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## “Only for Specialist” Medical Charms: Holistic Therapy in the German Medieval and Early Modern Tradition

**Abstract:** In this study, a corpus of almost unknown medieval and early modern healing-related charms is presented and discussed as being part of a holistic practical therapy combining conventional medical and surgical remedies with verbal formulas aimed at reinforcing the practitioner-patient-relationship and at propitiating the good outcome of the healing process. In this respect, these texts constitute a specific category of charms specifically addressing physicians and surgeons who recited them before or during a procedure.

**Keywords:** Complementarity of Medicine and Healing Magic, New Evidence, “Only for Specialist” Charms, German Tradition

From a contemporary point of view, medicine and magic belong to two completely different spheres of human activities. This distinction was not so clear-cut in the Middle Ages and early modern time, when medically competent practitioners were used to considering magical formulas on the same level as other therapeutic remedies, as witnessed by the frequent transmission of charms and blessings in medical collections. On the basis of a sample corpus of up-to-now disregarded late medieval and early modern German healing charms and blessings this study will show that the medical use of magical formulas was not alternative, but complementary to that of other, in our eyes, more appropriate remedies.

### *1. Medicine and Magic*

Medieval German charms and blessings have been repeatedly collected, classified, and interpreted from different perspectives<sup>1</sup>: antiquarian studies highlight the persistence of old Germanic, pagan elements in some of them (e.g., in the two Merseburg Charms),<sup>2</sup> more anthropologically oriented works aim at identifying parallels to these formulas in other traditions and cultures,<sup>3</sup> whereas pragmatistical analyses interpret them as “radicalized speech acts”.<sup>4</sup>

Despite this abundance of research, however, not all German charms have been equally covered. Particular attention has, in fact, been paid to oldest representatives of this genre (up to the thirteenth century), while only a few studies have examined

in depth the quantitatively more relevant corpus of late medieval and early modern formulas, many of which are still unedited.

The connection between magical formulas and medicine, above all, is stressed by Christa Haeseli, who, in describing the tradition of Old High German charms, underlines that they are mainly transmitted in religious manuscripts or in texts disseminating knowledge, such as medical collections and that they can, therefore, be placed in the crossover area (German *Interferenzbereich*) among magic, medicine and religion.<sup>5</sup> This is no surprise since the earliest German formulas are mainly aimed at healing diseases or at chasing away the demons causing diseases and were written in the context of the so-called “cloister medicine.”<sup>6</sup>

Early medieval “monk doctors” were active on three different levels, i.e., dietetics, medical therapy, and surgery, all reflected in the contemporary literary production and all showing significant contact points with magical practice. The ultimate aim of dietetics was, in fact, to keep (or, when necessary, restore) that healthy balance whose absence was considered the main cause of disease,<sup>7</sup> a goal, which could also be pursued with religious and magical practices, such as blessings, exorcisms or other healing rituals.<sup>8</sup> In case dietetics alone was not effective, medicinal remedies had to be used to treat the patient. The features and properties of medical plants and of other *simplicia* were listed in herbaries, while recipes explained how to prepare composite remedies (*composita*). Verbal magic, e.g., aimed at enchanting a herb before administering it to a patient, is often inserted in these texts. When both dietetics and medical therapy failed, surgery was the last resort of medieval medicine. This also included diagnostics and, most importantly, prognostics, which had recourse to charms,<sup>9</sup> name and number magic in order to predict the outcome of a disease and the ultimate destiny of the patient.<sup>10</sup>

The close connection between medical manuscripts and magic remained throughout time so that the increased production and transmission of medical compilations characterizing the late Middle Ages also resulted in an increased transmission of healing-related magical texts, which continued to be inserted in *Arzneibücher*.

Medieval and early modern medical compendia include, by definition, longer or shorter treatises, prescriptions and other materials of various origin and, among these, also magical texts. The (High and Low) German language area provides several examples of medical compendia transmitting formulas aimed not only at healing a given pathology or at helping in a medical situation, but also at providing help and protection in a wide range of everyday situations. Sometimes, these are inserted in thematic sections dealing with a specific medically relevant circumstance or pathology. This is, for example, the case of the blessings transmitted in the Middle Low German compendium known as *Düdesche Arstedia* (Gotha, Forschungsbibliothek, Cod. Chart. A 980), which are grouped together with other forms of remedy for the treatment of the same (kind of) condition, e.g., ophthalmological<sup>11</sup> or dental<sup>12</sup> pathologies. In other medical compendia, magical formulas do not show any logical connection with the surrounding material and seem to have been randomly noted along with other prescriptions of various kind.<sup>13</sup>

In both cases, however, magical formulas appear to be perceived as analogous to the other remedies, along which they are transmitted. In this respect, they simply represent an alternative method to treat a medical condition. In his *Feldtbuch der Wundarznei*, for example, Hans von Gersdorff lists various strategies a surgeon could employ to

stop bleeding: he could treat the wound with different ointments, or, in case these were ineffective, he could cauterize it with the help of a burning-iron or of black pitch. Furthermore, he could also administer a hemostatic drink to the patient.<sup>14</sup> All these remedies are considered effective and can be used in one circumstance or the other. In the same spirit, the anonymous Low German scribe of Copenhagen, Kongelige Bibliotek, GKS, 1663 4to selected some passages from von Gersdorff's surgical handbook, translated them into his mother tongue and integrated them with other material.<sup>15</sup> One of these heterogeneous integrations is constituted by a blood-staunching charm belonging to the Longinus tradition,<sup>16</sup> which represents a further alternative in the treatment of hemorrhages. In this respect, charms and blessings seem to be considered capable to heal through the power of the spoken word and, as such, employed in place of other medical remedies.

