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CREDULITY AND BELIEF: THE ROLE OF POSTCONDITIONS IN THE LATE MEDIEVAL CHARM

John C. Hirsh

Among the more popular applications of magic to medicine in premodern Britain are charms, popular and widespread texts containing, among other things, directions for employing verbal magic to address a variety of accidents, illnesses, loves, hates, irritations, inconveniences, fancies, resentments, vendettas, rash commitments, broken promises, failed undertakings, and a rich variety of like, if not exactly related, human contingencies. Recent scholarship has been sometimes adventurous but also, when addressing its connections to orthodox utterance, increasingly settled, so that the variously constructed taxonomy of the genre, though well advanced, requires further examination. Among the many hundreds of charms written in English, the now widely familiar "Flum Jordan," a charm that sought, among other things, to curtail an apparently unstoppable flow of blood, has become a kind of first among equals. It now contains a mix of conventional practice and orthodox Christian language, that, centuries after the religious orders had developed medical procedures to contend with the particular difficulty that the charm addressed, continued to inform practices well into the seventeenth century. The learning modern scholarship has expended on these texts has been extensive, though folklore studies in particular have sometimes identified magic and religion in such a way that it is difficult to envision any but a conventional role for their shared influence. It will be my contention here, however, that the circumstances and conditions involved in the practice of certain charms sometimes admits of greater variation than is usually believed.[1]

In this study I shall address one relatively common way in which late medieval and early modern magic overlapped with orthodox religious utterance, and shall do so by focusing on the indicated postconditions attached to certain charms, ones that involved directions to the practitioner about how to proceed after he or she has uttered the charm. These practices often involved the recitation of

familiar prayers that were required to be said after the charm had been recited, and were deemed necessary for it to succeed. In order to demonstrate the context for the interplay that concerns me, I will divide this article into two parts, one in which I discuss the specific uses of postconditions, followed by a second in which I shall quote, at some length, from the manuscripts in which they, and the charms to which they are attached, are preserved. The second part in particular will help to establish the larger context within which charm and postcondition are fixed, so helping to clarify not only the purpose of the specific postcondition, but also the ways in which, in this context, magic and orthodoxy interact.

The postconditions that concern me here are those preserved in Bodleian Library MS e Museo 243, but these postconditions were repeated in many other manuscripts, and as a group direct the practitioner to offer familiar and orthodox Christian prayers after a charm has been recited, sung, or otherwise performed. As I shall argue here, however, they do so in three distinct ways. In an important study of the charms to which these conditions are often attached, Jonathan Roper has pointed out that "verbal charms often had customary pre-conditions and postconditions that would, if not met, lead to their failure. These conditions involved secrecy, silence, fasting, not thanking the charmer, following the charm with prayers, or other canonical Christian verbal forms such as Aves, the Creed, or most popularly 'in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost.'"[2] But these directions were not all of a piece, and the traditional practitioners of a charm like the "Flum Jordan" might include not only apothecaries, barber-surgeons, and barbers, but also anyone with a practical interest in stopping the flow of blood, particularly in an emergency.[3]

That context of these texts indicates that there were three larger attitudes respecting the evident interplay of texts that had their roots in orthodox religiousness, but that were here employed in an evidently secular context. But it is clear, too, that even though there was no distinction observed between religion and magic by the great majority of those who employed the agency of charms, one important attribute of the postcondition was to attest to the evident compatibility of orthodoxy and magic, and to do so in such a way that the practitioner did not deny him- or herself the effectiveness of religious petition even while employing the charm's agency. The relationship between charm and postcondition is complex, and often implies a distinction, though not a difference, between what familiar orthodox prayer, and what the invoked charm, was able to effect. It was of course the outcome that mattered most, but the importance of the postcondition was effectively to negotiate between prayer and magic by

distinguishing one from the other, so that their separate spheres would neither contradict nor inhibit each other. The clearest way to observe the interaction of these properties is to turn to the manuscript record.

The texts preserved in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS e Museo 243 (*Summary Catalogue* 3548), a small, seventeenth-century, English collection of charms of unknown authorship and origin, almost certainly derived in part from another Bodleian manuscript, MS e Museo 273 (*Summary Catalogue* 3543), a larger and fuller collection written in the same hand but containing cosmological and other texts that the smaller, more practical manuscript does not. I have made an extended selection of recipes from MS e Museo 243 below, focusing in particular on several charms that treat the stanching of blood, one of the many medical charms that the manuscript contains, though also including others so as to give a sense of the range of texts the manuscript preserves.

The MS e Museo 243 postconditions implicitly divide the charms into the three distinct types that I will describe below, each one eliciting different expectations from the practitioner who utters the charm. These three types proceed in the manuscript in no particular order, so that a charm without any postcondition can immediately follow one in which a detailed postcondition is present, and these by a second type indicating yet another level of apparently orthodox allusion. These three types, as I have called them, include two that call for the use of traditional prayers, and taken together they suggest the ways in which charms could be employed to satisfy many practitioners. I shall discuss each type in turn.

