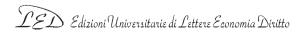# The Language of Magic

Edited by Eleonora Cianci and Nicholas Wolf

IL SEGNO E LE LETTERE

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CONTENTS

Contents

URINE FOR A TREAT!
OR, HOW TO CURE URINARY DISEASE IN EARLY MEDIEVAL IRELAND

Ilona Tuomi

Abstract

Illness and disease have always been part of human life. They shake our everyday existence, our sense of security and what we consider as normal. Illness is always a crisis which requires action and measures to be taken. These measures, due to the crisis nature of the situation, might be non-standard or considered unusual. However, these operations also reveal something about how and what we think and what we believe in. The article will consider an example of how the medieval Irish mind tackled the crises of illness by means of charms. Special attention is paid to the choice of expressions in the incantations as well as the rituals used. It is argued that in order to understand the mental landscape of illness and healing, attention should be paid to finding out what was thought to be the reason behind the disease. The investigation will focus on two early Irish charms against urinary disease in order to understand some of the ways in which this still very common ailment was overcome in medieval Ireland.

Keywords: healing practices; medieval Irish charms; medieval manuscripts; St. Gall incantations; Stowe Missal charms.

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Illness and disease have always been part of human life. As we have so accurately learned in recent times, illness and disease shake our everyday existence, our sense of security, and what we consider as normal. Whether a global pandemic or an isolated case in an individual's life, illness is always a crisis that requires action and measures to be taken. These measures, due to the crisis nature of the situation, might be non-standard or considered unusual. However, these operations also reveal something about how and what we think and what we believe in.

219

Using powerful words as part of healing acts has been known throughout history. The following chapter will consider an example of how the medieval Irish mind tackled the crises of illness by means of charms[1]. Can the surviving texts elucidate what was thought to be the reason behind illness and disease? Why were certain textual images included in the incantations? What meaning did the rituals described in the texts have? Is it possible to gain an insight into what early Irish people thought and believed through the study of charms?

There are eight well-known magical texts surviving in Old Irish manuscripts[2]. First, there are the four known as the St. Gall incantations; second, the three known as the Stowe Missal charms, and, finally, the incantation in the Reichenau Primer[3]. Seven of these texts can be labelled as healing charms. Out of these seven, two have titles that indicate that they were used against urinary disease. This investigation will focus on these two early texts in order to understand some of the ways in which this still very common ailment was overcome in medieval Ireland.

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[1] Some sections of this article were first presented at *The Language of Magic*, the 12th International Interdisciplinary Conference organized by the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming (University of Chieti-Pescara, May 22-24, 2019). I would like to thank the participants of the conference for the lively discussion after my paper. In addition, I would like to thank the anonymous readers for offering thoughtful remarks and important corrections on various aspects of this article. Their comments have greatly helped me to shape my discussion. As always, I am deeply grateful to Professor John Carey for his insights and encouragement. Any remaining errors or shortcomings are my own.

[2] This is, of course, not the full total of charms surviving in early Irish manuscripts. New studies continue to make more of this fascinating material available to a larger audience. See, for example, Stifter 2020, 290-291.

[3] For the manuscript witnesses, see Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Codex Sangallensis 1395, 419, https://e-codices.unifr.ch/de/list/one/csg/1395, for the St. Gall incantations; Dublin, Royal Irish Academy, MS. D ii 3 (cat. no. 1238), fol. 67v, https://www.isos.dias.ie/master.html?http://www.isos.dias.ie/libraries/RIA/RIA_MS_D_ii_3/english/catalogue.html, for the Stowe Missal charms; and Cod. Sti Pauli sec. xxv. d. 86, fol. 1b, https://hildegard.tristram.de/schulheft/pics/Reichenauer_Schulheft_1verso_2recto_kl1.jpg, for the incantation in the Reichenau Primer. All of these eight charms were edited and translated by two early eminent scholars in Celtic studies, namely Whitley Stokes and John Strachan. This is most probably one of the reasons why the charms in question have been the interest of many a Celticist. See Stokes - Strachan 1903, 248-49 for the St. Gall incantations, p. 250 for the Stowe Missal charms, and p. 293 for the text in the Reichenau Primer. Some of the early editions are listed in Jacqueline Borsje's article of 2019, 9-11.