The possibility that magical formulas were used along – and not in place of – other medical remedies has already been implied by Murdoch, who ascribes the triple repetition of the *amen* and of the Lord's Prayer prescribed at the end of the "Trier Blood Blessings" (German *Trierer Blutsegen*) in Trier, Stadtbibliothek, MS 49/1018, fol. 19v (tenth century) to the need of buying the time necessary to perform practical maneuvers to stop the bleeding, without, however, further elaborating on this aspect.<sup>17</sup>

The complementarity of medicine and magic becomes, on the other hand, central in Wolfgang Ernst's reading of magical formulas. In fact, he suggests that healing charms and blessings were actually part of a holistic practical therapy and were used as neuro-psychosomatic aid instruments in the practitioner-patient-relationship.<sup>18</sup> This thesis, which is also hinted at by the unity and contemporaneity of the recitation of the formula and the therapeutic gesture(s) in some wound charms, such as the so-called "Three Good Brothers Charm,"<sup>19</sup> is based on modern neurological research, but not supported by textual evidence.

In the present study, a particular category of healing-related charms which provide the contemporary textual evidence of the medieval and early modern complementary use of medical and magical remedies is introduced. These texts are not so much aimed at healing the patient, but rather at magically reinforcing the effectiveness or at propitiating the good outcome of another, in our modern eyes, more conventional medical remedy. As such, these formulas specifically address physicians and surgeons, who were thought to recite them before or during a procedure. This is, for example, the case of the "anesthesia charms" and of the other formulas, which will be edited diplomatically for the first time, translated into English, and commented on in this study, paying attention to their particular position within the tradition of charms and blessings in the German language area.

## 2. "Only for Specialist" Medical Charms

### 2.1 Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cpg 214, fol. 17va

Wilt dv ein sniden ane we. oder sterken wunden oder braten vz sniden daz er ez niht bevindet dem dv ez tûst. So lege daz messer oder wa mit du es tûn wilt vf die stat da du

im tûn wellest. vnd sprich ich beswer dich N. bi deme vatter vnd bi deme svne vnd bi dem heiligen geiste vnd bi der heiligen gottes mûter marien vnd bi allen gottes heiligen daz dv disen N. also sûze werdest also sûze der megde marien vil seligen sweiz waz vnd ane blût sist.

Dina predina flamma gottes cruze. caro carotis uil ut emanuel laze dich N gesunt amen. Vnd kere es denne vmbe da mit do dv sniden wilt oder stechen vnd tû daz cruze wis. Dis sprich vnd tû da zû drin malen vnd ie so du es vmbe kerest so sprich ein pater noster vnd nach dem dritten pater noster So stich oder snit ane vorhte es niht we vnd blûtet och niht vnd wirt man es och nit gewar

[If you want to cut someone without pain, or to excise a severe wound or a burn, without him feeling that you are doing this, then lay the knife – or what you want to use for this – on the very spot where you want to cut and say: ‘I enchant you N. in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and for the sake of the Holy Mary, God’s mother, and of all God’s Saints that you become as sweet toward this N. as the holy sweat of the Virgin Mary and that you do not bleed.

*Dina predina flamma* God’s cross. *Caro carotis uil ut emanuel* may you N. be healed, amen.’ And then turn around the spot where you want to cut or to puncture with it and do this in form of a cross. Say and do this three times, and every time you turn around recite a Pater Noster. After the third Pater Noster, then stab or cut without fear: it will cause no pain, nor bleeding and one will not be aware of the procedure.]

This “anesthesia charm,” which is transmitted in an early fourteenth-century<sup>20</sup> medical collection known as *Speyrer Arzneibuch*, describes in detail a ritual aimed at performing surgery on a patient without him feeling pain, bleeding, or even being aware of the procedure. The ritual revolves around the surgical instrument, which has to be placed on the spot of the incision and enchanted pronouncing the *incantatio*.

This centrality of the surgical instrument seems to be reminiscent of the tradition of protection charms and blessings addressing weapons, and enchanting them so that they will not harm the petitioner.<sup>21</sup> A recurring motif in these weapon blessings is that of Mary’s tenderness towards baby Jesus, which often constitutes the *analogon* for the effect desired when pronouncing the formula: the enchanted weapons have to be as sweet and tender as the Virgin Mary, her milk or the sweat she poured while she was giving birth to Jesus. See, for example, the fifteenth-century Low German formula transmitted in the *Stockholmer mittelniederdeutsches Arzneibuch* (Stockholm, Kungliga bibliotek, Cod. X 113, fol. 48r):

Wultu eyn mest ofte eyn swert bespreken, dat it nicht sniden en mach, so spreck jii: Yk beswere di swert efte mest bi dem namen des vaders vnde des sones vnde des hilghen gheistes, sachtmodich vnde otmodech wes van snede, also Maria was, do se des Hylghen Karstes ghenas. In dem namen ghodes, amen.<sup>22</sup>

[If you want to enchant a dagger or a sword, so that it cannot cut, then say three times: ‘I enchant you, sword or dagger, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, may you be as sweet and humble while cutting as Mary when she gave birth to the Holy Christ. In the name of God, amen.]

This reference to Mary’s sweat as *analogon* for the effect of the formula is also present in the Heidelberg charm, where the surgical instrument is enchanted to become as delicate as that (*daz dv disen N. also sûze werdest also sûze der megde marien vil seligen sweiz waz vnd ane blût sist*), in order to perform surgery without the patient feeling pain.

In this respect, the Heidelberg charm can be considered an evolution of this military tradition. The Marian imagery usually connected with weapons is, in fact, newly-motivated and applied in a completely different context, in which cutting instruments do not need to become blunt toward the petitioner, but rather to be sharp and delicate enough to perform surgery in the best (e.g., not causing excessive bleeding) and painless possible way.