The first type of postcondition present as a rubric in MS e Museo 243 involves an action—here the simple recitation of the charm—that by itself is expected to alter a natural process, and so bring about the desired result. The postcondition is printed below, and directs the writing of a (specified) word on an apple, and then throwing the apple at the person against whom the charm is intended to work. The effect of striking the person—man or woman—brings about the effect, and the person inscribing the apple and then throwing it effectively alters the natural order.

The second type involves the use of sacred words, images, or symbols, often a cross or a prayer, that cooperates with the charm and, though only after the charm's utterance, effectively empowers it. One of these is printed below, and like other postconditions of this type, attests to the agency of the speaker's performance of the charm, rather than the language of the charm itself, a process that involved confidently calling on God for quick help while also praising him. The effect of this type is to negotiate between religious language and magical

utterance, though its language retains an echo of a divine "other" present in late medieval devotions, but that is not further specified. The apparent religiousness in this second type, however, contrasts with the third, which further limits the power of the charm itself by setting it against certain familiar Christian prayers to which the charm itself now unmistakably defers. In the second type, however, the role of magic and religion may be further understood against Claire Fanger's perceptive observation that it is the brevity and the genre of most charms that separates them from ritual texts generally, a separation that certain of the second type effectively undermine, by involving the sort of literate effect associated with ritual magic.[4]

There are further distinctions to be drawn. As noted, the second type of postcondition specifically invokes and even harnesses divine power in order to advance the charm's effect, and does not seek, as does the first one, to effect a cure simply by recitation. But the second type enhances the effectiveness of the charm both through an evocation of apparently Christian prayer and through the agency of the charm itself, which is represented as active and potent.[5] The person who recites the charm understands its power and effect, but accepts too that these exist in consort with associated religious utterance. Such charms partook of the properties of natural magic, permitted practices that, inter alia, neither involved demonic agency nor violated nature. This type of postcondition represents one of the more widespread examples of natural magic, and as such illustrates the ways in which magical practice and religious utterance operated without contradiction in medieval medical practices.[6] But there is present, too, the seeds of an implicit opposition, evident in a third type of postcondition.

This third type is hardly less problematic, and involves both an invocation of the charm's now more limited power, but also an injunction to recite a number of familiar but unconnected prayers, to which the charm now acts as a kind of introduction, and which are expected, as much as, if not more than, the charm itself, to do the actual "work" of performing the cure. In this third type of postcondition, it is the action of reciting the prayers that is finally effective, and the charm seems to have assumed a largely supplemental role, being present mainly to direct attention to the remedy that is sought, but insufficient in itself to perform the requisite action. In this context, the subject's recitation of prayers, together with the use of signs of the cross or the invocation of other religious practices, serve as a kind of guarantee of probity, certifying that the sought-for good was acceptable and proper, and that no violation of orthodox practice is intended.

It is clear, however, that there is a religious, sometimes even devout component present in this type of postcondition, evidence among other things of the pervasiveness of Christian prayer even in evidently secular contexts. That this should be so is unsurprising given the separation from scientific practice that, as a general rule, charms observed, and the possibility remains that in other contexts such postconditions may have been intended to alleviate a chronic, perhaps self-remitting physical ailment, no less than an emergency occasioned, for example, by bloodletting. In any case, the linking, and in some cases the subordination, of charms to prayer is so clearly indicated in the manuscript record that it needs to be understood as a part of, not apart from, the use of charms in the late medieval and early modern period.

Interestingly, it is this third type of postcondition that has attracted a particularly unsympathetic postmodern critique. One of the most generally familiar if now widely contested studies of charms remains that of Keith Thomas, whose attitudes still figure in religious and cultural inquiry. In what are now traditional terms, Thomas remarks that any charm is finally

> a form of supplication: a spell was a mechanical means of manipulation. Magic postulated occult forces of nature which the magician learned to control, whereas religion assumed the direction of the world by a conscious agent who could only be deflected from his purpose by prayer and supplication. . . . In practice, however, the distinction was repeatedly blurred in the popular mind. The Church itself recommended the use of prayers when healing the sick or gathering medicinal herbs. Confessors required penitents to repeat a stated number of Paternosters, Aves and Creeds, thereby fostering the notion that the recitation of prayers in a foreign tongue had medicinal efficacy. . . . The medieval Church thus did a great deal to weaken the distinction between a prayer and a charm, and to encourage the idea that there was virtue in the mere repetition of holy words.[7]

But a close examination both of charms and of their postconditions makes clear that they were distinguished not only according to their intended use but also by the attitudes they evoked from their practitioners. There were, after all, many kinds of religiousness available to the late medieval Christian, and there is no reason to believe that the prayers, which were probably recited in English and for which the third type of postcondition repeatedly called, were uttered without understanding. The third prayer in the group of prayers usually indicated is often the Creed, usually named in English, and the Pater Noster and Ave were

well known by their Latin names, even when recited in English. In any case, it is probably mistaken to believe that such prayers were said, whether in Latin or in English, without some understanding of their meaning, especially when they sought relief from an illness.

