

PARCHMENT, PRAXIS AND PERFORMANCE OF CHARMS IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND

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St. Gall MS 1395, a collection of fragments from various periods, includes a page of Irish origin and apparently ninth-century date, containing four healing charms known as the St. Gall Incantations, each followed by instructions concerning its ritual performance. A close study of this single vellum folio examining the characteristics of the text, scribal practices and the cultural setting in which the document was compiled, provides a basis for theorizing about Old Irish magical practices and their multidimensional performative context. By highlighting the investigation of the liaison between the words of the charm and the associated ritual, an attempt will be made to elucidate how the textual register of the manuscript translated into physical performance. Accordingly, questions of mise-en-page performance and the manuscript as a material amulet are addressed in order to understand the written environment of magical language as well as the practices of charming in early medieval Ireland.

Key words: Christian tradition, healing charms, manuscripts, medieval Irish charms, performative context, pre-Christian tradition, power of words, ritual performance, sound patterns, St. Gall Incantations, textual amulets

INTRODUCTION

As the famous philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein has said, “The meaning of words lies in their use” (Wittgenstein 1953: 80; 109 – quoted in Tambiah 1968: 207); this paper constitutes a study of the use of words on the one hand, and of their meaning on the other. The use of words becomes even more important in the magical system, and as the social anthropologist Stanley Tambiah has noted: “... if the ethnographer questions his informants ‘Why is this ritual effective?’ the reply takes the form of a formally expressed belief that the power is in the ‘words’ even though the words only become effective if uttered in a very special context of other action,” (Tambiah 1968: 176).¹ It has also been said that “any given remedy is complete only in performance” (Garner 2004: 30).² The performance gains, in the words of Tambiah, “its realism by clothing a metaphorical procedure in the operational or manipulative mode of practical action” (1968: 194). Hence, the magical rituals, a complex of words and deeds, of concepts and

actions, as well as the interconnections of the latter, will be the topic of this article.³ The discussion will seek to show how a 9th century collection of charms known as the St. Gall Incantations, written in Old Irish, “ingeniously conjoins the expressive and metaphorical properties of language with the operational and empirical properties of technical activity” (Tambiah 1968: 202).

It is, without a doubt, a challenge to try to understand the mentalities, or modes of rationality, of people who are separated from the present day by twelve hundred years. It is possible, however, to study the individual pieces of evidence which the manuscript provides. It is possible to study the distinct style, content, purpose and function of the source in order to reveal as much of its internal logic as possible (Gurevich 1989: 36; 221). The text, which combines verse and prose, also includes instructions for a wide range of performative elements, including the acts of speaking, writing and, possibly, singing. As Karen Jolly has stated: “Ritual actions can be read as ‘texts’ with just as much meaning as printed words” (Jolly 1996: 23). It is hence possible to try and “unravel the logic and technique of the rite,” (Tambiah 1968: 190). It is possible to study the role of *materia medica*, the medical substances used in the healing process. The appearance of the texts on the page, principles of compilation, and the manuscript itself can also be studied. This method of moving back and forth between text and context, and standing back from the individual pieces of evidence that one can study, allows the forming of a more general picture of the early medieval practices of charming (see Jolly 1996: 5; 34).

The charms used for healing purposes that are the object of this study can be found on a single leaf of Insular vellum.⁴ The manuscript, today forming a part of the composite volume 1395 put together by the librarian Ildefons von Arx in 1822, has been preserved in the library of St. Gall in Switzerland. Because the leaf’s recto bears a portrait of Saint Matthew, it has been suggested that the leaf would have originally been a page from a pocket Gospel book (see for example Carey 2000: 3). The charms, four in total, are written on the verso of the leaf, each of them followed by directions for its use. There have been opposing opinions as to whether the work is of two or three different scribes.⁵ The manuscript, written in Insular majuscule, has been dated to the ninth century, although the eighth and the tenth centuries have also been suggested.⁶

It will be well to give brief attention to the pioneering work that has already been done and that makes possible ongoing research in the present day. The above mentioned librarian, Ildefons von Arx, noted that the script and language of the leaf were Irish, and sent a copy of the text to Paris, London and Oxford to be translated – apparently without a result. The text was later, in 1834, sent to the Board of Reports in London by Bishop Greith, the sub-librarian of the Monastery Library of St. Gall. There was plenty of interest in the manuscript

during the 19th century: The four charms were edited first by Johann Kaspar Zeuss in 1853 in his *Grammatica Celtica*, followed by the editions of Ferdinand Keller (1860), Heinrich Zimmer (1881), Ernst Windisch (1890) and finally by that of Whitley Stokes and John Strachan in 1903. There have been numerous translations of the individual charms; most recently, one can mention the contribution *Magical Texts in Early Medieval Ireland* by John Carey (2000: 98–117) as well as the 2009 effort by Bernard Mees in his *Celtic Curses* (pp.173–178).

I will begin by introducing of the charms one by one; and by investigating not only their content, but also some of their typical formulaic structures and compositional devices. Attention will be paid to the “implicative weight” of the charms, which connects these words to a wider context whose power they evoke (Foley 1991:7; Olsan 1992: 118; Passalis 2012: 7). After beginning with a consideration of the charms’ content, as well as what I would like to call ‘the linguistics of magic’, the discussion is expanded by studying “the grammar of the non-verbal acts that go with them” (Tambiah 1968: 184) – in other words, the accompanying rituals. This way, moving between particular texts and their larger context, it is hoped that some of the specific features found in the St. Gall Incantations will be illustrated in the process; the charms will be used as a case study of an aspect of charming traditions in Early Medieval Ireland (see Jolly 1996: 4). To conclude, a few thoughts will be advanced about the manuscript as a physical object, as well as its possible function as a textual amulet.

CHARM 1 – “BY THE HOLY WORDS THAT CHRIST SPOKE FROM HIS CROSS, REMOVE FROM ME THE THORN”

Ni artu ní nim
ni domnu ní muir
Ar nóibbríathraib ro-labrastar Crist
assa chr[oich]
Díuscart dím a ndelg
delg díuscoilt
crú ceiti
méim méinni
Benaim béim n-and
dod-athsceinn,
tod-scenn,
tod-aig.
Rogarg fiss Goibnen.
Aird Goibnenn,

re n-aird Goibnenn
Ceingeth ass.

Fo-certar ind epaid-se i n-im nad tet i n-uisce 7 fu-slegar de imma
ndelg immecuáirt 7 ni tét fora n-airrinde nach fora n-álath 7 mani bé a
n-delg and du toéth ind ala fiacail airthir a chinn.

