

## THE THREE GOOD BROTHERS CHARM: SOME HISTORICAL POINTS

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The charm for wounds beginning “Three good brothers were going/walking” has been documented in written and spoken sources in various languages across the European continent from the medieval period. Ferdinand Ohrt's article in the *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens* contained many examples of the formula from Northern European manuscript sources. There remain many more examples to be assembled from English manuscripts and from other cultural traditions. This paper (including the Appendices) does not attempt to offer a comprehensive collection of Three Good Brothers charms. Rather, it seeks to understand and interpret selected instances of the charm's appearance from the evidence of selected manuscript contexts. The phrase ‘Historical Points’ in the title of this paper signals my attempt to elucidate the cultural contexts for the use of this wound charm at specific moments during, before and after its popularity in the manuscript culture of the medieval period.

**Key words:** *Tres boni fratres*, *Longinus*, *Neque doluit neque tumuit*, encounter charm, Christ as healer.

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Fortunately, recent scholarship by specialists and new examination of original papyrus and manuscript sources make possible more precise understandings of the cultural contexts, that is to say, the different communities for which the charm was written down. My six historical points are discussed in six sections

and embrace the following themes: the text and character of an early Byzantine example, the charm's instructions and embedded motifs, identity of the three brothers, its use among doctors, its dispersion in vernacular texts and languages, and its associations with witchcraft.

First, it is useful to note that the charm typically exhibits the following structure:

1. Title or heading designating its use for wounds
2. Opening narrative describing an encounter between the three brothers and Christ
3. Dialogue consisting of a question from Christ and answer from the brothers
4. Instructions for a cure consisting of the application of oil and wool and the recitation of a charm

A stipulation against secrecy and taking a reward for the cure often occurs between parts 3 and 4. In part 4, the charm may be a Longinus motif beginning 'Longinus/Longeus, the soldier/Hebrew pierced the side of the Lord with a spear' or a conjuration of multiple wounds formula, 'just as Christ's wounds . . . so may this wound'. Both the Longinus motif and the wounds conjuration incorporate the motif of 'uncorrupted wounds', as discussed below.

## 1. A CHRISTIAN NARRATIVE CURE IN A PAPYRUS FROM OXYRHINCUS

My first historical point for the 'three brothers charm' is a Greek text that marks an early stage of the type of charm represented by the three brothers formula, which Ohrt labelled 'Begegnung' or 'encounter charms' (Ohrt 1936: 49). Some men meet Christ in a deserted place and ask him for a cure for the sick. This brief text occurs with four others on a fragment of papyrus belonging to the Oxyrhynchus collection from Egypt and dates to the 5th or 6th century AD. This narrative and the other four short texts on the fragment are all meant for healing purposes. The Greek text has recently been newly edited by Roberta Mazza and reads in translation:

Some men of ours met [or some men met us] / in the wilderness and said to the Lord: Jesu, what cure (*tharapia*) is there for the sick? And He said to them, 'Oil of olives I gave/ and I designated myrrh for those who have acted in the name of the Father and the Holy Spirit and the Son. (Mazza 2007: 440, my translation)

Significantly, neither the number three nor the word “brothers” occurs in this charm, although it contains a dialogue and a cure involving oil of olives plus myrrh.<sup>1</sup> The charm belongs to an on-going narrative in which the encounter between the Lord and the men seeking a cure is described by an observer. It appears that the speaker is a disciple who was walking with Christ and witnessed the encounter with the strangers or, on the other hand, who himself recognized the people who met Christ in the lonely place as fellow Christians or disciples. This narrative does not employ instructions or the performative language of charms, but tells a short story in the form of an *exemplum*.

The next short narrative in the papyrus is also an encounter charm: Angels of the Lord went up to middle heaven seeking an eye cure, and the Lord, meeting them, asks what they seek, and they answer that they want to receive a strong and powerful medicine. All the pieces on the papyrus, are medical remedies. According to Mazza, this Oxyrhynchus fragment is a private, informal personal record written by someone literate in Greek, probably for personal use. Each of the two narrative cures are preceded by small chi-rho symbols. The community in which it circulated was probably Christian because the charm cure is said to be appropriate only for those who have faith and the text preserves an early alternative form of the Trinitarian formula. This cure establishes the 5th or 6th century circulation of a formula in which Christ conducts a dialogue with healers and directs them to use specific ingredients to treat believers in the Christian faith. Evidently, the words of the narrative itself constitute the effective form the cure at the same time raising an expectation that oil and myrrh are medicines. This dialogue suggests that the appellation ‘brothers’ in Three Good Brothers charm originally designated ‘brothers’ in the sense of friends and followers who knew Christ.

## **2. THE REQUIRED INCANTATION: *LONGINUS AND WOUND* *MOTIFS***

In the medieval Three Good Brothers charm, Christ instructs the Good Brothers to apply oil with wool and then speak certain words over the wound. The recitation usually consists of a Longinus charm with enumeration of Christ’s wounds or a direct appeal to the five wounds of Christ. The Longinus/Longeus motif incorporates the uncorrupted wounds motif. An early 12th century version of the charm reads,

In nomine patris et / f. et [s]. s. Tres boni fratres / per unam uiam ambulab/  
ant et obuiauit eis dominus / noster iesus christus et interrogauit / eos  
dicens Tres boni fratres / quo itis et dixunt Domine nos / imus ad montem

oliueti / colligere he[r]bis plagac / ionis et percussio[n]is. Dixit / eis dominus noster iesus christus: Tres boni fratres [error MS: quo itis underlined for deletion] uenite post me et iurate / mihi per crucifixum et per lac beate marie . ut n' in ascondito dicatis ne merca. . . . accipiatis sed ascendite ad montem oliueti et accipite olium oliue et la. . . .ouis et mittae ad plagam et dicite: **Sicut dicit heb. . . . Longinus lanceam fixit in latere domini nostr[i] iesu christi nec diu sanguinet [above ulnus] ranclauit nec tumuit nec tempestatem ar[d]oris habuit. Sic nec diu sanguinet ne ranclet nec tempestatem ardoris habeat wlnus istud. In nomine . p . et f et s. . . .<sup>2</sup> (Munich, Clm MS 19440, p. 282; my transcription from access online.)**

*In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Three good brothers were walking one way and Our Lord Jesus Christ met them and asked them, saying: 'Three good brothers, where are you going?' And they said: 'Lord, we are going to the Mount of Olives to collect herbs [to cure] wounds and blows'. Our Lord Jesus Christ said to them: Three good brothers, follow me and swear to me by the crucifixion and the milk of the Blessed Maria that you will not speak [it] secretly or accept money, but ascent to the Mount of Olives and take oil of olives and [wool] of a ewe and put it to the wound and say: 'In the same way, he says: 'The heb[rew] Longinus fixed a lance in the side of our Lord Jesus Christ and not long did it bleed or rankle or swell or become inflamed. So may the wound of this person no longer bleed or rankle or become inflamed. In the name of the father and the son and the holy spirit. (Munich, BSB, Clm 19440, p. 282. Appendix I, 1.)*

An alternative late medieval motif focuses on the five wounds of Christ with little or no mention of Longinus, as in the following charm from the second half of the 15th century,

*et coniuretis vulnus per virtutem quinque plagas iesu christi et per virtutem mamillarum beate uirginis de quibus lactatus est iesus quod non amplius doleat nec putrestat nec cicatriscet plusquam fecerunt vulnera domini nostri iesu christi quando suspensus fuit in cruce. .*

*. . . and conjure the wound through the power of the five wounds of Jesus Christ and through the power of the breasts of the blessed Virgin from which Jesus was nursed that [the wound] may not ache nor putrify nor form a scar any more than did the wounds of our lord Jesus Christ when he was hung on the cross. . . . (Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Kk.VI.33, f.5r. Appendix I, 15.)*

In the Biblical account in John 19.34, the soldier who pierces Christ's side is unnamed. The verse reads, "but one of the soldiers pierced his side with a lance and immediately there flowed out blood and water".<sup>3</sup> This account of blood and water flowing out of the Christ's wound gives rise to medieval charms to cure wounds or to stop bleeding. The typical formula in English manuscripts begins, "Longinus miles latus domini nostri + Iesu Christi lancea perforavit et continuo exiuit sanguis et aqua in redemptionem nostram. Adiuro te sanguis. . . ." That is, "Longinus the soldier pierced the side of our lord Jesu Christ with a lance and there flowed out continuously blood and water in our redemption. I adjure you blood . . ." (Appendix I, 17, see Section 5). However, this Longinus motif, focussing on the flow of blood and water from the wound, is not used within the Three Good Brothers formulae. The name Longinus first appears by name from the fourth century in the apocryphal *Book of Nicodemus*, also known as the *Acts of Pilate* (Gounelle 2008). The language in a report attributed to Annias and Caiaphas corresponds to that opening the charms, "Longinus the soldier pieced his side with a spear".<sup>4</sup>

The Longinus motif embedded in the Three Good Brothers charm begins with Longinus piercing Christ's side and is followed by an iteration of wound symptoms. The motif expanding Christ's wounds that healed instantly, referred to as the "uncorrupted wounds" or *Neque doluit neque tumuit*, flourished early in the vernacular traditions (Roper 2005; Smallwood 1992; Braekman 1997; Ebermann 1903 et al.). This motif is one of the most continuously sustained features in the Three Good Brothers charms. The incantation specifies the symptoms to be averted. Table 1 shows the variations in the symptoms that are enumerated within 15 representative charms dating from the 12th through the 15th centuries.

