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Sēocnes ond Læcecræft: Treating the Body, Healing the Spirit in the Anglo-Saxon Era

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Abstract: The essay explores the multifaceted approaches to body care during the Anglo-Saxon era, focusing on the Anglo-Saxon metrical charms. The aim is to analyse the dynamics of Anglo-Saxon 'medicine', intending to derive from it a thorough study of the beliefs and knowledge related to the concept of *sēocnes*, 'illness', and the practices of *læcecræft*, 'healing'. First, it intends to uncover the intricate relationship between physical, spiritual, and social dimensions of body maintenance, emphasizing practices such as hygiene, medical treatments, and religious rituals as the main expressions of the intertwining of medicine, religion, and magic in the Anglo-Saxon era. In a period when the modern concepts of magic, medicine, and religion had not yet been coined, illness was approached through a multitude of practices related to herbalism, superstition, and religious rituals. Religion played a central role in both spiritual and physical well-being since the divine intervention and the power of prayer shaped medical practices. Medicine in Anglo-Saxon England encompassed a variety of approaches, blending empirical observations with folk remedies and herbal treatments. Magic, closely intertwined with both religion and medicine, played a significant role in healing practices. Charms, amulets, and incantations were believed to ward off illness, protect against malevolent forces, and promote healing. Then, the essay analyses some of the main texts of the *Lacnunga*, transmitted in the *Harley MS* 585 manuscript, and of the *Bald's Leechbook* contained in the *Royal 12 D XVII* manuscript.

Keywords: *Anglo-Saxon literature; Magic; Medicine and religion; Poetry*.

The Anglo-Saxon era stands as a pivotal chapter marked by its rich blend of tradition, belief systems, and remarkable advancements in medicine. Within this

period, the complex interplay between treating the body and nurturing the spirit unveils profound insights into the holistic approach to well-being. Delving into the depths of this era, it is possible to find a civilisation deeply attuned to the interconnectedness of physical health and spiritual vitality, who perceived and practised the art of healing, where the mending of the body was intricately woven with the restoration of the spirit, fostering a harmonious equilibrium essential for the flourishing of the individual and the community alike.

During the Middle Ages, the realms of medicine, religion and magic intermingled seamlessly, both driven by a common purpose: resolving ailments and afflictions. This era saw a diverse array of practitioners, encompassing sorcerers, witches, thaumaturgists, and necromancers, each employing their unique methods. However, amidst this variety, one notable figure emerged in medieval England – the "læce," akin to a modern-day physician or healer (Lamberti 1). Furthermore, it is necessary to acknowledge the enduring presence of Germanic heathen traditions among the Anglo-Saxons, existing alongside Christian beliefs. This fusion resulted in a complex tapestry of classical medical principles mingled with pagan superstitions.

Consequently, the concept of *sēocnes* ('illness') fluctuated between adherence to the doctrine of the four humours,[1] the intrusion of supernatural entities, or divine punishment for sin. The Anglo-Saxon *læce*, therefore, resorted to *læcecræft*, which included a diverse array of methods to combat illness, ranging from herbal remedies to the creation of amulets and recitation of prayers, as for the *Nigon Wyrta Galdor* and the *Wið Lencten Adle*.

The Corpus of Anglo-Saxon Medicine: Manuscripts

The corpus of Anglo-Saxon medical expertise encompasses four collections of medical texts and remedies, alongside fragments such as the *Wellcome* fragment and some marginalia. Such collections were transmitted through two manuscripts housed at the British Library in London: codex *Royal 12.D.XVII* and codex *Harley 585*. These manuscripts include the compilations known as Bald's

Leechbook, *Leechbook III*, *Lacnunga*, and the Old English *Pharmacopoeia*. These resources were intended to provide support for the treatment of diseases through the employment of botanical and herbal, but also spiritual, and magic practices prevalent during that era.

