https://doi.org/10.7592/Incantatio2018_7_Hindley

TEXT OVER TIME: THE WRITTEN WORD IN ENGLISH CHARMS BEFORE 1350

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After the Norman Conquest, many of the charms that had circulated in Anglo-Saxon England disappeared from the written record, while new charming techniques emerged. Among the most striking changes was a sudden increase in the proportion of charms using written words. This paper explores this post-Conquest change in the use of charms by examining examples preserved in manuscripts written or owned in England from the Anglo-Saxon period to 1350. It begins by arguing that in Anglo-Saxon England different types of words were used to treat different kinds of illness or injury. Turning to the post-Conquest period, it identifies not only an increase in the proportionate use of written charms, but also emerging interest in the idea of textuality.

Keywords: Anglo-Saxon, *caracteres*, post-Conquest, Sloane MS 475, textuality, written charms.

T. M. Smallwood, writing in 2004, presented the medieval history of English charms as one of rupture. In an article drawing attention to the disappearance of English-language charms after the Norman Conquest, he notes as well the disappearance of charms in other languages, stating that:

> [a]fter the mid-twelfth century there is, for the most part, a hiatus in the surviving record of charms in England. For a period of nearly a hundred and fifty years we have no more than a scattering of charm-copies in Latin and very few in Anglo-Norman French (Smallwood 2004: 13).

From the twelfth century until the second half of the fourteenth century, English-language charms are indeed largely absent from the surviving record. However, closer examination of the manuscript record does not bear out this claim for other languages. Where Smallwood suggests a hiatus in the copying of charms, I have found a rich and flourishing tradition. This tradition displays a rupture of another kind: after the Norman Conquest the types of charm circulating in England changed rapidly and dramatically, in ways that persisted at least until the end of the medieval period. Many of the charms that had circulated in Anglo-Saxon England disappeared from the written record

entirely. French, the new language of the nobility in England, soon appeared as a language for charming.[1] At the same time, novel techniques for charming emerged. Among the most striking changes, and the one I focus primarily on here, is a sudden increase in the proportion of surviving charms that instruct the practitioner to make use of powerful written words. This may indicate a shift in the way that text was perceived in medieval England.

In making this argument, I draw on my own database of more than five hundred charms copied in manuscripts written or owned in England from the Anglo-Saxon period to the mid-fourteenth century. For the purpose of this study I define charms as spoken or written words, in any language, that were expected to have an effect on the physical world. Although my database includes charms to stop babies from crying, to make pots break themselves, and to ensure permanent happiness, the vast majority either promise protection from harm or aim to restore a sick person to health.[2]

All of the charms I have recorded are in some sense written charms, in that they have survived to the present day in written form, and may not therefore be representative of actual charm practices. As the spoken performance of a charm is a temporary and transient phenomenon, such written instructions are the only evidence of spoken charms that can possibly survive. However, just as a cake recipe is not a cake, a written instruction for using a charm is not a charm. The terms "written charm" and "efficacious text" as I use them here refer therefore not to written charm instructions, but to charms whose words must be written down in order for the charm to perform its function. This is in contrast to spoken charms in which the words must be said or sung.[3]

The text of written charms is used performatively, as a necessary component of a ritual or as a necessary ingredient in a medicine. Often the writing does not need to be read either by the patient or by the practitioner, but transmits its power through ink, form, materiality, or physical contact. Spoken charms may use individual words or more complex formulae, including the performance of the full Christian mass. In these liturgical examples the importance of the mass as an expression of the Church's power cannot be overlooked: the spoken words of the mass differ from spoken words of other kinds because of their religious significance, and their power cannot be separated from the power of the Church. It is not uncommon for charms to combine several kinds of words, for example by using both spoken and written words, or by requiring the words of the mass to be spoken along with words of other kinds.

THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD

To demonstrate the change in charming practices between the Anglo-Saxon and post-Conquest periods, I begin in the Anglo-Saxon period. By my count, the surviving manuscripts owned in England before 1100 record one hundred and ninety-three verbal charms used for protection or to treat a wide range of medical conditions.[4] The three major medical compilations which survive in Old English - *Bald's Leechbook*, *Leechbook III*, and *Lacnunga* - all include both spoken and written charms.[5] Charms also appear in Latin medical books, in books of prayers or computus, or written into margins and onto flyleaves. Close analysis of these Anglo-Saxon verbal charms reveals that words of different kinds influenced subtly different categories of disease.

Remedies which rely on the spoken words of the mass were used primarily for diseases with supernatural causes. Twenty-four examples survive in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.[6] Five of these explicitly claim to treat diseases associated with elves ("ælfe"), representing half of all the verbal 'treatments for such conditions in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts.[7] Six say that they will protect their users from the temptations of the devil or from diseases caused by fiends ("feondas") and devils ("deoflu").[8] Five treat some form of insanity, which could be attributed in Anglo-Saxon England to the actions of demons or elves.[9] Several of the remedies which treat insanity or illnesses caused by elves or demons treat more than one of those conditions, further reinforcing the possibility that these diseases were seen as having related causes. While there are remedies which use the words of the mass to treat diseases which were not obviously seen as supernaturally-caused, such as "lencten adle" or "þeor," the primary use of liturgical words in Anglo-Saxon charming seems to have been to counteract the malicious actions of supernatural beings.[10] This association did not survive into the post-Conquest period. Only thirteen of the three hundred and sixty-nine charms I have collected from the period between 1100 and 1350 use the words of the full mass, and only one of these makes reference to supernatural illness.[11]