Symptoms are limited to six major ones—bleeding, festering (rankling or ulcerating), swelling, becoming inflamed, hurting (aching, throbbing) rotting (putrifying, decaying). Despite the difficulty presented by different languages, it is evident that no fixed pattern of enumeration or of the number of symptoms dominates the medieval tradition. The incantation builds on the structure, "Just as . . . so also . . ." Just as these named symptoms did not happen in Christ's wounds so also they will not develop in the patient's wounds. It is tempting to say that the enumeration of the wound symptoms medicalizes the charm by heightening the attention to the detailed characteristics of the wound. (They can be seen to describe the progress of a lesion toward serious infection.) In a single charm the named symptoms may be mentioned twice, sometimes with one symptom omitted or added within the formula (e.g., Appendix I,12 ). Over the long term, the enumeration of wound symptoms would have been affected by their reception in oral performance by churchmen, healers of

Century	Source	bleed	fester / rankle	swell	inflamm	hurt/ ache	putrify/ make pus/rot	make a worm or drop	scar or fistula
12th Latin	Munich, CIm 19440	+	+	+	+	-	-	-	-
13th Latin	Camb Corpus 441	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
13th Latin	Gilbert the Englishman	+	+	-	-	+	+	-	-
Latin	John of Gaddesden	-	+	-	-	+	+	+	-
14th Dutch	Yperman d. 1330	+	+	+ zeer	-	+ ver- techede	-	-	-
14th Latin	Scellinck	-	+	-	-	+	+	-	-
15th	Fayreford	-	-	-		+	+		+
14th	John of Grenborugh	-	-	-	-	+	+	+	+
14th Danish	App. 9	+ sweet	-	+	-	+ verkthe	+	-	-
15th English	App. 10	+	+	+	-	+	+	-	-
13th/14th German	Munich, CIm 23374	-	+ enfuelt	+	+	-	+	-	?
13th AN French	App. 12	+	+	+	+	+	+	-	-
15th Greek	Venice, San Marco 408	-	+	-	+	-	-	-	-
15th Latin	Camb. UL Kk.6.33	-	-	-	-	+	+	-	+
Latin	ME Remedy books	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	+

Table 1. Occurrence of Various Wound Corruptions

various kinds and lay persons. In the 13th century, this wound charm was deliberately adopted by some learned medical teachers and practitioners, as discussed in section 4.

### 3. WHO ARE THE THREE BROTHERS?

In a charm, found in a church gospel book from Dalby, a church and monastery in Scania, Denmark, dating from the 14th century (Appendix I, 9), the three brothers have the names Ylinus, Cosmas, and Damian. Cosmas and Damian are twin brother physician saints of third-century Syrian origin, whose relics were translated first to Constantinople and later to Rome and the Cathedral at Munich. In 1400 a shrine was created to preserve their heads. Since they did not take money for healing, they are among the saints known by the Greek epithet ‘anargyrontoi’ or ‘the unmercenary’. Their legend supplies them with brothers, who were also physicians, but none of those have a name like Ylinus, who is not easy to identify.<sup>5</sup> But Cosmas and Damian often appear in Greek charms with Pantaleon, another physician saint who took no rewards. The three occur in a Three Good Brothers charm in a 15th-century Bucharest manuscript and are depicted together in an oil panel originally painted in Cologne in 1455 by the Master of the Vision of St. John.<sup>6</sup> Haralampos Passalis reports that similar charms collected from Greek oral sources recorded in the early 20th century name Cosmas, Damian, Panteleimon or alternatively St. George, St. John, and St. Panteleimon.<sup>7</sup>

Very likely the stipulation that the healers must swear not to use the charm in secret nor take money or any reward for it derives from the association of the Three Brothers with the ‘unmercenary’ physicians in the eastern Christian tradition. The requirement is sometimes dropped by physicians practicing medicine for fees in north western Europe (See Section 4).

An English charm from the 15th century begins “Augustinus. Ihesu. Iohannes. Thre goode breþren went ouer þe londe and ihesu mete w<sup>t</sup> hem’ etc.” Although this late vernacular version shows that this recorder of the charm venerated Augustinus the saint, Jesus, and John the evangelist as “three good brothers”, the charm was probably not recited with these names, for we have many other examples from fifteenth-century England, none of which incorporate names for the healers. The recorder of this written charm takes the opportunity to write down names for the brothers, making the text more concrete. Even if these figures were not taken up by the wider English tradition, Augustine, Jesus, and John reinforce the strong sense of the Christianity of this charm echoing distantly the *Oxyrhynchus Papyrus*, where “brothers” in

the narrative indicate members of Christ's community of companions. Thus, the 14th century Danish reference to the physician saints, who were famous for their charitable cures may explain the charm's extraordinary stipulation that the healers must not speak it secretly or receive any money for it. The healers, who began as friends of Christ and brothers to Christians then latterly saints, become associated with the legends of the saintly brother physicians, venerated in eastern Mediterranean and the whole breadth of Europe. Christ's requirement in the charm that the cure be enacted freely and openly is likely to be a remnant of the identification of the three good brothers with the 'anargyrontoi'.

#### **4. EARLY HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE CHARM**

The German Three Good Brothers charm that Ohrt and others thought dated to the 12th century dates to the the 13th and 14th century according to the most recent description of Munich, BSB, Clm 23374 (Appendix I, 11) by the Bavarian State Library<sup>8</sup>. What had seemed to be a unique early, vernacular example can now be seen to belong to the era when the charm emerged all across Western Europe This Munich MS version of the Three Good Brothers was written into the book by one of several contributors to a collection of rituals and prayers inserted after sermon materials based on scriptural texts. The prayers invoke protection in the language of devotion to the cross. The Three Good Brothers has been added by a notably rough hand at the top, left column on a new page; the same hand continues in the second column with formulae consisting of letters or characters. Some of the added exorcisms exploit the use of divine names and angels' names, more or less outside the mainstream of public liturgical prayers and blessings. However, the vernacular Three Brothers charm contains the very same elements as its contemporary Latin versions — opening dialogue, the command to swear by the cross and Mary's milk not to take money, the instructions to use olive oil and sheep's wool and to recite the Longinus formula with the uncorrupted wounds. Here, the charm was evidently received as a religious text into an intensely religious, if at this point idiosyncratic, collection.

During the same period the charm was appropriated by medical practitioners. It achieved a certain cachet among a few well reputed physicians. Perhaps its enumeration of wound symptoms and its unique claim to have been given to physicians by Christ himself gave it some appeal to certain northern doctors. Gilbert the Englishman, writing his compilation of medicine for teaching purposes in France in the middle of the 13th century (McVaugh 2009) added

the charm into his section on the treatment for serious head wounds, despite the fact that he did not generally approve of verbal cures (McVaugh 2003: 330–1; Olsan 2003: 351, 360 ). He labels it an empirical cure and a charm (*carmen*).

Empericum carmen. Tres boni fratres per uiam ibant et obuiauuit eis dominus noster iesus christus et dixit eis. tres boni fratres quo it is? Unus ait. Imus ad montem oliueti colligendo herbas percussionis et plagacionis. et dicit dominus noster iesus christus. uenite post me tres boni fratres et iurate michi per crucifixionem domini et per lac mulieris uirginis ne in abscondito dicatis nec mercedem inde accipiatis. et accipite lanam succidam ouis et oleum oliuarum et ponite in plagis et dicite **si-cut longius ebreus cum lancea** in latere domini nostri ihu. x. percussit nec sanguinauit nec ranclauit nec doluit nec putredinem fecit: nec faciat plaga ista quam carmo?/f 45r in nomine patris et f. et s.s. amen. ter dicite pater noster. .