1. *Royal 12.D.XVII*

The manuscript, identified as London, British Library, *Royal 12.D.XVII* was meticulously crafted in a single script, likely within Winchester's scriptorium during the 10th century. Comprising 128 folios of medieval parchment, each measuring 270×205 mm, it houses a collection of medical treatises and enchantments written in Old English. Notably, interspersed within its pages are supplementary inscriptions in Latin, suggesting a later origin, perhaps from the 12th or 13th century (Ker 333).

Bald's *Leechbook* derives its name from the final Latin colophon in six verses, revealing that the work was compiled by the scribe "Cild" for an individual named "Bald", who was probably the book's owner (Cockayne xxi):

> Bald habet hunc librum Cild quern conscribere iussit,
>
> hic precor assidue cunctis in nomine Cristi
>
> Quo nullus tollat hunc librum pefidus a me
>
> Nec ui necfurto nec quodam famine falso.
>
> Cur? Quia nulla mihi tam cara est optima gaza
>
> Quam cari libri quos Cristi gratis comi.[2]

The work occurs in the folios 1r-111r, and it includes a wide range of remedies not solely confined to medical applications. The inclusion of some prayers and Biblical excerpts holds remarkable significance, emphasizing the healing potential attributed to the divine intervention of God. The composition comprises two distinct books, each preceded by a comprehensive table of contents: Book I (folios 1r-64v) which meticulously addresses internal ailments,

often arranged systematically following a *capite ad calcem order*[3]; Book II (folios 65r-111r) which initially delves into general anatomical structures before addressing external maladies[4] (Wright 14).

The major inspiration for these two Leechbooks is the Salernitan compilation of *Passionarius*. However, additional influences have been discerned from *Physica Plinii*, Oribasius, Pseudo-Antonius Musa, Celsus, and the later Latin translations of Soranus of Ephesus, namely *Esculapii* and *Liber Aurelii*. Furthermore, for Book II, other sources include the Pseudo-Galenic *Liber Tertius* and the Latin *Practica Alexandri* (Cameron 154-155; Talbot 163).

After the colophon of *Bald's Leechbook* in the same manuscript, *Leechbook III* (folios 111r-127r) commences with a table of contents. The recurrence of certain textual content between the initial two books of Bald and the third Leechbook suggests the likelihood that these works were initially conceived as separate compilations, potentially drawing from shared sources, and subsequently transcribed by another scribe into this manuscript. *Leechbook III* comprises 73 chapters and is organized in a manner reminiscent of both Book I and Book II[5].

2. *Harley 585*

Harley 585 is a parchment codex of uncertain origin, dating back to the 10th or 11th century (Ker xx-xxiii). Comprising 194 folios measuring 192x115 mm, it is bound in red under the title "Anglo-Saxon Charms and Receipts". This manuscript holds significant historical importance as the oldest extant witness to the *Old English Herbal* (folios 1r-129v). Additionally, it contains two other notable medical works: the Anglo-Saxon translation of *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* (folios 101v-114v) and *Lacnunga* (folios 130r-193r).

From a palaeographical perspective, the manuscript is written in a "rough square Anglo-Saxon minuscule", indicating that it was conceived for practical work (Cameron 46; Meaney 229). *Lacnunga*, translating 'remedies', serves as a compilation featuring nearly two hundred prescriptions, recipes, prose, and

metrical charms predominantly in Old English. Additionally, it incorporates Latin invocations, along with attestations in Old Irish and Old French.

Due to variances in compilation periods, the work has been split into two sections: the initial section (folios 130r-179r) originating from the late 10th century, and the subsequent section (folios 179v-193r) dating to the early 11th century. Mainly, the remedies consist of herbal lotions, beverages, and syrups aimed at alleviating health issues and disorders (Voigts 256). Frequently, these solutions incorporate animal substances and are influenced by classical teachings, with some overlaps observed in Bald's *Leechbook*. The compilation draws from a diverse array of sources, ten identified texts for its textual content. These include Pliny's *Historia Naturalis, Medicina Plinii, Physica Plinii*, Marcellus' *De Medicamentis Liber*, Pseudo-Apuleius' *Herbarium*, Sextus Placitus' *Medicina ex Animalibus, Practica Alexandri Latine, De minutione sanguinis sive de phlebotomia, Virtutes Iohannis*, and Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiae* (Grattan and Singer 94; Pettit 161-162).