The prayers for which the postconditions called were widely known, and even though contemporary tracts on, for example, the Pater Noster often "simply expound the meaning of that prayer," the prayer itself, even when called by its Latin name, was widely recited.[8] Thus the "Flum Jordan" charm, with its evident medical usefulness, often had a postcondition of the third type attached, though as will be evident below, the scribe of MS e Museo 243 evidently drew from a number of exemplars, and seems to have reported only what he found in his exemplars without seeking to regularize what he discovered or to impose his own order.

The mutual association of charms and prayers that postconditions reveal is important, and gives clear evidence of the relationship, sometimes amounting to a dialogue, that could exist between religion and magic in the late medieval period. Because the often practical ends that charms sought were often secular, the discourse between them could admit of variation, though it is not difficult to believe that some practitioners at least suspended personal judgment in the matter and acted as they were bid, apparently without misgivings. Thomas Aquinas had specifically objected when, in seeking a physical cure, a Christian employs "certain ciphers, words or other vain observances which clearly have no efficiency by nature."[9] But for many laypersons, an understanding of what was permitted under Church law was unclear, and particularly when charms were involved, the distinction between magic and religion was hardly apparent.

Printing representative charms in a study like this one presents certain challenges and certain choices, and I have escaped neither. What follows below is a series of charms, some with postconditions, from Bodleian Library, Oxford, MS e Museo 243, a working collection of charms and other texts which has a distinctly practical character, and which has a complex relationship with another Bodleian manuscript, MS e Museo 173, discussed below. Although both manuscripts are from the seventeenth century, the charms they contain are widely attested in late medieval manuscripts, and in some ways it gives a more accurate impression of the way charms were actually employed to encounter them thus, presented in evident mutual association in an early modern collection, than scattered individually throughout earlier manuscripts.

It has been my contention here that postconditions occur in many medical and other manuscripts that contain charms, including those late medieval

medical manuscripts that involve the stanching of blood. The common medieval English medical "Flum Jordan" charm appears, among other places, in the following manuscripts, all of the fourteenth and fifteenth century— Oxford, Bodleian Library: Douce MS 84 (*Summary Catalogue* 21658), fols. 11–11v (second type); MS Lat. liturg. g 1 (*Summary Catalogue* 31379), fol. 10v (first type); Add. MS B 1 (without *Summary Catalogue* number), fol. 21 (first type); London, British Library: Royal MS 12 B XXV, fol. 60v (first type); Royal MS 17 A VIII, fols. 48v–49v (first type); Sloane MS 2584, fol. 103v (first and second types); London, Wellcome Library MS 406, fol. 4v (second type); and Wellcome MS 542 fols. 9–14v (second and third types). For reasons of space I have confined the examples that follow to MS e Museo 243, but in the manuscript record as a whole, charms both with and without postconditions are virtually infinite.

MS e Museo 243 (*Summary Catalogue* 3548) is a small, 3.7" x 3.1", seventeenth-century paper manuscript, which contains iv + 86 folios, including, on folios 1–53v, a collection of late medieval and early modern charms, written in red and black, in both Latin and English.[10] Following its anthology of charms, folios 61v to 66v contain a series of lists detailing the dominical letter, the hour of prime, the first day of lent, Easter day, Rogation Sunday, and Whitsuntide for the years 1567 to 1661; the rest of the folios, including folios 3v, 8v, 10v, 12v, 40v, and 63v, are blank. The manuscript, preserved untrimmed and in its original binding, is so closely written that it contains only an inner margin: the written area measures 3.4" x 2.5", but the single hand that has carefully printed the manuscript throughout is clear and distinct. The volume is bound in brown leather, lightly wormholed on the back board, and its boards have been bounded with four gold marginal lines and also in the center with a small gold oval emitting rays of the sun that enclose the monogram IHS, with a cross above and three nails below.[11] The manuscript is dated 1622 on folio 1, and a note on folio 6 suggests that it was presented to the Bodleian by an unknown donor on August 6, 1655.