*Three good brothers were going along the path, and our Lord Jesus Christ met them and said to them: “Three good brothers, where are you going?” One said: “We are going to mount Olivet to collect herbs for blows and wounds.” And our Lord Jesus Christ said: “Follow me, three good brothers, and swear to me by the crucifixion and the milk of the lady virgin that you will not speak it secretly or accept rewards for it. And take wool from near the teat of a ewe (lanam succidam) and oil of olives and place it on the wounds and say: “Just as the Hebrew Longius struck the side of our Lord Jesus Christ and [the wound] did not bleed or rankle or ache or make pus, so may not this wound which I charm. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit Amen. Say three Our Fathers. (Appendix I, 3)*

Gilbert’s prescription of *lana succida* is a special medical usage subsequently recommended by the English physician, John of Gaddesden, whose medical compendium, *Rosa medicine*, appeared early in the 14th century. John of Gaddesden makes the charm his own by two changes: When Christ speaks to the three brothers, he tells them explicitly to put aside their quest for herbs (“I conjure you, three good brothers, that you set aside the herbs and take oil of olives and black wool, saying: . . .”, Appendix I, 4). Moreover, John of Gaddesden moves instructions not to take any reward for the charm outside of the charm formula proper, saying simply, (“May you not take a reward for it, but do it in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.” Appendix I, 4) It is John Arderne, a surgeon and practitioner of the late 14th century who precisely defines *lana succida* in medical terms. It is wool taken from near the teat of a ewe, an effective treatment of apostemes (that is pus-filled sores). Such wool was use-

ful because it contained more natural greases. The added adjective “black” (nigram, Appendix I, 8; blake, Appendix I, 10) indicates that this wool should be in its natural state, unwashed or “dirty”.<sup>9</sup> The notion of unwashed wool (“leine ke unkes ne fust lavee”) occurs in the 12th –century Anglo-Norman French version (Appendix I, 12), likely reflecting even earlier medical useage. Among later surgeons who recommended this charm for wounds are the famous Flemish surgeons Jan Yperman and Thomas Scellinck, who echo Gilbert’s directions about the wool (Appendix I, 5 and 6). Both Yperman and Scellinck express doubts about the efficacy of the verbal incantation in contrast to their faith in the wool and oil treatment (Braekman 1997: 175–177). In this way, the Three Good Brothers achieved a limited status in learned medical circles in northwestern Europe, while it never seemed to lose its credibility as a wound cure among the poor or for the poor.

Thomas Fayreford, a 15th-century medical practitioner who traveled in the southwest of England and whose patients came from all classes, except the highest aristocracy (Jones 1998: 163–4), notes that the Three Good Brothers is proven to work on the wounds of the poor. Fayreford employed charms without qualms. His version varies from the more learned version because he says simply to use the wool of a ewe (*bidentis*) and he omits the caveat about not taking money or keeping it secret, presumably because he made his living from practicing medicine, rather than teaching it. His assertion that the charm is proven to work among the poor may be his reinterpretation of the directions to Christian charity. Fayreford’s version also drops references to Longinus, which may have seemed old fashioned to him, and offers a poetic closing formula exploiting word play on the causes of the wounds:

... **sicut christus fu[i]t fixius clave et lancea** sic christus fu[i]t punctus clave et lancea. et sicut christus fu[i]t lanceatus clave et lancea et ritu sic fu[i]t sanatus ab ipsa punctura fixura. clavatura lanceatura per venerabilem nomen domini nostri jesu christi. sic sanetur verissime vulnus istud. fiat fiat fiat. Amen.

... *Just as Christ was fixed with a nail and a lance, so Christ was pierced with a nail and a lance, and just as Christ was lanced with a nail and a lance and a rite, so he was healed from being pierced and fixed and nailed and lanced. Through the venerable name of our lord Jesus Christ, so may this wound be most truly healed. Let it be done, let it be done, let it be done. Amen.* (Appendix I, 7)

On the other hand, John of Grenborough (that is, Grandborough in E. Warwickshire), who says he served as the man who looked after the infirmary (*infirmarius*) for thirty years, was attached to an ecclesiastical community.

This brother John first acquired a copy of Gilbert's book, then compiled his own treatments and remedies to supplement it. He wrote the charm into his own medical book (McIntosh 1986, I:114; Hunt 1990: 33–34). His Three Brothers charm (Appendix I, 8) resembles Gilbert's. Yet his wound treatments, which are presented as one unit, are explicitly religious, being attributed to Christ 'who is true salvation and medicine'.<sup>10</sup> The Three Brothers charm belongs to a set of surgical instructions for extraction of a spear point or arrow head. It is continuous with follow-up care for the wound.<sup>11</sup> The surgeon speaks a Longinus formula to accompany the extraction of the spear point with two pairs of fingers (*duobus digitis dualibus*), then he invokes the Holy Wounds ("And through the Holy Wounds may there be to you blessed medicine"); next he recites the three brothers charm over the wound and additionally a long "I conjure you wound by the 5 wounds" ending in Holy names of God. John's intervening medical notes say that the 'two fingers together' with which he makes the sign of the cross and grasps the iron point are the 'medicinal fingers' by which he seems to identify the gesture of blessing with the surgical action.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, he adds that this medicine (meaning the spoken formulae and the application of the wool and oil) is most effective for new wounds if another medicine has not already been applied. His version of the charm stands as the most devout use of the Three Good Brothers charm within an explicitly medical and surgical environment.

## 5. FIFTEENTH TO NINETEENTH CENTURIES: *VERNACULAR MEDICINE*

Vernacular medicine in 15th-century England served practical purposes and could be self-administered. The Three Good Brothers charm appeared in Middle English collections of medical remedies for English readers along with a few other Latin charms that appealed to saints like Apollonia for toothache and Longinus for bleeding. The remedy book formula (Appendix I, 13) follows 13th- and 14th-century versions designating the use of 'black' wool, 'cut from below'. The form preserved in at least 9 related Middle English remedy books contains the Longinus wound motif. (Olsan 2009: 226).

In England, as elsewhere, several different charm motifs begin with Longinus's wounding of Christ. The English remedy books mentioned above that include the Three Good Brothers also contain two independent Longinus charms in Latin—although not all the charms in these books are in Latin. Both staunch bleeding of one kind or another and both employ Longinus mo-

tifs to staunch bleeding that combine Longinus with the river Jordan, are translated below:

1. A charm for þe bloody flix/flux [f. 33r]

In nomine + patris + +? filii + spiritus sanctus. Amen. Stabat + Iesus contra flumum Jordanis et posuit pedem suum et dixit, Sta, aqua per deum te coniuro. Longinus miles latus domini nostri Iesu + Christi perforavit 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 sanguine. Sic restet sanguis sicut restabat Iordanis quum christus in ea baptizatus fuit. In nomine patris etc.

*A charm for the bloody flux. In the name of the + Father + Son + and Holy Spirit. Amen. Jesus was standing at the river Jordan and he put in his foot and said: Stay, I conjure you water through God. Longinus the soldier pierced the side of our Lord Jesus + Christ and immediately blood and water flowed out, the blood of redemption and the water of baptism. In the name of the Father, may the blood rest. In the name of the Son, may the blood cease. In the name of the Holy Spirit, may not a drop of blood go out of this servant of God, (named here). Just as we believe that holy Mary is the true mother and gave birth to the true infant Christ, so may the veins that are full of blood retain it. Thus may the blood stand still as the Jordan stood still when Christ was baptised in it. In the name of the Father, etc. (Appendix I, 16)*

2. A charm for to staunche blod.

Longinus miles latus domini nostri + Iesu Christi lancea perforavit et continuo exiuit sanguis et aqua in redempcionem nostram. Adiuuro 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.[f. 35v] In + Christi nomine et sancti Iohannis baptiste amen. Et dica ter pater noster et ter Aue Maria.

*A charm to staunch blood.*

*Longinus the soldier pierced the side of our lord + Jesus Christ with a lance and immediately blood and water flowed out in our redemption. I adjure you blood through + Christ himself, through His side, through His blood: + Stay + Stay + Stay. +*

*Christ and John went down into the river Jordan. The water stopped and stood still, so may the blood of this body. In + the name of Christ and Saint John the Baptist. Amen. And say three Our Fathers and three Hail Marys.* (Appendix I, 17)

In medieval England other Longinus motifs used independently to staunch bleeding appear in French, English and Latin (Hunt 1990: 93–94). Longinus motifs to staunch bleeding have been well documented in German (Schultz 2003: 90–93; Ebermann 1903: 42–52). In Greek, Longinus’s name disappears except in old charms.<sup>13</sup> Longinus appears in Czech charms (Агапкина 2010: 368–370). In Latvia the motif of a soldier or soldiers wounding Christ and water pouring out appears for staunching blood, but without naming Longinus.<sup>14</sup> In medieval England, although Longinus charms to staunch bleeding are sometimes called for in the treatment of wounds, the particular motifs contained within the Three Good Brothers charm remain distinct from other ones, because it focuses on wound symptoms and Christ’s wounds, rather than flowing blood.

As Thomas Smallwood (2009: 93) explains, “It was only with the advent of English as the first language of the literate and socially privileged that the written record of Middle English charms rapidly expands.” He adds that from the last third of the 14th century, “when compendia of practical medicine were at last written chiefly in English that much of the translation and re-working of established charm-formula took place.” Late medieval English versions of the Three Good Brothers display significant new variations. For example, a wound charm which Smallwood (2009: 94, 99) found in 23 manuscripts translates into English rhyming couplets the conjuration (*Coniuro te wlnus*) employed in Latin Three Good Brothers charms like John of Grenborough’s (Appendix I, 8). This conjuration in English begins “I conjure the wound blive/By the virtue of the wounds five”.<sup>15</sup> Robert Thornton, a collector of romances, religious works and a remedy book, records a Three Good Brothers charm in rhymed verses against a worm.<sup>16</sup> Missing from this picture are the Middle English and Early Modern redactions of the charm that circulated among the less literate population of English speakers, although English vernacular versions can be found in the manuscripts (e.g., Appendix I, 10).