In the Anglo-Saxon period non-liturgical spoken words were, unlike their liturgical counterparts, used only rarely against elves, demons, or mental illness: just eight out of the one hundred and twenty-seven that survive were so directed.[12] As these charms frequently make use of Christian words, including prayers, litanies, the Creed, and excerpts from hymns, the strong association between remedies using the mass and supernatural diseases in Anglo-Saxon England seems to stem neither from their words alone nor from their general Christian context, but from the specific ritual of the mass. Although they were not often directed against supernatural diseases, charms using non-liturgical spoken words could be used for a wide range of purposes, from ensuring victory

to treating headaches, and from treating lung disease in cattle to providing protection during travel.[13]

Although written words treated many conditions, they had narrower applications in Anglo-Saxon England than did spoken remedies. Among the one hundred and ninety-three verbal charms I am aware of in manuscripts from before 1100, forty-two - or just over twenty percent - specifically require the use of written text.[14] About a quarter of these also use spoken words. Excluding the written charms found in Sloane MS 475, which I discuss in more detail below, Anglo-Saxon written charms most commonly require practitioners to write out Biblical phrases or narratives, or the names of Christian figures. Even where practitioners are instructed to write out unknown words, Anglo-Saxon charms rarely make use of letters not recognisable from the Greek, Latin, or, rarely, the runic alphabet. As I discuss below, this is in contrast to post-Conquest usage.

The most common use for written charms, the treatment of fever, accounts for more than twenty percent of the surviving examples.[15] Written charms could also be used, although more rarely, for protection against elves and demons.[16]However, the patterns of use differ depending on the type of manuscript in which the charms survive. In the three main Old English medical codices – *Lacnunga*, *Bald's Leechbook*, and *Leechbook III* – written words are overwhelmingly used to treat supernatural conditions or fevers.[17] A wider application of written texts can be found in books that show continental influence or that are not primarily medical: for example, manuscripts of sermons, of prayers, and of tables for calculating astronomical events and moveable feasts.[18] These non-medical books, in which the remedies have often been added to flyleaves or margins by their users, may represent a more extensive application of written charms among literate non-specialists than among medical practitioners themselves.

Although no evidence survives of Anglo-Saxon attitudes towards the use of text for medical purposes, the use of textual amulets for protection was not generally viewed with enthusiasm. Amulets containing some sort of writing are specifically mentioned in the *Egbert Penitential*, which condemns diviners and sorcerers who "hang devilish amulets or devilish characters or herbs or amber on themselves."[19] The penalty given is five years of penance for a cleric, and three for a layman. However, this passage appears to have been taken directly from the fifth paragraph of *Sermo 13* of Caesarius of Arles (469/70-542), and may therefore give more information about practices from Gaul in the fifth century, where *Sermo 13* was written, than about Britain in the eighth (Meaney 1992: 109). Furthermore, neither "devilish amulets" nor "devilish characters" seem likely to refer to the heavily Christian text used in the majority of the surviving recipes.

A letter of Alcuin, written after 793 but before his death in 804, condemns the practice of wearing Christian texts. In it, Alcuin complains to an English archbishop about:

> Ligaturas vero, quas plurimi homines illis in partibus habere solent et sancta quaeque in collo portare, non in corde desiderant: et cum illis Dei verbis sanctissimis vel reliquiis sanctorum vadunt ad inmunditias suas vel etiam uxoribus debitum solvunt: quod magis est peccatum quam premium, magisque maledicto quam benedictio (Dümmler 1895: no. 291).
>
> The amulets which many men in those parts are in the habit of wearing, wanting to carry sacred things around their necks, not in their heart: and with these most sacred words of God or the relics of the saints they go to their dirty acts and even do their duty by their wives: which is more a sin than a benefit, and more a curse than a blessing. (Translation mine)

In this account, Alcuin's primary concern about the use of textual amulets is the sin caused by disrespectfully exposing the sacred words to the degradations of daily life. This, he suggests, could have the opposite effect to the one intended, harming rather than protecting the user's soul.

One remedy from *Leechbook III* - the only written charm in that compilation - suggests that Anglo-Saxon practitioners may have had similar concerns about the use of text in medicine. This remedy is for "elf-hiccup," and is also said to be a powerful remedy against the temptations of the Devil.[20] The recipe first gives a text to be written out, which reads: "Scriptu*m* est rex r*egu*m *et* d*omin*u*s* dominantiu*m*. byrnice. beronice. lurlure iehe. aius. aius. aius. S*anctu*s. S*anctu*s. S*anctu*s. D*omin*u*s* d*eu*s Sabooth. am*en*. all*eluiah*." ["It is written, king of kings and lord of lords. Byrnice, Beronice, lurlure iehe aius, aius, aius. Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of hosts. Amen. Alleluiah"].[21] It then gives a sequence of prayers to be sung over the writing. The written text, like the prayers that accompany it, is clearly theological. "Byrnice" is a form of the name Veronica, referring to the woman who touched the edge of Christ's robe and was healed of bleeding.[22] "Iehe" may be a corrupt form of the name "Yahweh", while "aius" is a version of "agios," the Greek word for "sacred," and its triple repetition is drawn directly from the liturgy. This sequence – "agios, agios, agios, sanctus, sanctus, sanctus" – also appears quite commonly in later text-based remedies and in at least one other Anglo-Saxon example.[23]

In the final sentences of the recipe the author reveals some unease about the use of efficacious text. He instructs his reader to wet the writing in a drink made with holy water and various herbs, and use it to make the sign of the cross on each of the patient's limbs while saying "signum crucis Christi conserva te

in vitam eternam. Amen." ["May the sign of the cross of Christ preserve you until life eternal. Amen"].[24] The sign of the cross is used for medical purposes at least four other times in *Leechbook III*, including other instances in which each of the limbs is crossed.[25] Interestingly, however, the author comments: "Gif þe ne lyfte hat hine selfne oþþe swa *ge*subne swa he gesibbost hæbbe 7 senige swa he selost cunne" ["If you do not wish to do this, ask him to do it himself, or a close relative, and make the sign of the cross as best he can"].[26]