As noted, the Bodleian Library also preserves a closely related manuscript, MS e Museo 173 (*Summary Catalogue* 3543), evidently one of its exemplars, which was written by the same hand and organized in the same format, though containing many texts not present in MS e Museo 243. Like MS e Museo 243, MS e Museo 173 is a paper manuscript, but contains iii + 78 folios, and is considerably larger in size, 7.7" x 5. 8". It is now bound in unmarked modern parchment, with a library stamp giving its Bodleian call number on its spine. The scribe employed the same format for both manuscripts, though MS e Museo 173 is designed less for use than for study, and contains several

astrological, cosmological and magical texts, and a wealth of elaborate diagrams not present in MS e Museo 243. The order of the items in MS e Museo 243, like the texts themselves, follows that of MS e Museo 173, except that the position within the manuscript of the like entries has changed, with, for example, the opening section in MS e Museo 243 concerning charms (fols. 1–3) coming late in the MS e Museo 173 (fols. 63–63v).

A comparison of the two manuscripts throws light on both. Like MS e Museo 243, MS e Museo 173 was organized in parts, and served its owner both as a general reference and as an exemplar for dependent manuscripts. Set against MS e Museo 173, MS e Museo 243 appears to be an empirical, practical handbook, intended to provide a wide range of useful charms, and even in the tables at the back of the manuscript, it is relatively innocent of the larger cosmological and other influences present in MS e Museo 173. The fact that the charms on stanching blood are inscribed at the opening of the manuscript gives a fair indication both of the importance of the practice and for what use it was intended; and the small size of the manuscript, together with the variety of religious and secular attitudes which it at once assumes and encodes, suggest a practical lay readership, impatient with general principles, and largely concerned with results. All items in both manuscripts were written as prose.[12]

In what follows I have printed words and passages written in **red** in **boldface**; the now lost Middle English letter thorn (representing "th") as þ; editorial comments in square brackets; the type of postcondition in square brackets and in **bold** to separate comment from text (e.g., [**type I, II, III**]); and foliation in angle brackets (e.g., << folio 1 >>). I have printed vernacular charms only, focusing on those versions of "Crist That Was" that refer to the stanching of blood, and on certain like charms, but selecting as well charms that give evidence of some forms of religiousness present in these decidedly secular manuscripts. I have used italics to indicate expansions of abbreviations within the body of the charms, but have silently expanded the abbreviations for "In nomine Patris . . ." or those that simply direct the reader to prayer.

Oxford, Bodleian Library MS e Museo 243 (*Summary Catalogue* 3548)

<< **folio 1** >>
A booke of Ex*er*iments taken out of dyverse augthors 1622
Anger to aswage
Wryte this name in an Apple **yava**. & cast it at thine enemie & þou shalt aswage his anger, Or geue yt to a woman & she shall loue thee. [**type I**]

Bledinge to stanch

Wryte w*i*th his owne bloude on his forheade this worde **Beronix** &c on a woman **Beronixa.** Or touch þe place þ*at* bleedeth & saye **In** no*mine* patris **vere** in no*mine* filii **vere** in no*mine* spirit*us* s*an*cti **vere.** and in þe vertue of these **3** names now of thy bleedinge stanch. **probatum est.** [**type I**]

Another to stanch bloude

<< **folio 1v** >>

[Two Latin charms following, the second headed **Bleedinge to stanch.**]

Another

God þ*at* was borne in þe borough of bethelem, & baptized in þe water of flem Jordayne. the water was both wylde & woode. þe child was both meeke and good. he blessed þe floude & still yt stoode. þe same blessing þ*at* he blessed þe floude. I doe blesse thee bloude. by vertue of the childe so good. & say **5** pater nosters **5** Avies & **1** Creede [**type III**]

<< **folio 2** >>

Another for bleedinge

Christ þ*at* dyed on þe Roode & on the **Crosse** shedde his bloude, ther came **3** Angels þ*at* were good w*i*th **3** Chalises to receaue his bloude. **Christ Jesu** for thy bitter passion stay thou the bloude of **N.** Say this thrice w*i*th a pater noster Ave. & Creed. [**type II**]

[Up to this point the manuscript follows MS 173, fol. 63, but it now breaks away and adds six other charms not present in MS 173, all concerned with stanching the flow of blood, which follow below. The charms immediately following in MS 173, however, follow on folio 4 of MS 243, under the heading **Bewitched, forspoken or Inchaunted.**]

Another for bleedinge

Jesus Christ of a mayde was borne baptized he was in þe water of flem Jordayne, þe water was both wylde & woode the childe was both meeke & goode. he comaunded þe floude & still yt stoode. so shall þe bloude of **N.** cease. In þe name of þe father. the sonne, & þe holye ghost.