Within *Lacnunga*'s collection of recipes, a distinct series of alliterative charms stands out. Critics have described *Lacnunga*'s content as "Semi-Pagan" or "folk medicine" due to the presence of such charms. However, it is essential to note that the compilation defies strict categorization as solely "pagan". While certain charms incorporate Christian references, the prevailing notion within *Lacnunga* portrays disease as stemming from supernatural entities such as dwarfs, worms, demons, dragons, and elves (Pettit 27).

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> The fundamental aim of primitive religion was to safeguard life ... Primitive medicine sought to achieve the same end, and not unnaturally used the same means. Hence in the beginning religion and medicine were parts of the same discipline, of which magic was merely a special department. (Rivers vii)

From the above statement by W.H.R Rivers we can assume that medicine, magic, and religion were interwoven and considered that the boundaries between these realms were fluid. It is not surprising that individuals often sought remedies from multiple sources, reflecting a complex blend of faith, tradition, and practicality in the pursuit of well-being (Kieckhefer 821).

The Anglo-Saxons did not adhere to a singular belief system regarding the origins of disease or the rationale behind the treatments they replicated or translated. The causes of illness in the medieval era were multifaceted, revealing a combination of natural, supernatural, and spiritual beliefs:

> If we examine the beliefs of mankind in general concerning the causation of disease, we find that the causes may be grouped into three chief classes: (I) human agency … (II) the action of some spiritual or supernatural being … (III) what we ordinarily call natural causes. (Rivers 7)

Indeed, environmental factors such as poor sanitation, contaminated water sources, and inadequate nutrition play a significant role in predisposing individuals to various diseases. Moreover, Anglo-Saxon medicine was profoundly influenced by the theory of the four humours. Drawing from the works of ancient Greek and Roman physicians like Hippocrates and Galen, Anglo-Saxon healers believed that human well-being depended on the balance of four bodily fluids: blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile (Cameron 12). This theory guided medical practices in Anglo-Saxon society, where healers often employed a combination of herbal remedies, dietary adjustments, and ritualistic treatments to restore humoral equilibrium (Ayoub 341).

However, supernatural explanations were also prevalent, attributing illness to malevolent spirits, curses, or divine punishment (Grimm 460). Folklore depicted various supernatural entities, including dwarfs, elves, demons, and dragons, believed to inflict diseases upon humans (Lamberti 5). Elf-related diseases, for instance, were often treated as if they were demonic possessions

(Závoti 74). Moreover, the influence of Christian beliefs introduced a new layer of understanding illness. Some viewed illness as a test of faith or divine punishment due to a sinful life, reflecting the prevailing religious worldview of sin and redemption and the conviction that God was responsible for afflicting people with diseases even if, in most of the texts, God is a helpful and benevolent creature (Závoti 67).

Accordingly, the *læce* or healer utilized a diverse array of techniques and methods to address sickness and enhance health. Central to the leech's practices were herbal remedies, often derived from a rich ancestral tradition of botanical wisdom, passed down across generations and often documented in texts such as the *Lacnunga* (Rubin 66). These remedies ranged from simple poultices to complex mixtures, harnessing the healing properties of plants like chamomile, sage, and yarrow. Alongside herbalism, complementing these botanical treatments, the leech relied on magical practices, such as incantations and spells, to invoke supernatural forces believed to ward off sickness or facilitate recovery. For example, charms engraved on amulets or spoken aloud during rituals were thought to possess protective powers against illness. Besides, religious rituals and prayers held considerable influence, as individuals sought divine assistance through petitions to saints or through Christian liturgy (Payne 94).