*Nothing is higher than heaven,
nothing is deeper than the sea.
By the holy words that Crist spoke
from his cross:
Remove from me the thorn,
a thorn which wounds.*

*** *****

**** *****

*I strike a blow on it
which makes it spring out,
which makes it spring forward,
which drives it out.
Very harsh Goibniu's wisdom!
The point of Goibniu,
before the point of Goibniu,
Let it step out of him!*

*This charm is put in butter which does not go into water, and from
it is smeared all around the thorn, and it does not go on the point or the
wound, and if the thorn be not there, one of the two teeth in front of his
head will fall out.⁷*

The first charm in the collection is a narrative healing charm for a thorn (or some other sharp, pointed object).⁸ The charm follows the bipartite structure generally found within the genre: power is first built up, then it is discharged. As Jonathan Roper has pointed out, “in the first half of a charm, supernatural personalities tend to be named or addressed, and often a little story is featured which touches on issues in some ways analogous to the plight of the person to be cured... In the second half of a charm, the power is discharged, the analogy is cashed in, the magic is worked, often in a highly formulaic language” (Roper 2003b: 51).⁹

The charm begins with the opening formula, “Nothing is higher than heaven, nothing is deeper than the sea”, followed by a *historiola*. This term is used to designate a short narrative, describing (often apocryphal) episodes of the lives of Jesus and the saints, frequently encountering or conducting a dialogue with one another.¹⁰ The *historiola*, “By the holy words that Christ has spoken from

his cross: Remove the thorn from me the thorn, a thorn which wounds”, is a micro-narrative that, although brief, has space enough to name the character and his location, to describe the illness, and to suggest how it was overcome.¹¹ Historiolae work with the principle of *similia similibus*, thus establishing an analogy “between mythic time and present circumstances,” (Frankfurter 1995: 465). David Frankfurter has furthermore stated that historiolae provide a link “between a human dimension where actions are open-ended and a mythic dimension where actions are completed and tensions have been resolved” (1995: 464). Frankfurter continues: “The historiola invariably includes some specific links with the immediate ritual context in which it is uttered.... The effect is, therefore, a collapsing of boundaries between the human situation and the mythical dimension; the historiola is effective not by analogy or precedent but by becoming dynamically real within the ritual context,” (1995: 469–470).¹² In general, “by uttering the same vital invocation as the character in the story, the practitioner or client taps into the power of the entire story” (Frankfurter 1995: 462). In the case of the charm under study, the practitioner thus taps into the power of Christ on the cross and connects the two events: thorns and nails that pierced Christ’s skin and the thorn that has pierced the patient’s skin.

After magical power has been built up and called up by the invocation and the historiola, it is time to release it. Here one finds the words that actually make the magic happen: “crú ceiti, méim méinni”. The meaning of these lines is unclear, even if there are number of other spells within the Irish tradition that are directed against *crú*, a word meaning something like blood and gore.¹³ Sometimes the meaning either becomes corrupt or gets lost in the course of the intercultural and diachronic transit of words through time, space and history (Passalis 2012: 10). On the other hand, it is at times the case with charms that they include words that were never meant to be understood, but rather the contrary. As Roper (2003a: 9–10) has pointed out, “syllables with a high degree of semantic redundancy... may still be significant: not semantically, but as a significant sound”.

According to Roper, the transition to the release of magical power is sometimes marked by “a change of verbal tense, often by one of mood, and by the use of more closely repetitive and formulaic language” (2003a: 23). Generally, “if the tone is imperative, it involves commands and adjurations addressed to the offending object” (Roper 2003b: 53). This is clearly visible in the charm, which reads: “I strike a blow on it (namely, a thorn) which makes it spring out, which makes it spring forward, which drives it out”. These are obviously descriptions with imperative force: the charmer releases all the power he gathered before and describes how the offending object will leave the body.

The final important feature in a charm is the manner of its conclusion. At times, as in the present case, charms are concluded with a ratification. Quoting Roper again, one can claim that “the final formula simultaneously works magic and ratifies that magic (and ratifies the other magic formulae which have gone before it)” (Roper 2003a: 26–27). As is known, there are numerous charms that have either “Amen” or even a prayer as their ratification, but here the ratification is clearly non-Christian, underlining the power and harshness of wisdom belonging to Goibniu, the divine smith of the Tuatha Dé Danann. There is a link between smiths and magic in several cultures, and early medieval Ireland is no exception.¹⁴ Blacksmiths are furthermore classed together with women and druids as practitioners of harmful magic in the famous Irish prayer known as ‘Saint Patrick’s Breastplate’.¹⁵

Following the actual words of the charm against a thorn, attention must be paid to what Alain Renoir might call “an empirical context within the text proper” (Renoir 1988: 18 – quoted in Nelson 1990: 20), namely the ritual performance of the first charm.¹⁶ As noted by Tambiah (1968: 202): “[language] enjoys the power to invoke images and comparisons, refer to time past and future and relate events which cannot be represented in action. Non-verbal action on the other hand excels in what words cannot easily do – it can codify analogically by imitation of real events, reproduces technical acts and express multiple implications simultaneously. Words excel in expressive enlargement, physical actions in realistic presentation”. From the context, the “realistic presentation” of “physical actions” remains unclear. It is undecided, whether the purpose is to place the physical charm, written on something (perhaps another parchment), into the butter; or to perform the charm over butter, in other words to make ‘enchanted butter’, or perhaps both.¹⁷ The reason for this ambiguity lies in the fact that both words used here, *epaid* and *fo-ceird*, have multiple meanings. The word for a charm, *epaid*, can mean both an incantation or an amulet, and the verb, *fo-ceird*, means both ‘places, puts’ and also ‘casts’.¹⁸

According to Tambiah, the mediating substances, into which spells are uttered, convey the attribute to the final recipient. In his view, “the logic guiding the selection of these articles is not some mysterious magical force that inheres in them; they are selected on the basis of their spatio-temporal characters” (Tambiah 1968: 193–194). During the Old Irish period, milk and butter were among the most common ingredients in medicines (Cameron 1993: 8), but what is meant by “butter which does not go into water”? Fergus Kelly has, in his book *Early Irish Farming*, described the production of butter as follows: “The first stage in the production of butter is to keep a quantity of cream for a week or so in a cool place. The cream must be then churned until it separates into butter and buttermilk. The lumps of butter are strained off, washed, and pressed into

butter-pats” (Kelly 2000: 325–326).¹⁹ Therefore, in order to remove buttermilk from the butter grains one needs to wash butter and then ‘work’ the grains by pressing and kneading them together. It is likely that this is what is meant by our instruction. Similar examples of using unwashed butter in magical contexts can be found in the Anglo-Saxon tradition.²⁰ It seems that the idea behind this is that the ingredients had to be unadulterated and pure.²¹ It could be argued that by rubbing the unadulterated butter around the thorn the user of the charm is thus making a formal enclosure, ritually purifying the wound with this pure substance, enabling everything inside the enclosure to heal.