Vernacularisation of the charm from Latin or Greek occurs across Europe. It occurs in Latin with Irish directions for application in a 15th/16th century manuscript (Best 1952: 27–28). In a 19th century Irish revision, the three brothers respond that they are seeking gold on Mt. Olivet (Wilde 1887: 2:80). Andrey Toporkov reports that the Three Good Brothers charm does not appear in the East Slavic charm traditions; while it does occur in Czech, Polish, Ukrainian

and Byelorussian charm traditions.<sup>17</sup> In a Greek charm probably from Crete, it is recorded in a 15th century manuscript in Bucharest, but the three good brothers encounter Mary instead of Christ.<sup>18</sup> A recent 20th-century Greek version collected from oral sources retains a few traditional features, while discarding others (Appendix I, 19)<sup>19</sup>. Toms Ķencis has found no Three Good Brothers charms in the Latvian archives although there are many charms featuring three men, probably derived from associations with the Trinity.<sup>20</sup> Jonathan Roper estimates that there are about 10 Estonian Three Brothers variants.<sup>21</sup> Daiva Vaitkevičienė's recent publication of 1,716 Lithuanian charms yields no Three Good Brothers' charms and no Longinus charms.

The Three Good Brothers charm belongs to the medieval Christian charm traditions. In the 15th century, the Three Brothers Charm is situated among other charms for bleeding and wounds which feature Longinus or the conjuration of the five wounds of Christ. The Flum Jordan charms utilise a different Longinus formula from that in the Three Good Brothers charms. Charms that conjure the five wounds are closely related to the formula appearing in some Three Brothers charms except that stand-alone 'I conjure the wound' charms favour the vernacular. English translations of the Three Good Brothers seem to be rare. Robert Thornton's rhymed version barely qualifies since he sees it as a worm charm and it has been interpreted as for toothache, even though it is a rather delightful rendition of the Three Good Brothers. This story of dilution and diversion fits the evidence from other charm traditions, which we know about from 19th and 20th century field work. The Three Good Brothers and Longinus seem to be primarily medieval phenomena, confined to Christian cultures and traditions of charity. At the end of the medieval period, in fact, the charm was loudly condemned, as we see in section 6.

## **6. THE CHARM AS THE DEVIL'S WORK**

In August 1427, the Franciscan friar Bernardino was preaching against the sin of pride in the Campo in Siena. Bernardino was to become the head of his order and most famous for his promotion of the veneration of the holy name of Jesus, represented by IHS in art, an abbreviation common in late medieval charms.

Here is part of what he said to the crowds gathered in the Campo:

Oh you who have used the three good brothers, what a great evil you do.  
O you who have used the charm for broken bones, to you, and to him or  
her who says that she is bewitched, and who makes you believe she is—

all these I say, take heed! For the first to feel the strokes from God's scourges will be those who have trusted in these enchantments and followed them; and next vengeance will overtake those who have not brought them to justice. (Kors and Peters 2001: 135)

Bernardino argues in another sermon that the Three Brothers charm leads its users from a foolish practice built on a lie to a demonic sacrifice in which the devil is clearly present in the oil and wool and in the secret remedy, meaning the incantation.<sup>22</sup> By this inflammatory preaching that those who work incantations must be condemned and punished as agents of the devil, Bernardino had succeeded in instigating the burning of women charmers in 1424 (Kors and Peters 2001:133). In England as early as the second quarter of the 14th century, the Dominican John Bromyard (d. 1352) warned against old, poor, and untaught women who recommended amulets, retrieved lost objects or loves or health, and provided incantations. In his manual for preachers he names them *carminatrices* and saw them as diabolically inspired (Rider 2007).<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile among English book owners, Protestant religious reforms after 1536 led people to remove Catholic Latin charms and charms relying on saints from books of remedies. Three Good Brothers disappears along with others. In one remedy book originally copied between 1450 and 1500, some owner obscured all the lines except for its distinct title: 'Here ys a charme for woundes with oyle and wolle'<sup>24</sup> The censors of these medical remedy books excised or covered up only the charms. The Three Good Brothers charm suffers various forms of erasure or strike-through, although they had been intentionally included a few decades previously.<sup>25</sup>

## CONCLUSIONS

Taking the long view of the charm's story, we know that the Three Good Brothers circulated first in Latin in literate Christian clerical communities. The original encounter formula probably emerged as a narrative for healing in the earliest Christian centuries, since we find it among the Christian remedies in the Greek papyrus. Its authority over the centuries consistently derives from its attribution as directly and personally conveyed by Christ to healers seeking medical cures. In the full-blown medieval Three Good Brothers found in monastic manuscripts in the twelfth-century, the contrast between the goal of the healers who are abroad seeking herbs and Christ's redirection of them to a different kind of cure altogether, foregrounds the significance of the cure as a Christian act that cannot be sold or preserved as a secret.

In the 13th century, the charm appealed to a few academically inclined physicians, perhaps because it dramatises an encounter between the healers and Christ, seeming to authorise Christian physicians in contrast to commonplace empirical practitioners who relied on herbal cures or animal ligatures. Most high profile physicians and surgeons expressed reluctance to include charms in their learned books because they preferred more rational and theoretical approaches to medicine. (McVaugh 2003). Ordinarily, they employed charms that belonged to their small circle of professionals, not the church or the peasants. The circulation of the Three Good Brothers charm in manuscripts of Gilbert the Englishman's *Compendium medicine* raised its status in formal Latin medicine.

In the 15th century the Three Good Brothers becomes a favourite remedy in much more commonplace vernacular medical remedy books. It appears in these English books still written in Latin, reflecting the religious piety of the time. But the charm also circulates widely in vernacular languages. Its popularity in Italy called it to the attention of the reforming preacher Bernardino of Siena in the 15th century, who condemned its use as diabolical and its users as witches. In the 16th century in England it, along with other charms, came under censorship by religious reformers, both Catholic and Protestant. Then, the three good brothers who acquired a cure from Christ along with charms mentioning the ancient legendary saint Longinus began to disappear from the manuscripts—but I daresay not from the lips of the people.

In this last regard, I offer one final suggestion concerning the charm in England. Jonathan Roper's database of charms in the English language includes a charm recorded in the 19th-century in southwest England that begins "There was three brothers come from the NorthWest going to the South to kill and to cure" (Appendix I, 20). Certain features of the charm echo, albeit very distantly, the Three Good Brothers charm—*besides* the mention of 'three brothers': (1) The brothers are traveling. (2) The charm is meant to cure a string of skin diseases which make sores. (The general medieval understanding of wounds often covered 'sores'.) Finally, (3) According to the collector, the accompanying procedure included dipping bits of cloth into cream and applying them to the inflamed area. It sounds as if the wound treatment, which forms part of the medieval charms where Christ commands the healers to take oil and wool and place it over the wound, has simply moved out of the dialogue and that the olive oil and wool have, as Roper notes, been transformed into local ingredients. Given the fluidity of variations possible in orally transmitted formulae and the long time-span available for such transformations, which we saw in section 5 were already occurring in English manuscript texts of the 15th cen-

tury, the Devonshire Three Brothers charm has a good claim to belong to the tradition of the medieval Three Good Brothers wound-charm.

## APPENDIX I. CHARM TEXTS<sup>26</sup>

This Appendix contains the texts of the charms mentioned in the paper. Numbers 16 and 17 do not belong to the Three Good Brothers group, but rather illustrate two independent variants that include Longinus, both Flum Jordan types.

### 1. 11th/12th century manuscript contains various lists of useful information and glosses. The charm is added in blank space at the end of a list of glosses.

In nomine patris et / f. et [s]. s. Tres boni fratres / per unam uiam ambulab/ ant et obuiauit eis dominus / noster iesus christus et interrogauit / eos dicens Tres boni fratres / quo itis et dixunt Domine nos / imus ad montem oliueti / colligere he[r]bis plagac / ionis et percussio[n]is. Dixit / eis dominus noster iesus christus: Tres boni fratres [error MS: quo itis underlined for deletion] uenite post me et iurate / mihi per crucifixum et per lac beate marie . ut n' in ascondito dicatis ne merca. . . . accipiatis sed ascendite ad montem oliueti et accipite olium oliue et la. . . . ouis et mittae ad plagam et dicite: **Sicut dicit heb. . . . Longinus lanceam fixit in latere domini nostr[i] iesu christi nec diu sanguinet** [above ulnus] ranclauit nec tumuit nec tempestatem ar[d]oris habuit. Sic nec diu sanguinet ne ranclat nec tempestatem ardoris habeat wlnus istud. In nomine . p . et f et s. . . .<sup>27</sup> (Munich, Clm MS 19440, p. 282; my transcription from access online at <http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/0003/bsb00036881/images/> .)