1. Let it flow like a camel lets it flow!

Let us begin by introducing the two texts dealing with the topic in question. The Stowe Missal is an Irish sacramentary of the late eighth or early ninth century. The charm against urinary disease can be found alongside two other healing charms on the final page of the volume. The St. Gall incantation, on the other hand, is one of a group of four healing charms, found on a single leaf of Insular vellum. The leaf, today forming a part of the composite volume 1395 put together by the librarian Ildefons von Arx in 1822, has been preserved in the Stiftsbibliothek of St. Gall in Switzerland. On the other side of the leaf there is a portrait of Saint Matthew, and because of this, it has been suggested that the leaf would have originally been a page from a pocket Gospel book[4]. The text, written in Insular majuscule, has been assigned to the ninth century[5].

For both texts, I refer to the latest studies by two eminent scholars in the field of Celtology. For the Stowe Missal charm, I use a normalized edition and translation by Professor David Stifter that he presented in a talk of 2021[6]. For the St. Gall incantation, I refer to the work done by

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[4] See, for example, Sims-Williams 1990, 90-91, and Carey 2019, 4.

[5] For a more detailed study of the various aspects of the manuscript, and especially of the four charms it contains, see Tuomi 2013, 60-85.

[6] Stifter 2021. Professor Stifter's translation has not yet been published; I am extremely grateful to him for allowing me to print it here. We await a new edition of the Stowe Missal charms by Stifter (2020, 292). For alternative editions and translations, see, for example, Stokes - Strachan 1903, 250, and Borsje 2013, 13-14. The edition by Stokes and Strachan, despite still being used as the standard edition of the text, only introduces the final two sentences of the charm in translation. Borsje (2013, 13) rightly comments that the "references to dripping, flowing and streaming liquid or bodily fluids may reflect the problems connected with urinary diseases, because of which too little flows". Her edition and translation are as follows:

Ar galar fuel	Against urinary disease
Suil suiles camull	Let flow/drip how/like a camel lets flow/drip.
lind lindas gaine	Give/yield milk/liquid like a *gaine* (?) gives/yields milk/liquid [i.e. let flow how/like a *gaine* lets flow]
reth rethte srothe	Run how/like streams run
telc tuisc	Let your water go (?)
*lotar teora mucca in*anáis (?)	Three pigs went/came into their age [i.e. grew older] (?)
bethade nethar	…
suil naro suil	Let flow what has not let flow [before].
taber do fual inai	Make your urine (i.e. urinate) in a (the?) place (?)
tonert 7 toslane	(of) your strength(s) and (of) your health
roticca ic slane.	May the cure of health heal you.

221

Professor John Carey in 2000 [7]. The Stowe Missal charm against urinary disease is as follows:

Ar galar fúel	Against urinary disease
Suil suiles camull,	Let it flow like a camel lets it flow,
lind lindas Gaine,	Give a liquid like [the river] Gaine gives liquid,
reth rethte srothe.	run like streams run.
Telc tuísc/t'uisc[e].	Let forth a gush (*tóesc?*)/your water (*t'uisce?*).
Lotar téora mucca ina n-aí.	Three pigs went into their *aí* [8].
Beth-ade n-ethar.	It should be there where one goes (?).
Suil náro·suil.	Let it flow what has not flowed.
Taber do fual i n-aí.	Give your urine into an *aí*.
To nert 7 to slláne.	Your strength and your health.
Rot·ícca íc slláne.	May a healing of salvation heal you.

The St. Gall incantation against urinary disease:

Ar galar fúail	Against urinary disease [9]
Dum·esurc-sa din galar fúail-se,	I rescue myself from this disease of the urine,
dun·esairc éu ét,	a cattle-goad saves us,
dun·esairc énlaithi admai ibdach.	skilful bird-flocks of witches save us. [10]

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[7] Carey's article was published in Irish as "Téacsanna Draíochta in Éirinn sa Mheánaois Luath," transl. Pádraig Ó Fiannachta, *Léachtaí Cholm Cille* 30 (2000), 98-117. The article is now available in English and the reference can be found in Carey 2019, 19.

[8] In his treatment of the text, Stifter left the word *ai* untranslated. According to him, there are "a number of words of that shape in Early Irish, but none of the semantics fit our context". He further speculated that the meaning would be something like "latrine." Professor Stifter kindly provided me with a copy of this earlier paper on the topic. See Stifter 2012. See also Stifter 2020, 293, as well as Borsje 2013, 14.