Although no other remedy in *Leechbook III* or in the other leechbooks suggests the possibility of reluctance on the part of the practitioner, this comment seems to have been prompted by the need to use text. It is clear that the use of written text was considered necessary in order for the remedy to be effective. The remedy gives no instructions for avoiding the use of text entirely: if the medical practitioner will not make crosses with the writing, the crosses must be made by someone else, even if they are made poorly. The prayer that must be said over the drink and the writing also refers explicitly to the fact that the remedy will function "per inpositionem huius scriptura" ["through the imposition of this writing"].[27] It is possible that this remedy records a moment of genuine concern about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of the use of text in Anglo-Saxon medicine, since it seems unlikely that the practitioner would ask the patient or the patient's relative to perform an action he knew to be truly unacceptable. The use of text in this remedy may well have been a matter of conscience. Evidently, the practice was not considered troubling enough to warrant absolute removal from the collection.

THE PERIOD FROM 1100 TO 1350

Any anxiety that Anglo-Saxon practitioners may have felt about using written words in medical charms seems to disappear immediately post-Conquest, as will become clear from the discussion of London, British Library, Sloane MS 475 below. For the period between 1100 and 1350 I have collected three hundred and sixty-nine charm-copies. Although the palaeographic dating of manuscripts is rarely precise, at least one hundred and eighty of these charm copies appear to have been written during the period of Smallwood's "hiatus" from 1150 to 1300. Many of these come from large collections of charms. For example, one section of London, British Library, Sloane MS 431, written in the late twelfth or early thirteenth century, contains thirty-seven separate charm-copies, intended to treat conditions ranging from snakebite to fever to rabies. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 86, which dates from the last quarter of the thirteenth century, includes a recipe collection stretching over seven folios in which almost

every remedy is a charm.[28] Charms were included in the main body of medical collections such as these, and were also copied onto blank flyleaves and into margins.[29] The practices of charming and recording charms therefore appear to have continued consistently throughout the medieval period, as far as it is possible to tell from the surviving evidence. However, the character of the charms being copied changed. Most notably, the proportion of written charms increased dramatically.[30] Furthermore, after the Norman Conquest, written charms increasingly made use of unknown words and letters, demonstrating interest not only in text as a method of transmitting power but also in the limits of textual communication.

In surviving manuscripts from before 1100, forty-two charms – just over twenty percent of the total – specifically require the use of written text, either alone or in combination with spoken words or masses.[31] In the period from 1100 to 1350, however, that percentage almost doubles.[32] Indeed, the shift towards written charms was probably still more dramatic and still more closely linked to the Norman Conquest than these figures suggest: London, British Library, Sloane MS 475, the pre-1100 manuscript with the highest number of written charms, was copied after the Conquest and shows continental influence.[33] This manuscript may therefore be an early representative of new charm traditions that produced the decisive shift towards the use of written, rather than spoken, charms.

As the earliest surviving example of the shift towards written charms, Sloane MS 475 will serve as a useful case study. It is a composite miscellany, written almost entirely in Latin.[34] It consists of two parts, written in several related hands (Beccaria 1956: 255). Part One, which begins imperfectly and runs from fol. 1 to fol. 124, dates from the first quarter of the twelfth century. It contains a medical treatise in five books, a treatise on weights and measures, texts on prognostication, and numerous medical recipes and charms. Scholars disagree as to whether this part of the manuscript was produced in England, with some arguing that the scribe may have written on the Continent even if the manuscript was owned in England.[35]

Part One of the manuscript shows considerable interest in text and writing systems. Several recipes have been written in cipher, using up to three forms of letter substitution in combination. In the first of these, the scribe replaces vowels with the consonant that follows them in the alphabet. The phrase "kn kllb dif," for example, should be read as "in illa die" ["on that day"].[36] The second letter substitution uses Greek letters in the place of their Roman counterparts, so that "Adkxρω te pxx*m* p*e*r d*eu*μ xkxx*m*" can be read as "Adiuro te ouu*m* p*e*r d*eu*m uuiu*m*" ["I adjure you, egg, by the living God"].[37] Finally, a third layer of substitution replaces vowels with different numbers of dots, so that "tfcta

c::ρNkc" reads "testa cornis" ["the skull of a crow"], while "ːnːμːcːːc" reads "inimicos" ["enemies"].[38] The majority of the charms in this portion of the manuscript are in Latin, although two use French - making them, to the best of my knowledge, the earliest examples of French charms to survive from England. Several more use unknown words or characters.

The second part of the manuscript, spanning folios 125 to 231, may be slightly earlier than Part One. It was copied by an English scribe in the last quarter of the eleventh century or the first quarter of the twelfth.[39] This section of the manuscript contains medical and prognostic texts including the Sphere of Pythagoras, a Latin translation of Galen's *Epistola de febribus*, a treatise on urines, and the *Somniale Danielis*. Its charms are either in Latin or in invented characters. Both sections of the manuscript are roughly written, with variations in the size of the hand and the ruling of the pages. The Latin of the manuscript is poor, with inconsistent spelling and word division (Liuzza 2010: 16). Most importantly for the study of written charms, more than half of the manuscript's charms require writing. This includes ten of the twelve charms in the section of the manuscript copied by an English scribe.