3 persons in trinitie & **1.** in vnitie so be yt. In no*mine* p*at*ris stat sangunis. in no*mine* filii stat sanguis. in no*mine* sp*iriti*s s*an*cti existat sangui*n*is **Amen** [**type II**]

<< folio 2v >>

Bleedinge to stanch

Ther went **3** maries by þe waye the first sayd staye bloude a gods name. the secunde sayde stanch bloude a gods name, þe third sayd stoppe bloude a gods name and bleede no more/saye this thrice w*ith* **3** pater nosters **3** Avies and **1** creed. **Fiat.** [**type III**]

An other for bleedinge

Longi*nus* miles latus . . . [a Latin charm follows, concluding on folio 3 thus:] Amen & dic ter pater noster / et ter Ave maria / **fiat.** [**type III**]

<< folio 3 >>

Bleedinge to stanch

Jesus þat was in bethele*m* borne and baptized in flem Jordayne & stint þe water vpon þe stone so stint the bloude of this man, **N.** thy servant through þe vertue of thy holy name **+** Jesus & of thy cossen sweet saynt John / say this charme **5** tymes w*ith* **5** pater nosters in the worshippe of þe **5** wounds of Christ, & **5** Avies in þe worshippe of þe **5** ioyes of oure ladye & **1** Creede in þe worshippe of the **12** Appostles. **+** [**type III**]

Bleedinge to stanch

Wryte these words in parchment & bynde them vpon both thy thighes **per. n. b. t. C. e. v. exoq.** & yf you will not beleeue yt wryte these letters on a knyfe & kyll a hogge ther wth & he will not bleede / [**type I**]

Bleedinge to staunch

Wryte w*ith* þe bloude þat bleedeth in þe forehead of þat p*ar*tie Consumatu*m* est [**type I**]

<< folio 3v is blank >>

> [A second section of MS 243 begins on folio 4, separated by a blank 3v, and moving on to charms on bewitchment. It starts with charms present in 273, folio 63–63v, before both breaking away on folio 6 to incorporate a charm for **Horse or beest bewitched** but reverting back to 273 again and containing a reference on folio 6v "**probatum** [**est**] **John Carpenter**," a name also present in MS 173, fol. 63v—one of the few personal names preserved in either manuscript, and possibly that of someone associated with its writing or composition.]

<< **folio 4** >>

Bewitched, forspoken or Inchaunted

Come to them & saye thes wordes + Anitrita + Secusuta + Gaudes + whip tibi tendi + whip tibi davia + conquenor*um* Jube dei +Tetragramaton + whether yt be a man or beast say these wordes, & in sayinge of them cast a litle salt into drinke & geue it him or into drinke þ*at* will not work or into any other thinge **pro[batum] est by a** 100. [**type I**]

Bewitched

yf any **3** byters haue thee forbidden w*i*th wicked tonge or w*i*th wicked thought or w*i*th wicked eyes all þe most, I praye god be thy boote In þe name of the father, & sone & of þe holy ghost **God** þ*at* set vertue between water & lande, be thy helpe & succour w*i*th this prayer þ*at* can, for Jesus sake & St << **folio 4v** >> Charitie **Amen.** Say this **9** tymes over, & at every third tyme saye a pater noster, an Ave, & a Creed. [**type II**]

Bewitched

Whosoever shall carye thes names of God **about them, neede not feare þe perell of water, fyre, incha*u*ntment evell ende or enemie yf a woman w*i*th childe curye them aboute her she shal be safelye delyvered / yt hath bine proved.** [**type I**]

> [Two Latin texts follow, fols. 4v–6, the first listing God's names, the sec-ond headed **Bewitched or forspoken**. Charms concerning bewitchment follow.]

<< **folio 6** >>

Horse or beast bewitched

Three byters haue bitten thee. **three** betters haue betters haue bettered thee **In** þe name of þe father þe sonne & þe holye ghost 3 persons and one trinitie stand vp a gods name. **Say this** 3 **tymes & make** 3 **crosses on him wth your hande & he shal be cured** [**type II**]

Another

Take þe witch knott & make yt blonddye w*i*th þe bloude of his eare & lappe it in the heare of his brest yf it can be had or in the heare of his tayle & rake it in the embers þ*at* it maye << folio 6v >> be burnt & tarie ther till yt be consumed & yt may be þe witch will come þe while & so þou may know her / p*ro*b*atum* [est]. **John Carpenter** [**type I**]

Another
N. Three tymes werte thou bitten thorugh þe lyver & through þe lungs through
þe hart & through þe tonge & by þe power of almightye god in trinitie, so shalt
þou never more bitte*n* be. **In** no*mine* patris et filii & s*piritu*s sa*n*cti Amen. **Then
say 5 pater nosters 5 Avies & 1 Creede** [**type II**]

<< **folio 7** >>
To know yf one be bewitched or no
Looke well in ther eyes & yf you can deserne your picture in them, they are not
bewitched / **et contra.** [**type I**]

<< **folio 7v** >>
Bewitched or forspoken
if any **3** byters haue thee bitten w*i*th wicked tonge or w*i*th wicked thought or
w*i*th wicked eyes at þe most / I pray God be thy boote In þe name of the father
þe sonne & þe holye ghoste **God** þ*at* set vertue between water & lande be thy
helpe & succour with this prayer þ*at* / I can, for gods sake & St Charitie / say
this **5** tymes thrice over & at every **5** tymes a pater noster an Ave. & a creede
[**type III**]