[9] Reconstruction and translation of the title, the directions following the charm, as well as the line with garbled Greek are mine, for these were not included in Carey's study.

[10] Carey's interpretation follows, for the most part, the earlier editions and translations; see Windisch 1890, 98-100, and Stokes - Strachan 1903, 248. A very different suggestion on how to approach the text was provided by Stifter in his aforementioned talk of 2012:

dum·esurc-sa din galar fúail-se	I save myself from this urinary disease
du·n-esairc éu ét	how *éu* (salmon?, brooch/point?, stem/yew?) saves *ét* (jealousy?)
du·n-esarcat éuin énlaithi	how birds save flocks of birds
admai ibdach	???

Following his analysis of the Stowe Missal charm, Stifter suggested that a similar structure would explain the St. Gall charm. Thus, the "speaker of the charm states that he is saving himself by comparing his own rescue to that exacted by other entities". Based on his analysis of the preceding verb, Stifter commented only that the idea of the line seems to

Fo-certar inso do grés i maigin hi tabair th'úal.   This is always put in the place in which you make your urine.

PreCHNYTφCAHωMNYBVC KNAATYONIBVS. Finit. [11]

Despite their apparent differences in content, the two – roughly contemporary – charms share more similarities than might be evident at a first glance. First, each is part of a small collection found in a religious context. The Stowe Missal is mainly written in Latin and contains extracts from the Gospel of John, the order of Mass and some special Masses (f. 12), the Order of Baptism and of Communion for the newly baptized (f 46v), and the Order for the Visitation of the Sick and Last Rites (f. 60). The last three folios of the manuscript are in Old Irish and contain a short treatise on the Mass and the Stowe Missal charms [12].

Because the St. Gall leaf is no longer in its original context, of which indeed nothing is known, it is impossible to confirm the supposition that it used to be a page from a Gospel book. Because of the quality of the vellum, however, I would certainly speculate that this is the case [13]. Both manuscripts were portable (the Stowe Missal measures 15 cm × 12 cm and the St. Gall leaf roughly 25 cm × 19 cm). This means that the healing charms were also portable, and could be brought along on visits to the sick.

Both texts are found together with a small number of other healing charms, not in large collections or as marginal notes. In the Stowe Missal there are three charms on the page, all with titles: the first against ailment of a red eye (*Arond dercsúil*), the second against a thorn (*Ar delc*) and the third against a urinary disease (*Ar galar fúel*) [14]. On the St. Gall leaf, there are four incantations: the first one (beginning on the first line with the words *Ni artu ní nim*) against thorns, the second one against a urinary

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be that "like saves like". He further noted that "whatever *éu* and *ét* exactly refer to, words are certainly very much alike in form". Stifter did not comment extensively on the words *admai ibdach*, saying only that "*admai* looks like a form of *ad·daim*, 'to acknowledge, admit, concede, grant, allow,' *ibdach* is spell-worker".

[11] The paleography does not indicate for certain that the line belongs to the charm against urinary disease. The words are found on a line of their own suggesting perhaps that the line works as a charm in its own right. However, the scribe of the first three charms uses distinct capital letters at the beginning of each charm. This line does not have that distinct capital, and therefore I take it to be a part of the charm against urinary disease.

[12] See, for example, O'Neill 2014, 18, and Warner 1906, viii-ix.

[13] Despite not being an expert on the various types of vellum, I can state that the St. Gall leaf is by far the finest example that I have studied. It is very thin, supple, and soft and has suffered very little damage throughout the centuries.

[14] Stifter 2021.

disease (*Ar galar fúail*), the third against headaches (known as the *Caput Christi*, written in Latin followed by an instruction in Old Irish), and the fourth one (written by a different scribe and beginning with the words *Tessurc marb·bíu*) a multifunctional charm against wounds, fire, and tumors [15].

The second feature that the two charms have in common is the heading. This similarity is all the more striking in that none of the other charms in the St. Gall leaf has a title. As is known, the headings of charms serve two purposes: they indicate the beginning of the text, and they state what the charm is for. In bigger collections, and especially if written as marginal notes, they also serve as a visual aid in locating the charm [16]. In the Stowe Missal the heading for the urinary disease does not stand out, as all of the charms are titled. But why does the St. Gall incantation include a title? In this case, it is easy to see where the charm against urinary disease begins, because the first word is marked by a capital letter. It is also evident from the first line of the charm that the aim is to heal a urinary disease of some sort.