### 2. English manuscript associated with Richard, Bishop of Chichester. Charm is added in 13th c.

In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti Amen. Tres boni fratres vnam uiam ambulauerunt et obuiauit eis dominus noster Iesus christus. Qui dixit eis: quo itis tres boni fratres? Qui dixerunt: Imus ad montem oliueti qui? rere herbas percussionis plagaconis sanaconis et doloris. et? dixit eis dominus noster Iesus christus: Venite post me et iurate in per crucifixum ut non in abscondito dicatis nec mercedem inde capiatis sed ite ad montem oliueti et accipiter lanam ovis sucernam [for succidam?] et oleum et ponite ad plagam dicentes: **Sicut Longinus latus domini nostri iesu christi lancea perforauit? nec diu sanguinauit nec ranclauit diu putruit nec trumuit nec doluit nec ardorem habuit Ita nec plaga ista diu sanguineat nec ranclat nec putrescat nec tumeat nec doleat? nec ardorem habent et ter dicatur hic benedictio: In nomine patris et filii et spiritus sancti amen. et in fine? ?libet bened? dicatur pater noster et Aue maria.** (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 441, p. 578; my transcription)

### 3. Gilbert the Englishman, *Compendium medicine*, composed the middle of the 13th c. in France. Empericum carmen.

Tres boni fratres per uiam ibant et obuiauit eis dominus noster iesus christus et dixit eis. tres boni fratres quo itis? Unus ait. Imus ad montem oliueti colligendo herbas percussionis et plagaconis. et dicit dominus noster iesus christus. uenite post me tres boni fratres et iurate michi per crucifixionem domini et per lac mulieris uirginis ne in abscondito dicatis nec mercedem inde accipiatis. et accipite lanam succidam ouis et oleum oliuarum et ponite in plagis et dicite **sicut longius ebreus cum lancea** in latere domini nostri ihu. x. percussit nec sanguinauit nec ranclauit nec doluit nec

putredinem fecit: nec faciat plaga ista quam carmo?/f 45r in nomine patris et f. et s.s. amen. ter dicite pater noster. . (New Haven, Yale, Cushing Whitney MS 19, fol. 44vb MS ca. 1300; my transcription)

#### 4. **John of Gaddesden's *Rosa medicine* (or *Rosa anglica*) compiled 1st quarter of the 14th c.**

Ad sanandum vulnera primo dicatur istud carmen. Tres boni fratres iverunt ad montem Oliveti ad colligendum herbas et obviaverunt domino nostro Jesu Christo qui dixit eis "Quo itis?" Tres boni fratres qui respondententes dixerunt "Ad montem Oliveti ad colligendum herbas ad sanandum vulnera". Et ait illis Jesus "Conjuro vos, tres boni fratres, quod herbas dimittatis et oleum de oliva et lanam nigram sumatis dicentes "**Conjuro te, vulnus**, per vulnus Christi preciosum a Longeo milite perforatum, quod neque ranclescebat neque putrescebat nec vermum generabat nec dolorem amplius sentiebat sic nec tu ranclescas, neque putrescas, nec vermum generes, nec dolorem inde sentias per virtutem olei et lane. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti, Amen." Nec inde mercedem capiatis, sed in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti id faciatis. (London, British Library, Additional 33996, fol.149v; printed in Hunt 1990: 29)

#### 5. **Flemish surgeon, Jan Yperman, (died about 1330) *Cyirurgie* followed Gilbert's.** He gives the following vernacular translation followed by the Latin version.

Een segening voer alle wonden olt ende nye, in wat leeden sy liggen ende doeter niet toe dan wollen met eycke ende olij van oliven. Drie goede broeders gingen over wech, [d]ie welcke ontmoeten onsen heere Jesum Christum, ende hy seid tot henlieden: 'Drie goede broeders, waer gady?' Die eene antwoorde: 'Wie gaen ten bergen van Oliveten leesen cruyden den ghewonden met te gheneesen'. Ende ons heer Jesus Christus antwoorde henlieden: Coempt acter my, drie goede broeders, ende sweert my by den gecruystden heer ende by den melck swijffs ende maget dat ghy niet sult seggen dese woorden stillekine noch loen daeraff ontfaen. Ende neept wolle met der yeke vanden scape ende doetse in oly ende legtse op den wonde. Gelovet vry et secht:

**Also Longinus den hebreusche met den speets** staech onsen heere Jesum Christum den wel[ken niet] bloede noch dravonck[elde] noc zeer was noch vertechede, so [lock] moet dese wonde + In den nae[me des] Vaders, des Soens, ende des [heylighen Gheestes]. Drie pater noster ende drie av[e Maria .ter] hec repete. (Braekman 1997: 176–77)

#### 6. **Flemish, Thomas Scellinck, *Boeck van Surgien Tirlemont/Tienen* (1343):**

Een conjurati die herde ghemein is om wonden te genesen.

Tres boni fratres obviaverunt domino et cominus noster Jhesus Christus interrogavit et dixit: Tres boni fratres, quo itis? 'Domine, nos ymus ad montem Oliveti ad col[l]igendum [h]arbos placacionis doloris et sanacionis'. Ende dominus noster Jhesus Christus dixit eis: 'Ite et ponatis supra vulnere lanam succidam madefactum in olio olivarum et dicatis hanc coniuracionem':

**Sicut vulnera domini nostri** in cruce pendentis non putruerunt nect doluerunt nec racielaverunt, sic vulnus istud nec putruat nect doleat nec ransulet sed dominus noster ab omni malo accidente custodiat et defendat. In nomine Patris + et Filij + et Spiritus sancti + Amen. (Braekman 1997: 175)

#### 7. **English physician, Thomas Fayreford 15th c.**

*Empiricum bonum expertum in vulneribus pauperum. Ibant tres boni fratres ad montem oliveti bonas herbas quirentes omnia vulnera sanantes. obviaverunt domino nostro Jesu christo. quo tenditis tres boni fratres? domine ad montem oliveti bonas herbas quirentes omnia vulnera sanantes. revertimini, inquit, tres boni fratres et accipite*

olium olive et lanam bidentis et **coniurate vulnus per virtutem .5. plagarum domini nostri jesu christi** quod neque vulnus doleat neque putrescat neque cicatriscat plus quam fecerunt vulnera domini nostri jesu christi. quando suspensus fu[i]t in cruce. sed ita munde sanet aprofundo sicut fecerunt vulnera domini nostri jesu christi. In nomine patris etc. et dic ter pater noster et ave maria. et magister dicas istud sequens: **sicut christus fu[i]t fixius clave et lancea** sic christus fu[i]t punctus clave et lancea. et sicut christus fu[i]t lanceatus clave et lancea et ritu sic fu[i]t sanatus ab ipsa punctura fixura. clavatura lanceatura per venerabilem nomen domini nostri jesu christi. sic sanetur verissime vulnus istud. fiat fiat fiat. Amen. (London, British Library, MS Harley 2558 fol.64v; my transcription)

#### 8. John of Grenborough (Grandborough, E. Warwickshire). 14th c., the infirmarer at St. Mary's Coventry<sup>28</sup>

IBANT TRES BONI FRATRES AD montem oliueti bonas herbas querentes et omnia wlnera sanantes et obuauerunt domino nostro Jesu christo: quo ibitis tres boni fratres? domine ibimus ad colligendum bonas herbas querentes et omnia wlnera sanantes. reuertimini tres boni fratres et accipite olium oliue et succidam lanam et nigram et ponite super plagas et dicatis: JN NOMINE PATRIS et FILII et SPIRITUS SANCTI Amen. **CONIURO te wlnus per .v. wlnera** domini nostri Jesu Christi et per mamillas ex quibus lactatus est Jesus quidem ut non doleas neque putrescas neque cicatrescas plus quam fecerunt wlnera domini nostri Jesu christi quando suspensus erat in cruce sic ita munde sanes a profundo sicut fecerunt wlnera domini nostri Jesu christi. In nomine patris et filii etc. Sicut plage domini nostri Jesu christi non putruerunt nec ranclerunt nec cancrerunt nec vermes fecerunt ita wlnus istud non doleat, nec putrescat nec ranclescat non cancrescat nec fetrescat nec vermes faciat sed ad sanitatem perueniat Messias + Sother + Emanuel + Sabaot + Adonay +. Jn nomine patris et filii etc.

Jsta medicina valet nouiter wlneris si prius super wlnus dictis fuerit et emplastrum appositis quod si per[?] prius apposite ferint alie medicine non habent tantam virtutem. stringit sanguinem et delet ache[sic] et sanat wlnera. (London, British Library MS Royal 12. G. IV, f. 178); my transcription.