Charms and Prayers: Exploring their Shared Essence

Despite their apparent differences, prayers, and charms share noteworthy similarities in their fundamental purposes and underlying mechanisms (Hill 145). Their distinction lies exclusively in the nature of the practitioner and the supernatural entity being invoked (Lamberti 211). Certainly, both practices involve a form of communication with the divine or supernatural realm, seeking assistance, protection, or intervention in worldly matters. They often convey a sense of reverence, faith, and devotion from the practitioner towards the higher power being invoked. Additionally, prayers and charms frequently rely on ritualistic gestures, words, or symbols believed to possess spiritual potency (Buzzoni 66).

For what concerns spells, they can be classified into five groups: exorcisms for curing diseases, herbal charms, charms for transferring diseases, amulet charms, and charm remedies. Charms typically commence with an epic narrative recounting the feats of a deity or hero (Vaughan-Sterling 189). These introductory anecdotes, termed *historiolae,* serve to establish the mythological context for magical events or miraculous occurrences involving supernatural entities (Heim 495). The intention behind invoking these tales is often to replicate past successes, thereby activating the desired magical effect. Charms commonly incorporate specific names or letters and may involve the use of threats or commands by the practitioner to achieve the desired outcome. Sometimes, the practitioner may provide instructions to the target or directly perform the spell on parts of their body. Certain symbolic numbers, such as three, seven, or nine, are frequently featured in these texts (Grendon 123). Moreover, the word often used to refer to the charms is *galdor*:

> The commonest O.E. word is Anglian galdor, West Saxon gealdor. Occasionally we find O.E. galung. They are derived from O.E. galan, 'to sing', so their meaning is 'song, magic song, charm'. In Germanic dialects we find O.S. galdar, O.H.G. galdar, galstar, kalstar, O.N. galdr. To indicate a magician or any person singing charm songs we have O.E. galere, gealdorgalere, wyrm-galere, wyrt-galere. Practising charms is called O.E. galan, agalan, begalan, gegalan, ongalan, all meaning 'to sing, to charm' (Storms 113).

From *Lacnunga*: The *Nigon Wyrta Galdor*

The *Nigon Wyrta Galdor*, commonly known as *Nine Herbs Charm*, is one of the most noteworthy Anglo-Saxon incantations, that exemplifies the fascinating witness of the blend of religious, pagan, and medical influences that highlighted the healing practices of the time. This mystical charm, found in the Harley 585 manuscript among the remedies of *Lacnunga*, holds substantial importance since it mentions the pagan god Woden, it invokes the divine assistance of Christ and

appeals to the power of nine sacred herbs (Van Arsdall 157) to combat illness and adversity (Pollington 211).

The charm opens with the healer's invocation of the nine *wyrta*, the herbs and their several properties:

Gemyne ðu mucgwyrt hwæt þu ameldodest

hwæt þu renadest æt Regenmelde

Una þu hattest yldost wyrta

þu miht wið III & wið XXX

þu miht wiþ attre & wið onflyge

þu miht wiþ þa[m] laþan ðe geond lond færð.

Ond þu wegbrade wyrta modor

eastan openo, innan mihtigu

ofer ðy cræte curran ofer ðy cwene reodan

ofer ðy bryde bryodedon ofer ðy fearras fnærdon.

Eallum þu þon wiðstode and wiðstunedest

swa ðu wiðstonde attre and onflyge

and þæm laðan þe geond lond fereð.

Stune hætte þeos wyrt, heo on stane geweox

stond heo wið attre, stunað heo wærce

Stiðe heo hatte, wiðstunað heo attre

wreceð heo wraðan, weorpeð ut attor.