The final point to make relating to the first charm in the collection from St. Gall concerns what charm scholars describe as the evaluation of the charm. The purpose of the evaluation is to describe the expected result intended with the conjuration (Alonso-Almeida 2008: 20). It is clear that the charm is thought to be highly powerful, since the author of the instructions informs his readers that if one uses the charm without there being a thorn involved, something sharp, in this case the front tooth of the conjurer, will fall out!

CHARM 2 – “I SAVE MYSELF FROM THIS DISEASE OF THE URINE”

Ar galar fúail
Dum·esurc-sa din [MS dian] galar fúail-se
dun·esairc éu ét
dun·esarcat eúin énlaiti admai ibdach.
Fo-certar inso do grés i maigin hi tabair th’úal.
PreCHNYTϕCAH⊙MNYBVC KNAATYONIBVS Finit.

*Against a disease of urine
I save myself from this disease of the urine,
a cattle-goad saves us,
skillful bird-flocks of witches save us.*²²

This is always put in the place in which you make your urine.

In contrast to the other St. Gall Incantations, the second charm, non-Christian in its references, has a clear title, realized by a nominal group, and introduced by a preposition ‘ar’ – against: “Ar galar fúail” “against disease of urine”.²³ In general, the titles of charms serve two distinct purposes: firstly, they indicate the beginning of the text and secondly, they state what the charm is for. The St. Gall manuscript only contains four charms, but in bigger collections the titles, especially if written as marginal notes, serve as a visual help in locating

the charm (Alonso-Almeida 2008: 22; Olsan 2004: 59–62). The *desideratum* of the charm is stated already in the first line where the charmer speaks the conjuration: “I save myself from this disease of the urine”. Perhaps due to the shortness of the charm, there is quite a lot of repetition found in the lines – for example, all of the lines begin with the same verb, ‘to save’. The principle at work behind this feature might be the notion that repeating an idea or a word enhances its efficacy (Roper 2003a: 20, Skemer 2006: 92). Indeed, Roper declares how “[i]n fact, repetition, whether of sounds, words, or syntactic units is perhaps the key characteristic of verbal charms” (2003a: 20).

It is questionable whether the next line of the manuscript belongs to the charm against urinary disease or whether it is a charm on its own.²⁴ It would seem, however, that it should be read as a part of the charm.²⁵ The line is a mixture of Greek and Latin, the sacred languages of the Christian tradition. It reads:

“PreCHNYTϕCAHοMNYBVC: ~KNAATYONIBVS: ~Finit:~” (Presinitphsan omnybus knaatyonibus). This seems to be a Latin version of Matthew 28:19, incorporating one or two words or garbled Greek.²⁶ The passage in question runs as follows: “Euntes ergo docete omnes gentes baptizantes eos in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti” (Vulgate) and “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (King James Version).

As noted by John Carey, it is not “likely to be a coincidence that a line based on Matthew is written on the back of a portrait of Matthew; or that the allusion to ‘preaching to all nations’ is written on a piece of vellum which was part of the ninth-century Irish intellectual diaspora” (Carey 2000: 6). The use of classical languages and code-switching in medieval medical writing has been described by Päivi Pahta as follows: “Some Latin prefabricated utterances ... can... be seen as part of the special language of contemporary medical practice. Like in prayers, the function of the code is to enhance the power and efficacy of the words... A related group of switches contains instances in Latin, sometimes combined with transliterated Greek or Hebrew, in religious charms for medical purposes,” (Pahta 2004: 88 – quoted in Alonso-Almeida 2008: 28). It is noteworthy that the passage, which draws upon different languages, also already refers to different languages in itself, as the resurrected Jesus Christ instructed his disciples to spread his teachings to all nations of the world, thus by implication speaking all the different languages of the world.

The instruction for using the charm against the urinary disease reads as follows: “This is always put in the place in which you make your urine”. As is the case in the first charm, the verb *fo-ceird* poses a problem in interpretation. Is the charm supposed to be recited in the place where one makes one’s urine,

or is it the physical charm that is meant to be placed there? Was the charm intended to be recited while copying the signs to a separate parchment, or while placing the parchment?²⁷ It could be that the line with the quasi-Greek words, the quotation from the scripture, was supposed to be reproduced and then put in its place while reciting the actual charm. Whichever the case may be, Stanley Tambiah (1968: 190) has argued that “spells were uttered close to them [objects] so that they became charged; these objects in turn transferred their virtue to the final recipient of the magic”. This is probably what is happening with the second charm in the St. Gall manuscript, which apparently exorcises a *place*, in order to prevent or cure a urinary disease.

CHARM 3 – “THIS IS SUNG EVERY DAY ABOUT YOUR HEAD AGAINST HEADACHE”

Caput Christi
Oculus Isaiae
Frons nassium Nôe
Labia lingua Salomonis
Collum Temathei
Mens Beniamín
Pectus Pauli
[I] Unctus Iohannis
Fides Abrache
Sanctus, Sanctus, Sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth.

Cánir an-i-siu cach dia im du chenn ar chenn galar iarna gabáil do-
bir da sale it bais 7 da-bir im du da are 7 fort chulatha 7 caní du pater fo
thrí la se 7 do-bir cros dit saíliu for ochtar do chinn 7 do-gní a tóirand-sa
dano · U · fort chiunn.

The head of Christ
the eye of Isaiah
the bridge of the nose of Noah
the lips and tongue of Solomon
the neck of Timothy
the mind of Benjamin
the chest of Paul
the joint of John
the faith of Abraham
Holy, Holy, Holy

Lord God Sabaoth.

This is sung every day about your head against headache. After singing it you put two spittings [i.e. you spit twice] into your palm, and you put it around your two temples and on the back of your head, and you sing your Pater (Noster) three times thereat, and you put a cross of your saliva on the top of your head, and then you make this sign, U, on your head.

