Anxiety, Ambition and Agency: Charms and *Experimenta* as Social Remedies in Late-Medieval England

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Abstract

What might medieval people have done when faced with everyday social challenges such as being the victim of theft, malicious gossip, or the machinations of their enemies? This thesis explores the need to exert agency in the tangled multiplex of social relationships through a hugely popular but still relatively unexplored category of texts: charms and *experimenta*. These texts have the potential to provide us with new facets of understanding of medieval social relations.

The first chapter constitutes an in-depth analysis of charms and *experimenta* to address five prominent social concerns or desires: dealing with enemies; uncovering false friends; manipulating the outcome of court cases; preventing malicious speech; and winning favour and influence. Drawing on supporting literary and documentary evidence such as letter archives, poetry, and court records, I interweave these charms and *experimenta* with case studies of real medieval people – particularly members of the gentry – whose surviving voices reveal the same socio-cultural concerns as those disclosed by my corpus. I argue that these texts represent the desire to assert agency within the confines of existing power structures and social networks, and that they typically operate in a way that is aligned with the social conventions and prescribed behaviours of the time, albeit in a way which ensures that the practitioner comes out on top. The latter half of this first chapter places these texts in context, focusing on three manuscripts likely owned by members of the gentry, and revealing how charms and *experimenta* to tackle social concerns align with the typical reading patterns of this strata of society.

The second chapter is a case study of the most common charms and *experimenta* outside of those for healing: ones for theft. Despite the evident popularity of practices to prevent theft or identify a thief after an item had been stolen, no research to date has placed these practices in the social, cultural, and domestic contexts within which they may have been used. This is the role my case study performs, drawing on documentary evidence such as records of criminal activity, while interweaving theory on conflict resolution, object ownership, and social control. This chapter also engages in textual analysis to recover the actual performance of this little-researched aspect of medieval ritual behaviour. Overall, it reveals the specific fears these texts speak to, highlighting the vulnerability of the body, home, and community space.

The final chapter uses six manuscript case studies to demonstrate how charms and *experimenta* to control women, for example to incite love or lust, to reveal women's secrets, prove virginity, or uncover adultery, are often found in medical manuscripts containing copies of the *Trotula* texts. I argue that these manuscripts represent a particular type of medical practice, one provided by someone learned and Latinate, who may have collected these texts in response to both client demand and personal interest. This deepens our understanding of the shape and nature of medical practice, and reveals how medieval people might have sought outside help in order to address social concerns, including around their interpersonal relationships.

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A note on editorial conventions

All transcriptions and translations are mine unless stated otherwise. In transcriptions, I have expanded abbreviations silently and retained original spelling, while modern punctuation and capitalisation have been applied throughout. Square brackets ([ ]) indicate my own comments, glosses, or reconstructions of the text. If text has been struck out by the scribe or a later reader, I place this between angular brackets (<>).Where letters or a series of words are unreadable due to damage to the manuscript, I indicate this with a question mark enclosed in square brackets ([?]). Where appropriate, I use a forward slash to signal virgules which have been executed by scribes (/) or, in quoting edited verse, to signal line breaks.

Introduction

What might medieval people have done when faced with everyday social challenges such as being the victim of theft, malicious gossip, or the machinations of their enemies? This thesis explores the need to exert agency in the tangled multiplex of social relationships through a hugely popular but still relatively unexplored category of texts: charms and *experimenta*. These texts – many of which are still unedited – have the potential to provide new facets of understanding of medieval social relations: this potential is explored and exploited throughout the course of this thesis.

Within the context of medieval intellectual thought, the practices with which I am concerned were classified as *experimenta* and are routinely referred to as such within the manuscript sources. The term *experimenta*, sometimes used interchangeably with *empirica*, had a significance quite separate to that which we assign to the word 'experiment' in modern scientific discourse. It simply referred to any recipe or, in the case of medicine, remedy, that was understood to work by experience, rather than accounted for through theoretical concepts.[1] This found its origins in the writings of ancient philosophers and authors such as Pliny the Elder and Galen: in the process of devising therapeutic taxonomies for natural and animal substances, they recorded that there were some substances that had occult or hidden virtues which were known to bring about certain effects. These effects were known only through the experience of an observer and could not be explained based on the substance's known principles, that is, whether it was hot or cold, dry or moist, and to what degree.[2] The occult virtues of substances could be manipulated by those who possessed the necessary know-how, and books of *experimenta* or 'secrets', which were extremely popular during the medieval and early modern periods, distilled philosophical knowledge into practical guides for achieving certain therapeutic results.[3] *Experimenta*, 'secrets', 'wonders', and 'natural magic' were all part of the same semantic field, and are terms which are often used interchangeably by modern

[1] Peter Murray Jones, '*Experimenta*, Compilation and Construction in Two Medieval Books', *Poetica*, 91/92 (2019), 61–80 (pp. 69–70).

[2] Brian P. Copenhaver, 'A Tale of Two Fishes: Magical Objects in Natural History from Antiquity Through the Scientific Revolution', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52.3 (1991), 373–98.

[3] William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 4–9.

scholars to describe many of the texts discussed in this thesis.[4] Charms, spoken or written formulae performed in a ritual context to accomplish a specific purpose, fall into the category of *experimenta*, in that they had been observed to work, but their efficacy could not be explained by Galenic principles and they could only be known empirically.[5] However, throughout this thesis I make a conscious distinction between charms and *experimenta*, while acknowledging that these terms represent practices which are closely linked. I use the term 'charm' to signify any method or ritual which features a standalone verbal element, whether this is oral – through an incantation – or textual, that is, via an inscription. The term 'experiment' indicates a method which either incorporates this verbal element into a wider process involving objects and natural substances – such as plants, stones, and animal parts – with occult properties, or which relies on such objects and ingredients alone.

Often, the two terms described above are considered under the broader umbrella term of 'magic'. This term, however, poses a problem of definition for modern scholars. This is fostered in part by the fact that during the medieval period itself, definitions of the term 'magic' were unstable, and changed over time to include and exclude certain practices. From the end of antiquity to the thirteenth century, the term retained its classical definition and was broadly understood to refer to practices which relied on demonic power to execute the user's will; later, consideration of what constituted magical practice branched out to include natural magic.[6] It is also important to note that during the Middle Ages, classifying or defining magic was the preserve of theologians, patristic authors, and natural philosophers. The people who used the charms and experiments with which I am concerned would not necessarily have considered them to be magical, nor were they likely to have been as preoccupied with

[4] On wonders, see Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature, 1150-1750* (New York: Zone Books, 1998); on natural magic see Steven P. Marrone, 'Magic and Natural Philosophy', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019); and Isabelle Draelants, *Le Liber de virtutibus herbarum, lapidum et animalium (Liber aggregationis): un texte à succès attribué à Albert le Grand* (Firenze: SISMEL, edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007).

[5] This is described in more detail in Lea T. Olsan, 'Charms in Medieval Memory', in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 59–88 (p. 60); this definition of charms synthesises two definitions used by Olsan in 'Charms in Medieval Memory', p.60, and 'The Inscription of Charms in Anglo-Saxon Manuscripts', *Oral Tradition*, 14.2 (1999), 401–19 (p. 403).

[6] For an exploration of the term 'magic', see 'Definitions of Magic' in Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 8–17; Richard Kieckhefer, 'Rethinking How to Define Magic', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 15–25.

their classifications as the great thinkers of the time were. Therefore, caution needs to be exercised when using the term.[7] Recently, Richard Kieckhefer has suggested that we should consider 'magic' as an 'aggregating term'. Aggregating terms are:

> [D]ifficult to define, because they encompass diverse elements that may or may not be combined with each other. The different elements may not share any common defining feature that brings them under the umbrella of the aggregating term; they are not linked by a shared essence. They may not even have shifting combinations of shared features; they are not necessarily bound by family resemblance.[8]

Kieckhefer acknowledges that scholars use the term out of convenience, but that too much time is devoted to unpacking and refining it; instead, he exhorts scholars to pay more attention to defining 'constitutive terms': ones which connote specific forms of reference.[9] It is in this regard that, throughout the course of this thesis, I mainly confine my terminology to the two terms defined above. However, it is important to note that other scholars routinely use the term 'magic' when discussing charms and experiments and that, in the course of responding to this scholarship, I occasionally deploy the term myself in order to avoid unnecessary and repeated clunky caveats.

While I strive to make a distinction through my own terms of reference, in light of the fact that charms and *experimenta* are frequently referred to, and folded into, the study of magic more broadly, it is useful to outline the key milestones in the modern study of this field, in order to understand exactly how charms and *experimenta* – more specifically – are situated within this historiography. In the published literature, the study of magic is closely linked to religion; in fact, much of the early scholarship on magic was devoted to establishing a differentiation between magic and religion. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the paradigm for analysing magical practice was structured around a model of 'progress'. This suggests an evolution of belief systems from magic, through religion, and into science. In this way, magic is typically described as irrational and is set in opposition to the rationality of science, with magical belief

[7] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 8–17.

[8] Kieckhefer, 'Rethinking How to Define Magic', p. 16.