As well as demonstrating an increased emphasis on the use of written words in charming, Sloane MS 475 contains the earliest English examples of charms using non-alphabetic characters. These are particularly common in the second, English section of the manuscript. Their shapes follow the tradition of *charaktêres* or *caracteres*, symbols that seem to have developed among Graeco-Egyptian magicians in the second century A.D. as the ability to read and write hieroglyphs declined (Gordon 2014: 257-61). The Greek intellectual reception of hieroglyphs as divine symbols representing complete ideas led to the development of a method for creating hieroglyph-like characters for use in magical ritual (Ibid., 262). Richard Gordon even argues that "the pseudo-hieroglyphics that are so common in mortuary contexts (mummy-cases) indicate that by the Roman period it was often the idea of hieroglyphs rather than the text they communicated that was important" (Ibid., 260-61).

The interpretation that the idea of writing was more important than the text it communicated is equally valid when considering the pseudo-alphabetic charms of post-Conquest England. On fol. 137r-v of Sloane MS 475, for example, is a charm for protection. The text reads:

> Vt non timeus. aliqu*em* non inimicu*m* non iudice*m*. no*n* maleficium. non erberum non potione malu*m* non serpentem. non demonium non pestem.
>
> In order that you not fear anything, neither enemy nor judge nor wrongdoing nor witch nor harmful drink nor serpent nor demon nor pestilence.[40]

The charm itself consists of two lines of distinct shapes [Figure 1].

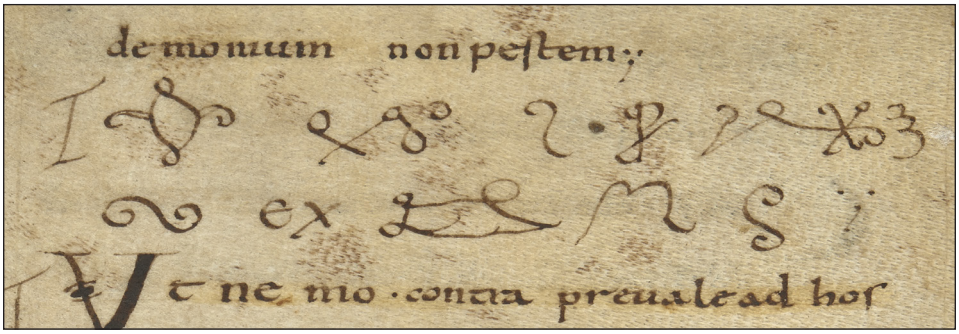

Figure 1: © British Library Board, London, British Library, Sloane MS 475, fol. 137v (detail).

Some of the characters in the lower line resemble letters from the Roman alphabet. Others resemble elaborated or conjoined versions of letters. Still others bear no similarity either to the Roman alphabet or to the alphabet of any other language. However, in their separation into individual units and in their linear organisation they mimic the appearance of an alphabet, albeit an illegible one which cannot be read aloud.

Sloane MS 475 is the earliest surviving example of charms of this type from England. The set of individual *caracteres* does not align with any recognisable alphabet, but still imitates the letter separation of an alphabetic or hieroglyphic writing system. The signs have no known phonetic value. They convey the idea of a communicative system, but are inherently unpronounceable and visibly differentiated from standard alphabets (Ibid., 266-7). As a result, they cannot be understood either by the patient or – if the two are different – by the practitioner.

I have identified two further types of incomprehensible text, both of which appear to have been introduced or elaborated after the Conquest. In the Anglo-Saxon period, as mentioned above, written charms occasionally made use of letters that were not part of the Roman alphabet. However, in all of the Anglo-Saxon examples the letters were taken from Greek or from the runic alphabet.[41]This technique, taking a string of recognisable letters from the Roman, runic, or Greek alphabets, is the earliest and simplest form of incomprehensible writing. While pre-Conquest examples might include up to ten Greek letters, post-Conquest examples can be significantly longer.[42] An early English example of a charm that uses this technique, recorded in the second half of the eleventh century, is an amulet to ensure favour during a meeting with a king or lord.It includes the sequence: "xx. h. d. e. o. e. o. o. e. e. e. laf. d. R. U. fa. ð. f. þ. Λ. x. Box. Nux ."[43]

In some cases, such strings of letters were used as mnemonic devices for familiar texts, as in the early twelfth-century scientific miscellany Durham,

Durham Cathedral Library, MS Hunter 100. Here, a charm to stop nosebleeds reads:

> **Ad restringnendu*m* sanguin*em* de uena nar*is* effluent*is*. I**n no*min*e. p. 7. f. 7. s. s. **S**ta sta stagnu*m* fluxus sanguinis sicut stetit iordan in q*uo* ioh*anne*s ih*esu*m xp*istu*m baptizauit. **K**yriel*eison* .iii. **P**at*er* n*oste*r. **E**cce cruce*m*. d. f. p. a. u. l. d. t. i. r. d. in no*min*e d*omi*ni.[44]
>
> To restrain blood flowing from the vein of the nose. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Stand, stand, pool of the flow of blood, as stood the Jordan in which John baptized Jesus Christ. Kyrie eleison .iii. Pater Noster. Behold the cross of the Lord! Be gone all evil powers! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David. In the name of the Lord.

At the beginning of the charm, the scribe has abbreviated the common phrase "patris et filii et spiritus sancti" ["of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost"] to "p. 7. f. 7. s. s.," assuming that the reader will recognise the sentence from the opening words "In nomine" ["in the name..."]. The later string of characters works in much the same way: the opening words "Ecce cruce*m*" ["behold the cross"] serve as a cue for the reader, who will call to mind the rest of the familiar prayer "Ecce crucem domini! Fugite partes adversae! Vicit Leo de tribu Iuda, radix David!" ["Behold the cross of the Lord! Be gone all evil powers! The Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David"]. The initials of each word ensure accurate recollection of the text.