Bewwitched or forspoken p*ro*ved by a 100
Come to them & saye these wordes + **Aintrita** + **sockuluta** + **Gaudes** + **whip
tibi bendi** + **whip tibi davia** + **conquer ora suve dei** + **Tetragrmanlon** +
whether it be man or beast, saye these wordes, & in saying of them cast a lit-
tle salt into drinke þ*at* will not worke or into any other thinge þ*at* is forspoke,
probatum **est.** [**type I**]

<< **folio 8** >>
To bringe þe witch to one þ*at* is bewitched or forspoken put 5 spanish needles
into an egge through þe shell & seeth it in þe uryne of one þ*at* is bewitched &
whyle it is seethinge þe witch will come w*i*thout doubte p*ro*batum est, p*ro*batum
est, p*ro*batum est [**type I**]
<< **Folio 8v** is blank. **Folio 9v** contains a type III Latin charm against bites. >>

<< **folio 9v** >>
Birdes to take
Wryte þe **103** psalm in virgin parchment & hange it in a tree & þou shall haue
byrds enough therin [**type I**]
Bitinge of a mad dogge
Wryte thes words thrice, & put them in a peece of cheese & eate it. **Oribusq***ue*
Aliebq*ue* **niues vinas mues vinal populsq***ue* **qui ne.** [**type I**]

Another

Wryte vpon breade or cheese thes wordes **Aribq***ue,* **Alibq***ue* **riuos riuas opusque** Or thus **Artibq***ue* **Alibq***ue* **omnib**usque **riuas vincris** & eate it [**type I**]

<< **folio 10** >>
Another

Wryte thes **5** words in any convenient thinge & geue it to þe p*ar*ty so bitten within 24 houres after þe bytinge **Alabas. orabus, rinus rimas Apulusq***ue.* P*r*obatum est./ [**type I**]

Another

Wryte these words in bread or cheese & geue it to eate **Are Arebas opolusq***ue.* ***probatum est*** [**type I**]

Another

Wryte these words on Cheese & geue yt to man or dogge or on a leafe & geue it to any beast þ*at* is bytten **Aries Acrias riues Imas Apolusq***ue* [**type I**]

<< **folio 10v is blank** >>

[The following charms are inscribed later in the manuscript and illustrate its overall contents. Except for the last text, I have chosen this illustrative selection from among the shorter English charms, almost all type I.]

<< **folio 16** >>
Another to win at dyce/
wryte thes words in virgin p*ar*chment on a mondaye before sonne rysinge = **Bala tartibria** or **Galiera tarlibria** & put it in thy sleeue/ [**type I**]

Another

wryte w*i*th þe longest fether of a swallowes winge & þe bloude of a Batt or mole in virgine parchment these wordes **Alia cedica Rback as ratale abasache** & holde it in thy left hand & touch þe dyce sayinge thes words **et fyal**

<< **folio 22v** >>
Favour to haue
Gather vervin on midsom*m*er even fastinge & out of deadlye sinne w*i*th **3** pater nosters **3** Avies & **1** Creede & beare it aboute thee

Another

Yf þou wilt be well receaued into any Cittye or to any prince or maiestrate wryte þe **15** psal. do*mine* gr*a*cuis habitabit & beare it about thee & þou shalt fynd grace

<< **folio 28** >>

Monye to haue alwayes

Take a mole in march & make a purse of þe dryed skynne, & with a hawks fether & þe bloude of a batt wryte thes names **Rosquilla dunstallum** & look what summe you haue in your purse & so much you shall fynde alwayes

Nights spell. see theeues

Prison to escape

Gether Celondyne in þe morninge of St peeter ad vincula saying **3** pater nosters & beare it about thee & þou shalt feare no imprisonmente

<< **folio 34** >>

Theeves to wyhstande

In Bethelem god was born, betweene **2** beastes to rest he was layd in þat sted ther was no man but þe holy trinitie, the same god þat ther was borne defende our bodies & out Cattell from theves & al maner of mischeeves of harmes whersoever we wend ether by water or by land by night or by day Amen

<< **folio 37v** >>

Teeth ach

Wryte these words, **Tipo. Alipo. Chodon. Ardoi. Anoi/** & þe parties name therwith & burne yt.