[9] Kieckhefer, 'Rethinking How to Define Magic', p. 16.

systems regarded as primitive, in contrast to the enlightened scientific understanding of modernity.[10] One of the most prolific twentieth century writers on magic, Lynn Thorndike, can be credited with laying the foundations for the study of magic and what he termed 'experimental science'. Thorndike surveyed, recorded, and interrogated the manuscript evidence to produce a chronological exposition which traces both broader intellectual thought and the surviving textual witnesses for ritual practices from antiquity into the eighteenth century.[11] However, Thorndike was writing under the premise of the magic-religion-science model, and his treatment of the sources betrays the influence of this paradigm, particularly in the vocabulary he uses to describe certain practices. For example, he labels practices including charms and *experimenta* as 'superstitious' and as barriers to 'rational scepticism' and 'continued achievement and sustained progress'.[12]

The latter end of the twentieth century witnessed a changing approach, with scholars searching for an alternative paradigm with which to understand the interplay of magic, religion, and intellectual thought. The model of progress was swapped with a trajectory of 'rise and fall', first mapped out by Keith Thomas in his seminal text *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. Thomas sets out to explore the complex relationship between the systems of belief commonly described as magical, and the religious ideas of the early modern period, thus breaking down the traditional opposition between these two domains. His extensive research and corpus of sources certainly serve to demonstrate that magical practices, including charms and experiments, were never too far from the influence of religious ideas, whether they were tolerated or fiercely opposed by the Church. However, while his research adds much-needed nuance to the relationship between magic and religion, his conclusions continue to reinforce the earlier magic-religion-science paradigm, offering the rise of

[10] This concept and its impact on early scholarship on magic is explored in greater depth by Karen Jolly in 'Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, Practices', in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages*, ed. by Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (London: Athlone Press, 2002), pp. 1–72.

[11] See principally Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1923); Lynn Thorndike, *A Catalogue of Incipits of Medieval Scientific Writings in Latin* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Mediaeval Academy of America, 1963).

[12] Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 4, p. 614.

scientific thought as one explanation for the decline of magical thinking, ultimately reinforcing the traditional view of magic as primitive.[13]

Twenty years after Thomas, Valerie Flint published a monograph which focuses on earlier sources than Thomas but uses the same model of rise and decline. Flint traces the 'rise' of magic through a trajectory which begins with the advent of Christianity and the fall of the Roman Empire, and which ends at around 1100 AD. As Thomas does, Flint challenges previous scholarship which positions religion and magic in opposition to one another, and instead explores what she demonstrates to be a dynamic and fluid relationship between the two. Flint makes a strong case that magical practices were frequently absorbed into Christianity, with some adaptation to make them less problematic. However, her conclusions suffer from her classifications; her use of the term 'magic' is broad and encompasses rituals and practices that were specifically excluded from the category of magic by the medieval authors she draws on as sources.[14] Nevertheless, Flint's assertion that there was a process of accommodation of magic during the Christianisation of Europe is widely corroborated by other scholars and is frequently explored in an English context through the study of early medieval Latin and Old English charms. The textual evidence of these pre-Conquest charms is frequently interrogated to understand the place of these practices after the conversion of Europe to Christianity, and the texts are deconstructed in order to identify the pagan elements which may have been transformed to legitimise the use of these practices within the eyes of the Church.[15]

While early medieval magic may have incorporated adapted pagan rituals and motifs, as the Middle Ages progressed new magic texts emerged. These were not derived from pagan models, but were instead conceived of and composed within the

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[13] See Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England*, Repr (London: Penguin Books, 1991), pp. 641–68; c.f. Hildred Geertz, 'An Anthropology of Religion and Magic, I', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 6.1 (1975), 71–89.

[14] Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe*, Repr (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001); c.f. Richard Kieckhefer, 'The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic', *The American Historical Review*, 99.3 (1994), 813–36 (pp. 822–30).

[15] The most prominent work on this can be found in Godfrid Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1948) and J. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine: Illustrated Specially from the Semi-Pagan Text 'Lacnunga'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952); for later advances in this field see, for example, Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England : Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); A. L. Meaney, 'Extra-Medical Elements in Anglo-Saxon Medicine', *Social History of Medicine*, 24.1 (2011), 41–56; Michael David Bailey, 'The Age of Magicians: Periodization in the History of European Magic', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 3.1 (2008), 1–28; and Ciaran Arthur, *'Charms', Liturgies, and Secret Rites in Early Medieval England* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2018).

context of a Christian belief system, or otherwise influenced by contact with Jewish and Arabic traditions as well as renewed access to classical works of natural philosophy engendered by the translation movements of the twelfth century.[16] Therefore, the critical questions applied to these later sources by modern scholars are, by necessity, different. These texts are not interrogated as witnesses to earlier pagan practices. Instead, they are examined to further our understanding of the position of different forms of magic within orthodox Christian practice, to reveal clues for their oral or literary transmission, and to gain a deeper understanding of their practical utility, for example within the field of medicine. These topics have all been key areas of focus in the examination of charms and *experimenta*.

The place of charms and *experimenta* within religious belief has been well studied, and they are now typically understood as adjunct to orthodox Christian belief, rather than as opposing practices. In a compelling essay, Richard Kieckhefer responds to Thorndike's and Flint's treatment of the sources, arguing that the terms 'magic' and 'religion' would not have been viewed as distinct categories in medieval discourse, and more specifically, that both could be rationally explained, albeit through different causal principles.[17] Thus Kieckhefer not only continues to break down perceived barriers between magic and religion, but also challenges the typical assertion that magical practices were nonrational or irrational. From a different perspective, Eamon Duffy has explored the place of charms and what he calls 'magical prayers' in medieval devotional manuscripts. Duffy sets out to challenge the conception that the use of such items was the preserve of the lower classes, and he therefore examines manuscripts that were owned by the elite, such as a codex which was in the possession of Richard III and subsequently owned by Margaret Beaufort, mother of Henry VII.[18] Mainly looking at personal devotional manuscripts such as Books of Hours or *Horae*, Duffy argues that there was an acceptable link between the charms found in these volumes and Church-sanctioned practice, and that the rationale of many of these charms could be traced back to sermons on the power of the Cross or the use of holy names.[19] This

[16] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 72; Charles Burnett, 'Arabic Magic: The Impetus for Translating Texts and Their Reception', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 71–84.

[17] Kieckhefer, 'The Specific Rationality of Medieval Magic', p. 821.

[18] Eamon Duffy, 'Prayers and Spells' in *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400 - c. 1580*, Second Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 209–98.

[19] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 282–83.

does not mean, however, that they were met with blanket approval by religious authorities. Catherine Rider's exegesis of medieval pastoral manuals exposes the complex relationship that existed between the opinions of theologians, Church fathers, and preachers, and certain forms of magic, including charms and experiments. While these pastoral manuals reveal a relative tolerance for most types of charms and experiments, particularly those for healing, some were seen as more problematic by the clergy and other key thinkers of the time, particularly those which involved divinatory practices such as experiments to identify thieves.[20] This thesis does not strive to understand if there was a distinction between magic and religion in the Middle Ages, nor does it seek to establish whether these practices were uniformly tolerated or rejected by authorities. However, it is important to summarise the ways in which scholars have approached these practices, and to draw attention to some of the paradigms that have previously been made recourse to. The existing early secondary literature which discusses the same texts that I examine here was often written under the paradigm described above, whereby magic was considered 'primitive'; in these works, scholars are comfortable to label these practices as 'irrational' or 'superstitious', without becoming bogged down by unpacking the significance of those terms and whether they are accurate or useful.[21] The above summary of the way that these views have been expressed – and counterargued – in scholarship therefore serves to contextualise this secondary literature, as well as my response to it at the pertinent moments throughout the course of this thesis.

Whether these practices were tolerated or condemned, understood to be magical, superstitious, religious, or irrational, they were nevertheless used regularly across all strata of society, and the body of texts that survives in manuscripts of the period is testament to their popularity.[22] This body of texts has provided substance for the pursuits of literary scholars who have homed in on these texts and extracted them

[20] Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

[21] See also Douglas Gray, 'Notes on Some Middle English Charms', in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. by Beryl Rowland (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1974), pp. 56–71; Thomas R. Forbes, 'Verbal Charms in British Folk Medicine', *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 115.4 (1971), 293–316.

[22] Richard Kieckhefer, 'The Common Tradition of Medieval Magic', in *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Second edition (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 56–94; Katherine Storm Hindley, *Textual Magic: Charms and Written Amulets in Medieval England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023), pp. 6–11.

from their manuscript contexts, publishing them as literary curiosities.[23] While, as stated directly above, the early treatment of these texts can now be understood as outdated, their transcription and publication in the middle of the twentieth century made them available to wider audiences, and attracted further scholarly interest.[24] As the body of edited charms and experiments has grown, this increasing sample size has allowed scholars to begin identifying key recurring motifs and evidence of transmission.[25] Katherine Hindley has produced one of the most important recent works on medieval charms.[26] Drawing on an extensive corpus of charms from England across a seven-hundred-year period, Hindley consolidates the work of earlier scholars in confirming that these texts appeared in manuscripts owned by people across a range of social classes. However, going far beyond this, Hindley's work is the first comprehensive investigation of written versus spoken charms, in which she finds that 'textual' charms were not, as has previously been suggested, merely written versions of spoken forms, but appear to have been conceived of as a separate genre from their oral counterparts. This differentiation between spoken and written charms is consolidated by the way in which language is used in each: Hindley finds that while – particularly in later medieval England – incantations could and did use the vernacular, this was not the case for textual charms which were always confined to Latin.[27] This points towards a nuanced relationship between Latin and the vernacular, as well as between writing and speech. Hindley's study demonstrates that there is huge potential for new avenues of research when scholars draw on such a large corpus of charm texts.

Hindley highlights the social and cultural value of charms, but her research primarily focuses on those used for healing. This follows a similar pattern to previous

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[23] See for example Rossell Hope Robbins, 'Popular Prayers in Middle English Verse', *Modern Philology*, 36.4 (1939), 337–50; J. M. McBryde, 'Charms for Thieves', *Modern Language Notes*, 22.6 (1907), 168–70; Curt F. Bühler, 'Middle English Verses against Thieves', *Speculum*, 33.3 (1958), 371–72; Curt F. Bühler, 'Prayers and Charms in Certain Middle English Scrolls', *Speculum*, 39.2 (1964), 270–78.