The third charm of the St. Gall Incantations, written in Latin with an Old Irish instruction, is thoroughly Christian in its enumeration and arranged following the traditional a capite ad calcem, “head-to-foot” order of remedies (Cameron 1993: 36).²⁸ Interestingly, the ailment to be cured with this charm that invokes the “the virtues inherent in different parts of the bodies of various patriarchs, prophets, and apostles, together with Christ himself” (Carey 2000: 3–4), only becomes clear from the instruction that follows the spell. This informs the reader that the spell is a charm against headache – perhaps that is the reason why it begins with the line “Caput Christi”, “Head of Christ”. The third charm is the only one of the present collection that has parallels elsewhere: the same charm is found in three other manuscripts, the time range of which extends over nine centuries.²⁹

The source of power in the text resides in its implicative weight. The characters named in the charm derive from the Christian textual tradition, and are all to be found in the Bible. What is more problematic is the background for their association with various physical attributes. Where is a text referring to the neck of Timothy? As Lea Olsan has noted, “biblical figures depicted in charms often have no scriptural sources (canonical or apocryphal), although a biblical narrative may supply a cue or kernel, sometimes a model” (Olsan 1992: 129). Olsan has also made use of John Foley’s concept of ‘traditional referentiality’, which also seems operative here, for the one line evokes “a context that is enormously larger and more echoic than the text or work itself” (Foley 1991:7, quoted in Olsan 1992: 118).³⁰ Thus, the conjurer hypostasizes his units of power as he utters the names of the sacred figures (see also Nelson 1990: 29). Simultaneously, he invokes the larger Christian tradition: The holy instances of the sacred characters in the Bible, the tradition of the church, the Christ himself are all behind the power of the third charm.³¹

This model of listing sacred characters or naming body parts in a litany is known from another genre, called the ‘lorica’ or ‘breastplate’.³² Loricæ are adopted from St. Paul’s expression concerning the spiritual armour (Ephesians, vi., 11–17 and I Thessalonians v., 8). According to Pierre-Yves Lambert (2010, 629), “*loricæ* are prayers characteristic of Medieval Celtic cultures that exhibit several features very close to ancient magical charms”. He lists three features

most salient in the *loricae* as: 1, an enumeration of the powers invoked; 2. an enumeration of the body-parts to be protected; and 3. an enumeration of the dangers, enemies or obstacles to be avoided or overcome (Lambert 2010, 629). Perhaps the most known example is the Lorica of St. Patrick already mentioned, where protection is asked against various things (ranging from black laws of heathenry and false laws of heretics to spells of women, smiths and druids), from various Christian agents. The idea is similar here: various different agents are invoked together with Christ himself.

The complaint being dealt with the charm is evidently a chronic headache, since the instruction of the charm informs us that it is to be performed *every day* – perhaps not only to recover from a headache, but in order to prevent it.³³ Here again there is ambiguity concerning the verb: *canaid* can mean that the charm was supposed to be sung, recited, chanted, or uttered. All that is certain is that the holy names from the Bible were meant to be enunciated out loud. Saliva is commonly employed in magic throughout the world, and examples of such usage could be cited at length. Here, the saliva is used in combination with a massage.³⁴ While putting the saliva around the temples and around the back of one's head, one is to sing or recite the Pater Noster or 'Our Father' three times. Three is a number that is used extensively in magical rituals; here, in the context of a Christian charm, it could also refer to the Trinity – Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.³⁵ Repetition is often seen as a means for enhancing efficacy (Skemer 2006: 92). On the other hand, from a purely functional point of view, it could be argued that the Pater Noster here serves primarily as a unit of time and implies the duration of application.³⁶ E.E. Evans-Pritchard noted that "Magic is seldom asked to produce a result by itself, but is associated with empirical action that does in fact produce it" (1937: 476–477), and one could easily imagine that a massage around the temples during which the Latin prayer is said three times would work in order to cure or prevent a headache.

At the end of the instruction one is told to make two signs: First, a sign of a cross on the top of one's head and then a more mysterious sign U on one's head. Since the charm as well the instruction so far have been thoroughly Christian, it seems more than likely that by making a cross on one's head the instruction is telling the patient to bless him or herself with the best known religious symbol of Christianity. Another possibility, which should be taken into account, is that the sign U is an abbreviation for the Latin numeral five, and thus the instruction would tell the patient to make, not one, but five signs of the cross on one's head.³⁷ This tradition of a circle of crosses seems to have been a widely acknowledged insular tradition; examples vary from drawn crosses in manuscripts to erected stone crosses and descriptions of rituals involving a circle of four crosses with the fifth one in the middle of the circle.³⁸ This type

of apotropaic protection would make sense in the context. Karen Louise Jolly (2006: 71) has noted that “[...] marking four sides with crosses is a popular method of sanctifying space for the purpose of providing health and protection”.

CHARM 4 – “I SMITE HIS SICKNESS, I CONQUER WOUNDS”

Tessurc marbbú,
ar díring,
ar gothsring,
ar att díchinn,
ar fuilib híairn,
ar ul loscas tene,
ar ub hithes cú.
Rop a chrú [MS: cuhrú] crinas,
teora cnoe crete,
teora féthi fichte.
Benim a galar,
ar fiuch fuili,
guil fuil.
Nirub att rée,
rop slán forsá·te
Ad·muinur in slánicid fo·racab Dián
Cecht lia muntir corop slán ani forsá·te.

Fo·certar inso do grés it bois láin di uisciu oc indlut 7 da·bir it béulu
7 im·bir in da mér ata nessam do lutain it bélaib cehtar áí á leth.

*I save the sick to death,
against *****,
against *****,
against the tumour of the headless (snake?)
against wounds of iron,
against ** which fire burns,
against ** which a dog eats.³⁹
May it be his blood which withers,
three nuts which decay,
three sinews which weave.
I smite his sickness,
I conquer wounds,
blood of lamentation.
May it not be an enduring tumour,*

*may that whereon it goes be whole.
I invoke the remedy which Dian Cécht
left with his household,
so that whereon it goes may be whole.*

*This is always placed in your palm full of water at washing, and you
put it in your mouth, and you move/put the two fingers that are nearest
to the little finger in your mouth, each of them apart/one at each side.*

The fourth and final charm in the collection from St. Gall, written in a different hand to the first three charms, comprises a lengthy conjuration followed by a ratification invoking the remedy of Dian Cécht, the healer for the Tuatha Dé Danann. This charm could be said to belong to a class of non-Christian charms known as *I-form charms*. According to Roper “this class of charms features opening lines with declarative sentences..., in which the charmer’s ‘I’ is explicitly present” (2005: 132). In this charm there are four different cases of the I-form, and it does indeed begin with one: “Tessurc marbbíu”, “I save the sick to death”. Henni Ilomäki, who has studied charms in which the reciter of the charm is present at a verbal level, argues that the speaker is what she calls “the ritual I”. Ilomäki argues further that as such, the verses of the charm “are drawn from a collective paradigm and may be adapted intuitively for use in acute situations. The material available to a reciter comes from a controlled repertoire and there is a good deal of uniformity in the form the expressions take,” (Ilomäki 2004: 55).