Finally, neither of the charms against urinary disease include *materia medica*, that is, remedial substances used in the practice of medicine. This is interesting, as for instance later examples of recipes that were used for ailments of the male reproductive organs call for different kinds of herbal and animal ingredients [17]. That both early Irish charm collections include a charm against urinary disease can be taken to indicate that urinary diseases were a common problem at the time. That this should be the case is supported by the fact that there are also examples from Anglo-Saxon England for this particular ailment, such as a remedy to cure bladder pain and/or infection [18]. What separates the Old English examples from our two

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[15] Interestingly, the hand of the scribe who has written the first three of the St. Gall charms is rather similar to that of one of the scribes of the Stowe Missal. I would like to thank Timothy O'Neill for his expertise relating to the paleography of the St. Gall charms (personal communication, 31 May 2017). Nevertheless, the charms in the Stowe Missal are not the work of the scribe whose hand resembles that of the scribe responsible for the first three St. Gall charms. For more information on the *Caput Christi* charm, see Tuomi 2019, 51-64.

[16] See, for example, Alonso-Almeida 2008, 22, and Olsan 2004, 59-62.

[17] Hayden 2021, 248.

[18] Apparently, carrots were prepared, and in the Old English Herbarium, brookmint is also used for this purpose (Pollington 2000, 103, 106). M.L. Cameron, in talking about the rational medicine of the Anglo-Saxons, has mentioned that "in a remedy for bladder complaint, garlic mustard, which also has diuretic properties was added to a decoction in ale of parsley, whose diuretic properties made it a standard ingredient in medicines for ailments of the bladder". See Cameron 1993, 127.

charms is their extensive use of *materia medica*. Diana Luft has pointed out that not only were urinary problems common at the time, but also uncomfortable, even painful. She has further noted that these kinds of long-lasting, chronic, and painful conditions take up a great deal of space in remedy collections[19]. Finally, she makes an excellent point in noting that urinary diseases were very *visible* illnesses: "in a time before indoor toilets, friends and neighbours might be well aware if an individual was having trouble urinating, or holding their urine"[20].

2. The skillful bird-flocks of witches?

Neither of these two early medieval Irish charms define what kind of urinary disease we are dealing with. In the Stowe Missal, most likely the problem is obstructed urination, but in the St. Gall charm it can be either obstructed or excessive urination, or possibly even urinating blood. Stokes, an earlier editor of the St. Gall incantations, thought that the perceived medical problem was "strangury" or "gravel", however, Stifter has pointed out that also an inflammation could be cause of pain[21]. Stifter also draws attention to damage from the outside that would explain the problem. Here he refers to the famous *Scéla Muicce Meic Dathó*, or *Tales of Mac Da Thó's Pig*. In the story, an Ulster warrior named Celtchar is injured with a spear by the Connacht warrior Cet mac Mágach. The spear goes through Celtchar's thigh and through the upper part of his testicles, and as a result Cet declares, "You are with a urinary disease since, [and] neither son nor daughter has been born to you"[22].

It might be useful to approach the diagnosis from a different angle. Modern medicine finds causes for illnesses and disease often from within the human body, whereas many traditional societies thought that illness comes from outside, although the reason might differ: disease could be

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[19] As other examples Luft 2018 mentions toothache, gout, arthritis, and headache.

[20] Luft 2018.

[21] Stokes 1883, 513; Stifter 2012. Strangury refers to a condition characterized by painful urination in which the urine is emitted drop by drop owing to muscle spasms of the urethra or urinary bladder. Gravel, on the other hand, means aggregations of crystals formed in the urinary tract.

[22] "Ataí co ngalur fhúail ónd úair-sin, nicon rucad mac na ingen duit" (Thurneysen 1935, 13, § 13). It would seem that urinary disease and impotence are synonymous in this text.

caused by malevolent people, the dead, spirits, certain places and powerful locations, the evil eye, or the elements – fire, air, earth, or water. This is why verbal magic had a crucial role in healing rituals. Before modern science, charms were a central means of controlling reality. On occasion, more important than making a proper diagnosis of the actual illness (whether strangury or gravel, for instance) was to find out its cause. It was only then that the banishing of the illness could begin followed by the healing process[23]. The healing restored the balance of life which was being shaken and sabotaged by the illness.