[24] For example, the unpublished PhD thesis of Suzanna Sheldon, in which she transcribes and translates 140 charms and experiments found in vernacular manuscripts. This thesis is still a valuable contribution to the study of these texts, see Suzanne Sheldon, 'Middle English and Latin Charms, Amulets, and Talismans from Vernacular Manuscripts' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tulane, 1978).

[25] See, for example, T.M. Smallwood, '"God Was Born in Bethlehem...": The Tradition of a Middle English Charm', *Medium Ævum*, 58.2 (1989), 206–23.

[26] Hindley, *Textual Magic*.

[27] Textual charms being those which are copied on to paper or parchment and carried on the body, rather than recited orally. The distinction will be explained in more detail later on in this introduction.

scholarship, including the foundational work of Lea Olsan and Peter Murray Jones. Olsan's extensive work on charms has served to challenge previous conceptions that medical charms and other verbal formulae were the preserve of 'lay' or 'folk' healers, rather than learned physicians. Through an exploration of surviving manuscript sources for four medical writers, all with academic credentials, Olsan has demonstrated that charms and *experimenta* were an integral part of medical practice, and that there was no indication that these physicians viewed such items as any less valid than the recipes copied from classical authorities such as Galen and Hippocrates.[28] Similarly Jones, in his work on the commonplace book of the fifteenth-century medical practitioner Thomas Fayreford, cites the charms included in this manuscript to suggest that many of the remedies he recorded were grounded in the outcome of experience rather than academic learning.[29] Elsewhere, Jones emphasises the incorporation of *experimenta* into miscellaneous manuscripts which contain a vast array of medical tracts and remedies, as well as craft recipes, prognostics, and alchemical works.[30]

Olsan's work on charms has gone further than showing that they were an acceptable and widespread component of healing practice. Her study of the charms which occur regularly – and often in the same order and with strikingly similar compositions – in the vernacular medical tract known as the *Leechcraft* provides an insight into the specific illnesses which charms were most often used to treat. Olsan probes why only certain illnesses have charm-related treatments associated with them, and posits that a combination of factors such as a high occurrence of the illness or issue itself, along with concomitant cultural interest and social resources, generated a verbal formula for that particular ailment.[31] Furthermore, she identifies the key motifs

[28] Lea T. Olsan, 'Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice', *Social History of Medicine*, 16.3 (2003), 343–66 (pp. 343–66).

[29] See in particular Peter Murray Jones, 'Harley MS 2558: A Fifteenth-Century Medical Commonplace Book', in *Manuscript Sources of Medieval Medicine: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Margaret R. Schleissner (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 35–54; and Peter Murray Jones, 'Thomas Fayreford: An English Fifteenth-Century Medical Practitioner', in *Medicine from the Black Death to the French Disease*, ed. by Andrew Cunningham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 156–83.

[30] Jones, '*Experimenta*, Compilation and Construction'.

[31] Lea T. Olsan, 'The Corpus of Charms in the Middle English Leechcraft Remedy Books', in *Charms, Charmers and Charming: International Research on Verbal Magic*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 214–37.

of sixty-five healing charms and draws a link between certain ailments and the narratives or *historiolae* that are used in their cures.[32]

The work of scholars such as Olsan and Jones has revolutionised the handling of charms and *experimenta* in modern scholarly discourse. However, it is part of a continuing trend which places focus on the study of medical charms, by which I mean ones which are exclusively related to healing. It is natural that there is a tendency towards the study of medical charms as a group: they are the most prolific charm-type found in surviving manuscripts and form an intuitively coherent corpus. Furthermore, the majority of existing surveys of charms are confined to the medical or skewed in their favour; this contributes to a perpetuating cycle of continued focus on this genre of text. However, this can lead to the sense that charms or *experimenta* which are not for healing are anomalous or rare, rather than regular occurrences. It is worth noting here that there are many instances where other scholars *have* engaged with charms and *experimenta* for purposes beyond healing. However, they typically focus on sources which provide evidence for the *use* of these practices – such as court records of prosecutions of magic – or sources which delineate contemporary opinions on magical practices, such as works of theologians, condemnatory tracts, and pastoral writing.[33] This is useful, as it provides broader social and cultural context around how these texts might have been understood and used. However, these studies do not draw on the surviving texts of charms and experiments themselves – or the manuscripts which hold them – as a primary source. My thesis therefore forges new ground because it begins with, and is led by, the texts themselves; it then broadens out to place these texts within their wider social or cultural contexts.

While scholarship which focuses on the texts themselves tends to focus on those intended for use in healing, there are two exceptions: charms and experiments for theft, and one type of more generally protective charm – often called the 'Heavenly Letter' or 'Charlemagne Charm' – have received more considerable attention from scholars. Studies which concern practices for theft primarily focus on identifying and

[32] Olsan, 'Charms in Medieval Memory'.

[33] See, among others, Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*; Tabitha Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure: Service Magic in England from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022); Rider, *Magic and Religion*; Catherine Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Michael David Bailey, *Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies: The Boundaries of Superstition in Late Medieval Europe* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2013).

analysing prominent motifs in the texts in order to suggest a stemmatic link, or otherwise to draw parallels with practices which fulfil the same purpose (that is, to prevent theft or identify a thief after the fact) which have been recorded in other countries or even as part of other religious belief systems.[34] The second chapter of this thesis is concerned with charms and experiments for theft; however, unlike previous scholarship, it analyses these texts in order to place them within their broader social, domestic, and economic contexts, thus shedding new light on how, when, and why they might actually have been used.

Like charms for theft, studies of the Charlemagne Charm have typically been confined to an analysis of their textual form, or otherwise their manuscript context. This text is often lengthy and preceded by a legend which details how the charm was delivered by an angel to the emperor Charlemagne, though on occasion Pope Leo is cited as the recipient. It is protective in nature, offering its bearer numerous benefits, among which are frequently found: protection from death in battle, from fire, water, or an iron instrument, as well as from malignant forces, and additionally, to ensure safe labour for a woman in childbirth.[35] It is one of the 'magical prayers' that Eamon Duffy cites from Books of Hours, and which he uses to argue that such texts were not part of a 'devotional underground' but employed by devout and ostensibly orthodox members of the laity such as Margaret Beaufort.[36] As well as Books of Hours, this charm is often found in prayer rolls, and Curt Bühler has suggested that a scroll format was a particularly suitable vehicle for this type of charm.[37] Building on Bühler's earlier analysis, Rosanne Hebing has explored how the functional utility of this charm-type differs depending on whether it is found in a roll or book format. Hebing argues persuasively that the contents of a roll has functional unity: all of the roll's content defines its use. In the case of this protective charm, the portability of the item reinforces

[34] See for example Smallwood, '"God Was Born in Bethlehem..."'; Chiara Benati, 'Painted Eyes, Magical Sieves and Carved Runes: Charms for Catching and Punishing Thieves in the Medieval and Early Modern Germanic Tradition', in *Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Time: The Occult in Pre-Modern Sciences, Medicine, Literature, Religion, and Astrology*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 149–218; Stephen Stallcup, 'The "Eye of Abraham" Charm for Thieves: Versions in Middle and Early Modern English', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 10.1 (2015), 23–40.

[35] Hindley, *Textual Magic*, p. 74; Rosanne Hebing, '"Allmygti God This Lettyr Sent": English Heavenly Letter Charms in Late Medieval Books and Rolls', *Studies in Philology*, 114.4 (2017), 720–47; Peter Murray Jones and Lea T. Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England, 900–1500', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 89.3 (2015), 406–33.

[36] Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 266–98.

[37] Bühler, 'Prayers and Charms in Certain Middle English Scrolls'.

its utility, and it performs its protective function simply by being carried by the user. Codices, on the other hand, may possess *thematic* unity, but the functional combination of a codex's materiality and contents is not as strongly pronounced as it is for a scroll.[38] Therefore, a user may be required to interact with the text in a codex in order to activate its protective qualities, rather than simply carrying it.

The functional utility of a scroll containing this charm-type is explored further by Don Skemer, who examines the apotropaic function of intricate and often syncretic textual charms or 'amulets' as Skemer labels them, many of which feature the Charlemagne Charm. His assessment includes a consideration of whether the power of the text is increased by folding the parchment or keeping the words of power hidden from view.[39] In a similar vein, Katherine Hindley has examined scrolls which would have been difficult to un-roll and read on a regular basis, for example Oxford, Bodleian Library, Bodley Rolls 26, which is around two hundred and seventy-four times longer than it is wide. Hindley posits that owners of these rolls, which often featured amuletic images and protective texts such as the Charlemagne Charm, were not intended to engage with the contents of the roll but instead were to trust in its ability to perform its intended function without any intervention by the user.[40] The methodologies employed in the examination of these surviving charms are useful because an increased understanding of the interplay between the text and its context – and how this may increase or diminish the functional utility or the ritual efficacy of the text – is crucial to the understanding of how charms might have participated in broader social and cultural contexts. In Chapter Two of this thesis, the means through which these texts were deployed, for example by placing them under one's pillow, or by performing the incantation aloud while encircling the domestic space, and how this might have contributed to their ritual efficacy, is a key component of my analysis, and offers us new ways of understanding how these texts sought to address or mitigate specific fears.