Although the eleventh-century charm to ensure favour looks similar, it gives no opening cue. The presence of the runic letters ð and þ mean that any text expanded from it in the manner described above would have to be in English or a Scandinavian language. However, as two words supposedly begin with *x*, and another with the Greek letter lambda, this would be impossible. Instead, the string of letters gives the visual impression of being an abbreviation of a longer text, borrowing the trappings of learning to imply a verbal meaning that is inaccessible to its user. The power of the inscription appears to derive not from the actual presence of a longer text to be decoded from the abbreviation, but from the suggestion that one might be present - in other words, from its illegibility.

The third and final type of incomprehensible written charm is the most distinct from ordinary writing. These "texts" take the form of magical seals, blurring the boundary between text and image. They are often depicted within a circular frame, and are neither alphabetic nor attempting to appear alpha-

betic, but have complex symbolic forms. In one particularly common layout, the body of the seal takes the form of a branching, weather-vane-like symbol with decorative extensions at the end of each branch. In some cases these extensions take shapes that are reminiscent of Roman letters, and in some cases the seals incorporate legible text. However, the obviously non-alphabetic layout and the non-textual appearance of the seal as a whole prevent the reader from viewing it as a piece of ordinary writing. These "texts" cannot be read. Their power is accessed through physical contact, by carrying them as an amulet, or by looking at their designs.

A series of excellent examples can be found in the mid-thirteenth-century Canterbury amulet.[45] The amulet's single large sheet of parchment (51.2 x 42.7 cm) was folded vertically into eight columns, and horizontally into four rows, making it small enough to be easily carried or worn around the neck. A single scribe copied its text in a neat and readable *textualis* hand, complete with scribal corrections (Skemer 2006: 199). The seals are found along the top of the recto and on part of the dorse of the amulet. Most of them sit within circular roundels, but two on the recto are shaped like an almond or mandorla, similar to depictions of the side wound of Christ, and others stand alone with no border. Still other seals appear within the body text of the amulet. The legible text of the amulet specifies that these should be understood as a form of writing. For instance, one symbol in the fifth column on the recto, which incorporates the word for the four-letter Hebrew name of God "tetragrammaton," is explained as follows [Figure 2]:

Figure 2: Canterbury, Canterbury Cathedral Archives, Dean and Chapter Collections, Additional MS 23, recto (detail). Reproduced courtesy of The Chapter of Canterbury.

> Hoc signu*m* dedit angelus domini s*anct*o colu*m*bano ep*iscop*o siquis fidelis hanc figuram in qua scripta sunt nomina dei ineffabilia sup*er* se habuerit nulla uis dyaboli aduersus eum preualebit [...].[46]
>
> The angel of the Lord gave this sign to St Columbanus, bishop. If any of the faithful has upon him this figure in which are written the ineffable names of God, no power of the devil will prevail against him [...].

The opening information, asserting that the seal has a heavenly origin, is not unusual: several other seals or charms in this amulet alone make the same claim. The claim that the ineffable names of God are written within the seal is less common. Taken together, these statements imply not only that this particular seal represents a form of heavenly writing that can convey information and power beyond the scope of the human alphabet, but also that other similar seals may represent other unknown texts.

Although the seals of the Canterbury amulet cannot be read as ordinary text, they use alphabetic forms to draw the reader towards the experience of textuality. This technique is most evident in the seal at the top left on the recto of the amulet [Figure 3]. This sign is clearly not legible in any standard fashion. However, the symbol at the top of the seal resembles the letter P, while the symbol directly below it can be read as an A. The cross on the branch to their right could resemble a T, while the three cross-bars on the branch to their left could be a reflected letter E. The symbol to the left of that branch is an R.

Figure 3: Canterbury, Canterbury Cathedral Archives, Dean and Chapter Collections, Additional MS 23, recto. Reproduced courtesy of The Chapter of Canterbury.

If these branches are read as "Pater," other symbols suggest further letters: the bottom branch, for examples, includes an N, a black circle that could hint at an O, and a finial whose curves might remind a viewer of the shape of an S. Alternatively, the letters could be read as spelling out "Pax" ["peace"], or as an elaborate form of the chi-rho christogram. The seal simultaneously resists and invites reading. It uses the viewer's potential familiarity with alphabetic signs and Christian symbols to encourage engagement with the seal in a search for meaning, thereby creating a space between legibility and illegibility. This seal is positioned at the top left of the amulet where it will be the first to be encountered by a viewer. Its suggestion of a textual meaning therefore influences the viewer's approach to the remaining seals, even those that cannot be as easily resolved into possible words.

Each of these three types of illegible writing relies on its distance from ordinary text to create an impression of hidden power. Although little information about the reception of charms survives, the evidence of one early fourteenth-century medical miscellany does suggest that the users of written charms may have perceived power in their illegibility. On fol. 74v of Oxford, Bodleian Library MS Rawlinson C 814, there are brief instructions for a charm that promises that whatever the reader wants he will get [Figure 4].[47] The charm gives a

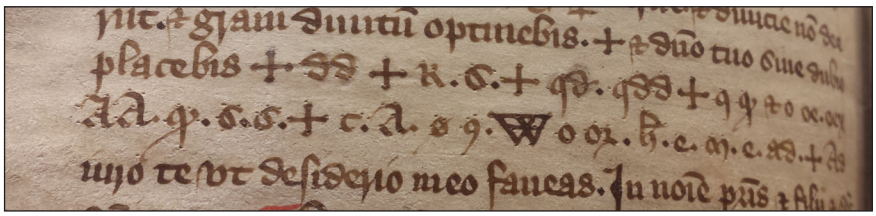

Figure 4: Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Rawlinson C 814, fol. 74v.

string of letters, interspersed with crosses, to be written and carried in the left hand: "+ dd + K. S. + qd. qdd + q q*ui* 7 o oe. oex AA. q*ui*. s. s. + c. A. ø 9. W o or. hæc. e. m. e. ad. +." It also offers a short prayer, although it is unclear whether this was to be written or read. The charm is of the first type discussed above: although the letters cannot be resolved into meaningful text, they are all easily recognisable as characters from the Roman alphabet or common forms of abbreviation. These characters, however, have been accorded special treatment: their user appears to have copied them not as text, which could by copied by eye, but as images or *caracteres*.