## 2.2 Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cpg 264, fol. 100r

A further step in this evolution is represented by the “anesthesia charm” preserved in another later (first half of the sixteenth century) Heidelberg manuscript constituting the fourth volume of Louis V, Count Palatine of the Rhine’s *Buch der Medizin*.<sup>23</sup>

Wiltu flaisch schneiden aus einer wunde on wethagen

So sprich diese wordt dorzu, Ich beschwer dich Es sei fraw oder man Bei dem vatter Bei dem sune Bei dem heiligen geist Vnd bei vnser lieben frauen gottes mutter vnd allen Gottes heiligen das diesem menschen also süsse werdest Als süssen maid Maria Ir seliger schwais was do sie irs kinds rain magt genas das du on bluet seihest dyaperdyna flamma gotz creutz Caro carnis + nil Emanuel Los dich gesunt Amen Vnd kere es vmb do du es stechen oder schneiden willt Vnd thu das kreutz wol zu dreien molen Ehe du es vmbkerest so sprich ein pater noster vnd ein aue maria Dornoch so stich oder schneid on all forcht Demnoch zeuch ein leinen duch durch ein vngeberts wachs vnd schlage es im also warm dorüber vnd vff das ein filtz Als dan mach ein daiglen ans weissem mel vnd aiern das nit zu dünne noch zu dick sei das streich vff ein leinen duch Sölchs thu vber das glied vnd nehe im de filtz fast das er im fast anlige dornoch so bind im viel schindeln ordenlich vmb de wethagen noch der leng vff de filtz die in der leng sein von den augen bis vff die knie vnd los dorvff liegen Cantzler, [If you want to cut flesh from a wound without pain

Then pronounce these words while doing it: ‘I enchant you, woman or man, in the name of the Father, of the Son, of the Holy Spirit and for the sake of our dear Lady, God’s mother and of all Saints that you become as sweet and delicate toward this person as the Virgin Mary’s holy sweat when she gave birth to her baby as a pure virgin, may you be without blood. *Dyaperdyna flamma*, God’s cross, *caro carnis + nil Emanuel* may heal you, amen.’ And turn it around the spot in which you want to stab or to cut and make a cross three times. Before you turn it around say a Pater Noster and an Ave Maria. Then stab or cut without fear. Then prepare a canvas cloth with new wax and lay it warm on it and a felt on that. Then make a dough with white flour and eggs, stretch it out so that it is neither too thin nor too thick and spread it onto a linen cloth. Put this onto the limb and sew it down to the felt, so that it almost comes into contact with it. Then bind some shingles around the aching spot and order them lengthwise on the felt, so that they are from the eyes to the knee and let it lay there, Cantzler.]

In this version, in fact, the surgical instrument is not mentioned anymore in the first sentence of the *incantatio*, which simply refers to a second person pronoun *dich* (*Ich beschwer dich*), apparently (and completely nonsensically) indicating the patient, as suggested by the following passage – *Es sei fraw oder man*. This loss of centrality of the surgical instrument is also reflected in the description of the anesthetic ritual, which does not prescribe to lay the blade onto the very spot of the incision, but enchanted verbally, while performing the surgery.

Though less evident than in the previously-analyzed version, the connection with the tradition of protection blessings against weapons is maintained in the reference

to Mary's sweat as *analogon* for the effect desired (*Als süssen maid Maria Ir seliger schwaiss was do sie irs kinds rain magt genas*). This analogy and the meaning of the whole charm can be understood only on the basis of this tradition, which allows identifying the *dich* of the beginning of the formula as the surgical instrument.

The ritual associated with the formula is the same as described in the *Speyrer Arzneibuch*: the surgeon has to turn his instrument around the spot of the incision, pray and make a cross three times. The peculiarity of this version of the charm, if compared with the fourteenth-century one, is constituted by the operative instructions on how to treat the wound, which have been inserted after the sentence encouraging the surgeon to cut without fear. The insertion of this passage at the end of the charm clearly witnesses that medicine and magic were not considered antithetical, but rather complementary and integrating each other to achieve the best possible outcome for the patient.

### 2.3 Michael Bapst von Rochlitz, *Ein neues und nützlichs Ertzney / Kunst / vnd Wunderbuch*, fol. 179r

A different approach to magical help for pain management during medical-surgical procedures can be found in the late sixteenth-century (1590) printed medical collection by the Lutheran priest and medical amateur Michael Bapst von Rochlitz known as *Ein neues und nützlichs Ertzney / Kunst / vnd Wunderbuch*.<sup>24</sup> In this case, in fact, the “anesthetic” ritual does not involve the surgical instrument, but simply a Latin blessing, which has to be pronounced by the practitioner and then repeated five times by the patient, who, in this respect, becomes part of a therapeutic alliance with the surgeon (or physician) and contributes to the good outcome of the magic ritual and, consequently, of the procedure.

Another peculiarity of this blessing is represented by its introduction, which ascribes the anesthetic remedy to two eminent medieval medical authorities – Bernardus de Gordonio (ca. 1285–ca. 1320) and Antonio Guainerio (ca. 1380–ca. 1455), thus fully embedding it in the context of early modern medical collections, where single prescriptions and operative indications are often legitimated by their attribution to an acknowledged medical authority.<sup>25</sup>

Das ein verwundter oder beschedigter Mensch keinen schmerzen befinde  
Gordonius vnd Guainerius haltens dafür / wann man den verwundten vff den Schlagk  
oder schaden die hand lege / vnd das Patient fünff mahl nach einander folgende wort  
nachspreche.