So far, I have mainly presented scholarship which focuses on the surviving texts of charms and *experimenta*. However, work which has focused on the *practitioners* of

[38] Hebing, 'Allmygti God This Lettyr Sent'.

[39] Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006).

[40] Katherine Storm Hindley, 'The Power of Not Reading: Amulet Rolls in Medieval England', in *The Roll in England and France in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Stefan G. Holz, Jörg Peltzer, and Maree Shirota (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 289–306.

these texts, rather than the texts themselves, has also been informative for the present study. In particular, scholarship on magical practitioners commonly referred to as 'cunning folk' has been foundational. Keith Thomas was one of the first to provide a comprehensive depiction of a cunning person, using a vast range of early modern sources to supplement his portrayal of a practitioner who offered – often magical – solutions to common problems in exchange for money.[41] Owen Davies has substantively built on Thomas's work, drawing on sources from the close of the medieval period up to the end of the twentieth century.[42] Davies argues that it is the diverse range of services on offer which characterises these multi-faceted practitioners of magic: they are best defined by the services they provide, including healing the sick and bewitched, inducing love, telling fortunes, and identifying thieves.[43] A recent study by Tabitha Stanmore builds further on this earlier scholarship on cunning folk.[44] Stanmore, however, opts for the term 'service magician' over cunning folk, due to the fact that the latter term often brings to mind a person who practices unlearned rituals, or who might be considered a lower status, parochial figure.[45] Stanmore uses documentary evidence such as court records and other literary sources to demonstrate that service magicians were key – though often marginalised – figures in medieval and early modern society. She does not include manuscript evidence in her corpus of sources; however, the types of services commissioned by the clients in her sources reveal many close parallels with the utilities of the texts examined as part of this thesis. Therefore, this thesis complements Stanmore's work and, where links can be drawn between the manuscript evidence I analyse and the court records described by Stanmore, it elaborates on her work by providing further detail about the exact methods which might have been used by those who were being prosecuted for their professional services.

The above summary of some of the pertinent scholarship on charms and *experimenta* demonstrates the diverse range of approaches that can be used to examine this genre of texts. The paradigms and models which form the basis of this

[41] For Thomas's take on cunning folk, see 'Cunning Men and Popular Magic' in Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 212–52.

[42] Owen Davies, *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London: Hambledon, 2003).

[43] Davies, *Cunning-Folk*, p. vii.

[44] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*.

[45] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, p. 11.

area of study are fluid and constantly shifting, engendered in part by the instability of the definitions of many of the key terms utilised. Analysis of our surviving sources for these medieval practices requires a complex interplay of disciplines, and a resistance to the modern urge to draw clear boundaries and delineations between the magical and the scientific, the rational and the irrational. Where an interdisciplinary approach has been applied, our understanding of the significance of these texts has been most greatly advanced. The methodologies used to understand medical charms and experiments, intertwining an exploration of their literary structures, manuscript contexts, and evidence for their use in practice, have revolutionised our understanding of their social and cultural value. If we apply these same methodologies to the lesser-examined practices outside of the sphere of healing, we will shed light on an element of medieval daily life which has, until now, remained in shadow.

That is the intervention which this thesis makes. I adopt an interdisciplinary approach which combines methodologies from social history, book and manuscript studies, with literary and textual analysis. I identify parallels between the purposes of the most prolific charms and experiments and the prominent fears or desires expressed in contemporary literary and documentary sources, in order to suggest that the creation, copying, and perhaps even use of these charms and experiments was one means of response to the social exigencies of late-medieval England. However, taking this further, I perform close reading of these ritual texts – both of the rubrics or instructions for use, as well as the words of the invocations – to provide a deeper insight into the specific social contexts in which they might have been used and, where possible, to reconstruct elements of their performance. This enables us to understand how a practitioner might have conceptualised the use of these texts: for example, in Chapter Two of this thesis I suggest that the similarities between the language used in one regularly occurring charm for theft and many medical charms which are intended to treat an invasive disease show striking parallels between ideas about the boundaries of the body and the boundaries of the home or domestic residence. In addition to a close focus on the texts themselves, I also perform case studies of a total of nine manuscripts, which serve to further place these texts in context. For example, in Chapter One, I focus on three manuscripts owned by members of the gentry, and suggest that the social concerns revealed by the charms and experiments they copied resonate closely with the interests, fears, and desires which underpin the other materials that these owners collected in their codices. In Chapter Three, the focus is

on six manuscripts which were likely owned by medical practitioners and which contain material almost exclusively related to healing. Here, I argue that charms and experiments to address interpersonal or social problems were, for some medical practitioners, an intrinsic part of their armamentarium. This approach allows us to fully appreciate the social and cultural value that these texts would have held.

Terminology and typologies

The corpus of charms and *experimenta* in medieval manuscripts is vast, diverse, and difficult to define. The problem this poses for scholars and their attempts at classification is evidenced by the multitude of labels which have been coined and, often inconsistently, applied since such texts first started to be examined and edited by antiquarians and historians in the late nineteenth century. While, as I state earlier in this introduction, I am careful to make use of constitutive terms in my analysis, the terms I have chosen do not always align with those used by other scholars. As already mentioned, often these practices are incorporated into the broader category of 'magic', but the term 'charm' itself, too, can often be found doing a lot of heavy lifting, covering many of the practices which fall under what Richard Kieckhefer describes as the 'common tradition' of magic.[46] Kieckhefer defines the common tradition as magic that was distributed widely, and whose use was not limited to any specific group of practitioners, nor confined to those who had specialised knowledge.[47] The scope of practices found within the common tradition of magic is large. Healing, naturally, makes up a significant proportion, but we also find methods of divining or learning truths, ways of gaining protection or defending oneself against malevolent forces – whether spiritual, for example demons, or earthly, such as thieves and other enemies – agricultural rituals, protection from inclement weather, and techniques to engender love or admiration from peers or overlords. These practices thus address a wide range of concerns which would have frequently preoccupied the medieval populace. While I confine my use of the word 'charm' to indicate only spoken or written verbal formulae, sometimes other scholars may deploy the same term to indicate the wearing of a certain gemstone to protect against poisoning, or the carrying of a particular herb in a

[46] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 57.

[47] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 57.

pouch to aid fertility, practices which I would instead describe as *experimenta*. Scholars also commonly make use of the terms 'ligatures', 'amulets', and 'talismans' to refer to these same practices.[48]

One of the issues most routinely cited when discussing how to define charms – especially those which are spoken, rather than textual – is the difficulty in distinguishing them from prayer.[49] Charms often employ deeply religious language and call on biblical narratives as exemplar, or to establish a biblical precedent for what the user is requesting.[50] They frequently invoke the Trinity, as well as numerous saints, the Apostles, and the four Evangelists, and are saturated with *Pater Nosters*, *Credos* and *Aves*. In attempts to find a clear dividing line between the two, scholars have posited that charms and other forms of 'magic' are manipulative or coercive, while religious practices such as prayers are more supplicatory.[51] But the distinction is not always so clear: as Karen Jolly has demonstrated, in some religious literature saints possess coercive power, while the language of many charm rituals can be predominantly supplicatory.[52] There is no clear dividing line, but – following Katherine Hindley – I consider texts with a primarily devotional purpose to be prayers, while written or spoken formulae which are intended to bring about specific, earthly or material, outcomes are charms.[53] Furthermore, the way in which charms state that they will bring about such material outcomes is more closely aligned with the textual form of a recipe, rather than a prayer.[54] Though terse in form, charms contain many of the linguistic features of recipes, including a title which states its purpose, the use of imperative verb forms, instructions which are delineated according to a temporal sequence, and finishing with a formulaic phrase that describes the end result.[55]

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[48] Olsan and Jones consider charms, prayers, ligatures, amulets, and sequences of action using special objects under the umbrella term of 'performative ritual' in 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth', p. 407.

[49] See, for example, Jones and Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth', p. 410; Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 70–71.

[50] See Edina Bozóky, 'Medieval Narrative Charms', in *The Power of Words Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by James Alexander Kapaló (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), pp. 101–15; Olsan, 'Charms in Medieval Memory'.

[51] For example Marjorie Harrington, 'Magi and Angels: Charms in Plimpton Add. MS 02', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 16 (2013), 1–23 (p. 4).

[52] Jolly, 'Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, Practices', p. 8.

[53] Hindley, *Textual Magic*, pp. 15–17.

[54] See Ruth Carroll, 'The Middle English Recipe as Text-Type', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 100.1 (1999), 27–42.

[55] Carroll, 'The Middle English Recipe as Text-Type', p. 38.

Combined, these features make clear to the reader or user that if the prescribed steps are followed accurately, the desired outcome will be achieved.

As outlined at the beginning of this introduction, I opt for the use of two terms, 'charms' and '*experimenta*'. Examples of these are as follows:

1. The term 'charm' connotes a ritual which relies only on the power of spoken or written words. For example, the commonly occurring 'God was born in Bethlehem' charm against thieves, here cited from London, British Library, Additional MS 33996 is a straightforward spoken charm:

> In Bedthlehem God was y bore betwene too bestes. To rest he was leyde. In þat stede was noþer þef ne mon but þe Holy Trinyte. Þat ilke selve God þat þer was y bore, defende oure bodyes and oure cateles from þeves and alle manner myscheves and harmes, where ever we wende, y by lond by water, by nyȝt or by day, by tyde or by tyme, Amen.[56]

This remedy for toothache, on the other hand, is a textual charm:

> Ffor toþeache. Wryte þis writte and bynd aboute þe nekke: *In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti Amen + amy acay + lomy + arilla Domy + Salomy + libera Domine famulum tuum .N. a dolore dentium et ab omni dolore Amen + boen + been + naym + In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti Amen*.[57]
>
> [Lord free your servant [Name] from pain of teeth and from all pain Amen + boen + been + naym + In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen]

[56] Fol. 113r.