Þis is seo wyrt seo wiþ wyrm gefeaht

þeos mæg wið attre, heo mæg wið onflyge

heo mæg wið ða[m] laþan ðe geond lond fereþ.
Fleoh þu nu attorlaðe, seo læsse ða maran
seo mare þa læssan, oððæt him beigra bot sy.
Gemyne þu, mægðe, hwæt þu ameldodest
hwæt ðu geændadest æt Alorforda
þæt næfre for gefloge feorh ne gesealde
syþðan him mon mægðan to mete gegyrede.
Þis is seo wyrt ðe wergulu hatte.
Þas onsænde seolh ofer sæs hrygc,
ondan attres oÞres to bote.
Stond heo wið wærce, stunað heo wið attre,
seo mæg wið III ond wið XXX
wið feondes hond ond wið frea-bregde
wið malscrunge minra wihta.
Þær geændade æppel ond attor
Þæt heo næfre ne wolde on hus bugan.
Fille and finule, felamihtigu twa
þa wyrte gesceop witig drihten
halig on heofonum, þa he hongode
sette and sænde on VII worulde
earmum and eadigum eallum to bote (Pettit 60-69).

Translation:

Remember, Mugwort, what you made known / what you arranged at Regenmeld. / You were called Una, the oldest of herbs / you have power against three and thirty, / you have power against poison and infection, / you have power against the loathsome foe roving through the land. / And you, waybread, mother of herbs / open from the east, mighty inside. / Over you chariots creaked, over you queens rode, / over you brides cried out, over you bulls snorted. / You withstood all of them, you dashed against them. / May you likewise withstand poison and infection / and the loathsome foe roving through the land. / 'Stune' is the name of this herb, it grew on a stone, / it stands up against poison, it dashes against poison, / it drives out the hostile one, it casts out poison. / This is the herb that fought against the snake, / it has power against poison, it has power against infection, / it has power against the loathsome foe roving through the land. / Now, atterlothe, put to flight now, Venom-loather, the greater poisons, / though you are the lesser, / you the mightier, conquer the lesser poisons, until he is cured of both. / Remember, maythe, what you made known, / what you accomplished at Alorford, / that never a man should lose his life from infection / after maythe was prepared for his food. / This is the herb that is called 'Wergulu'. / A seal sent it across the sea-right, / a vexation to poison, a help to others. / It stands against pain, it dashes against poison, / it has power against three and thirty, / against the hand of a fiend and mighty devices, / against the spell of mean creatures. / There the Apple accomplished it against poison / that she (the loathsome serpent) would never dwell in the house. / Chervil and Fennel, two very mighty ones. / They were created by the wise Lord, / holy in heaven as He hung; / He set and sent them to the seven worlds, / to the wretched and the fortunate, as a help to all.[6] (Storms 1948)

Every herb holds symbolic and medicinal importance, deeply rooted in folklore and tradition, integrating elements from both Christian and pre-Christian customs. Mugwort, Plantain, Lamb's Cress, Nettle, Betony, Chamomile, Crab Apple, Chervil, and Fennel are the nine herbs highlighted in this charm, which are not only revered for their healing capabilities but also for their associations with

spiritual beliefs and magical practices. Their inclusion in the charm represents a clear example of the blend of paganism and Christianism, reflecting the interconnectedness of nature, spirituality, and human existence. Each herb symbolizes different aspects of life, from intuition and balance to strength and protection, offering a complete approach to healing and well-being (Payne 141).

In the following lines, the charm appeals to the Germanic god Woden[7] to fight the *wyrm*, a creature often depicted as a serpent or dragon, which embodies primal forces of chaos and destruction, threatening the stability of the Anglo-Saxon world. In the text, this creature is split into nine parts of nine different colours, representing nine 'poisons', which must be treated with the nine herbs, hence emphasizing the symbolism of the number nine:

> Þas nigon magon wið nigon attrum.
>
> Wyrm com snican, toslat he nan.
>
> Þa genam Woden VIIII wuldortanas,
>
> sloh ða Þa næddran Þæt heo on VIIII tofleah.
>
> Nu magon þas VIIII wyrta wið nygon wuldorgeflogenum
>
> wið VIIII attrum and wið nygon onflygnum
>
> wið ðy readan attre, wið ðy runlan attre
>
> wið ðy hwitan attre, wið ðy [hæwe]nan attre
>
> wið ðy geolwan attre, wið ðy grenan attre
>
> wið ðy wonnan attre, wið ðy wedenan attre
>
> wið ðy brunan attre, wið ðy basewan attre
>
> wið wyrmgeblæd, wið wætergeblæd
>
> wið þorngeblæd, wið þystelgeblæd

wið ysgeblæd, wið attorgeblæd (Pettit 60-69).

Translation:

These nine have power against nine poisons. / A worm came crawling, it killed nothing. / For Woden took nine glory-twigs, / he smote the adder that it flew apart into nine parts. / Now these nine herbs have power against nine evil spirits, / against nine poisons and nine infections. / Against the red poison, against the foul poison / against the yellow poison, against the green poison, / against the black poison, against the blue poison, / against the brown poison, against the crimson poison. / Against worm-blister, against water-blister, / against thorn-blister, against thistle-blister, / against ice-blister, against poison-blister. (Storms 1948)

The final part of the charm contains an appeal to Christ as if he came to help the pagan Woden who precedes him (Galloni 123), stating the continuing presence of Germanic heathen traditions among the Christian beliefs. Moreover, the incantation ends with a prose section, more practical (Batten 7), to be used by the healer while preparing the herbal remedy.

Gif ænig attor cume eastan fleogan

oððe ænig norðan cume

oððe ænig westan ofer werðeode

Crist stod ofer adle ængancundes

Ic ana wat ea rinnende

þær þa nygon nædran behealdað

Motan ealle weoda nu wyrtum aspringan

sæs toslupan, eal sealt wæter

ðonne ic þis attor of ðe geblawe.

Mucgwyrt, wegbrade þe eastan open sy, lombescyrse, attorlaðan, mageðan, netelan, wudusuræppel, fille & finul, ealde

> sapan. Gewyrc ða wyrta to duste, mængc wiþ þa sapan and wiþ þæs æpples gor. Wyrc slypan of wætere and of axsan, genim finol, wyl on þære slyppan and beþe mid æggemongc, þonne he þa sealfe on do, ge ær ge æfter. Sing þæt galdor on ærce þara wyrta,: III: ær he hy wyrce and on þone æppel ealswa; ond singe þon men in þone muð and in þa earan buta and on ða wunde þæt ilce gealdor, ær he þa sealfe on do (Pettit 60-69).

Translation:
Against harmfulness of the air, against harmfulness of the ground, / against harmfulness of the sea. / If any poison comes flying from the east, / or any from the north, (or any from the south) / or any from the west among the people. / Christ stood over diseases of every kind. / I alone know a running stream, / and the nine adders beware of it. / May all the weeds spring up as herbs from their roots, / the seas slip apart, all salt water, / when I blow this poison from you.

Mugwort, waybread open from the east, lamb's cress, atterlothe, maythe, nettle, crab-apple, chervil and fennel, old soap; pound the herbs to a powder, mix them with the soap and the juice of the apple. Then prepare a paste of water and ashes, take fennel, boil it with the paste and wash it with a beaten egg when you apply the salve, both before and after. Sing this charm three times on each of the herbs before you prepare them, and likewise on the apple. And sing the same charm into the mouth of the man and into both his ears and on the wound, before you apply the salve. (Storms 1948)

From Bald's *Leechbook*: *Læcedomas eft wið Lencten Adle*

Within the folios of *Bald's Leechbook* lie remedies composed of herbs and potions but also prayers and incantations believed to invoke divine aid in the healing process. These prayers, often intertwined with Christian symbolism and invocations of saints, reflect the dual nature of Anglo-Saxon medicine. They illustrate the belief that physical ailments were not merely the result of natural causes but also manifestations of spiritual imbalances or divine punishments.