#### 9. Danish. 14th c.

Ylinus Cosmas z Damianus gingae thre gothe bröther aat een vegh. Möthe them var herraie Jesus Christus: Hwart welii thre gothe bröther? Wi vellya ganga teel byærg oliuetj, sancka thæ saluiæ ther man skal saar meth helæ oc vnder meth lækhæ. Tha saghte war herra Jesus Christus: Gar meth mykh thre gothe bröther oc swær a guz doth oc Marie myælk, aat ij skuly thessæ oor æy löna oc æy löön fore taka, oc taka boma ellær fara vl oc signa the vnder aller saar meth, hwat the ær ellær huggen æller stvngen, sligthen eller br öthen: Swa æræ the signal sum the vnder ther:

**Longinus gyorthe Jesu Christo** ynnan siin sitha, ther æy sweet oc æy verkthe oc æy rotnathe oc æy bulnathe, ynnan nauf father, soon oc then helyand . . . (Ohrt 1917 no. 1125 (145b)).

#### 10. English. 15th c.

Se ihesu and propter plagas de tribus fratribus.  
Augustinus. Ihesu. Iohannes.

Thre goode brepren went ouer þe londe and ihesu mete w<sup>t</sup> hem and seyde: brepren wheþer wolle ge gon? lorde we wendeþ to þe mount of Oliuet to gadar herbes to hele wonddis and oþer soris. comeþ w<sup>t</sup> me and y schal gow teche. Take oyle of oliue tre and blake wolle and do þe wolle in þe oyle and lay it to þi wonde and say þ<sup>s</sup> charme þer-ouer: **righte as longius brillide þe seyde of god** and þ<sup>t</sup> wonde ne blede not longe ne rotide not ne oke nogt ne swellede ne festarde nought rygtht so þ<sup>s</sup> wonde ne blede he nought ne

fesster he nougt ne ake he nougt ne swelle he not ne rote he not in þe name of þe fader + and þe sonne + and of þe holy gost + amen. and say þ<sup>s</sup> charme þris and .v. pater noster and .v. auys in þe whorchipe of þe v woundis of oure lorde. (British Library, Sloane MS 3160, ff. 133–134; Sheldon 1978, no. 32; here as printed in Roper 2005: 127)

#### 11. German. Re-dated 13th/14th centuries.

Indem namen des uater [. . .] Dri gût prûder giengen æinen wech. da bechom in unser herre ih'c cpc. und sprach: wanne uart ir dri gût prûder? Herre, wir uarn zæinem perge und sùchen æin chrût des gewaltes, daz iz gût si zaller slath wnden si si geslagen oder gestochen oder swa uon si si. do sprach unser herre ih'c xt: chomet zû [v] mir ir dri\_gût prûder und swert mir bi dem cruce gûten. und bi der milch der maide sanct Marien daz irz enhelt noch long enphahet und uart hinz zo dem mont oliuet und nemt ole des olepûmes und scapwolle. und leget die uber die wndin und sprechet also:

**De iud longinus der unsern herren** ih'm xpm stæch in die siten mit dem sper. dazen eiter nith. noch gewan hitze. noch gewan hitze noch enswar noch enblûtet zeuil. noch enfuelt also to disiu wnde [. . .] Sprich den segen dristunt und also manigen pater noster und tû nith mer. Wan als thie gescriben si. (München, BSB, Clm 23374, f. 16v; my transcription from online access <http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/bsb00007207/images/> [image 36]; cf. Schulz: 68)

#### 12. Anglo-Norman French. 13th century.

Treis bons freres estoient ke aloient al mont d'Olivet por coillir herbes bones a plaie et a garison. Et ancontrerent Nostre Seigneur Jesu Crist et Nostre Seigneur lor demaunda: , Treis bons freres, ou alez vous? Et il responderent: Al mont d'Olivet por coiller herbes de plaie et de garson. Et Nostre Sire dit a eus Venez o mai et me grantez [f.23va] en bone fei ke vous nel dies a nul home ne a femme ne aprendrez. Pernez oile d'olive et leine ke unkes ne fust lavee et metez sor la plaie. **Quaunt Longius l'ebreu aficha la launce** en le coste Nostre Seigneur Jesu Crist, cele plaie ne seigna, ele n'emfla point, ele ne puiot mie, ele ne doloit mie, ele ne rancla mie. Ausi ceste plaie ne seine mes, ne'emfle point, ne pue mie, ne doile mie, ne rancle point, ne eschaufe mie. En le nun del Pier, et nun del Fiz, el nun del Seint esprit, Pater Noster treis fois.

(Cambridge, Trinity College, MS 0.1.2, f.23rb; printed Hunt 1990: 72.)

#### 13. Latin Charm in English Remedy Books (15th c.)

##### A charm for woundes with oyle 7 wolle.

Tres boni fratres per viam ambulabant et obuiabat eis iesus quibus dixit, tres boni fratres quo itis? domine, nos imus ad montem oliueti ad [f. 61v] colligendum herbas salucionis sanitatis & integratatis. tres boni fratres uenite post me et iurate mihi per lac beate virginis marie quod non abscondetis neque in abscondito dicetis neque luctum accipietis et ite ad montem oliueti et accipite lanam nigram succisam et oleum oliue. postea sic dicendo: **sicut longinus miles** latus domini nostri + iesu + christi lancea perforauit et illa plaga non diu doluit neque putridauit neque fistulauit neque ranclauit, neque sanguinauit neque guttam fecit + sic plaga ista per uirtutem illius uirtutem illius plage non diu doleat + neque diu putridet + fistulet + neque ranclet + neque sanguinet neque guttam faciat sed ita sana fiat [f.62r] & munda sicut fuit vulnus quod fecit longinus in latem domini nostri + iesu christi quando pendeat in cruce. In nomine patris etc. (Cambridge University Lib. MS 9308 f. 61r)

#### 14. Greek (15th c.)

Useful for a wound and every cut.

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. As the three good brothers were going peacefully, quietly, and unimpeded to the mount of Olives in order to find herbs beneficial for every cut and for every blow and for every disease and every infirmity, our lord Jesus Christ encountered them and said to them, "Where are to you going three good brothers so peacefully, quietly and unimpeded? And they responded, "My Lord, we are going to the mount of Olives in order to find herbs that are beneficial to every cut and to every wound and to every sickness." And He said to them, "Swear on the true and life-giving cross and on the holy mother of God that you will not accept any gifts or say it secretly, and I will reveal it to you." And they swore on the true and life-giving cross and on the holy mother of God that "we will not accept any gifts nor speak it secretly." And he said to them, "Come to the mount of Olives and take the produce of the olive [oil] and wool of a ewe-lamb and say, "**As Longinus, the centurion, pierced our Lord** Jesus Christ and He did not become inflamed or ulcerate or make a wound, so may the wound of this servant of God (named) not ulcerate or become inflamed, but may it be healed and and be healthy. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and ever amen. (Venice, San Marco MS 408, f. 147) Legrand 1881:25, translated into English.<sup>29</sup>

**15. Latin, 2nd half of 15th c. A charme for alle manner woundes.**

Ibant tres boni fratres ad montem oliueti bonas herbas querentes omnia uulnera sanantes. obiauerunt domino nostro Iesu Christo qui dixit eis. quo tenditis tres boni fratres? domine ad montem oliueti bonas herbas querentes omnia vulnera sanates. reuertimini tres boni fratres et coniuertis vulnus per virtutem quinque plagas iesu christi et per virtutem mamillarum beate uirginis de quibus lactatus est iesus quod non amplius doleat nec putrestat nec cicatrisceat plusquam fecerunt vulnera domini nostri iesu christi quando suspensus fuit in cruce. Set iste munde sanata putredine. In nomini patris et filij et spiritus sancti. Amen. And sey this charme thre daies ouer þe wounde blissing with wolle and oyles. And afterward put hit to the wounds til it be hole. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Kk.6.33, f. 5r)

**16. Jordan + Longinus. 15th century English vernacular remedy books.**

A charm for þe bloody flix/flux

[f. 33r] In nomine + patris + +? filii + spiritus sanctus. Amen.

Stabat + Iesus contra flumum Jordanis et posuit pedem

suum et dixit, Sta, aqua per deum te coniuero. 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 sanguine. Sic restet sanguis sicut restabat Iordanis quum christus in ea baptizatus fuit. In nomine patris etc. (Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Additional MS 9308, ff. 32v-33r, Olsan 2009)

**17. Longinus + Jordan (Christ and John). 15th c. English vernacular remedy books.**

A charm for to staunche blod.

