraseology separates a discourse community to which this language belongs from the audience. A sense of respect to social convention is also conveyed by CS for secrecy which appears to reflect the social situation of the time.

In healing charms, CS seems to answer to completely different strategies. It is true that Middle English switches in headings can be accounted for as a means of including a wider group of people that would not understand what the charm was for, while Latin headings and Latin assessment formulas could give a sense of major technicality and draw the charm closer to medical recipes. But these kinds of switching are not the most frequent, as Table 1 shows.

Code-switching	N°	content	N°		N°
		Technical terminology	6		
Intra-sentential	14	Function words	2		
		Nouns + modifiers	6		
Extra-sentential	3	Translation	3		
		Headings	16		
		Evaluation formula	19		
Inter-sentential	182	Historiolae	49		
		Formulas	98	Simple naming	31
				Complex invocation	27
				Religious formulas	23
				Intervention call	17

Tab. 1: CS types and their functions in healing charms (absolute numbers)

CS in healing charms is almost exclusively inter-sentential – 91% of total CS occurrences – and predominantly involves Latin prefabricated utterances (80%), which should have a performative effect: they are formulas or *histori-*

olae that should either heal or solve the problem by being uttered or enhance the intervention of the supernatural to heal or solve it. The choice of Latin does not necessarily address a bilingual addressee or serve to establish an in-group membership, because Latin here coincides with the language of magical rituals, i.e. the language through which the divine intervention is evoked and coerced. It is not the patient who has to understand, but the divine authority. Indeed, all the inscriptions of words and formulas on protective or healing amulets are in Latin and often the patient is not supposed to see or read them. It is therefore difficult to think that CS is due to bridge a gap between the practitioner and the patient, between the (bilingual) magician and the (bilingual) layperson. More plausibly Latin could have been chosen to gain the approval of Christian church. Even more likely choosing Latin – a language that the patient was likely to be completely incompetent in – served to increase the healing power of formulae, some of which are borrowed from prayers: the more powerful a charm the less intelligible for a layperson. It comes as a support to this hypothesis that charms with Latin ritual formulas have English (or Anglo-Norman French) metatextual introductory, instructive and conclusive vocabulary. In other words, those parts for which it might have been useful to establish a mutual comprehensible relations are in the patient's language. On the contrary, those parts of the healing charms responsible for the magic to take place are in a language that would separate the enchanter from the other participants of the magical performance and connect him not only with his own group sharing the same language, but more significantly with the supernatural and/or divine power. The exiguity of intra-sentential CS and the types of CS found in charms do not require a high degree of grammatical competence and accordingly could be a sign that the switch occurred among speakers who were no longer necessarily proficient in Latin.

4. Conclusion

In medieval medicine the dividing line between magic and medicine was far from being neat since factors such as destiny, sin, and spiritual influences were believed to play as great a part as any physical cause in the origin and in the cure of a disease. It is therefore logical that *remedia physicalia* could often contain reference to the spiritual intervention and/or invocations to the divine authority, thus resembling healing charms. Given their formal similarities, medical remedies and healing charms are usually categorised under

the macro-category of recipes. Among these shared features, there is the use of CS, a phenomenon typical of multilingual communities such as medieval England.

The present paper focused on the use of CS in Middle English healing charms, where it seems to meet different functions than those in medical recipes. Like many other genres and text-types, medieval medical recipes show intra-sentential CS more frequently than inter-sentential one and mainly use it as a social communicative strategy to establish a group membership, related to the medical profession, as well as to reflect the spirit of the time. In healing charms, on the other hand, CS appears to be predominantly inter-sentential and coincident with the ritual formula or *historiola*, which are unanimously considered as the feature distinguishing a remedy as a charm. In other words, CS occurs in those segments addressed to the divine and supernatural force, that have a “doing-it-by-saying-it” effect, that is, have to be uttered and, by being uttered, make the supernatural force intervene. Accordingly, CS has no other possible functions than enhancing the power and efficacy of the words (and thus also indirectly to impress the patient). As a matter of fact, unlike medical recipes, charms base their power on the pronounced word and the rituals accompanying it. “Charm incantations are seen as ‘speech events’, i.e. culturally recognised social activities within a very particular social and linguistic context, in which language plays a specific role”.⁷⁷ According to this analysis, the type and function of CS can be diagnostically significant in helping to distinguish healing charms from more properly medical recipes.

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⁷⁷ Lenker 2012, 329.

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