A clear example is Remedy 65 (folio 53r) which is contained in the first book of Bald. This text includes instructions to prepare a cure for *lencten-adle* ‘spring fever’ or ‘typhoid fever’, mixing features of the charm and prayer:

> Eft drenc wið lenctenadle. Feferfuge, hramgealla, finul, wegbræde. Gesinge mon felá mæssan ofer þaere wyrte, ofgeot mid ealað, do halig wæter on. Wyl swiðe wel. Drince þonne swa he hatost mæge micelne scene fulne, ær þon sio adl to wille.
>
> Feower godspellara naman y gealdor y gebed:
>
> +++++ Matheus +++++ Marcus +++++ Lucas +++++ Iohannes +++++ Intercedite +++ pro me.
>
> Tiecon. leleloth. patron. adiuro uos.
>
> Eft godcund gebed:
>
> In nomine domini sit benedictum.
>
> Beronice Beronicen. Et habet in vestimento et in femore suo. Scriptum rex
>
> regum et dominus dominantium.
>
> Eft godcund gebed:
>
> In nomine dei summi sit benedictum.
>
> D E E R E þ . N y . þ T X D E R E þ N y . þ T X.
>
> Eft sceal mon swigende þis writan and don þas word swigende þis on þa winstran breost and ne ga he in on þæt gewrit ne in on ber.
>
> And eac swigende þis on don:
>
> HAMMANẏEL . BPONICE . NOẏePTAẏEPΓ. (Cockayne 140; Storms 270)

Translation:

Again, a drink against typhoid fever. Feverfew, ram-gall, fennel, waybread. Let somebody sing many Masses over them, pour ale over them, add holy water. Boil them very well. Let the patient drink a large cupful as hot as he can, before the fever attacks him. Say the names of the four evangelists, a charm and prayer:

+++++ Matthew +++++ Mark +++++ Luke +++++ John +++++ Intercede for me. I command you Tiecon, Leleloth.

Then a divine prayer: In the lord's name be blessed. Veronica. Veronica. And he has written on his robe and on his thigh 'king of kings and lord of lords'.

Again, a divine prayer: In the name of the lord be blessed. D E E R E þ. N and. þ T X D E R E þ N and. þ T X.

Afterwards, you shall write this in silence, and silently put these words on the right breast, and you must not go indoors with that writing, nor carry it in. And you must also put this on in silence: HAMMANŷEL. BPONice. NOŷepTAŷEPΓ (Cokayne 141; Storms 271).

This remedy begins with an herbal recipe, marked by a Christian influence consisting of singing masses and recurring to the employment of holy water. Then an invocation of the four evangelists occurs: it does not include instructions on how it had to be performed but the cross symbols and the Latin petitions seem to indicate that it had to be performed as a liturgy. It is also followed by two prayers: the first is addressed to Saint Veronica; the second seems to incorporate the sequences of Roman letters and runic symbols, which had to be written down in silence. The last line also contains some Greek letters, mentioning two Hebrew names: Emmanuel and Veronica (Storms 271). This last prayer is a clear reference to the blending of pagan symbols and Christian elements (Cameron 133-134), considering also that the act of writing in silence the letters is a clear witness of Anglo-Saxon magic tradition (Storms 271).

Conclusion

The significance of these magico-medical texts lies in their ability to offer insights into the Christian culture of Britain. Both *Bald's Leechbook* and *Lacnunga* provide glimpses into the intricate belief systems surrounding disease during the Anglo-Saxon era. Through the texts analyzed, taken from two of the most relevant witnesses of medical culture, such as *Lacnunga* and *Bald's Leechbook*, it is also possible to increase awareness of the remedies and rituals employed by the Anglo-Saxons to combat illness and restore health.