<< **folio 39v** >>

violent deth or hanging to escape

Beare these letters about the/ **Y. A. C. h. he ney may**

<< **folio 40** >>

Women to pisse in ye fyre

Cast þe seeds of sorrell into þe fyre þat they knowe not of yt & afterwards cause them to come to þe fyre & when they beginne to be warme they will pisse in þe fyre

<< **folio 47** >>

For loue

Take 3 heares of her head whom þou knowest & bynde þe **3** heares secretlye aboute an Image of virgin waxe & holde yt over a fyre of thorns until it melt & saye **I counire** thee **N** (her father & mother & þe place wher she dwelleth) by Cathan, Galian, Belsebub & by þe sonne of Reignell & by all þe devels þat haue power to hurte anythinge þat þou turne vnto my loue & þat þou never rest sleepinge nor wakinge eatinge nor drinkinge vntill þou come to me & fulfill my will in

all things **I counire** thee Sathan by þe verye god, by þe holye god & by his holye virginitie, & by his moste chast mother & by þe dreedful daye of iudgment & by þe virginitie of St John Baptist & by his heade, & by þe virginitie of St John þe evangeliste, & by þe virginitie of saynt Katherine, St. margurett, St lucye & all saynts, & by þe effusion of þe precious bloude of our Lord Jesus christ << folio 47v >> by his incarnation, Circumsision death & buriall, by his rersurection & glorious Ascension, & by these most holy names of God **Emanuell. Sabaeth. Adonay. Otheos. Iskyros. Athanatos. Agla. Alpha et omega** þe bigininge & þe endinge & by this holy name of God **Tetragramaton** by Angels, Archangels, Thrones dominations, principals, & potestats by all orders of Angels & þe vertu of them by þe patriarks, prophets, Appostles, martires, Confessors & virgins & by þe **4** Evangelists, & by all heavens & by all thinges contayned in them

I counire thee Sathan & all thy power by þe vertue of our lord Jesus Christ & by þe vertue of all the aforesayd things rehearsed þat þou cause this woman **N** of whose heade these **3** heares belongeth to burn in my loue as this waxe melteth at þe heate of this fyre / & þat she maye not rest sleeping nor wakinge, sitting nor standinge, eatinge nor drinkinge, lyinge << folio 48 >> nor walking vntill she come to me and fulfill my will by thy power Sathan, & by þe vertue of þe aforesayd Image let all this be done without tarienge Amen **Finis. [type II]**

NOTES

I am grateful to the authorities of the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and to those of the British Library and of the Wellcome History of Science Library in London, for permission to consult and to cite from their collections during the preparation of this study. I am further grateful to Dr. Jill Kraye of the Warburg Institute for helpful advice.

1. Piers D. Mitchell, *Medicine in the Crusades: Warfare, Wounds and the Medieval Surgeon* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. chaps. 6 and 7; and Angela Montford, *Health, Sickness and the Friars in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries* (Aldershot, Hants: Ashgate, 2004), esp. 232–39. For an important study of the influence of Christianity on late medieval English charms, see Lea Olsan, "Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Oral Tradition," *Oral Tradition* 7 (1992): 116–42.

2. Jonathan Roper, *English Verbal Charms*, FF Communications, vol. CXXXVI, no. 288. (Helsinki: Acadamia Scientiarum Fennica, 2005), 189. Roper also distinguishes verbal charms from "a conservatively memorial set of reified texts repeated verbatim (as the related genre of canonical prayers would seem to be)" (188). He discusses "Flum Jordan" as a separate and most important English charm in the same work (104–9).

3. On the medieval physician Roger French, see *Medicine Before Science: The Rational and Learned Doctor from the Middle Ages to the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 2003), esp. chap. 4; and Vivian Nutton, "Medicine in Medieval Western Europe, 1000–1500," in *The Western Medical Tradition, 800 B.C. TO A.D. 1800*, ed. Lawrence I. Conrad et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 139–205. Nutton points out that as science gained in respectability it received institutional support: surgeons, barbers, physicians, apothecaries, and other medical professions were regulated in Freiburg, and the papacy came to permit such practices as the dissection of human corpses, provided that certain procedures were adhered to (146–59).

4. Claire Fanger, "Medieval Ritual Magic—What It Is and Why We Need to Know More About It," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, Magic in History, ed. Claire Fanger (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), vi. In fact, the extent to which charms could reach out to ritual needs to be explored further. See, for example, the texts designed for "arousing a woman's love," or for "gaining dignity and honor," or for "arousing hatred between friends," in MS Clm 849, a necromancer's handbook contained in the fifteenth-century manual edited by Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century*, Magic in History (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), 196–208. The same sought-for ends appear in MS 243, which equally promises to be effective in obtaining them. The line between ritual and magic—with or without Christian complications—could be thin indeed.

5. The presence of Christian elements has often been noted, but the importance of manuscript context in understanding their significance has escaped attention. See David Elton Gay, "On the Christianity of Incantations," in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke, U.K.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 32–46, which adduces some interesting examples and parallels, but without concerning itself with the kinds of human agency present in many charms, and often testified to in their manuscript context.