Vulneribus quinis me subtrahe Christe ruinis,  
Vulnera *quinque* dei sint medicina mei.

[So that a wounded or injured person does not feel any pain

Gordonius and Guainerio believe that, when one lays the hand onto the patient's lesion  
or wound, the patient should repeat five times, one after the other the following words:

*Vulneribus quinis me subtrahe Christe ruinis,*  
*Vulnera quinque dei sint medicina mei.*]

The Latin magical formula to be repeated by the patient contains a reference to a motif frequently occurring in charms – particularly those aimed at staunching blood or at healing wounds –, that of the Five Wounds of Christ,<sup>26</sup> which, possibly elaborating on

the *Christus medicus* religious metaphor,<sup>27</sup> are here identified as the patient's medicine (*medicina mei*).

#### 2.4 Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cpg 264, fol. 22v

Apart from being able to perform surgery on a patient without him feeling pain, magical help can also be required to perform particularly complex procedures, such as, for example, the extraction of an arrow. Examples of blessings of this kind can be found again in the sixteenth-century manuscript Heidelberg, Cpg 264:

Ein segen ein pfeil aus zu ziegen mit den zwain vngenanthen fingern  
 Sprich Jn Godtes namen amen Nicodemus was der man der vnsern herren die hailigen drei negell aus henden vnd aus füssen gewan Also müssestu mir pfeil hernoch gan Das helff mir der man der den vnschuldigen dodt an dem hailigen kreutz name Jn Godtes namen amen Vnd sprich v *pater noster* den v minnenden zaichen zu lobe vnd ere Gibe auch v de vmb godtes willen Wan du wunden segen sprichst So lege die zwen nechsten finger bei den klain an den pfeile vnd zeuch dormit Er folgt C barbier Drentwein,  
 [A blessing to extract an arrow with the two nameless fingers  
 Say: 'In God's name, amen. Nicodemus was the man, who took the holy three nails from our Lord's hands and feet. In the same way you, arrow, must follow me out. May the man who died innocent on the holy cross help me in this, in the name of God, amen.' And recite five Pater Noster in honor of the five loving signs. Give also five ... for God's sake. When you pronounce the wound blessing, then lay the two fingers, which are closer to the small one, onto the arrow and pull with them. It will come. C barber Dreintwein.]

As other blessings aimed at extracting an arrow from a wound, this formula has recourse to an apocryphal expansion of the biblical account in John 19: 39, according to which the Jew Nicodemus<sup>28</sup> came first to Jesus and brought a mixture of myrrh and aloe to embalm his body. Since Nicodemus was the first to reach Christ's body, he is traditionally attributed the gesture of extracting the nails from his hands and feet. In arrow blessings, this very action becomes the *analogon* for the effect to be achieved through magic.

#### 2.5 Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cpg 264, fol. 23r

The same Heidelberg manuscript also transmits another, longer, blessing to extract an arrow from a wound:

Ein pfeil segen  
 Also thu im Setze sie zwen namlosen finger ... ..halb dere wunden do der pfeil eingeschossen ist ihr ein finger vff blasse handt Vnd sprich, Das ist an In Godtes namen amen Nun walt sein Godt Sanctus Longinus der jüdisch ritter der stach Godt ein wunden doraus so gienge menschlichs bluet vnd Göttlichs wasser Sant Longinus was bei im gar on hass Sanctus Benedictus der Godt aus seinen handen vnd füssen brach die nagell die Godt durch sein hend vnd füss wunden geschlagen doraus gienge ein geruch der was gar zucker süsse Also gen aus eisen vnd bain vnd aus flaisch das gebeudt dir der hailig her Sant Longinus Stach Godt ein wunden Jst das wore So gehe du eisen heraus drew mole sprich das Nun gehe eisen heraus das gebeudt ich dir Bei der geburt die Maria vnder irem hertzen druge Vnd bei der hailigen westerbare die Maria druge an irem arm Vnd bei dem woren keuschen magdum den Maria hedt Jren hertzen heben sune vor mir an die erden das du kainem menschen nümmer schadest daz helff mir Mein fraw Sancta Maria Vnd

mein fraw Sant fele vnd alle die hailigen die mit Godt seint Amen das ist gar ein gudter segen Wisse auch fur war das über hundertt mole versüecht ist Dinst,

[An arrow blessing

Do this to him. Place the two nameless fingers inside the wound where the arrow has been shot, a finger on the naked hand and say: 'This is in the name of God, amen. Now may God grant this. Saint Longinus was the Jewish knight, who pierced a wound in God. There gushed human blood and divine water. Saint Longinus did not do that because of hate. Saint Benedictus extracted the nails, which had been banged in the wounds in his hands and feet. A very sweet scent came out of them. In the same way, may iron and bone (splinters) go out from the flesh, the holy Lord orders you this. Saint Longinus pierced a wound in God, if this is true, then go out, iron.' Say three times this: 'Go out now, iron, I order you this for the sake of the birth which Mary carried under her heart, and of the holy baby in baptismal vest, whom Mary carried in her arms, and of the real chaste virginity, which elevated Mary's heart, atone in front of me on the earth and do not damage any other human being. May my Lady Saint Mary help me in this, and my Lady Saint Fele and all the Saints who are with God, amen.' This is a very good blessing. Be also aware that it has been used more than hundred times, Dinst.