Lacnunga, with its collection of diverse medical recipes and incantations, exemplifies the syncretic nature of Anglo-Saxon healing practices. It demonstrates the belief in the efficacy of both natural remedies and supernatural interventions, reflecting a society where the boundaries between medicine and religion were blurred. It is the case of the *Nigon Wyrta Galdor*, with its explicit references to botanical knowledge, Christian faith, and pagan remnants in the collective imaginary. Similarly, *Bald's Leechbook* offers a perspective into the medical knowledge and techniques of the era, showcasing a pragmatic approach to treating ailments alongside the incorporation of charms and prayers, as in Remedy 65, against *lencten adle*.

Through the examination of these texts, it becomes evident that the Anglo-Saxons approached sickness and healing in a heterogeneous way, drawing upon a combination of empirical observation, folk wisdom, and religious devotion, because:

> By magic primitive man attempted to obtain results by means that seem to be abnormal and supernatural, at any rate by methods that strike us as distinct from those that we like to call normal and natural (Storms 27).

The broader implications of these findings extend well beyond the historical understanding of Anglo-Saxon medicine. They offer a valuable framework for examining how other ancient and medieval cultures integrated religious and supernatural beliefs into their medical practices. Additionally, these

texts provide a rich resource for future research into the evolution of medical traditions and the cultural factors that influence healing practices. By further exploring the interplay between magic, religion, and medicine in Anglo-Saxon texts, it is possible to gain a more nuanced understanding of how early societies conceptualized health and disease. This research can also shed light on the resilience and adaptability of human belief systems in the face of illness, contributing to a broader appreciation of the diverse ways in which humanity has sought to understand and alleviate suffering throughout history.

Notes:

1. According to early Western physiology, humours (meaning 'liquids, fluids' in Latin) were the four fluids of the body that determined a person's temperament. These were blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile and the varying mixtures of these fluids caused a change in temperament, and in physical and mental disposition.
2. *Translation*: "Bald is the owner of this book, / which he ordered Cild to write; / earnestly here I beg everyone in the name of Christ / that no deceitful person should take this book from me, / neither by force nor by stealth nor by any false statement. / Why? Because no richest treasure is so dear to me / As my dear books which the grace of Christ attends".
3. Book I starts with the disorders of the head and proceeds with to eyes, ears, throat, face, nose, lips, thoracic organs, diaphragm, stomach, shoulders, thighs, knees, shins, feet, and genitals (remedies 1-30). The remedies 31-60 focus on cutaneous pains, while those following deal with: (remedy 62) joints, (remedies 62-66) fever, (remedy 67) alimentation, (remedy 68) bites of spiders, (remedy 70) cures for the libido, (remedy 71) feet, (remedy 72) bloodletting, (remedies 73-77) cutaneous disorders, (remedy 78) appetite, (remedy 79 and 86) some magical remedies for a journey, (remedy 85) magical charm to win a battle, and the remaining relate some disorders like insomnia, cold, drunkenness.

4. Book II first deals with (remedies 1-16) stomach, (remedies 17-24) liver, (remedies 25-33) intestines, (remedies 34-45) spleen; then it proceeds with (remedies 46-51) lungs, (remedies 52-55) purgatives, (remedy 56) dysentery, (remedy 59) paralysis, (remedy 64) a fragmentary letter from the Patriarch of Jerusalem to King Alfred, (remedy 65) miscellaneous recipes, (remedy 66) magical properties of jet, (remedy 67) densities of fluids.
5. *Leechbook* III first deals with diseases of the head, eyes, ears, mouth, teeth, neck; then the order is broken, and it focuses on cancer and bloody sputum. It progresses with internal illnesses (remedies 11-23) and then it returns to external pains (remedies 24-36). The structure *a capite ad calcem* is interrupted when it deals with eyes (remedy 46).
6. *The Nine Herbs Charm* is one of the poems containing one of the two only surviving references to Woden in Old English literature (the other one is in the Exeter Book).

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