Therefore, instead of trying to diagnose the disease, we should focus on what is causing it. If we can figure out the purported cause, we can speculate how it was approached by the medieval Irish and learn about their ways of dealing with the crises of illness and disease. This is an aspect which has not received much attention in Celtic Studies, but one that we could consider here in more detail. One who has touched upon this topic is Carey[24]. In his article, Carey noted that the St. Gall charm seems to "pray *to*, not against, 'skilful bird-flocks of witches'". He refers to the story *Cath Maige Tuired*, *The Second Battle of Mag Tuired*, in which "it is the sorcerers […]. who undertake to enchant the enemy so that they will be unable to urinate"[25]. In the story, the mythological people known as Tuatha Dé Danann are fighting against their enemy, the Fomorians. Anticipating the battle, the druid of the Tuatha Dé boasts:

> Three showers of fire will be rained upon the faces of the Fomorian host, and I will take out of them two-thirds of their courage and their skill at arms and their strength, and *I will bind their urine in their own bodies and in the bodies of their horses.*[26]

I propose accordingly that the causes for the afflictions mentioned in the Stowe Missal and the St. Gall charms are supernatural ones, perhaps some-

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[23] Ilomäki 2014, 126. Many of my suggestions are supported by the authority of the Finnish folklorist Henni Ilomäki, who has worked extensively on charms. While her work is based on the Finnish tradition, I find a comparative approach very fruitful in understanding the logic of charms in medieval Ireland as well.

[24] Concerning this, Jacqueline Borsje has made an extremely valuable remark in her article of 2013 in which she suggested that the second charm in the Stowe Missal could have been used not only for literal thorns piercing the skin but also against "thorns used in […] destructive supernatural rituals, performed from a distance" (Borsje 2013, 19).

[25] Carey 2019, 5.

[26] In the original, "arnenas a fúal ina corpoib fodesim 7 a corpaib a n-ech". See Gray 1982, 44-45.

thing like a curse[27]. Carey also mentions the saga *Serglige Con Culainn*, *The Wasting Sickness of Cú Chulainn*, "in which fairy women who appear initially in the forms of birds first cause [the hero of the story] Cú Chulainn to fall sick, then help him to recover"[28]. Before the actual healing, the women beat Cú Chulainn with horsewhips:

> Cú Chulainn went then and put his back against a pillar stone, and he was downcast [lit.: his mind was bad], and a sleep fell upon him. He saw two women come towards him. One wore a green mantle; the other a purple mantle in five folds. The woman in the green mantle came to him and laughed at him, and struck him with her horse-whip. The other came to him, too, and laughed at him, and struck him in the same way. And they continued for a long time, each of them in turn coming still to beat him, so that he was almost dead. Then they went from him.[29]

The agents mentioned in the charms are not unequivocally good, despite the fact that help is asked from them. Nor are they unequivocally bad. Like the fairy women in the Cú Chulainn story, the agents evoked in the

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[27] That curses cause illness and disease would have been a familiar concept, for example, from the Bible to the early Irish. Also, it seems that especially binding urine was done via supernatural means and thus we can speculate that the problem in the St. Gall incantation was also obstructed urination.

[28] Carey 2019, 5.