In this version of the blessing, which again prescribes the use of the two nameless fingers to extract the arrow, Nicodemus' legendary role as the one who extracted the nails from Christ's hands and feet is combined – as often is the case<sup>29</sup> – with the Longinus motif. As in other formulas of this tradition, the Roman soldier mentioned in John 19: 34 becomes a "Jewish knight" (*jüdisch ritter*).<sup>30</sup> Another traditional element of Longinus blood and wound blessings is constituted by the reference to the blood and water gushing out from Jesus' flank, which are often interpreted, as here, as a visible sign of his double – human and divine – nature.<sup>31</sup> Not so common is, on the other hand, the commentary in the Heidelberg formula, according to which Longinus did not act because he hated Christ, without, however, further explaining the reason why he stabbed him (e.g., as an act of mercy? Because he was blind, as in some texts of the tradition?).

Nevertheless, the account of Longinus' episode does not provide the analogical basis for the surgical extraction of the arrow, which, instead, is represented by the sweet scent coming out of Christ's wounds in the very moment when the three holy nails were taken out from them. Differently from other arrow blessings, this gesture is attributed here not to Nicodemus, but to Saint Benedictus.

Another peculiarity of this formula is represented by the *invocatio*, in which the arrow – here simply indicated as "iron" (*eisen*) – is personified and told to come out and to make amends for its behavior in front of the surgeon/petitioner, who also asks him not to damage any other person. This last passage can be seen as reminiscent of protection charms, in which weapons are enchanted to become harmless.<sup>32</sup>

Apart from the initial, synthetic, description of the surgical maneuver of extraction,<sup>33</sup> another feature of this text allows considering it a formula aimed at easing the work of a specialist. This is constituted by the final remark guaranteeing the real effectiveness of the blessing, which is witnessed by the fact that it was proven effective in more than hundred occasions. "Efficacy phrases"<sup>34</sup> of this kind are extremely common in medical prescriptions and are possibly aimed at highlighting a specific remedy, which, according to the author of the collection or to his sources, were particularly useful in a given situation.



### 3. “Only for Specialist” Variants of Popular Medical Charms

#### 3.1 Lucerne, Zentral- und Hochschulbibliothek, Pp 27 4to, fol. 63r

This complementarity of medicine and magic in the Middle Ages and Early Modern times is further witnessed by the existence of variants of popular healing-related charms possibly indicating their use as verbal fortifiers of other – non magical – therapeutic remedies. This is, for example, the case of one of the three blood-staunching formulas transmitted in an early eighteenth-century medical commonplace book from the Swiss monastery of Werthenstein:

Ain bluott segen<sup>35</sup>  
 Cristus war geboren den hatt maria ver=  
 loren, vnd wider geffunden, also verstel  
 ich dir daz bluott in dinen wunden.  
 Im Namen Gotteß Vaterß vnd deß  
 sonß vnd deß hailigen gaists Amen.  
 [A blood staunching charm.

Christ was born, Maria lost him and found him again. In the same way I staunch the blood in your wounds. In the name of God, the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.]

This short charm, which is centered around the popular motif of Christ being born, lost and found again,<sup>36</sup> is constituted by apparently unrelated parts: one shortly recalling these three moments in Christ’s biography and the invocation to pronounce in order to staunch bleeding. Despite the *also* “so” introducing the *incantatio* and suggesting an analogical relationship between the two parts of the charm, in fact, there is no real justification for the use of these Biblical episodes in a formula aimed at stopping bleeding,<sup>37</sup> since they do not contain any reference to flowing liquids which are suddenly stopped.

As pointed out by Schwab,<sup>38</sup> however, *Christus war geboren* charms do not need to be explained on the basis of analogy, because they belong to a particular form of magic based on the Apostolic Creed, whose exorcistic effectiveness and power lies in the *epiklēsis* of Christ’s resurrection.<sup>39</sup> This late antique form of Christian magic has been preserved and developed in the Middle Ages, giving rise to a great variety of charms listing significant moments of Christ’s biography.<sup>40</sup>

The peculiarity of this very variant of the *Christus war geboren* blood charm, which makes it interesting in this context, is constituted by the use of the first-person pronoun *ich* “I” in the second part of the simile, whereas other versions of the same charm invoke Christ’s intervention to help the wounded.<sup>41</sup> Given the context of the transmission of the charm – in a medical commonplace book together with prescriptions and medical-surgical operative instructions of various origin – this first-person pronoun can be interpreted as referring to a medically-competent practitioner invoking divine help to be able – with pharmacological or surgical means – to stop the bleeding from his patient’s wounds.

#### 4. Conclusion

As this sample corpus of medieval and early modern charms and blessings ranging from the fourteenth to the eighteenth centuries has shown, medicine and magic were by no means considered antithetical and alternative, but rather complementary healing strategies. This complementarity of medicine and magic is visible at different levels. The most macroscopic of these is constituted by the transmission of healing charms and blessings within medical and surgical collections, where they are listed along with other remedies and are, therefore, inserted in the palette a medical practitioner could have recourse to treat a specific pathology.

Evidence of a complementary use of medicine and magic can, on the other hand, also be found within the same text. In this case, we are in front of a particular category of healing-related formulas, whose aim does not seem to be the healing of a patient through the power of the spoken word, but rather to reinforce the effectiveness or to propitiate the best possible outcome of another therapy.

The analysis of a corpus of “only for specialist” charms has revealed a series of analogies and similarities with other kinds of formulas, with which they might be genetically related. In this respect, they can either be seen as evolution and re-motivation of pre-existing magical traditions or as integration of originally autonomous magical motifs within the context and the textual forms of medical operative instructions and of their legitimation and efficacy assessment. The former case is clearly exemplified by the two Heidelberg “anesthesia charms,” in which the diction and the motifs of weapon blessings are applied to a very specific kind of blade – surgical instruments – in order to be able to perform an incision in the best possible way. The interpenetration of magical motifs and medical operative and prescriptive instructions is, on the other hand, well visible not only in Longinus and Nicodemus arrow blessings, but also in the use of an efficacy assessing sentence at the end of the “anesthesia charm” in Cpg 214, in the legitimating introduction to the formula inserted in Michael Bapst’s medical collection and in the detailed description of postoperative care in Cpg 264, fol. 100r.