This could also be the case with our fourth charm. The I-forms of the charm find strikingly close parallels in other charms within the Irish tradition, where the sickness and wounds are being smitten.⁴⁰ The fourth charm also includes a list of injuries towards which it is directed. In this list we find, what Carey has translated as “(from) the tumour of the headless snake, (from) wounds of iron, (from) a beard which the fire burns, (from) an ‘ub’ which a hound eats”. There are multiple places where the translation is not clear, but it is still, however, possible to find parallels in other Old Irish charms, where a snake, a hound and a fire are all conjured against.⁴¹

It is possible to see the line invoking Dian Cécht’s remedy as a conclusion or a ratification to the charm. It can also be, simultaneously, a *historiola*. A *historiola* does not need to refer to Christian tradition, as was the case in the first charm, but can also allude to non-Christian beliefs. As was noted about the first charm, “the *historiola* not only changes a particular element of the environment, it transforms the entire environment into a mythic situation” (Frankfurter 1995: 467). According to Frankfurter, “the use of indigenous names and motifs simply indicates their continuing availability and authority,” (1995:

476) and "... it is this 'traditional' factor, the historiola's recognizability, which establishes the historiola's performative value and power," (1995: 473). Dian Cécht was the healer of the already mentioned divine race, the Tuatha Dé Danann. He killed his own son Miach, also a healer, out of professional envy. Healing herbs grew from his grave and they were organised by Dian Cécht's daughter. Dian Cécht, however, mixed the herbs and hence it was said that no human can know the healing qualities of all herbs without the assistance of the Holy Spirit.⁴² Is there perhaps a reference to this story here? Another detail worth pointing out here is the fact, as John Carey has noted, that *slániccid* can mean not just 'remedy', but also 'saviour', *saluator* as well as *salua*. He has further wondered whether the *slániccid* here is the curative herb, or Miach, or possibly both? Also, is Miach, "the young healer whose death brings wellbeing to mankind, a 'saviour' implicitly homologized with Christ?" (Carey 2000: 4).

In the instruction for the fourth charm one faces the familiar problem with the verb: Does the instruction tell one to put the charm, written on something, in one's palm full of water at washing, or is one supposed to recite the charm over the palm, or perhaps both?⁴³ What is interesting about the last instruction is that it is written by a different hand to that which wrote the charm itself. John Carey has pointed out that this clearly shows "collaboration and shared knowledge" – one scribe knew the charm, whereas the other one knew the tradition behind the ritual performance, "this is *always* put in your palm full of water at washing" (Carey 2000, 6). In the words of Marcel Mauss: "Magical ideas are a category of collective thought" (Mauss 1902: 3).

THE WHOLE IS GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS PARTS – MANUSCRIPT AS A MAGICAL AMULET?

Having studied the two different dimensions of the manuscript, the words of the charms *per se* and the ritual performance implied in them, it will be suitable to touch on a third dimension in the manuscript which requires that the words and the rituals are considered *in situ* and the manuscript is studied as a physical object. The idea that the manuscript from St. Gall served the purpose of a textual amulet was first suggested by John Carey. Carey writes: "Either the entire Gospel-book travelled to the Continent, or the leaf only. In either case, the charms could have been written on the leaf either before or after its removal from the book. Any of these scenarios has interesting implications: for it must have been the case either that the a book (or a page) containing invocations of pagan deities formed a part of the baggage of an Irish ecclesiastic travelling

abroad, or that one or more Irish-speakers residing abroad added the invocations at some point after the page's arrival," (Carey 2000: 5).

According to Don. C. Skemer, the author of a thorough study on textual amulets in the Middle Ages, the church, through its literate clergy, played a central role in the transmission of textual amulets and related ritual practices from late antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. The production of amulets containing Christian and pre-Christian traditions began from the areas which today consist of Italy, Spain and Southern France, gradually moving to predominantly Celtic and Germanic regions (Skemer 2006: 40). Skemer argues that blank space in margins and on final leaves of monastic manuscripts offered "a convenient place for monastic dabblers in magic" to write down brief texts that could serve as future exemplars for verbal charms and textual amulets (2006: 77).⁴⁴ According to Skemer, "the selection of writing materials was probably a matter of convenience not affecting efficacy". In his opinion, the clerical producers of textual amulets would have preferred parchment slips or blank pages cut out of sacred books, since this would have enhanced the efficacy of the written word. He writes that these products would have enjoyed "the status of sacralized objects, perhaps needing no additional ecclesiastical blessing" (2006: 128–129). Understandably, "the need for writing material could also lead to abuse. Monastic manuscripts were sometimes mutilated for small blank pieces of parchment" (Skemer 2006: 129).

We do not know whether the charms were written down as an aide-mémoire for personal or communal reference for future verbal use, or whether the charms were turned into a textual amulet by being written down on a piece of parchment with an image of a saint on the other side. It is also possible that the manuscript from St. Gall was written to serve as an exemplar for the creation of other amulets. (Skemer 2006: 83; 124).⁴⁵ It is clear from studies done on textual amulets that they were not just worn physically without ever being read, seen, or otherwise used. According to Skemer, especially in "the late Middle Ages, textual amulets could also be read, performed, displayed, visualized, and used interactively," (2006: 127). He also states that sometimes "the composite texts might look like folk compilations thrown together with little planning. But amulet producers who knew the efficacy of each textual element could assemble disparate elements to create multipurpose self-help devices" (Skemer 2006: 124). According to Skemer, "the textual amulets were the successful union of content, form, and function" (Skemer 2006: 126).