Longinus miles latus domini nostri + 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.[f. 35v] In + Christi nomine et sancti Iohannis baptiste amen. Et dica ter pater noster et ter Ave Maria. (Ibid. f.35r)

**18. Robert Thornton's copy of the charm in rhymed Middle English, 1430–1450.**

Thre gude breþer are ye  
Gud gatis gange ye  
Haly thynges seke ye  
He says: will ye tell me?  
he sais: Blissede, Lorde, mot ye be  
It may neuer getyne be  
Lorde, bot your willis be.  
Settis doune appone your knee  
Gretly athe suere ye me  
By Mary Modir mylke so fre  
There es no mane þat euer hase nede  
Ye schall hym charme *and* aske no mede  
And here sall I lere it the:  
As þe Iewis wondide me  
þay wende to wonde ne fra þe grounde  
I helyd my selfe bathe hale *and* sounde.  
Ga to þe cragge of Olyuete  
Take oyle de bayes þat es so swete  
And thris abowte this worme ye strayke.  
This bethe þe worme þat schotte noghte  
Ne kankire noghte, ne falowe noghte  
And als clere hale fra þe grounde,  
Als Jesu dide *with* his faire wondis  
þe ffadir *and* þe sone *and* þe haly gaste  
And goddis forbott þou wikkyde worme  
þat euer þou make any risynge<sup>30</sup> or any sugorne,  
Bot away mote þou wende  
To þe erthe *and* þe stane.

(adapted<sup>31</sup> from Horstmann 1999 reprt.: 375; Brewer and Owen 1977, f. 176r)

**19. Greek, early 20th c. oral sources.**

Saint George, and saint John and saint Panteleimon were going to Jerusalem in order to ask for, to learn the charm of iron, of stone, of bone and of wood. And our Lord Jesus met them in the road.

–Saint George and Saint John and Saint Panteleimon were are you going?

–Our Lord Jesus, you know the secrets, but you don't know the obvious.

–We were going to Jerusalem in order to ask for, to learn the charm of iron, of stone, of bone and of wood.

–Come back and I will teach it [the charm] to you, to not say it secretly, and without being paid and begged for.

As the Jew Zacharias speared our Lord Christ with the knife at the right side and he didn't make inflammation, not pus, he wasn't worsened, so the head (or any other part) of ... [name of afflicted person] may not make inflammation, not pus, not be worsened ... (Πάγκαλος 1983, 372–73, Translation by H. Passalis)

## 20. Devonshire, England, 19th c.

There was three brothers come from the North West going to the South, to kill and to cure N

for Ringworm—Wild Titters—Burn-gout—Itching gout—Smarting gout—Water gout—chicken pox—St. Tanterous Fire—Girdleing or whatever it may be, in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen. (In the accompanying procedure, the charmer hung a hawthorn branch on the wall under which the patient sat. She took bits of cloth and dipped them into raw cream and applied them to the inflamed area.) (Davies 1996: 24–25; Roper 2005: 129)

## APPENDIX II. COMPARATIVE STRUCTURE

This Appendix groups similar verbal structures for 1. Opening words, 2. Instructions, and 3. Required Incantation within Three Good Brother Charms discussed in this paper. Charms are identified by their number in Appendix I. Openings display two versions a longer and shorter reduced form, “Three brothers were going to the Mount of Olives.” The Instructions typically begin, ‘Come after me’, and specify oil, wool, and speaking specified words. Ten of the 18 charms include the requirement not to say the charm in secret or to take any money for it within the narrative. Phrases describing the wool vary according to individual interpretations by scribes. The required incantation begins “Longinus . . . pierced the side . . . with his spear” followed by “the uncorrupted wounds motif. The alternative incantation conjures the wound by the five wounds of Christ, also incorporating the “uncorrupted wounds.” This motif is analysed in Section 2, Table 1.

Numbers, however, are deceptive because the list of charms is representative, not complete, and it is dominated by material found in English manuscripts. For example, the charm listed once as Gilbert the Englishman’s (3) will occur in all complete manuscript copies of his work. Similarly, the 15th-century remedy book charm (13) appears in at least 10 manuscripts.

### 1. Opening words:

*Tres boni fratres / per unam uiam ambulab/ant et obuiauuit eis dominus* (1)

*Tres boni fratres vnam uiam ambulauerunt et obuiauuit eis dominus* (2)

*Tres boni fratres per uiam ambulabant et obuabat eis iesus* (13)

*Tres boni fratres per uiam ibant et obuiauuit eis dominus* (3)

(Ylinus Cosmas z Damianus.) *gingae thre gothe bröther aat een vegh. Möthe them var herra* (9)

*Thre goode breþren went ouer þe londe and ihesu mete w<sup>t</sup> hem* (10)

*Drie goede broeders gingen over wech, [d]ie welcke ontmoeten onsen heere Jesum Christum* (5)

*Dri gūt prūder gingen æinen wech. da bechom in unser herre ih<sup>c</sup>* (11)

*Tres boni fratres obuiaverunt domino* (6)

*Treis bons freres estoient ke aloient al mont d’Olivet* (12)

*Tres boni fratres iverunt ad montem Oliveti* (4)

Ibant tres boni fratres ad montem oliueti (7)

IBANT TRES BONI FRATRES AD montem oliueti (8)

As the three good brothers were going peacefully, quietly, and unimpeded to the mount of Olives (14)

Ibant tres boni fratres ad montem oliueti (15)

Thre gude breþer are ye / Gud gatis gange ye (18)

There was three brothers come from the North West going to the South (20)

Saint George, and saint John and saint Panteleimon were going to Jerusalem (19)

## 2. The Lord's instructions to the three good brothers:

### a. including oath against secrecy and accepting a fee

uenite post me et iurate / mihi per crucifixum et per lac beate marie . ut n' in ascondito dicatis ne merca. . . accipiatis sed ascendite ad montem oliueti et accipite olium oliue et la. . . ouis et mittae ad plagam et dicite (1)

uenite post me tres boni fratres et iurate michi per crucifixionem domini et per lac mulieris uirginis ne in abscondito dicatis nec mercedem inde accipiatis.. et accipite lanam succidam ouis et oleum oliuarum et ponite in plagis et dicite (3)

Venez o mai et me grantez [f.23va] en bone fei ke vous nel dies a nul home ne a femme ne aprendrez. Pernez oile d'olive et leine ke unkes ne fust lauee et metez sor la plaie. (12)

Venite post me et Iurate in per crucifixum ut non in abscondito dicatis nec mercedem inde capiatis sed ite ad montem oliueti et accipite lanam ouis succernam [for succidam?] et oleum et ponite ad plagam dicentes (2)

uenite post me et iurate mihi per lac beate virginis marie quod non abscondetis neque in abscondito dicetis neque lucrum accipietis et ite ad montem oliueti et accipite lanam nigram succisam et oleum oliue. postea sic dicendo (13)

chomet zû [v] mir ir dri gût prûder und swert mir bi dem cruce gûten. und bi der milch der maide sanct Marien daz irz enhelt noch long enphahet und uart hinz zû dem mont oliuet und nemt ole des olepo' mes und scapwolle. und leget die uber die wndin und sprechet also (11)

Come back and I will teach it [the charm] to you, to not say it secretly, and without being paid and begged for. (19)

Coempt acter my, drie goede broeders, ende sweert my by den gecruystden heer ende by den melck swijffs ende maget dat ghy niet sult seggen dese woorden stillekine noch loen daeraff ontfaen. Ende neept wolle met der yeke vanden scape ende doetse in oly ende legtse op den wonde. Gelovet vry et secht (5)

Gar meth mykh thre gothe bröther oc swær a guz doth oc Marie myælk, aat ij skuly thessæ oor æy löna oc æy löön fore taka, **oc** taka boma ellær fara vl oc signa the vnder aller saar meth, hwat the ær ellær huggen æller stvngen, slighthen eller br öthen: Swa æræ the signat sum the vnder ther (9)

Swear on the true and life-giving cross and on the holy mother of God that you will not accept any gifts or say it secretly, and I will reveal it to you.” And they swore on the true and life-giving cross and on the holy mother of God that “we will not accept any gifts nor speak it secretly.” And he said to them,: Come to the mount of Olives and take the produce of the olive [oil] and wool of a ewe-lamb and say (14)

**b. Oath omitted or moved as an instruction outside the charm**

reuertimini tres boni fratres *et accipite olium oliue et succidam lanam et nigram et ponite super plagas et dicatis* (8)

Conjuro vos, tres boni fratres, quod herbas dimittatis et oleum de oliva et lanam nigram sumatis dicentes . . . Nec inde mercedem capiatis, sed in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti id faciatis. (4)

comeþ w<sup>t</sup> me and y schal gow teche. Take oyle of oliue tre and blake wolle and do þe wolle in þe oyle and lay it to þi wonde and say þ<sup>s</sup> charme þer-ouer (10)

Ite et ponatis supra vulnere lanam succidam madefactum in olio olivarum et dicatis hanc coniuracionem’ (6)

accipite olium olive *et lanam bidentis et coniurate vulnus* (7)

reuertimini tres boni fratres *et coniuretis vulnus* (15)

Settis doune appone your knee  
Gretly athe suere ye me  
By Mary Modir mylke so fre  
There es no mane þat euer hase nede  
Ye schall hym charme *and* aske no mede  
And here sall I lere it the (18)