Finally, popular healing-related charms, such as the *Christus war geboren* blood-staunching formula, show, in some variants, e.g., in Lucerne, ZHB, Pp 27 4to, fol. 63r, linguistic elements explicitly indicating their possible use as supporting pharmacological or surgical remedies. All these examples convey the idea that some healing-related charms were used to integrate medicine and surgery in a holistic approach and to reinforce the therapeutic alliance between healthcare professionals and patients. Whether this neuro-psychosomatic function can be extended to all healing formulas – even those not explicitly mentioning the unity of therapeutic gesture and recitation of the formula – as suggested by Ernst,<sup>42</sup> cannot be told for sure. Nevertheless, the very existence of these “only-for-specialist” charms certainly casts new light onto medieval and early modern medical practice, which, despite being usually labeled as irrational and inaccurate, turns out to be rather refined and well aware that the whole person has to be treated (and not just the injury or disease), in order to obtain a complete healing.

## Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, Verena Holzmann, “*Ich beswer dich wurm vnd wyrmin...*” *Formen und Typen altdeutscher Zaubersprüche und Segen*. Wiener Arbeiten zur germanischen Altertumskunde und Philologie, 36. Bern, Berlin et al.: Peter Lang, 2001; Eleonora Cianci, *Incantesimi e benedizioni nella letteratura tedesca medievale (IX-XIII sec.)*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 717. Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 2004; Gerhard Eis, *Altdeutsche Zaubersprüche*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1964; Heather Stuart and Fred Walla, “Die Überlieferung der mittelalterlichen Segen,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum* 116.1 (1987): 53–79; Ernst Hellgardt, “Die deutschen Zaubersprüche und Segen im Kontext ihrer Überlieferung (10. bis 13. Jahrhundert). Eine überlieferungsgeschichtliche Skizze,” *Atti Accademia Peloritana dei Pericolanti, Classe di Lettere, Filosofia e Belle Arti* 71 (1995): 5–62; Russell Poole, “Charms and Incantations,” *Handbook of Medieval Studies: Terms – Methods – Trends*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Vol. 2. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010, 1700–05.
- 2 See, for example, Jacob Grimm, “Über zwei entdeckte gedichte aus der zeit des deutschen Heidenthums,” *Abhandlungen der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin* 1842 (1844): 1–26.
- 3 See, for example, Irmgard Hampp, *Beschwörung Segen Gebet. Untersuchungen zum Zauberspruch im Bereich der Volksheilkunde*. Veröffentlichungen des staatlichen Amtes für Denkmalpflege Stuttgart. Reihe C: Volkskunde, 1. Stuttgart: Silberburg Verlag, 1961; Monika Schulz, *Magie oder Die Wiederherstellung der Ordnung*. Beiträge zur Europäischen Ethnologie und Folklore. Reihe A: Texte und Untersuchungen, 5. Bern, Berlin et al.: Peter Lang, 2000; eadem, *Beschwörungen im Mittelalter. Einführung und Überblick*. Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 2003; Albrecht Classen, “Old High German Missionary Activities by Means of Zaubersprüche–Charms: Anthropological-Religious Universals in the Early Middle Ages,” *Kościół w dobie chrystianizacji (Churches in the Era of Christianization)*, ed. Marian Rędkowski. Wolińskie Spotkania Mediewistyczne III. Szczecin/Stettin: Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology, Department of Archaeology, 2016, 77–88.
- 4 Christa M. Haeseli, *Magische Performativität. Althochdeutsche Zaubersprüche in ihrem Überlieferungskontext*. Philologie der Kultur, 4. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011, 10.
- 5 On this, see Haeseli, *Magische Performativität* (see note 4), 29.
- 6 The diffusion of this practice in European monasteries paralleled that of the Benedictine Rule, which stated the priority of assistance and care of the sick over all other activity: “*Infirmorum cura ante omnia et super omnia adhibenda est, ut sicut revera Christo ita eis serviatur, quia ipse dixit: Infirmus fui et visitastis me, et: Quod fecistis uni de his minimis mihi fecistis,*” and was institutionalized by the Council of Aachen in 817, in which monks and nuns were entrusted with the responsibility of assisting and treating the sick. This scenario changed radically at the beginning of the twelfth century when the Council of Clermont (1130) and of Tours (1163) forbade monks to practice medicine, thus paving the way for the separation between cultivated, medical theory and surgical practice, which is characteristic of the Salernitan medicine. On this, see also Haeseli, *Magische Performativität* (see note 4), 30–31.
- 7 See also Jörg Riecke, *Die Frühgeschichte der mittelalterlichen medizinischen Fachsprache im Deutschen*. Vol. 1. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2004, 8.
- 8 See also Hans H. Lauer, “Klostermedizin,” *Enzyklopädie Medizingeschichte*, ed. Werner E. Gerabek, Bernhard D. Haage, Gundolf Keil, and Wolfgang Werner. Berlin and