[29] Dillon 1953b, 50. In the original, "Dotháet Cú Chulaind iar sin co tard a druim frisin liic, 7 ba h-olc a menma leis, 7 dofuit cotlud fair. Co n-accai in dá mnaí cucai. Indala n-aí brat úaine impe. Alaili brat corcra cóicdíabail im šude. Dolluid in ben cosin brot úane chucai, 7 tibid gen fris, & dobert béim dind echfhleisc dó. Dotháet alaili cucai dano, 7 tibid fris, & nod slaid fón alt chétna. Ocus bátar fri cíana móir oca sin .i. cechtar dé imma sech cucai béus dia búalad combo marb acht bec. Lotir úad íarom". See Dillon 1953a, 3. While Carey mainly follows Stokes and Strachan in his translation of the St. Gall incantation against urinary disease, he suggests the words *éu ét* to be translated as "a cattle-goad". As a result, his translation runs "a cattle-goad saves us". Carey sees a similarity with the goad and "a point of Goibniu" of the first charm in the St. Gall collection: they both function by causing pain. A goad is a traditional farming implement used to spur or guide livestock, usually oxen, that are pulling a plough or a cart. Traditionally, a goad is a long stick with a pointed end. A goad can also be used to round up cattle, or to use a term fitting the context, to "bind" cattle. It can be questioned why such an instrument is included in the charm's vocabulary, but it makes sense if we compare it to the horsewhips that were used in whipping Cú Chulainn in order to make him sick as well as to make him recover. The look and purpose of both instruments is rather similar. Interestingly, a later example in a sixteenth-century Irish manuscript (RIA MS 23 N 29 [467]) introduces a medical recipe in which impotence is cured by writing a name of the afflicted man on a stick of elm and beating him with it. See Hayden 2021, 261, 266.

227

charms have the ability to cause sickness and help the sufferer to heal from it. In short, they are not good or bad, they are simply powerful[30].

It would be tempting to speculate that there were different ways in which to understand illness and disease in early medieval period. Perhaps the recipes which include multiple *materia medica* were a result of knowledge how for example herbal remedies are effective in certain illnesses. When we have a charm that consists simply of words, the situation might be different: the cause of the problem was unknown and/or supernatural and therefore a charm was used in order for the healing process to begin.

In certain cultures, and with certain charms, in order for a charm to work, the charmer or healer needs to know their opponent and find out what is causing the harm at hand. The charm seldom names the problem directly; instead, the words seek to identify its underlying cause[31]. While Carey suggested that the St. Gall charm is praying to the "birdflocks of witches", I suggest that maybe the charm is aiming to name the cause behind the urinary disease. In fact, perhaps the charm is doing both: help is asked for the same agent who caused the affliction[32]. The user of the charm dismantles the magical charge of the illness by naming the cause of the disease and by using powerful words, that is, a charm[33]. Thus the power of the words turns a malevolent representative of the otherworld into a benevolent healing agent.

When talking about charms, we need to remember that their message is not straightforward. The communication is not only with this world, but also with the supernatural. When this context, too, is taken into account, the words make sense. The charm combines the laws of cause and effect in a mythical way that differs from our everyday thinking. The charm works in between two realities: even if the aim is to solve a problem in this world, the images provoked in the words of the charm belong to the mythical world of folk belief. The power in the charm which effects this world, comes from the supernatural reality[34].

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[30] This is true in other cases as well, thus Goibniu, the metalsmith of the Tuatha Dé, mentioned in the first of the St. Gall incantations, seems both to cause afflictions and to cure them.

[31] Ilomäki 2014, 10. This is especially true of my own native, Finnish tradition.

[32] This might be true also for the other charms in the St. Gall collection that mention an otherworldly agent – the agent is the one causing the affliction and thus has the power to heal it.

[33] Ilomäki 2014, 132.

[34] Ilomäki 2014, 12.

3. "Go ye therefore and preach all nations"

The charms against urinary disease in the Stowe Missal and the St. Gall manuscript share yet two more final similarities to be considered here. The first similarity might seem somewhat artificial but should be mentioned nonetheless: both texts have included biblical references in their vocabulary. In the Stowe Missal charm we read about camels, and the St. Gall incantation is followed by a line that is thought to derive from St. Matthew's Gospel. It should be stressed however, that these two things are very different from one another: a reference to a nonnative (and not *solely* Biblical) animal in one case, and a line of text that is conceivably not even part of the charm on the other[35].

While it is certain that the vast majority of people in medieval Ireland would not have known what a camel looks like, the animal was familiar from the Bible, Isidore, and probably other sources[36]. Having stated that, in the end the camel would have simultaneously been something strange and exotic, nearly like an agent from the otherworld[37]. Similarly, one line in the St. Gall manuscript would have definitely looked exotic to the majority of people at the time: PreCHNYTϕCAHωMNYBVCKNAATY ONIBVS. It has been thought that the words stand for a Latin version of Matthew 28:19 ("Go ye therefore, and preach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost"[38]), incorporating one or two words of garbled Greek[39].