**3. Required Incantation:**

**a. Longinus**

**heb. . . Longinus lanceam fixit in latere domini nostr[i] iesu christi** (1)

**Sicut Longinus latus domini nostri iesu christi lancea perforauit** (2)

**sicut longius ebreus cum lancea** in latere domini nostri ihu. x. percussit (3)

**Also Longinus den hebreusche met den speets** staech onsen heere Jesum (5)

**Quaunt Longius l’ebreu aficha la lancee** en le coste Nostre Seignor Jesu Crist, cele plaie ne (12)

**De iud longinus der unsern herren** ih’m xpm stæch in die siten mit dem sper. (11)

**Longinus gyorthe Jesu Christo** ynnan siin sitha (9)

**righte as longius þrillide þe seyde of god** and þ<sup>t</sup> wonde ne (10)

**sicut longinus miles latus domini nostri + iesu + christi lancea perforauit** (13)

**As Longinus, the centurion, pierced our Lord** Jesus Christ (14)

As the Jew Zacharias speared our lord Christ with the knife at the right side (19)

As þe Iewis wondide me / þay wende to wonde ne fra þe grounde / I helyd my selfe bathe hale *and* sounde, . . . (18)

**b. 5 wounds of Christ**

**Conjuro te, vulnus**, per vulnus Christi preciosum a Longeo milite perforatum (4)

**Sicut vulnera domini nostri** in cruce pendentis non putruerunt (6)

**coniurate vulnus per virtutem .5. plagarum domini nostri** iesu christi quod (7)

coniuretis vulnus per virtutem quinque plagas iesu Christi christi et per virtutem mamillarum (15)

**CONIURO te wlnus per .v. wlnera domini nostri** Jesu Christi et per mamillas ex quibus lactatus est Jesus quidem ut (8)

**NOTES**

<sup>1</sup> Previously, editors found a blank space before the word ‘men’ or ‘people’ (*andres*) where the number three might have fit, but that seems unwarranted.

<sup>2</sup> Elipses indicate illegibility where the line runs into the gutter in the manuscript.

<sup>3</sup> sed unus militum lancea latus eius aperuit et continuo exivit sanguis et aqua.

<sup>4</sup> *New Testament Apocrypha* 1966 XVI, p 513. This apocryphal gospel was originally written in Greek, but was translated into several vernacular including Polish.

<sup>5</sup> Ohrt suggested that Ylinus is Elidas or Elinus or Helinus/Elias. St. Elias was Egyptian who in 494 became patriarch of Jerusalem and attended the synod of Sidon in 512. He was exiled to Aila on the Red Sea and died there in 513.

<sup>6</sup> Now in Madrid and online at [http://www.museothyssen.org/en/thyssen/ficha\\_obra/72](http://www.museothyssen.org/en/thyssen/ficha_obra/72), last accessed 20Dec.2010

<sup>7</sup> Email 18 December 2010, Μανολάκος, Γεώργιος Δ 1915, “Ἐπωδαί και κατάδεσμοί [Charms and defixiones], Λαογραφία, Ε’, τευχ. β: 609–615.

<sup>8</sup> Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Katalog. Text online <http://daten.digital-sammlungen.de/~db/bsb00007207/images/index.html>

<sup>9</sup> The Middle English translation of Ardern reads, “Lana succida is wolle þat groweth atyux þe legge[s] of ane eye about þe udder, ful of swet, no[g]t y-wasshe . . .” Power 1910: 12.

- <sup>10</sup> ‘*Domine deus omnipotens saluator et liberator noster qui es vera salus et medicina*’ begins the first prayer before extracting the iron point or arrow, British Library, Royal 12.G.IV, f. 177vb.
- <sup>11</sup> The Italian surgeon Teodorico Borgognoni records a ritual including the formula: “Nicodemus drew out the nails from our Lord’s hands and feet, and let this arrow be drawn out.” in the mid-13th c. (McVaugh 2003: 320–1).
- <sup>12</sup> ‘*Nota quod digiti dualis dicuntur duo digit qui vocantur medicinalis*’ Ibid. f. 178ra.
- <sup>13</sup> H. Passalis email 18 December 2010, for example, Μανούσακας 1965: 62.
- <sup>14</sup> Toms Kencis reports 46 blood staunching charms from the Latvian Archives in 5 variants featuring a soldier or soldiers causing Christ’s stab wound from which water flows out, but not the blood. (Email 31 October 2010).
- <sup>15</sup> In one group of remedy books, it follows immediately after the Latin Three Good Brothers charm and is titled, “A charm for a wound in English” thus providing an easily remembered vernacular alternative to the Three Good Brothers charm. (Olsan 2009: 221).
- <sup>16</sup> Lincoln Cathedral MS 91, fol. 176r. Although this version has been designated a charm for toothache, it is probably better identified as a charm against the worm associated with wound infections, as found in Appendix, 6,8).
- <sup>17</sup> Email from Andrey Toporkov, 12 November 2010 citing Агапкина (2010: 361–363).
- <sup>18</sup> “Three brothers, good brothers, Kosmas, Damianus and saint Panteleimon were going to wild mountains to find herbs in order to heal the wound of ... [name of the afflicted person]. There, the virgin Mary met them and asked them: Where, three brothers, good brothers are going? We said, my lady Mary, you shouldn’t ask, but since you asked, we will tell you. We were going to wild mountains to find herbs to heal the wound of ... [name of the afflicted person]. I adjure, I conjure you in the name of the [living] God...” Μανούσακας 1965, 62; translation by H. Passalis.
- <sup>19</sup> H. Passalis email 18 December 2010.
- <sup>20</sup> Based on charms of the type, “Three men went across the high hill. First one was God the Father, second one was God the Son a third – Holy Spirit”. Email from Toms Kencis, 31 Oct. 2010.
- <sup>21</sup> Email 17 November 2010 and see Roper 2009: 177. For related Estonian incantations, see Kõiva 2007: 16.
- <sup>22</sup> “*Contra vulnera incantant, dicentes, Tres boni fratres, etc. quod quidem non tantum mendacium, sed ridiculum manifeste apparet: tunc ibi diabolus, cui sacrificium adhibetur, partim manifestum propter oleum et lanam, partim occultum remedium praestat.*” [They chant against wounds, saying, Three good brothers, etc. which indeed appears manifestly to be not so much a lie, but foolishness: then the devil, for whom it provides a sacrifice, is present partly on account of the oil and wool, partly [on account of] the secret remedy.] (Bernardino 1745: 38–43).
- <sup>23</sup> Are these women what Chaucer had in mind when he spoke of ‘charmeresses’?

<sup>24</sup> BL Sloane 374, f. 46v–47r.

<sup>25</sup> No thorough study of how the censorship of charms in manuscripts fits into the larger picture of censorship in early modern England has been carried out. For preliminary observations on a few manuscripts, see Olsan 2011.

<sup>26</sup> I have set in bold type the opening of the incantation required within the Three Brothers Charm.

<sup>27</sup> Elipses indicate illegibility where the line runs into the gutter in the manuscript.

<sup>28</sup> McIntosh, Samuels, Benskin (1986) I: 114.

<sup>29</sup> I sincerely thank Haralampos Passalis for giving me notice of this charm and for his help with the English translation. Any errors here are my own.

<sup>30</sup> Horstmann reads ‘ristying’, but I do not see the ‘t’ in the facsimile.

<sup>31</sup> I have substituted y’s for MS yogh’s represented in Horstmann, written *and* for Horstmann’s &, and altered his punctuation and capitalisation.

## **MANUSCRIPTS**

Cambridge, Cambridge University Library MS Kk.6.33  
Cambridge, Cambridge University Library Additional 9308  
Cambridge, Corpus Christi College 441  
Cambridge, Trinity College, MS 0.1.2  
Lincoln, Lincoln Cathedral MS 91  
London, British Library, Additional 33996  
London, British Library, Harley 2558  
London, British Library, Royal 12.G.IV  
London, British Library, Sloane 374  
London, British Library, Sloane 3160  
Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 19440  
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ISNFR Committee on Charms, Charmers and  
Charming

# **Incantatio**

An International Journal on  
Charms, Charmers and Charming

## **Issue 1**

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Guest Editor For This Issue: Jonathan Roper

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## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first issue of *Incantatio*. This peer-reviewed journal is the natural outcome of the recent upsurge in charms studies, as illustrated, for example, by the activities of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research's Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming (<http://www.isfnr.org>). It is intended that *Incantatio* will be a lively forum for charms studies from a wide variety of traditions and scholarly approaches rather in the manner that *Proverbium* fulfills this role in paremological studies. Some of the range we hope to cover will be indicated by the contents of this our first issue, where we have articles on both medieval and (near-)contemporary charms, both European and North American material, and both close readings and theoretical interventions. Alongside such articles, we intend to published reports of conferences (or conference sessions) and reviews of books which touch on charms, charmers and charming.

The general editor of *Incantatio* is Mare Kõiva ([mare@folklore.ee](mailto:mare@folklore.ee)), who is also editor of the *Electronic Journal of Folklore* (<http://www.folklore.ee/folklore>). In addition, each issue will have a guest editor. For this first issue this role is being played by Jonathan Roper. We look forward to informative and productive developments in charms studies appearing the pages of *Incantatio*.

Mare Kõiva and Jonathan Roper