At some point during the manuscript's history, a reader pricked pinholes around each of the letters of the charm and each of the crosses between the letters. While it is impossible to know when these pinholes were made, the

fact that they only affect the letters that should be copied as part of the charm suggests that they were made by someone who intended to put the charm to use. They may have been made by a medieval technique for transferring images known as pouncing, in which holes were pricked through the original image onto a second sheet of parchment or paper (Miner 1967: 87-107). Chalk or charcoal could then be rubbed through the holes in the second sheet onto a third sheet, transferring the outline of the image to be copied. This method of copying prioritises the letter as a shape to be precisely transferred over the letter as a symbol for conveying linguistic meaning. The illegible texts of the charms begin, therefore, to disrupt our sense of what certain medieval people might have viewed as a text.

CONCLUSIONS

As Debby Banham has demonstrated, the mid-eleventh century marked the point at which sophisticated Continental medical texts reached England (Banham 2011: 341-52). In the same period, techniques of charming in England altered dramatically. Among other changes, the late-eleventh and early-twelfth centuries saw a marked increase in the use of the written word as an efficacious medium, and the powerful textual elements of written charms became increasingly illegible. The twelfth century is also the period identified by Michael Clanchy as marking the shift from oral to written testimony (Clanchy 1993: 260). This change represents the penetration of literate culture into wider society: by the thirteenth century even serfs, whether or not they were literate themselves, used written charters as titles of property (Ibid., 2). Text, even for those who could not read it, had both symbolic and practical power. As more people began to embrace literate culture and the power of text for the purposes of business and administration, however, composers of written charms developed ways of distancing charms from "ordinary" text in order to preserve the mystery of their power.

Discussing later charms, Owen Davies has argued that England, unlike France, placed a heavy emphasis on written charms in the nineteenth century. He suggests that this could be linked to religious influence, arguing that "the Protestant emphasis on the importance of the written word in worship, and as a vehicle of religious instruction, led to a concomitantly greater popular emphasis on the power of literacy and literary forms in early modern folk magic" (Davies 2004: 109 and 2007: 183-4). The changes first seen in Sloane MS 475, however, indicate that England's preference for written charms started well before the emergence of Protestantism, and possibly under Norman French influence. As

I have tried to show, there was no late-twelfth-century hiatus in the copying of charms. Instead charm techniques evolved, responding to growing literacy by embracing increasingly complex versions and abstractions of the written word.

NOTES

[1] The earliest surviving French charms recorded in a manuscript made or owned in England date from the first quarter of the twelfth century. They appear in London, British Library, Sloane MS 475, fols 109r-v and 109v. Both are intended to treat diseases of horses. French charms continued to circulate at least until the end of the medieval period: see, for instance, the late fifteenth-century examples in London, British Library, Egerton MS 833, fols 9v, 12v, and 18r-v.

[2] A charm to stop babies crying appears in London, British Library, Sloane MS 431, fol. 44v (first half of the thirteenth century). A charm to make pots break themselves is recorded in London, British Library, Sloane MS 146 (c.1300), while a charm that promises happiness can be found in the first column on the recto of Canterbury, Canterbury Cathedral Library, Additional MS 23 (first half of the thirteenth century).

[3] For discussion of the idea that spoken charms derive some of their power from sound or rhythm see, for example, Delaurenti 2015: 477-9.

[4] I base this count on an examination of every manuscript catalogued as containing charms or medical texts in Gneuss & Lapidge 2014. I am aware of charms appearing in Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, MS Ll.1.10 (one example) and Corpus Christi College MSS 41 (ten examples), 190 (one), and 383 (one); in London, British Library, Cotton MSS Caligula A vii (one) and A xv (six), Faustina A x (four), Galba A xiv (three), Tiberius A iii (one), Vespasian D xx (one), Vitellius C iii (eight), Vitellius E xviii (five); MSS Harley 585 (fifty-five) and 2965 (three); Royal MSS 2 A xx (eight) and 12 D xvii (thirty-nine), and Sloane MS 475 (thirteen in the earlier section of the manuscript, discussed further below); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 1431 (four); MS Auct F.3.6 (two); MS Barlow 35 (one); MSS Bodley 130 (seven) and 163 (one); MS Hatton 76 (eight), and MS Junius 85 (four); Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, Reg. Lat. 338 (two); Worcester, Worcester Cathedral Library MS Q.5 (one), and in the now-destroyed Herrnstein near Siegburg, Bibliothek der Grafen Nesselrode, MS 192 (three). A description of this last manuscript can be found in Sudhoff 1917: 265-313.

[5] *Bald's Leechbook* and *Leechbook III* are both contained within the same mid-tenth-century manuscript, London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D xvii. *Bald's Leechbook* consists of two parts, one dealing primarily with external illnesses and wounds, and one more interested in internal illnesses. The manuscript may have been written at Winchester, since the same scribe wrote the annals for 925-55 in the Parker manuscript of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 173. See Wright 1955: 13 and 20-23. *Lacnunga* is a collection of medical recipes and charms found in London, British Library, Harley MS 585, a medical miscellany dating from the late tenth or early eleventh century. It also contains, perhaps written in the same scribal hand, English translations of the *Herbarium* of Pseudo-Apuleius and the *De herbis feminis* and *Curae herbarum* of Pseudo-Dioscorides, as well as the *Medicina de quadrupedibus*. See Pettit 2001: 133-50.