- New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2005, 758–64; here 761 and Riecke, *Die Frühgeschichte* (see note 7), 14–15.
- 9 See, for example, the thirteenth-century water rituals to find out if a patient will recover or not, which are preserved in London, British Library, Ms. 295, fol. 255r: “*Cum aliquis longa ergritudine fuerit detentus et uelis experiri si conualescat an non. Accipe in aliquo uase aquam fontanam actualiter frigidam et accipe lapidem de torrente actualiter frigidum et tenens lapidem in manu dextra dic hec uerba coniurationem faciendo.* In des Jordânes flûm / Wart gebadet Crist gotes sun: / Des enist kein lougen. / Dar inne badete er sîn ougen, / Sîn houbet, brust unde fuoz. / Also waerlich er uns abewusch / In dem Jordâne unsere sünde, / Also müeze uns diz wazzer künde, / Waz disme siechen künftec sî. / Des beswere ich dih, wazzer, in nomine patris et filii. / Ich spîe an die erden: Sule es ime iemer bouz werden, / Stein, sô siuse dû lûte. / Des beswere ich dich hiute / Bî den zehern der frîen, / Mîner frouwen sante Marien, / Die dâ giengen über ir wangen / Dô sie ir trût kint sach irhangen. / Sule er der sieche in algeriht / Sterben, stein, son siuse niht” (When someone has been sick for a long time and you want to know if he will recover or not. Take some really cold water in a bowl and a pebble from a really cold river. Then keep the stone in your right hand and pronounce these words while you cast the spell. Christ, son of God washed in the Jordan river, this is no lie. There he washed his eyes, head, breast and feet. As it is true that he washed away our sins in the Jordan, so may this water tell us the future of this sick. I enchant you, water, in the name of the Father and of the Son. I spit on the earth: Should he ever be better, then whirl loudly, stone. I enchant you by the cold tears which ran on my Lady Holy Mary when she saw Her dear Son crucified. Should the patient die, do not whirl, stone). See also Holzmann, “*Ich beswer dich* (see note 1), 237.
  - 10 See, for example, the *Spera Apulei Platonici de vita, de morte vel omnibus negotiis*, a diagram which can be found in Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Ms. 752 (ninth or tenth century) and which was used by doctors and priests to evaluate the life expectancy of a patient by calculating the numerical value of the letters composing his or her name and adding it to the day of the lunar month, on which the patient had fallen ill. This figure had to be divided by 30. If the result was located in the upper half of the sphere, the patient would survive, otherwise he would die. See also Karl Schmucki, “Eine medizinische Sammelhandschrift mit der magischen Sphäre über Leben und Tod,” *Cimelia Sangallensia. Hundert Kostbarkeiten aus der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen*, ed. Karl Schmucki, Peter Ochsenbein and Cornel Dora. St. Gall: Verlag am Klosterhof, 1998, 98–99.
  - 11 See Sven Norrbom, *Das Gothaer mittelniederdeutsche Arzneibuch und seine Sippe*. Hamburg: Hartung, 1921, 75–79.
  - 12 See Norrbom, *Das Gothaer mittelniederdeutsche* (see note 11), 88–89.
  - 13 See, for example, the first four blessings appearing in the so-called *Stockholmer mittelniederdeutsches Arzneibuch* (Stockholm, Kungliga bibliotek, Cod. X 113), dealing with gangrene, wounds, and fever respectively, which are preceded by a prescription to help people hearing better and followed by a remedy to remove unwanted hair from someone’s body. Agi Lindgren, *Ein Stockholmer mittelniederdeutsches Arzneibuch aus der zweiten Hälfte des 15. Jahrhunderts*. Stockholm, Göteborg and Uppsala, 1967, 91–92.
  - 14 Hans von Gersdorff, *Feldtbuch der Wundarzney*, mit einem Vorwort zum Neudruck von Johannes Steudel. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967, fol. XXIXr–XXXIr.
  - 15 On the way of dealing with the High German source in the Copenhagen manuscript, see Chiara Benati, *Die niederdeutsche Fassung des Feldtbuchs der Wundarzney in Kopenhagen, Kongelige Bibliothek, GKS 1663 4o. Edition und Kommentar*. Göppinger Arbeiten zur Germanistik, 787. Göppingen: Kümmerle, 2017; and eadem, “The Field Surgery Manual Which Became a Medical Commonplace Book: Hans von Gersdorff’s *Feldtbuch*