[57] London, British Library, Additional MS 34111, fol. 70r.

On occasion, the sources indicate that the ritual requires both oral and written components, or that the efficacious words can be either spoken or written down and carried on the body, depending on need.

2. An experiment can be either verbal or non-verbal. When verbal, both words and objects are involved in the ritual process. This can be a simple directive to say a certain number of *Pater Nosters*, *Aves* or *Credos* while gathering efficacious herbs, for example this extract from a longer text, which describes how to gather celandine to evade captivity:

> Who so wele on lammesse day
> Erly on morw or sonne splay
> Gadere celydony wit his roote
> It helpyth and doth meche bote
> Þe gaderere fastend most be
> Wit *Pater Noster* and *Ave* thre
> And celydonye wit hym bere
> No prison schal holde ne dere.[58]

However, more complex examples involve either the inscription of certain words onto objects with occult power, or bringing together different ingredients, such as this experiment to 'have anything' from someone:

> If þou wylt have ony thing of lord or lady, wryte þese wordys a forseyd '*sator arepo opera rotas*' wit the blod of a dowe and þanne strenkele þere on haly water and þanne ley it iij dayes on an auter, and þanne bere it wit þi right hand, and what þou axe rightfully thou xal have it wit owtyn dowte.[59]

[58] Stockholm Royal Library, MS X.90, pp. 53 - 4, transcription in Sheldon, 'Middle English and Latin Charms', p. 145.

[59] London, British Library, Additional MS 12195, fols. 126v – 127r.

A non-verbal experiment indicates a ritual which exploits the properties of an object, usually a herb, stone or animal part, and does not incorporate any verbal element, whether spoken or written. For example, this Anglo-Norman experiment which uses a magnet to uncover infidelity:

> *A saver si uone femme aime sun barun plus ke nul autre: pernez un aimant, si metez desuz la femme e si ele vus aime plus ke nul autre, tantost vus embracer, e si ele aime autre plus que vus, ele s'en turnera de vus e dormant cherra hors de lit*.[60]
>
> [To know if a woman loves her husband more than any other: take a magnet and put it under the woman and if she loves you more than any other she will kiss you, and if she loves another more than you, she will turn away from you and sleep outside of the bed.]

As stated above, charms fall under the classification of *experimenta*, in that they were known to work through experience, rather than understood based on scientific or Galenic principles. My decision to treat charms as a separate but linked entity is guided by the distinction that is often made in the source texts themselves. For example, the charm against thieves cited above is specifically labelled as a charm (or *carmen* in Latin) by the scribe who copied it: it is accompanied by the rubricated title '*Carmen contra latrones*'. Similarly, *experimentum* or experiment are frequently used by medieval scribes to describe practices involving objects or natural substances. For example, in this extract from the *De corio serpentis,* a tract detailing the different properties of powdered snakeskin, found in London, British Library, Additional MS 12195:

> The thredde experiment is if þou takeke this powdyr and watyr and wasche þerwit þi face, þine enmyes xal not dorn a bydyn to lokyn in

[60] London, British Library, Sloane MS 146, fols. 63v – 64r.

> thi face but flen fro the, and thi frendis schul drawyn to þe, and ther by thou xalt knowyn thy frendys fro thyn enmyes.[61]

These classifications are not universally applied in the medieval sources; however, given that they *are* utilised and they clearly form a natural part of the lexicon of the compilers and/or scribes, it seems sensible to preserve the distinction and retain these terms as descriptors within my own analysis.

Beyond clarifying the terminology in use here, it is also important to consider how to typologise the sources themselves. Jonathan Roper has highlighted that the absence of any universally accepted typology for charms serves as a barrier for international scholarship on the topic.[62] He notes that the lack of rich typological classifications within the field of charms reveals that this area of scholarship is as yet relatively underdeveloped.[63] There have been a number of attempts to establish suitable categories for these texts. For example, in the late nineteenth century Leonid Majkov published an edition of Russian verbal charms which are organised according to which 'sphere of life' they most naturally correspond to, among them health, love, agriculture, and social relations.[64] Tatiana Agapkina and Andrei Toporkov, in their consideration of East Slavic charms, have argued for a system which first assigns a charm to a thematic group, for example: illness, love, household, and so on. They then subdivide this category into functional groups. For example, if healing charms were considered a thematic group, functional groups within that would include charms for bleeding, toothache, and so on.[65]

Roper argues for a system that makes finer distinctions between charm texts than by simply grouping them according to function. He recommends a typology which groups charms according to their narrative motif. As an example, Roper refers to the *flum Jordan* motif, which is one of the most common to occur in English charms, and

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[61] London, British Library, Additional MS 12195, fol. 122v.

[62] Jonathan Roper, *Charms, Charmers and Charming International Research on Verbal Magic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

[63] Jonathan Roper, 'Typologising English Charms', in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 128–44 (p. 129).

[64] Leonid Majkov, *Velikorusskija Zaklinanija* (St Petersburg: Tipografia Majkova, 1869).

[65] Tatiana Agapkina and Andrei Toporkov, 'Charm Indexes: Problems and Perspectives', in *The Power of Words: Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by James Alexander Kapaló (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), pp. 71–99.

which draws on the biblical story of Jesus being baptised in the river Jordan.[66] At the point of his submersion, the water is said to have stopped flowing and the river stood still. Charms which employ this motif commonly begin with a succinct summary of this narrative such as in this one for bleeding: 'Ihesu þat was in Bedelem borne and baptyzed in flum Iordam and stynte þe water in þe stone so staynt þe blod of þe man'.[67] As well as to staunch blood, this particular motif can be found in charms that serve various other functions, such as to bind thieves and relieve toothache.[68] Roper's proposition is attractive in that it allows us to identify links between charms which otherwise might not have naturally appeared together; the *flum Jordan* motif, for example, also appears in charms against thieves, and a comparison of these two – functionally very different – charms might enhance our understanding of each. However, we must be wary that attempting to devise a typology for charms and experiments that goes solely beyond their functional purpose is artificial. After all, they are typically indexed according to their utility in their manuscript contexts and we must appreciate that this is how their medieval users would have considered them. Furthermore, while Roper's suggestion is useful when considering charm and experiment texts from a linguistic and literary perspective, it is less so when exploring the social and cultural currency of these items. It is their thematic grouping, or the 'sphere of life' to which they best correspond, which can shed most light on the anxieties and concerns of their medieval users.

Classification therefore requires some flexibility. This flexibility has been demonstrated through the outputs of individual scholars, who have adjusted the way in which they group and categorise texts according to the research question at hand. For example, Lea Olsan has used various modes of grouping texts in order to investigate different aspects, or to analyse them from alternate perspectives. When identifying their 'semantic motifs', which Olsan defines as the 'key meaning content within the incantations or operative words, of a charm', she organises them by that prominent motif.[69] While utility is still relevant, it is secondary. However, in a different essay Olsan, in collaboration with Peter Murray Jones, examines how certain rituals occupy a specific place within medieval practices around conception and childbirth;

[66] Roper, 'Typologising English Charms'.

[67] London, British Library, Sloane MS 3160, fol. 116r.

[68] Roper, 'Typologising English Charms', pp. 131–39.

[69] Olsan, 'Charms in Medieval Memory', p. 63.

here, the texts under investigation are selected and organised according to their utility, and their key motifs are secondary.[70]

The purpose of this thesis is to understand how charms and *experimenta* reflect and respond to the key social concerns and anxieties of medieval people. While the term 'anxiety' has separate modern connotations related to mental illness, anxiety is defined (and used throughout this thesis) more generally to mean 'worry over the future or about something with an uncertain outcome; uneasy concern about a person, situation, etc'.[71] The practices under examination here often function as a means to bring certainty or clarity to a situation or to control an unpredictable outcome. Therefore, within the scope of this thesis, classifying these texts primarily according to the unpredictable outcome they are designed to address, that is, their specific purpose or utility, is the most useful approach. This approach is also closest to the way that medieval scribes themselves typologised these texts. For example, the rubricated title of the *Carmen contra latrones* cited above privileges its function: the titles or incipits of charms and *experimenta* typically lead with the purpose to which the text can be put.

When grouping these sources together according to utility, we can better appreciate the wide range of methods that were available to address certain anxieties. Remaining with the issue of theft as an example, we find simple oral charms seeking protection, spoken charms to paralyse a would-be-thief on crossing a property's boundary lines, and textual charms that will defend from theft so long as they are borne on the user's body. We also find instructions for sprinkling powdered snakeskin around the head to reveal the perpetrator in the victim's sleep, and marigold worn about the neck during sleep to do the same. Other methods of identifying a thief including letters carved into virgin wax or written on virgin parchment, experiments using loaves of bread or balls of clay, and an eye painted on a wall which, when a nail is driven into it, will make the guilty party weep.[72] This diversity of methods to combat a problem reveals much about the ways that a medieval person might understand their own ability to manipulate both the world and the people around them, as well as the way

[70] Jones and Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth'.

[71] 'Anxiety, n.', in *Oxford English Dictionary*, Third edition (Oxford University Press, 2023).

[72] Frank Klaassen and Christopher Phillips, 'The Return of Stolen Goods: Reginald Scot, Religious Controversy, and Magic in Bodleian Library, Additional B. 1', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 1.2 (2008), 135–76; Benati, 'Painted Eyes'; Stallcup, 'The "Eye of Abraham"'.

that they interacted with objects and the natural world. Furthermore, we are given an insight into how pervasive a specific anxiety may have been in the Middle Ages based on the prolificacy of the different tactics which evolved to address it. Theft is clearly a prominent concern, and it is the subject of the second chapter of this thesis.