[6] *Bald's Leechbook*, fols 51v-52r, 52r, 52r-v, 52v, 53r, 53v, 58r-v, and 107v; *Leechbook III*, fols 120r, 120r-v, 123r-v, 123v, 124r-v, 125v, 126v, and 126v-127r; *Lacnunga*, fols 134r-v, 137r-138r, 157v-158r, 171r, and 178r. Outside the main compilations, charms that use the words of the mass can be found in London, British Library, Cotton MSS Vitellius E xviii, fol. 15v (to treat lung disease in cattle), Caligula A vii, fols 176r-178r (the Æcerbot field blessing), and Galba A xiv, fol. 118r (for the preservation of health).

[7] *Lacnunga* contains one example, against elvish influence ("ælf siden," fol. 137r-v). In *Leechbook III* there are four instances: against the temptations of the fiend, the influence of elves ("ælf siden") and spring sickness ("lenctenadle"), on fol. 120r-v; against elves and night-goers ("ælfcynna" and "nihtgengan"), on fol. 123r-v; and two against elf disease ("ælfadle"), on fols. 123v and 124r-v. Remedies including the words of the mass are also used to treat "ofscoten" horses: this has often been interpreted to mean "elf-shot" horses, but Alaric Hall has argued persuasively that the presence of elves should not be assumed. See Hall 2005: 197-201.

[8] In *Lacnunga*, one recipe on fols 137r-138r is used to treat the temptations of the devil as well as elvish influence. In *Leechbook III*, recipes against temptations of the fiend appear on fols 120r and 120r-v, and against devils and insanity on 125v. *Leechbook I* contains a remedy for fiend-sick men (fols 51v-52r), while *Leechbook II* contains one against temptations of the fiend (107v).

[9] London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D xvii. *Leechbook I*, fols 51v-52r, for madness or a fiend-sick person, fol. 52r, and fol. 52r-v. *Leechbook III*, fol. 125v, which can also be used against devils, and fols 126v-127r.

[10] Cameron 1988: 129 suggests that "þeor" might refer to dryness or roughness of the skin or internal tissues. Earlier scholars have suggested a variety of other possibilities.

[11] London, British Library, Harley MS 273, fol. 215v, which also uses written and non-liturgical spoken words, promises protection from a range of undesirable experiences including "illusionib*us* diaboli nocturnis" ["nocturnal illusions of the devil"].

[12] London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D xvii, *Leechbook II*, fol. 107v; *Leechbook III*, fols 123v-124r, 125r-v, 125v-126r; London, British Library, Harley MS 585, *Lacnunga*, fols 96r-97r; London, British Library, Cotton MS Vitellius C iii, fol. 72v; Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 41, p.272; and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Hatton MS 76, fol. 122r.

[13] The most common uses are general protection (sixteen examples), treatment for eye pain (thirteen examples), fever (eight), snakebite (seven), and charms to be used when livestock has been stolen (seven).

[14] Written remedies appear in London, British Library, Cotton MSS Caligula A vii (one) and A xv (two), Faustina A x (one), Galba A xiv (one), and Vitellius E xviii (three); Harley MS 585 (six); Royal MSS 2 A xx (three) and 12 D xvii (seven); and MS Sloane 475 (ten); Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Auct. F.3.6 (two), Barlow 35 (one), and Junius 85 (two); Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Reg. Lat. 338 (two); and Worcester, Worcester Cathedral Library, MS Q.5 (one).

[15] Nine of the forty-two written charms treat fever: London, British Library, Cotton MS Faustina A x, fol. 116r; Harley MS 585, fols 165r (two examples) and 167r-v; Royal MS

12 D xvii, fols 51r and 53r; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Auct F.3.6, fol. ii r; Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Reg. Lat. 338, fol. 90r; and Worcester, Worcester Cathedral Library MS Q.5, "on a blank leaf at the end": see Napier 1890: 323-7.

[16] Against elves or demons, see: London, British Library, Royal MS 2 A xx, fol. 45v; Harley MS 585, fols 137r-8r (also using the words of the mass) and 146v-50v (also using spoken words); Royal MS 12 D xvii, fols 52v, 106r, and 124v-125r (also using spoken words).

[17] The treatment of supernatural conditions or fevers accounts for ten of the thirteen examples. In *Lacnunga* (London, British Library, Harley MS 585) there are remedies for elvish influence and the temptations of the Devil (fols 137r-138v), a holy salve against the Devil (fols 146v-150v), and three for fever (two on fol. 165r and one on fol. 167r-v). In *Leechbook I* (London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D xvii) there are two remedies for fever (fols 51r and 53r) and one against elvish magic or runes (fol. 52v). *Leechbook II* contains a remedy for an "ofscoten" horse on fol. 106r which mentions the possibility that the condition might be caused by an elf, while in *Leechbook III* there is a remedy for "elf-hiccup" ("ælfsogoða") and the temptations of the Devil (fols 124v-125r).

[18] In some cases, such as London, British Library, Cotton MS Caligula A vii or Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Barlow 35, the charms have been added to non-medical manuscripts. In other cases the charm is part of the main text of the manuscript. London, British Library, Sloane MS 475, which I discuss elsewhere in this article, is an example of a book which shows continental influence.