Where did the clergy get the content for their amulets, the charms they were writing down? In Skemer's opinion, they would not only copy charms from exemplars, but "also draw on personal memory (however imperfect) in the form of a mental notebook of apotropaic texts, which might have been read in written

sources, learned by rote, or heard from clerics, family, and friends” (Skemer 2006: 83). These charms were then given physical permanence in the form of writing, a means which functioned to ‘lock in’ the power of the uttered words for ongoing effect (Frankfurter 1995: 463– 464 and Skemer 2006: 133).⁴⁶ Lea Olsan has however, very aptly, pointed out that these kinds of “uses of writing in connection with charms do not signify that charms should be understood as if generated primarily as written texts. Rather, writing as a technology was very early adapted to the rituals and tradition of curative magic” (Olsan 1992: 123).

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

“This has been a paper”, as John Miles Foley has put it, “about *word-power*, that is, about how words engage contexts and mediate communication”. It has also been a paper, again quoting Foley, “about the enabling event – *performance* – and the enabling referent – *tradition* – that give meaning to word-power,” (Foley 1992: 278). It has thus been possible to observe, not only the logic and mechanism of magical performance in the early medieval period, but also the enabling tradition of these rites. Attention was paid to the *materia medica*, as well as to the manuscript as a physical object. Word-power was studied and while there was no space here to go over each of our four charms in very great detail, this preliminary study of their structural elements has shown that all four charms under study share certain features such as traditional, formulaic language, and that they possess analogues with the wider charming tradition. It was also noticeable how traditional, native healing and Christian faith merge with one another in the St. Gall Incantations.

It is possible that the St. Gall Incantations were copied from earlier manuscripts without any expectation that they would be performed. It is also possible that the St. Gall manuscript would have served as a textual amulet or as an exemplar for future amulets. It is equally possible that the charms were recorded to make them accessible for use, “with the explicit intention that they might be put into practice” (Olsan 1999: 407). This practice offers the reader a planned performance – a combination of words and rituals. From the linguistic aspect, future investigations on the Irish charms could include the role of contextual factors in the structure of language and whether the genre itself to which a text belongs, in this case charms, potentially dictates a variety of grammatical choices. Another interesting line of inquiry would be the possibility of a typology in Old Irish charms – whether there is such a thing as charm-types within the Irish tradition and whether these types are constricted within the linguistic and cultural borders of this tradition. Finally, it would be appropri-

ate to conclude by quoting the French sociologist Marcel Mauss, who stated in 1902, while writing on his general theory on magic, that “We shall pass from observing the mechanism of the rite to the study of the milieu of these rites, since it is only in the milieu, where magical rites occur, that we can find the *raison d’être* of those practices performed by individual magicians”.⁴⁷

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The article forms a part of a work in progress; therefore all the remarks presented remain tentative rather than conclusive. The topic will be discussed more fully in my forthcoming dissertation concerning charms and their ritual performance in early medieval Ireland in general and the St. Gall Incantations in particular. It is to be hoped that the article and especially the charms published as a part of it, will be beneficial, not only for scholars in Celtic studies, but for a larger, interdisciplinary, academic audience.

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NOTES

¹ See also Olsan 1999: 401–402: The efficacy of a charm “depends on formulaic language and the rightness (or felicitousness) of the performance situation”.

² See also Olsan 1992: 123: “Furthermore, charms, in fact, live only in performance. Whether the performance is written or oral, it is conceived as an efficacious action and often operates in combination with physical rituals involving face-to-face human interactions characteristic of oral societies.”

- ³ See Tambiah 1968: 175; 184.
- ⁴ The leaf has been digitized, and the excellent reproduction of the manuscript can be found in <http://www.e-codices.unifr.ch/>, an e-codices service provided by the Virtual Manuscript Library of Switzerland.
- ⁵ E.A. Lowe (1956: 42 §988) and Ferdinand Keller (1860: 302–303) have suggested that the manuscript contains the writing of two scribes, while Ernst Windisch (1890: 90–91) as well as Whitley Stokes and John Strachan (1903: xxvii) have argued for the participation of three individual scribes.
- ⁶ J.K. Zeuss (1871: 949–950) wrote that the manuscript originated in the 8th century, Lowe and Carey both argue for a ninth century origin, while Stokes and Strachan were of the opinion that it could be either. J.H. Todd (in Reeves and Keller 1860: 303) writes: “... they [the charms] are evidently very ancient, probably as old as the tenth century”.
- ⁷ For previous editions of all of the charms (both transcriptions and translations), see the references in the ‘Introduction’.
- ⁸ DIL (*Dictionary of the Irish Language based mainly on Old and Middle Irish materials*) gives the following: thorn; pin; brooch; leaf-; shaped; brooch; brooch; peg; spike; nail; pointed; implement; nail; Crucifixion. Jacqueline Borsje has pointed out that the use of thorns in destructive supernatural arts makes one aware of the possibility that the spells “may not only have been used against ‘thorns’ immediately harming body parts but also against thorns used in such destructive supernatural rituals, performed from a distance.” Borsje 2013a, 19.
- ⁹ As Roper has pointed out: “This is itself reminiscent of our contemporary health service with its bipartite mode of operation: first diagnosis, then referral to treatment” (Roper 1998: 67).
- ¹⁰ See for example Frankfurter 1995.
- ¹¹ According to Roper historiolas can sometimes be less than a sentence in length. He writes: “Sometimes the historiola is so short that it is debatable whether the charm is a narrative one, or a non-narrative one with a bare narrative allusion sufficient enough to allow the presentation of an analogy...” (Roper 2003a: 23). The historiola of the charm in the St. Gall manuscript brings to mind two other types of charm, **Neque doluit neque tumuit** and **Tres boni fratres**. The key comparison in the first type, **Neque doluit neque tumuit**, is between the incorrupt wounds of Christ (made by nails and thorns), and the wounds of the patient at hand. In the **Tres boni fratres**, the historiola describes how Jesus instructs three good brethren to heal wounds by applying oil to them while reciting a charm. The similarity in all these charms is the historiola mentioning Jesus and the wounds and the attempt to apply the principle of that narrative to heal the patient. See Roper 2004: 133; and 2005: 113–15; 127–130. A modern version from the Irish tradition with the same theme: “The briar that spreads, the thorn that grows, the sharp spike that pierced the brow of Christ, give you power to draw this thorn from the flesh, or let it perish inside; in the name of the Trinity. Amen” (Wilde 1919: 11).
- ¹² Haralampos Passalis has studied the same borderline of narrative text and performative present. He writes: “The blurring of the borderline between the narrative text

and the performative present becomes even more conspicuous in cases where technical instructions proposed by the mythic sacred person come along with an embedded charm, as well as in cases where the embedded charm constitutes the very kernel of the proposed healing. This embedded charm appearing in the form of a simile or command or even in the form of another narrative, depending on the narrative type, not only enables and graphically enhances both the bi-directional relationship and the consonance of the performative past with the actual present, but also promotes the merging of the narrative and the performative/actual healer. Although the charm is delivered or imparted by the mythic narrative healer and is rooted in the mythic past, it is also embedded both organically and functionally in the performative present, but also in reverse order, that is, although it is performed in the present, it is embedded in the narrative mythic past. At the same time it not only enables the mythic sacred person to appear in the present time of the performative act via the correlative association with the healer, but it also allows the healer to enter the mythic narrative structure thus enhancing the validity and prestige of the healing process.” (Passalis 2011a: 45–46).