While it is not possible within the restrictions of this short study to investigate further why such a quote would have been appended to our particular charm (or if it indeed belongs with the charm at all), it is important to note that both charms against urinary disease combined images from the native-Irish tradition together with Christian influences. This is of

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[35] See the earlier footnote on the matter.

[36] See, for example, Genesis 24 and Luke 18:25.

[37] Or else the camel was chosen simply because, like other large ungulates, it can urinate copiously.

[38] This was first suggested by J.K. Zeuss in his *Grammatica celtica*: "praedicent omnibus nationibus" (Zeuss 1853, 950). Interestingly, this garbled version of the Greek verb is completely different from what one finds in the Greek original: μαθητεύσατε. However, even if the Greek text is sketchy and inaccurate, the scribe evidently knew more than just the mere alphabet: the first bit of the text contains a correct third plural aorist ending *-san* (Carey 2019, 7).

[39] As noted by Carey, Jerome consistently uses *gentes* rather than *nationes* to render Greek ἔθνη.

course no surprise as it was medieval monks who were writing down these charms, and others among the charms have explicitly Christian content.

Finally, both charms include instructions on how to use the texts. In the St. Gall incantation, the direction ("This is always put in the place in which you make your urine") is separated from the actual words of the charm by punctuation, but in the Stowe Missal charm the direction ("Give your urine into an aí") is embedded within the words of the charm. The directions look deceivingly simple, but in reality they raise multiple questions[40]. What needs to be underlined, however, is that even if we do not know exactly what is said in the directions, both charms have them and thus we can deduce that a ritual was thought to be an elementary part of using the charm in order to start the healing process. This kind of thinking does indeed find support in ritual studies, where the so-called "rituals of affliction attempt to rectify a state of affairs that have been disturbed or disordered; they heal, exorcise, protect and purify"[41].

4. Finit – The conclusion

In this short article two early medieval Irish charms against urinary disease were studied in order to contribute to an understanding of the early medieval Irish world of illness, healing and overcoming a crisis situation. I argue that in both cases the problem was obstructed urination. Two texts, the St. Gall incantation and the Stowe Missal charm, which bear no resemblance to each other in their content, have proved to share quite a number of similarities. It is these similarities that enable us to take a glimpse into

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[40] In the St. Gall incantation, the verb *fo-ceird* poses a problem in interpretation. It can mean either that the charm is to be placed somewhere, or that the words are to be uttered. Perhaps the twofold meaning is deliberate. It has been suggested that the charm was meant to exorcise a place, in order to prevent or cure a urinary disease (Borsje 2013). We can therefore ask whether the charm is supposed to be recited in the place where one makes one's urine, or is it the physical charm that is meant to be placed there? Was the charm intended to be recited while copying the signs to a separate parchment, or while placing the parchment? In a prior publication, I have suggested that the line including the mixture of Latin and Greek words was supposed to be reproduced and then put in its place while reciting the actual charm (Tuomi 2013, 67-68). It is possible that the text was meant to be put over the genitalia. For further parallel evidence of placing charms on body parts, see the texts in James and Maura Carney 1960 as well as in Best 1952. In the Stowe Missal charm, the most obvious problem lies with the word *aí*, the meaning of which is unclear.

[41] Bell 1997, 115.

the worldview of the medieval Irish and what they thought about illness and disease as well as about healing. Both charms are found in portable contexts, which means that healing could be brought to a person instead of the sick person having to travel to get the healing charm. Neither of the charms have *materia medica* included, so herbs or other healing substances were not used in order to cure a urinary disease. But because both charms include a ritual, it can be suggested that ritual action was thought to be needed in order for the healing process to begin.

The mythical reality of charms is alien to the modern rationalist person. The Irish charms studied in this paper were used within a different worldview in which the structures of knowledge were built in a way different to ours. For the users of the charms, the supernatural wasn't strange, but a reality which had its own laws and structures[42]. An appeal to these laws and structures of the supernatural was used in order to solve an aim in this world, in this case to change reality of illness into health. A urinary disease had shaken the balance of an individual, perhaps because of an unknown and/or supernatural cause. A charm was a verbal tool with which one was able to overcome such crises by finding and naming the cause of the problem. It is hoped that this short article has provided some new approaches to thinking about charming practices in early medieval Ireland and also to enabling a larger readership to enjoy this fascinating material.

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[42] Ilomäki 2014, 43.

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