[19] "filecteria etiam diabolica vel characteres diabolicas vel erbas vel succinum suum vel sibi inpendere." Schmitz 1883-98: II 668. Although the reading "vel caracteres diabolicas" only appears in Vatican Library Pal. Lat. 294, Meaney 1992: 109 notes that this reading is present in similar passages in Caesarius of Arles and Burchard's *Decretum*, and so may be the intended reading. The *Egbert Penitential* may contain a core of Anglo-Saxon material, perhaps written by Egbert, the first archbishop of York (735-66).

[20] "ælfsogoða." *Leechbook III*, London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D xvii, fols 124v-125r.

[21] *Leechbook III*, London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D xvii, fol. 124v.

[22] Mark 5:24-34, Luke 8:42-48, and Matthew 9:19-22.

[23] See, for example, the fifteenth-century manuscripts London, Wellcome Library, MS 542, fol. 6r, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Wood empt. 18, fol. 1r. The Anglo-Saxon remedy is found in *Bald's Leechbook*, London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D xvii, fol. 51r.

[24] *Leechbook III*, London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D xvii, fol. 125r.

[25] For example, see *Leechbook III*, London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D xvii, fol. 123v. In a remedy for "elf disease" ("ælfadle"), the practitioner is instructed to dip various plants into holy water, have three masses sung over them, and them place them on embers to smoke the patient while singing the litany, Creed, and Lord's prayer and making the sign of the cross on each of the patient's limbs.

[26] *Leechbook III*, London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D xvii, fol. 125r. See Olds 1984: 146-8.

[27] *Leechbook III*, London, British Library, Royal MS D 12 xvii, fol. 125r.

[28] A facsimile edition of MS Digby 86 is available in Tschann & Parkes 1996. The section with the most charms occurs on fols 28r-34v.

[29] For example, the four charms added in a twelfth-century hand to fol. 162v of London, British Library, Royal MS 12 E xx, or the charm for wounds added in the thirteenth century to the last leaf (fol. 415r) of London, British Library, Royal MS 1 A xvii.

[30] Only thirteen of the three hundred and sixty-nine charms I have collected from the period between 1100 and 1350 make use of the words of the mass.

[31] Written remedies appear in *Lacnunga* (London, British Library, Harley MS 585), *Bald's Leechbook* and *Leechbook III* (both contained in London, British Library, Royal MS 12 D xvii); London, British Library, Cotton MSS Caligula A vii and A xv, Faustina A x, Galba A xiv, and Vitellius E xviii; Royal MS 2 A xx and Sloane MS 475; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MSS Auct. F.3.6, Barlow 35, and Junius 85; Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Reg. Lat. 338; and Worcester, Worcester Cathedral Library, MS Q.5.

[32] Forty-three percent of the charms, or one hundred and fifty-eight out of the three hundred and sixty-nine I have collected from this period, require the use of writing.

[33] London, British Library, Sloane MS 475. The earlier section of this composite manuscript is dated to between 1075 and 1125, and contains ten written charms on fols 133v, 135v-136r, 136v (two examples), 137r, 137r-v, 137v (two examples), 137v-138r, and 138r-v. Newly digitised at http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Sloane_MS_475 (accessed 17 May 2017).

[34] For a description of this manuscript see Beccaria 1956: 255-9; Liuzza 2010: 16-19.

[35] Beccaria 1956: 255-9 argues that both parts of the manuscript have a British origin. Cameron 1982: 144 argues, on the basis of confusion between r and n, that even if Sloane MS 475 itself is not an English production it was copied from an exemplar in Anglo-Saxon minuscule. Gneuss & Lapidge 2014, which I have used as my primary catalogue for identifying relevant manuscripts, includes both Part One and Part Two as manuscripts made or owned in England before 1100.

[36] London, British Library, Sloane MS 475, fol. 111v.

[37] London, British Library, Sloane MS 475, fol. 112r.

[38] London, British Library, Sloane MS 475, fol. 112r and 111r.

[39] Part Two of the manuscript may also have a continental connection. Chardonnens 2007: 42-5 argues, because of the dissimilarity between the prognostic texts in Sloane MS 475 and in other English manuscripts of the period, for a Continental origin either for fols 125-231 or for its exemplar.

[40] In the words "timeus" and "erberum" the scribe seems to have confused an *a* in his exemplar for a *u* ("timeas"; "erberam").

[41] See, for example, the single rune in *Bald's Leechbook*, fol. 20r-v, or the Greek letters in *Bald's Leechbook*, fol. 53r and *Lacnunga*, fol. 165r.

[42] A remedy against "dweorh," possibly a type of fever, in *Lacnunga*, fol. 165r, uses ten Greek letters, divided by crosses.

[43] London, British Library, Cotton MS Caligula A xv, fol. 140r. The text is illegible in places, and I have partially relied on the transcription in Jolly 2006: 64.

[44] Durham, Durham Cathedral Library, MS Hunter 100, fol. 118r. I am grateful to Sarah Gilbert for bringing this charm, and others in the manuscript, to my attention.

[45] Canterbury, Canterbury Cathedral Library, Additional MS 23. This amulet is discussed in detail in Skemer 2006: 199-214. There is an edition of the text at 285-304.

[46] Canterbury, Canterbury Cathedral Library, Additional MS 23, recto, column 5.

[47] "Vt quicq*uid* volu*er*is accipias . 7 q*uicqui*d pecieris g*ra*tu*m* fiat" ["That whatever you want you will get, and whatever you ask for will be freely given"].

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Research that contributed to this paper was funded by a Short-Term Fellowship from the Bibliographical Society of America, a Hope Emily Allen Dissertation Grant from the Medieval Academy of America, and a MacMillan International Dissertation Research Fellowship from Yale University. I am grateful to these institutions for their generous support.

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Reg. Lat. 338
Worcester, Worcester Cathedral Library, MS Q.5

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