It is not just the means used to achieve a desired result which are diverse, however. The linguistic formulae as well as the genre or style of text are just as wide-ranging. The use of marigold in identifying thieves cited above occurs as part of a long Middle English poem on the properties of herbs which is formed of rhyming couplets.[73] One charm against thieves locates itself within a longer narrative which positions the narrator as the protagonist of some sort of religious journey or experience.[74] Language serves different functions: some texts are confined to either Middle English, Anglo-Norman, or Latin, while others combine languages, the efficacious words employing the language of ritual and of the Church, the instructions for use detailed in the vernacular.[75] For example, this charm using angel names uses different languages for the instructions and the incantations:

> When ȝe be in eny thunder sey thys: '*Sancte Gabriel libera me a vexacione et tempestate malignorum spirituum*' [free me from the disturbance and storms of wicked spirits]. When ȝe taste mete or drynke sey thys: '*Sancte Raphael conforta me et ab omnibus malis meis custodi me semper*' [give me courage and guard me always from all evils].[76]

Hebrew and Greek words of power are also integrated into incantations: 'tetragrammaton', the term for the Hebrew name for God (YHWH) makes a frequent appearance, often in charms for protection from evil spirits and enemies, while the Greek 'alpha' and 'omega', typically copied in letter-form, are also routine finds.[77]

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[73] See Jake Walsh Morrissey, 'An Unnoticed Fragment of "A Tretys of Diverse Herbis" in British Library, MS Sloane 2460, and the Middle English Career of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' "De Virtutibus Herbarum"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 115.2 (2014), 153–61.

[74] London, British Library, Sloane MS 3556, fol. 8v.

[75] For an in-depth study of language in charms see Hindley, *Textual Magic*.

[76] Columbia University Library, Plimpton Additional MS 2, fol. 2r-v; transcription and translation along with a discussion of this charm and the effect of the language switching is provided in Harrington, 'Magi and Angels: Charms in Plimpton Add. MS 02'.

[77] Hindley, *Textual Magic*, pp. 178–79, 251–53.

Meanwhile words in less obviously identifiable languages, sometimes called nonsense words or 'gibberish charms' – such as those in the toothache charm cited above '*amy acay* + *lomy* + *arilla Domy* + *Salomy*' – and other indecipherable letters and characters, have provoked speculation regarding their origin, meaning, and perceived efficacy.[78] Ciaran Arthur dedicates a chapter to placing pre-Conquest 'gibberish' charms within the context of early medieval riddles and other intellectual decryption games.[79] Others have argued that unintelligible words increased the sense of mystique and made the recitation of a charm more impressive to its audience: in the case of healing charms, the patient.[80] Others still have argued that these indecipherable words and characters had a significance which was only understood by the supernatural agent that witnessed the ritual. Leslie Arnovick, for example, suggests that the lack of semantic meaning in some charms suggests the imminence of a supernatural audience.[81] This theory is supported by scholars of performative ritual such as Jesper Sørensen who suggests that the inclusion of words or characters that were unintelligible to the user of a charm means that, by default, the supernatural addressee must be the only agent intended to understand them.[82] A deeper analysis of the use of language in these texts (that is, whether Latin, vernaculars, or what appears to be gibberish have been used) is beyond the scope of the present study, but the above summary indicates the diversity of the sources at hand, and some of the ways in which they have hitherto been investigated. It also provides an introduction to, and navigational guide of, many of the texts which I cite regularly throughout this thesis.

Whatever combination of languages and literary techniques has been used, the notion of performance must always inform our understanding of the text. This is supported by the range of symbols indicating gesture and explicit instructions for physical actions within the texts themselves, and which underpin the performativity of these rituals. The most obvious indicators of performance are the rubricated crosses

[78] Thomas Forbes, for example, goes so far as to use 'gibberish' as one label of classification within his own attempts to organise charms, see 'Verbal Charms in British Folk Medicine'.

[79] Arthur, *'Charms', Liturgies, and Secret Rites in Early Medieval England*, pp. 169–214.

[80] For example Lea T. Olsan, 'The Marginality of Charms in Medieval England', in *The Power of Words: Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by James Alexander Kapaló (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), pp. 135–64.

[81] Leslie K. Arnovick, *Written Reliquaries: The Resonance of Orality in Medieval English Texts* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 2006), p. 41.

[82] Jesper Sørensen, 'The Problem of Magic - or How Gibberish Becomes Efficacious Action', *Recherches Sémiotiques / Semiotic Inquiry*, 25.1–2 (2005), 93–117 (p. 111).

which are omnipresent in charms, and which signify that the user must cross themself at those moments; this can also be understood as a textualisation of what had once been an oral tradition.[83] Other performative elements are more explicit: the Anglo-Norman experiment to uncover adultery cited above includes instructions to place a magnet beneath the head of one's wife. Furthermore, the way that the wife – the passive target of this experiment – reveals the truth about her fidelity is also performative: if she loves her husband she will turn and kiss him, if she loves another she will get out of bed. The significance of leaving the marital bed as the means of revealing one's infidelity here is particularly apt. Other texts are accompanied by diagrams to demonstrate to the user where something should be copied out and carried on the body or inscribed onto an object. The *sator arepo* formula cited above is often illustrated in manuscripts to show how it must be written out in the form of a square.[84] Elsewhere, five *signa* – circular figures containing characters, shapes, and sacred names – have been copied into the blank spaces in a manuscript, each designed for a specific purpose including to protect against enemies and to aid in victory, and presumably intended to be copied out by the user and worn on the body as a textual charm.[85] The inventiveness and multifaceted approach to language and style reveals a certain creativity and syncretism when it came to designing solutions to specific problems. The way in which this creativity manifests in charms or experiments designed to address social problems, and how this provides insight into the way they might have been deployed, is explored throughout the course of this thesis.

Tracts of experiments and 'Books of Secrets'

As mentioned at the beginning of this introduction, 'wonders', 'secrets' and 'natural magic' were all terminology used during the medieval period to refer to *experimenta* and the manipulation of the occult properties of natural substances. There are three

[83] Lea T. Olsan, 'Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Tradition', *Oral Tradition*, 7.1 (1992), 116–42 (p. 122).

[84] This is the case in the Additional MS cited above, as well as in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Wood Empt.18, fol. 32r, among others.

[85] San Marino, Huntington Library MS HM 64, fols. 17v, 21v, and 34; see Sophie Page, 'Medieval Magical Figures: Between Image and Text', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 432–57 (pp. 440–41).

tracts of experiments which occur frequently in the manuscripts examined for this thesis, and which form key parts of my analysis.[86] One of these is the *De corio serpentis* or *Twelve Experiments with Snakeskin* cited above.[87] This tract, which in its preface claims to have been translated from Greek into Latin by a certain Johannes Paulinus, lists the different uses of the skin of a green adder, burnt into a powder when the moon is full and in the first degree of Aries. These uses include, among others: to drive away enemies; to tell friends from enemies; to uncover secrets; protect against poison; treat a head wound; and halt the progression of leprosy. The two other common tracts are the *Secreta Alberti*, more commonly known as the *Liber aggregationis* and attributed to Albertus Magnus, and the *Experiments of King Solomon* or the *Ludi nature regi Salamonis*. There was a common tradition of attributing occult texts to ancient or more contemporary authorities in order to give them more legitimacy or mystique or, in the case of the *Ludi nature*, to align them with the renowned wisdom of a figure such as Solomon.[88] The 'secrets' attributed to Albertus Magnus, the renowned Dominican friar, closely mimic the actual scientific writings of the thirteenth-century philosopher, particularly his works on the properties of certain stones, animals, and plants. However, they are now recognised as having been modelled on these Albertan texts, rather than being authored by Albertus Magnus himself.[89] The Solomonic experiments are typically concerned with the creation of illusions and are closer to what we might now regard as magic tricks. For example, 'to make wine burn in oil', 'to make a ring jump', and 'to make gold and silver letters' are all entries in one fifteenth-century manuscript witness to this tract.[90] The *Liber aggregationis*, on the other hand, consists of three tracts, one each on the properties of plants, stones, and animal parts, and provides instructions for specific rituals with these substances to address medical, social, and domestic concerns. For example, the plant heliotrope (sunflower or marigold) must be gathered under the sign

[86] These are three recognised tracts with multiple surviving witnesses. There are large numbers of individual experiments, or clusters of experiments, which occur in the manuscript sources too.

[87] Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2, pp. 794-6.

[88] Laura Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic in Fifteenth-Century England' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2012), p. 47; on ritual magic attributed to Solomon see Julien Véronèse, 'Solomonic Magic', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 187–200.

[89] Draelants, *Le Liber de virtutibus herbarum*; Lynn Thorndike, 'Further Consideration of the *Experimenta*, *Speculum Astronomiae*, and *De Secretis Mulierum* Ascribed to Albertus Magnus', *Speculum*, 30.3 (1955), 413–43.