6. Natural magic was often involved in ritual magic and could take on different meanings depending on its context; it awaits a general, and cross-cultural, examination, which would certainly involve medical texts. For England in this period, see Frank Klaassen, "English Manuscripts of Magic, 1300–1500: A Preliminary Survey," in Fanger, *Conjuring Spirits*, esp. 12–13. The same volume contains studies of several medieval magic texts that further illustrate the dialogue between magic and religion, including Robert Mathiesen, "A Thirteenth-Century Ritual to Attain the Beatific Vision from the *Sworn Book* of Honorius of Thebers," 143–62; and Nicholas Watson, "John the Monk's *Book of Visions of the Blessed and Undefiled Virgin Mary, Mother of God*: Two Versions of a Newly Discovered Ritual Magic Text," 163–215.

7. Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London: Penguin, 1972), 46–47. Even after almost forty years, Thomas's study retains a wide readership, but for a different approach, see now Jonathan Roper, "Typologizing English Charms," in Roper, *Charms and Charming in Europe*, 128–44.

8. Evidence for the popular understanding of the prayers for which the postconditions often called appears in P. S. Jolliffe, *A Check-List of Middle English Prose Writings of Spiritual Guidance* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), 29. The text continues, "It is unusual to find a tract of this type containing anything but a brief, impersonal exposition which is not directed to the needs of the individual and is of little assistance to him while he is praying." See also Peter Revel, *Fifteenth-Century English Prayers and Meditations: A Descriptive*

List of Manuscripts in the British Library (New York: Garland, 1975); and John C. Hirsh, "Prayer and Meditation in Late Medieval England: MS Bodley 789," *Medium Aevum* 48 (1979): 55–66, where the importance of manuscript context in describing late medieval English devotions is discussed further.

9. Catherine Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 135–59, and esp. 150, citing Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. Elsewhere Thomas warns against "scriptural amulets which contained 'strange words we do not understand' or signs other than the sign of the cross" (150). Like most canonists, however, Thomas did not doubt that magic existed, or that it could obtain cures: only that it did so through demons. See Rider's section titled "Magical Cures," 148–53.

10. Folios i–iv are blank, except that folio i reads, "58 olim e Museo. e Museo 243 O.C. [i.e., Old Catalogue for *Summary Catalogue*] 3548." Folio v reads, "Aug. vi. M. DC. LV. Liber Bibl: Bodliana ex dono / Dm. Josephi Godwin / Bibliopolae, et ciuis / Oxoniensis." The study of late medieval English charms develops apace, and among those concerned specifically with Middle English texts, see J. M. McBryde, Jr., "Charms for Thieves," *Modern Language Notes* 22 (1907): 168–70; Curt Bühler, "Middle English Verses Against Thieves," *Speculum* 33 (1958): 371–72; Bühler, "Three Middle English Prose Charms from MS Harley 2389," *Notes and Queries* 207 (1962): 48; Bühler, "Prayers and Charms in Certain Middle English Rolls," *Speculum* 39 (1964): 270–80; Rossell Hope Robbins, "Medical Manuscripts in Middle English," *Speculum* 45 (1970): 393–415; and Douglas Gray, "Some Middle English Charms," in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1974), 56–71. See also the extensive examination of charms in George Keiser, *A Manual of Writings in Middle English* 1050–1500, vol. 10, *Works of Science and Information* (New Haven: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1998), 3669–76.

11. The design embossed in gold on the cover of MS e Museo 243 has evident associations with the Low Countries. See Harriet Stroomberg, compiler, and Jan van der Stock, editor, *Hollstein's Dutch and Flemish Etchings, Engravings and Woodcuts, 1450–1700* (Amsterdam: Sound and Vision, 2007), 106, nos. 57, 58.11, 58.12 (1594); no. 67, 138 (1599); no. 77, 167 (1619); no. 81, 176 (1623), for printers' devices closely related to this one, the work of Johannes (1549–ca. 1620), Hieronymous (1553–1619), and Antonius II (1555/59–1604), all of whom were associated with Christopher Plantin's publishing house in Antwerp. The paper of MS e Museo 243 is watermarked with grapes and with part of a letter (an *H*?) conjoined, similar to no. 3499 (1617) or 3500 (Stoke-on-Trent 1623) on plate 476 in Edward Heawood, *Watermarks Mainly of the 17th and 18th Centuries* (Hilversum, Holland: Paper Publications Society, 1950). MS e Museo 173, described below, is written on un-watermarked paper.

12. Identical texts, sometimes with minor variations, include among others the following, here listed by folio number, first in MS e Museo 273, then in MS e Museo 243: 63/2 (God þɑt was borne in þe borowgh); 63/4 (yf any 3 byters); 47/75 (For loue. Take 3 heares of her head); 75/52v (To mak a woman followe thee); 63v/6 (Horse or beest bewitched); diagrams: 26/43v (figura de forma); 20v/31v (three circles joined). The opening folios in MS e Museo 243, fols. 1–10, were copied from MS e Museo 273, fols. 63–63v.