¹³ For other charms against gore (*crú*) see Stowe Missal 2 (*nip crú cruach*; Stokes & Strachan 1903, 249, 250); and Leabar Breacc *éle* (*nip crú*). See also Borsje 2013c: 200.

¹⁴ Several examples of the connection between smiths and magic can be found in Mircea Eliade’s *The Forge and the Crucible* (1979, originally published in French as *Forgerons et alchimistes* in 1956).

¹⁵ See for example Carey 2000: 5. For more on Goibniu and the Tuatha Dé Danann, see Koch, *Celtic Culture. A Historical Encyclopedia*, 830; 1693–1696 and Mac Cana 1983: 34–35; 54–71.

¹⁶ See also Alonso-Almeida (2008: 24): “The function of the P[reparation] stage can be any of the following three: (i) to show how to perform a ritualistic action, (ii) to describe how a remedy must be elaborated, or (iii) to give the ingredients needed to produce a remedy”. Also: “The writer shows his expertise in giving directions to achieve a ritualistic remedy to cure a disease; by doing so, he positions himself in a higher rank with respect to reader, who must follow the steps to succeed in the preparation,” (Alonso-Almeida 2008: 33).

¹⁷ See also Borsje 2014, in print.

¹⁸ In the example found in the Dictionary of the Irish Language, the preposition used with the verb *fo-ceird* in the context of casting a spell is ‘fo’ – casting a spell *over* something (e.g. when a woman called Garbdalb casts a spell over men in a poem about a place called Duma Selga, it is frased as *rolá bricht forru*, “cast a spell over them” [see Gwynn 1906, *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, vol. 3, p. 388]). So, perhaps here, where the preposition is ‘i’, usually, when used with dative, denoting place *where*, or used with accusative, denoting *whither*, the purpose is actually to place the charm in(to) butter.

¹⁹ See also M. Ó Sé, ‘Old Irish Buttermaking’.

²⁰ “Against flying poison and every poisonous swelling: on a Friday churn butter that has been milked from a cow of one colour or a hind, and do not let it be mixed with water; sing a litany over it nine times, and an Our Father nine times, and this incantation nine times,” (Pettit 2001, II: 22–3, n. 29).

- ²¹ Another interesting parallel to the idea of using unadulterated ingredients comes from the later Irish tradition (15th–16th century) from a ‘Tres boni fatres’-charm, similarly against a thorn. In it the instruction reads: ‘Put that into oil and wool of a wether which has not before been shorn, and place it about the wound, and every wound against which it is put will become free from soreness except peritoneum or chest’ (Best 1952: 30). The charm in the St. Gall collection uses butter that has not been washed, whereas the other charm uses wool which has not been shorn before.
- ²² David Stifter has presented a very different interpretation of the reading of the charm. He emends the lines as follows: “I save myself from this disease of the urine/ how *éu* saves *ét*/ how birds save flocks of birds/ Skillfull spell-worker!” Stifter presented his translation in a paper “New Readings in the Stowe Missal”, given in Los Angeles.
- ²³ It could be pointed out that the charm is not the only Early Irish spell against a urinary disease. Another charm with the same title, although with a different orthography (*argalar fuel*) is contained in the Stowe Missal, a manuscript written around the year 800. The contents of the two charms, however, bear no resemblance to each other.
- ²⁴ David Stifter, for example, comments on *five* charms (A–E) in the St. Gall manuscript. Stifter, paper ‘New Readings in the Stowe Missal’, given in Los Angeles.
- ²⁵ The first three charms, written by the same hand, all begin with a decorated capital letter, thus clearly showing the beginning of the charm. This line does not have a decorated capital letter, and arguably therefore it should be read as a part of the second charm.
- ²⁶ This was first suggested by J. K. Zeuss, who translated this passage into Latin in his *Grammatica Celtica* as “praedicient omnibus nationibus” (Zeuss 1856: 950). This was later accepted also by Stokes and Strachan in their treatment of the charms (Stokes and Strachan 1905, 248). Interestingly, this garbled version of the Greek verb is completely different from what one finds in the Greek original: $\mu \alpha \theta \eta \tau \epsilon \upsilon \sigma \alpha \tau \epsilon$. However, even if the Greek text is sketchy and inaccurate, the scribe evidently knew more than just the mere alphabet: the first bit of the text contains a correct third plural aorist ending *-san* (Carey 2000: 5–6).
- ²⁷ The already mentioned charm in the Stowe Missal, also against urinary disease, reads in one of its lines: “put your urine in a place”. What exactly is the place referred to here is arguable. Stifter has suggested ‘latrine’, and it would definitely suit the context. The difference in the charms is that the one in the manuscript from St. Gall apparently exorcises a *place*, in order to prevent or cure a urinary disease.
- ²⁸ Cameron 1993: 36. See also Hughes (1970: 52), according to whom the British and Irish doctors, as well as churchmen, must have been aware of this method of arranging the body parts.
- ²⁹ The charm is also present in MSS Harley 2965 and Additional 30512 from the British Library, London as well as in MS 1336 from Trinity College, Dublin. The time range for all these manuscripts reaches over nine centuries: MSs Harley 2965, also called as ‘The Book of Nunnaminster’ is dated to the 8th or the 9th century, Trinity MS 1336 to the 15th and 16th centuries, and the Additional 30512 to the 16th century, with this specific passage with the charm having been added in the 17th century. The comparison of the manuscripts provides help in translating the line “unctus Johannis”. As it is presented in the manuscript from St. Gall, the translation should be ‘oil

of John'. This would not be completely fanciful, since not all the lines refer to body parts, for example the completing "fides Abrache" (the faith of Abraham). *Unctum*, oil, is, however, originally a neuter noun, whereas the manuscript presents it as a masculine, *unctus*. There is another possibility for the translation: In the 8th century Book of Nunnaminster the line reads as "iunctus Iohannis". 'iunctus' means 'joint' and would semantically suit the text from St. Gall. It is also easy to see, how a scribe would miss the letter 'i' while copying the charm, since the preceding word 'Pauli' ends with it and the next two letters consist entirely of minims; *Pauli iunctus* could thus be thought of as PAUL | | | | CTUS. Stokes & Strachan (1903: 248) in fact make this emendation; as does Mees (2009: 174). See also Lambert 2010: 629–648 in general for listing body parts in *loricae* and litanies, as well as Hughes 1970: 48–61 for some very useful examples. For the Book of Nunnaminster, see *An ancient manuscript of the eight or ninth century: formerly belonging to St. Mary's Abbey, or Nunnaminster, Winchester*. Ed. by Walter de Gray Birch, 1889.