[90] All London, British Library, Sloane MS 121, fols. 90v – 93v.

of Virgo during the month of August and, when carried on one's person while wrapped in a laurel leaf and accompanied by the tooth of a wolf, will ensure that nobody will be able to speak anything but good words about the bearer. Furthermore, if the user places it beneath their head at night, they will see who has stolen from them, and if it is put over the door of a church while a woman is inside, if she has broken her marriage vows she will be unable to leave.[91]

These tracts of knowledge or 'Books of Secrets' as they were commonly known in the medieval and early modern period can be found in diverse company, but they tend to circulate alongside medical treatises or within personal miscellanies.[92] London, British Library, Harley MS 2378 contains all three tracts: an extensive version of the *Liber aggregationis* (fols. 169r – 181v), the *De corio serpentis* (fols. 181v – 182v) and the *Ludi nature regis Salamonis* (fols. 182v – 183r). The majority of the manuscript seems to have been compiled by or for a Nicholas Spalding, who may well have been a medical practitioner; medical recipes dominate the remaining contents. It is difficult to determine to what extent these items were copied out with the intention of using them, or whether they were collected by the manuscript compiler based on an interest in occult knowledge. These types of texts represented an esoteric wisdom, the domain of forbidden knowledge, and the cunning of their user.[93] Certainly, when they are found travelling together such as in Harley MS 2378, there is the implication that the compiler had a specific interest in curating texts of a certain genre. These tracts as a whole, however, are also vehicles which reveal the attitudes of their collector and their broader concerns and social values. This is something which has been argued recently by Carrie Griffin.[94] Griffin examines a range of instructional writing, including some 'magic tricks' much like those found in the *Ludi nature regis Salomonis*, and suggests that these texts are for entertainment as well as edification and, as she argues elsewhere, that they represent a 'performance of possibilities […] a record of aspirations'.[95] A text offering its reader the means of preventing malicious speech

[91] According to London, British Library, Harley MS 2253, fol. 137r.

[92] For more on the tradition of Books of Secrets see Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*.

[93] Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature*, p. 5.

[94] Carrie Griffin, *Instructional Writing in English, 1350-1650: Materiality and Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2021).

[95] Griffin, *Instructional Writing in English*, p. 58; Carrie Griffin, 'Reconsidering the Recipe: Materiality, Narrative and Text in Later Medieval Instructional Manuscripts and Collections', in *Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe 1350-1550: Packaging, Presentation and Consumption*, ed. by Emma Cayley and Susan Powell (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 135–49 (p. 148).

against them, or to entertain their household guests with a ring which jumps across the table, for example, would have appealed precisely because it resonated with the reader's key social concerns; whether or not they would have actually used it is not necessarily the pertinent question at hand here. This is something which is explored in more depth in Chapter One.

Many *experimenta*, however, circulate independently of these three longer tracts. For example, a Middle English experiment to secure victory in wrestling and while pleading in court, which also draws on the properties of *solsequia* or marigold.[96] This requires the execution of a series of rituals; however, in this example these rituals include explicitly Christian elements, as opposed to the notably secular rituals in the three tracts cited above. The flower is to be picked in the morning before sunrise and set on the user's knees facing eastward; however, it is then 'conjured' – that is, an invocation is spoken over it – with an oration which calls on the Virgin Mary, Saint John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, and other saints and the Apostles, as well as all four elements and the virtues of God.

Another Latin experiment which supplements its ritual actions with Christian invocations, uses the plant celandine to evade captivity:

> *Ut carcer aliquem non possit detinere. Vade ad herbam que dicitur celedonia et collige eam in vigilia Sancti Petri dicens Pater Noster et ave in honore Dei et Sancti Petri ad Vincula, et portet super te et carcer te non retinebit. Experimentum est probatum*.[97]
>
> [So that a prison cannot hold someone. Go to the plant that is called celandine and collect it on the eve of the feast of Saint Peter saying the *Pater Noster* and *Ave* in the grace of God and Saint Peter ad Vincula, and carry it on you and no prison will hold you. This experiment is proved.]

Similarly, a number of *experimenta* which have an identifiable basis in the *Liber aggregationis* of pseudo-Albertus Magnus have been copied into one fifteenth-century

[96] London, British Library, Sloane MS 121, fol. 109r.

[97] London, British Library, Sloane MS 56, fol. 79r.

manuscript; however, they have been embellished with Christian invocations.[98] For example, the experiment using heliotrope to prevent malicious speech and to identify an adulterous woman, cited above, is accompanied by instructions to the user to say three *Pater Nosters* and three *Ave Marias*.[99] It is tempting to speculate that these prayers have been added in order to heighten or perhaps even legitimise the occult power of these natural substances.

Scribal engagement with Books of Secrets goes beyond adding directives for Christian observations and incantations as plants are gathered and prepared, however. Surviving copies of the *Tretys of Diverse Herbis*, a Middle English rhyming herbal which lists the virtues of at least twenty-four herbs, demonstrate a literary engagement with *experimenta* too.[100] Here, the same properties of heliotrope that are listed in the *Liber aggregationis* are laid out in poetic form:

> ȝif thou on the it so bere
> Ffro ilke perel hit wol the were
> Man ne woman schal haue no myȝth
> To speke aȝen the no þing bot ryȝth
> And frend and fo the schal grete
> With wordes fair and swete.[101]

The *Tretys of Diverse Herbis* draws on herbal lore from several authorities, translated into English and composed with an intentional rhyme scheme, suggesting that authorial or scribal engagement with *experimenta* went beyond accumulating and listing practical knowledge. The herbal poem from which the above extract is cited precedes a copy of the vernacular medical tract the *Leechcraft*, suggesting that it

[98] London, British Library, Sloane MS 3160.

[99] Fol. 137v; for more on the works of pseudo-Albertus Magnus in this manuscript see Heather A. Taylor, '*Hec Que Sequuntur Non Sunt Fide Digna* : The Censorship of Charms in Late Medieval Manuscripts', *Manuscripta*, 66.2 (2022), 239–77 (pp. 273–74).

[100] George Keiser, 'Vernacular Herbals: A Growth Industry in Late Medieval England', in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, ed. by Margaret Connolly and Linne R. Mooney (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2008), pp. 292–307; Anke Timmermann, 'Scientific and Encyclopaedic Verse', in *A Companion to Fifteenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. by Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), pp. 199–211 (pp. 204–5).

[101] London, British Library, Sloane MS 2457, fol.7r; links between the source material for the verse herbal and the pseudo-Albertus Magnus tract have been spotted by Jake Morrissey in 'An Unnoticed Fragment of "A Tretys of Diverse Herbis"' and will be discussed further in a forthcoming article by myself.

formed part of the reader's medical practice; however, the choice to record the pertinent information in a more literary format suggests that it has a significance beyond its content. Does the rhyme scheme serve as a memory aid, or does it suggest that the poem was intended to be performed? The style of the text means that we can read the practical applications of the herbs not just as representative of common anxieties, but as literary tropes and, as such, they begin to form part of a wider discourse, breaking free from the confines of the genre of practical knowledge. Hannah Bower has recently explored the literary qualities of recipes, suggesting that 'remedy writers and poets drew upon a shared, commonplace tradition of figurative language, which was not the property of one particular type of writing but was used in various modes and texts for distinct but overlapping purposes'.[102] This herbal poem is one such example of this relatively unexplored overlap between *experimenta* and other literary genres.

The present study and its corpus of sources

The above summary of the types of texts under examination here makes it clear that this is a very diffuse and complex source base. It is difficult to impose limits on what should be included in the corpus of sources and what should be excluded. As is made clear by the discussion of terminology in this introduction, this is a field which is made up of overlapping grey areas. The groundwork for this thesis began with a survey of late-medieval manuscripts of English provenance. These manuscripts were identified based on an initial research question: how common were 'non-medical' charms and *experimenta* in late-medieval English manuscripts, and what range of problems did they seek to address? This question was motivated by the disparity between the focus on medical charms and *experimenta* in existing scholarship versus the study of those which are not exclusively related to healing. Such scholarship – outlined further above – has been invaluable, breaking down pre-conceived barriers between 'lay' and 'learned' medicine and challenging the notion that charms and *experimenta* were only the purview of folk practitioners.[103] And yet, from a preliminary survey, I became aware

[102] Hannah Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 32.

[103] Olsan, 'Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice'.

of a significant number of texts which offered solutions to a whole host of other problems: the threat of enemies, fear of adultery, theft, infestations of vermin, the dangers of road travel or sea voyage, and the damage that could be caused by malicious speech.[104] Further quantitative analysis revealed that social relations and interpersonal relationships were a core theme of the majority of these non-medical texts, and I thus refined my research to focus primarily on practices which could be deemed 'social' in nature. While existing surveys of charms and *experimenta* are heavily skewed towards the medical, these nevertheless provided the foundations for my source base: many manuscripts which contain charms and *experimenta* for healing often contain ones for other purposes, and thus these surveys told me where to look first.[105] Through extensive archival investigation, I have identified 98 manuscripts, and over 500 relevant texts. Inclusion and exclusion criteria were informed by three elements: the purpose of the texts – that is, whether they address problems which can be understood as pertinent to different aspects of social relations; the date range within which the texts were copied (between roughly 1100 and 1530); and the way in which the text was understood to operate – that is, whether through the power of words or the manipulation of occult forces rather than, for example, by explicitly summoning spirits or communicating with demons. With regard to language, I have included any and all texts which are either exclusively in, or in a combination of, the three primary spoken and written languages used in England during the later medieval period: Latin, Anglo-Norman and Middle English. While unpacking how these different languages function within the tradition of charms and other *experimenta* is not a focus of this thesis, it was nevertheless important to include all three languages in my corpus. This permits me to obtain the most comprehensive oversight of the different texts that were in circulation during the period, and thus also to gain an accurate insight into the quantitative breakdown of charms and *experimenta* to address individual issues and identify which utilities are most prominent. Furthermore, previous scholarship has

[104] For the results of this preliminary survey, see my forthcoming article, '"An experiment pervyd for a thyng y lost": "Non-medical" charms and *experimenta* in medieval medical manuscripts', in *Social History of Medicine* (expected 2024).