- der Wundarzney (1517) Translated into Low German,” *Bodily and Spiritual Hygiene in Medieval and Early Modern Literature. Explorations of Textual Presentations of Filth and Water*, ed. Albrecht Classen. Fundamentals of Medieval and Early Modern Culture, 19. Berlin and Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2017, 501–27.
- 16 See also Benati, *Die niederdeutsche Fassung* (see note 15), 49–52; on this Low German blood-staunching charm, see also Chiara Benati, “Eine neue niederdeutsche Fassung des Longinussegens zur Blutstillung,” *Zeitschrift für deutsches Altertum und deutsche Literatur* 145 (2016): 89–97.
- 17 Brian Murdoch, “*Dorhtin, uerthe so!* Funktionsweisen der altdeutschen Zaubersprüche,” *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch im Auftrage der Görres-Gesellschaft Neue Folge* 32 (1991): 11–37; here 18.
- 18 Wolfgang Ernst, *Beschwörungen und Segen. Angewandte Psychotherapie im Mittelalter*. Cologne, Weimar and Vienna: Böhlau, 2011, 7.
- 19 On this, see also Schulz, *Beschwörungen im Mittelalter* (see note 3), 67.
- 20 The manuscript is dated 1321. See Matthias Miller and Karin Zimmermann, *Die Codices Palatini germanici in der Universitätsbibliothek Heidelberg (Cod. Pal. Germ. 182–303)*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005, 103–07.
- 21 On this, see also Chiara Benati, “*À la guerre comme à la guerre* but with caution: Protection charms and blessings in the Germanic tradition,” *Revista Brathair* 17.1 (2017): 155–91.
- 22 Lindgren, *Ein Stockholmer mittelniederdeutsches* (see note 13), 136.
- 23 On this, see also Karl Bartsch, *Katalog der Handschriften der Universitäts-Bibliothek in Heidelberg*. Vol. 1: *Die altdeutschen Handschriften*. Heidelberg: Verlag von Gustav Koesler, 1887, 53–54.
- 24 This medical collection contains a large number of healing charms, blessings and “superstitions,” which, however, are strongly criticized by the author, who underlines that he has reported them simply because he wanted to show his readers how deceitful the Devil can be. See Michael Bapst von Roehrlitz, *Ein neues vnd nützlichs Ertzney / Kunst / vnd Wunderbuch / deßgleichen hiebeuorn nicht gesehen / darinnen allerley Alchymistischen und andern Künsten / wunderbarlichen Sachen vnd Historien / vornemlichen angezeigt wird*. Mülhausen: Andrea Hanßsch, 1591, fol. 178v.
- 25 On this, see Melanie Panse, *Hans von Gersdorffs ‘Feldbuch der Wundarzney’. Produktion, Präsentation und Rezeption von Wissen*. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2012, 58–59.
- 26 On this, see Schulz, *Beschwörungen im Mittelalter* (see note 3), 72–74.
- 27 On this, see Schulz, *Beschwörungen im Mittelalter* (see note 3), 97–98.
- 28 On this, see Schulz, *Beschwörungen im Mittelalter* (see note 3), 77–78.
- 29 On this, see *Beschwörungen im Mittelalter* (see note 15), 77–78.
- 30 See also Adolf Jaboby, “Longinussegens,” *Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*. Vol. 5: *Knoblauch – Matthias*, ed. Hanns Bächtold-Stäubli and Eduard Hoffmann-Krayer. Berlin and Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1932–33, coll. 1327–48; here 1337.
- 31 See, for example, the charm in Wrocław, Biblioteka Uniwersytecka, Cod. I F 334, fol. 7r: “Longinus stach vnßerme hern in sine sithen, das us vlos wasser vnde blut ... wasser us der gotheit, blut us der menscheit” (Longinus pierced our Lord in his side, there gushed water and blood... water from his divinity, blood from his humanity).
- 32 See also Benati, “*À la guerre comme*” (see note 17), 159–60.
- 33 If surgical operative instructions of this kind are absent, it is impossible to ascertain if a magical formula was intended as a therapeutic means on its own and, as such, alternative to any other medical remedy or if it could also be used by medical practitioners to reinforce the effectiveness of their work. This is, for example, the case of another arrow blessing in Heidelberg, Universitätsbibliothek, Cpg 264, fol. 19r: “Ein segen wan einer mit eim pfeil ist geschossen. Sprich, Ich gebeut dir pfeil in flaisch in bluet in gebain Ich gebeut dir in

dem namen des vatters vnd des suns vnd des hailigen gaists vnd der lieben mutter Maria vnd bei den vier ewangelisten vnd bei dem iüngsten gericht das du heraus gangest on aller handt schmerzen Als vnser lieber herr ging aus seins vatter herzen do in Maria entpfing In dem namen des vatter vnd des suns vnd des hailigen gaists Amen. [A blessing when one is shot with an arrow. Say: 'I order you, arrow in flesh, blood and bone, I order you in the name of the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit and of the dear Mother Mary and of the four Evangelists and of the Doomsday, that you come out without any pain as our dear Lord came out from His Father's heart when Mary conceived Him. In the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, amen.]

- 34 On this, see Claire Jones, "Formula and Formulation: 'Efficacy Phrases' in Medieval English Medical Manuscripts," *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen* 99.2 (1998): 199–209.
- 35 On fol. 62v this title is preceded by another one – *Ain andernn* "Another one" – marking the thematic continuity with the preceding passage.
- 36 The reference is here to the passage in Luke 2: 41–52, in which the twelve-year old Jesus went to Jerusalem with his parents, stayed behind in the city, without Mary and Joseph knowing it, and was finally found in the temple.
- 37 On this, see Oskar Ebermann, *Blut- und Wundsegen in ihrer Entwicklung dargestellt*. Berlin: Mayer & Müller, 1903, 27–28.
- 38 Ute Schwab, "In sluthere bebunden," *Studien zum Altgermanischen. Festschrift für Heinrich Beck*, ed. Heiko Uecker. Ergänzungsbände zum Reallexikon der Germanischen Altertumskunde, 11. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1994, 554–83; here 560–61.
- 39 See also Robert W. Daniel and Franco Maltomini, *Supplementum magicum* I. Abhandlungen der Rheinische-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 16.1. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990, 65.
- 40 In case of rhymed charms, the selection of these moments is often determined by the therapeutic aim of the formula. This means that the participle (*ge*)*funden* "found" has been inserted in wound-healing charms because it rhymes with the keyword *wunden* "wounds." The need of a rhyming partner for the past participle *geboren* "born" and the semantic relation to (*ge*)*funden* must then have determined the choice of *verloren* "lost," thus evoking the temple episode in Luke 2. The aim of the Lucerne charm – staunching blood – as stated in its title seems to be a later addition to the original wound-healing nucleus, which has been maintained, thus leaving the rhyming pattern *funden* – *wunden* unaltered.
- 41 See, for example, the other version of the *Christus war geboren* charm against bleeding transmitted on fol. 34r of the same manuscript: "Cristuß war geboren, Cristus war *verloren*, Cristuß ward wider *funden*, Jesuß stel mir *daz* bluott, vnd hail mir die *wunden*, Im namen gotts vaterß + vnd deß sonß + vnd deß hailigen gaists Amen."
- 42 Ernst, *Beschwörungen und Segen* (see note 18).