³⁰ See also Passalis 2012.

³¹ Pierre Bourdieu has stated "authority comes to language from outside" and it is through the involvement or participation in the "authority of the institution" that invests words with their 'performative' power (Bourdieu 1994: 109, quoted in Kapaló 2011: 94).

³² For more about loricas, see for example Lambert 2010: 629–648; Herren 1987; and Gougaud 1911–12.

³³ Cf. Olsan 2003: 355 and 358. According to Olsan (2003:358), in the four collections she studied from the late Medieval period, most of the problems for which charms were prescribed, were chronically remitting or episodic conditions "whose recurrence a sufferer would want to take steps to prevent".

³⁴ Borsje has argued that at least two people are involved in the healing ritual: the singer of the *Caput Christi*-text and the patient who is addressed with 'you' and who performs the rest of the ritual (Borsje 2014, in print). The involvement of two people cannot obviously be ruled out, but the charm works just as well with only one person: the person who first sings the text and then executes the rest of the ritual. It is common for the charms to address the reader in the 2nd singular form, especially when instructing on the preparation and application of the charm. See also Alonso-Almeida (2008: 28): "The [...] element strongly associated with this stage [application] relates to the use of personal pronouns. These are *thu* in subject, thematic position, and *it/hym* in object, rheme position."

³⁵ See for example Kieckhefer 1989: 70.

³⁶ About time-keeping and ancient charms, see for example Cameron 1993: 38–39. See also Alonso-Almeida 2008: 22.

³⁷ See Gaidoz 1890: 225–227 and Sims-Williams 1990: 301.

³⁸ See, for example, Sims-Williams 1990:293; McEntire 2002: 397 and Jolly 2006: 71.

³⁹ Many of the words present here are only attested in this composition, and therefore the meaning of some of the lines remains unknown.

⁴⁰ Where the charm in the St. Gall manuscript says “Benaim a galar, ar-fiuoh fuili” “I smite his sickness, I conquer wounds”, the Old Irish spell in Leabhar Breac, a medieval Irish manuscript containing mainly religious material (RIA MS 23 P 16 or 1230), says “benaim galar, benaim crecht”, “I smite sickness, I smite wounding”.

⁴¹ Again the parallel comes from Leabhar Breac, where the charm goes: “its poison in a snake, its rabies in a hound, its flame in bronze” (“a neim hi naithir, a chontan hi coin, a daig hi n-umae”). Both charms also clearly invoke non-Christian agents, in the St. Gall charm the line goes as follows: “Ad-muinur in slánicid fo-r-acab Dian Ceeth lia muntir”, “I invoke the remedy which Dian Ceeth left with his household”. In LB the line goes: “Ad-muiniur teora ingena Flithais”, “I invoke the three daughter of Flidais”. The two charms have clearly some mutual resemblance, both in varied repetition, as well as structural repetition, which includes the repetition of whole line-groups (See Roper 2003a: 20). This structural repetition can also be observed in two other Irish spells, the first one found in the Stowe Missal, where the line goes “Admuiniur epscop nibar iccas”, “I invoke the bishop Ibar who heals” (Stokes and Strachan 1903: 250). The second set of invocations is from a text known as Fer Fio’s Cry, in which one finds three separate invocations to non-Christian agents, again using the verb form ad-muiniur: “I invoke the seven daughters of the sea” (“Admuiniur secht n-ingena trethan”), “I invoke my silver warrior” (“Admuiniur m’argetnġa”) and finally, “I invoke Senach of seven ages” (“Admuiniur Senach secht aimserach”), (Carey 1998: 136–138). All these charms seem to belong to the same formula family and it could be postulated that the lines were drawn from a collective paradigm. Lea Olsan has written of how “the structure of charms supported recollection in memory” (2004: 60).

⁴² For more about Dian Ceht, see Koch 2006: 586 and Mac Cana 1983: 23; 32; 58; 61.

⁴³ Here, as elsewhere in the collection, it is possible to find parallels from other charms. An instruction in the collection of medieval Irish charms by Carney & Carney, published in 1960 (p. 148), refer to saying a charm with a sip of water in one’s mouth.

⁴⁴ According to Skemer, “clerically produced textual amulets could take many physical forms in the early Middle Ages”. Certain sacred books in codex format were used amuletically to protect and cure. He also notes how the “boundaries between textual amulets, sacred books, and holy relics could be quite fluid, and at times the three could be one and the same thing” (Skemer 2006: 77). Possibly the most famous Irish example of this is the *Cathach* of St. Columcille of Iona (also called the Psalter of Columba), generally translated as ‘the battler’. The relic was used to bring spring rains and bountiful harvest as well as to secure victories in battles. For more on the *Cathach*, see Koch 2006: 351–352. Similarly, see the Book of Durrow used as a healing charm in Conell Mageoghahan, *The Annals of Clonmacnoise*, ed. Denis Murphy (1896: 96).

⁴⁵ According to Skemer it is possible that the incantations were used in ritual practices such as inscribing apotropaic formulas on digestible substances, and “washing sacred text in water in order to produce a liquid water therapy” (Skemer 2006: 2), cf. the instruction of the fourth charm in the manuscript from St. Gall.

⁴⁶ Also opposite views exist; for example Katrin Rupp, having studied the Old English charms, has argued that the process of writing down the charm, bringing it to parchment, weakens its protective or healing power. She claims that charms are most ef-

fective when performed and lose some of their original spell when transformed from “spoken words to voiceless signs” (Rupp 2008: 256–257).

⁴⁷ Mauss 1902 (2009): 12.

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