[105] Existing surveys include Sheldon, 'Middle English and Latin Charms'; Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic'; George R. Keiser, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, ed. by Albert E Hartung and John Edwin Wells (New Haven, Conn.: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1998), x; Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*; Thorndike, *A Catalogue of Incipits of Medieval Scientific Writings in Latin*; Linda Ehrsam Voigts and Patricia Deery Kurtz, *Scientific and Medical Writings in Old and Middle English: An Electronic Reference*, Online edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000).

tended to focus on texts in one specific language, creating unnecessary demarcation lines that do not necessary reflect the reality of the people who were copying, reading and using these texts, who were likely multi-lingual.[106] My intention is to elide these demarcation lines and create a fuller picture of the range and multitude of texts which were designed to address the non-medical concerns of the medieval populace.

As with most methods of periodisation, the cut-off dates for the corpus under examination here are artificial, but necessary. The earliest manuscript studied is from the turn of the twelfth century, while the latest manuscript is from the early sixteenth. These dates roughly align with typical periodisation, which puts the end of the early medieval period – at least in England – at the time of the Norman Conquest, while the advent of the Tudor monarchs and the turn of the sixteenth century heralds the beginning of the early modern period. However, with specific regard to charms and *experimenta*, this date range also has rationale. As described above, pre-Conquest charms are recognised for reflecting the process of accommodation and adaptation of pagan practices that occurred as Christianity spread and became established in England. After the Conquest, though there was of course much continuity with the texts and practices which had come before, the nature and language of charms changed profoundly, as part of what Katherine Hindley describes as a 'diverse and flourishing charm tradition'.[107] After 1100, too, the emergence of universities and the rise in the numbers of educated clerics created an environment in which magical texts were written and circulated. Though many of these were typically long tracts of ritual magic, astrological image magic, or necromancy, others dealt with the types of practices which are most of interest here: they used the language of experiment or empirical knowledge to describe the occult properties of natural substances and how they could be used.[108] These shifts affirm the inclusion of codices from the turn of the twelfth century onwards. Similar changes in the way that magic – including charms

[106] Among others, examples of scholarship which makes reference to charms and experiments and which focuses on one particular language include Lea T. Olsan, 'Latin Charms in British Library, MS Royal 12.B.XXV', *Manuscripta*, 33.2 (1989), 119–28; Olsan, 'Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Tradition'; Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500*; Stallcup, 'The "Eye of Abraham"'; Hebing, 'Allmygti God This Lettyr Sent'; Arnovick, *Written Reliquaries*; Bühler, 'Prayers and Charms in Certain Middle English Scrolls'; Gray, 'Notes on Some Middle English Charms'; Tony Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine: Volume II Shorter Treatises* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997).

[107] Hindley, *Textual Magic*, p. 146.

[108] Catherine Rider and Sophie Page, 'Introduction', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1–12 (p. 2).

and *experimenta* – were viewed, used, and understood, were underway at the end of the period under study here too. Towards the end of the fifteenth century, growing fears about magic, especially with regard to the possibility for communication with demons, were emerging across Europe, which would eventually give rise to the notorious witch hunts of the early modern period. Charms, which were often classified as superstitious, were met with growing intolerance by the clergy and other secular elites.[109] This intolerance was compounded – though for other reasons – by religious reformation in the sixteenth century, during which charms became dangerously associated with the 'magic of the Catholic Church'.[110] Thus, the moment of England's break with Rome offers a natural closing parenthesis for my collection of sources.

Finally, I have included only simple ritual practices within my corpus, and not those which explicitly rely on conjuring spirits – whether demonic or angelic – through a process of long and complex learned ritual magic. The identification of a thief or the retrieval of stolen goods are common goals in necromantic texts, usually executed by summoning spirits or demons, binding them to one's will, and then commanding them to fulfil those desires.[111] These practices are part of what has been termed the 'clerical underworld' by scholars, due to the fact that they were popular among learned and Latinate members of the clergy, or those in monastic orders.[112] While there is crossover in the goals of some necromantic texts and the charms and *experimenta* examined here, the inclusion of these longer ritual magic texts would be beyond the scope of this research, which focuses on shorter, less complex rituals that relied on the virtues of words, plants and stones, and which would have been more broadly accessible and more widely circulated.

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[109] Rider and Page, 'Introduction', p. 3; see also Bailey, *Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies*.

[110] 'The magic of the medieval church' is a phrase used by Keith Thomas to title the first chapter of *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 27–57; the association of charms with Catholic superstition was consolidated in the sixteenth century in particular by Reginald Scot in The Discoverie of Witchcraft (London, 1584), see Klaassen and Phillips, 'The Return of Stolen Goods'; Bailey, *Fearful Spirits, Reasoned Follies*, pp. 23–35; Alexandra Walsham, 'The Reformation and "The Disenchantment of the World" Reassessed', *The Historical Journal*, 51.2 (2008), 497–528; Frank Klaassen, *The Transformations of Magic: Illicit Learned Magic in the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance* (University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), pp. 173–78.

[111] Richard Kieckhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the Fifteenth Century*, Magic in History (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998), p. 100.

[112] See for example Sophie Page, *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013); Frank Klaassen, 'Learning and Masculinity in Manuscripts of Ritual Magic of the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 38.1 (2007), 49–76.

Thesis structure

This thesis draws on – and builds on – a vast and wide-ranging corpus of scholarship. It seeks to course-correct the prior focus on medical charms and *experimenta* by examining those which correspond to a different 'sphere of life': the social. Documentary evidence such as court records, wills, and family letter archives, as well as literary works – both poetry and prose – are the life-source of inquiry into the social and cultural history of the Middle Ages. This thesis makes a case for the inclusion of charms and *experimenta* within this traditional corpus of primary sources. By gathering and analysing the core utilities of these texts, the means through which they were understood to operate, and the way in which they position their user within the broader social imaginary, we are offered a hitherto unexplored insight into the way that medieval people understood their place in the world, and how they might have attempted to assert agency in that world. The first chapter constitutes an in-depth analysis of charms and *experimenta* to address five prominent social concerns or anxieties: dealing with enemies; uncovering false friends; manipulating the outcome of litigation; preventing slander; and winning favour and influence. With the use of supporting literary and documentary evidence, such as letter archives, poetry, and court records, I interweave these charms and *experimenta* with case studies of real medieval people – particularly members of the gentry – whose surviving voices reveal the same socio-cultural concerns as those disclosed by my corpus, most prominently in relation to fears around downward social mobility and status anxiety. I argue that these texts represent the desire to assert agency within the confines of existing power structures and social networks, and that they typically operate in a way that is aligned with the social conventions and prescribed behaviours of the time, albeit in a way which ensures that the practitioner comes out on top. The latter half of this first chapter places these texts in context, focusing on three manuscripts likely owned by members of the gentry, and revealing how charms and *experimenta* to tackle social concerns align with the typical reading patterns of this strata of society. The second chapter is a case study of the most common charms and *experimenta* outside of those for healing: ones for theft. Despite the evident popularity of practices to prevent theft or identify a thief after an item had been stolen, no research to date has placed these practices in the social, cultural, and domestic contexts within which they may have

been used. This is the role my case study performs, drawing on documentary evidence such as records of criminal activity, while interweaving theory on conflict resolution, object ownership, and social control. This chapter also engages in textual analysis to recover the actual performance of this little-researched aspect of medieval ritual behaviour. Overall, it reveals the specific fears these texts speak to, highlighting the vulnerability of the body, home, and community space. The final chapter uses six manuscript case studies to demonstrate how charms and *experimenta* to control women, for example to incite love or lust, to reveal women's secrets, prove virginity, or uncover adultery, are often found in medical manuscripts containing copies of the *Trotula* texts, three famous tracts on gynaecology and women's health. I argue that these manuscripts represent a particular type of medical practice, one provided by someone learned and Latinate, who may have collected these texts in response to both client demand and personal interest. This deepens our understanding of the shape and nature of medical practice, and reveals how medieval people might have sought outside help in order to address social concerns, including around their interpersonal relationships.

Chapter One: Status anxiety and fear of social decline

Previous scholarship which has situated 'magic' texts within social history has tended to focus on the social value of these texts, rather than how they might be used to counteract or mitigate certain social concerns.[1] In these studies, therefore, the focus has routinely been more on the *genre*, if we can call it that, of these texts as a whole, rather than on the specific texts themselves and how their utilities or purposes might reflect the common attitudes and anxieties of the period. This chapter will examine how the utilities of charms and *experimenta* resonate with other documentary evidence – such as letter archives, court records, and pastoral writing – for social relations. In doing so, it will be possible to see where the charms and experiments closely reflect the real concerns voiced by medieval people. Furthermore, analysis of the nuances of these texts, including linguistic features and the instructions that they include for their performance, will allow us to imagine the instances in which these texts might have been used, and the ways in which they engaged conceptually with the established power structures and prescribed behaviours of the period.

The word 'imagine' here is pivotal. Court records do reveal that some of the practices discussed here were deployed during the medieval and early modern periods; however, the texts examined in this thesis, and the codices in which they are found, are rarely accompanied by concrete evidence that they were used. Nevertheless, I contend that proof of use is not the most important factor here. The presence of such texts in manuscripts of practical or personal information is sufficient evidence that they corresponded to particularly pertinent fears, anxieties, or desires experienced by the medieval population. This approach is largely informed by Carrie Griffin's work on recipes and instructional writing.[2] Griffin suggests that recipes (a category within which charms and *experimenta* fall) do not necessarily have to be

[1] See, for example, Frank Klaassen, 'Learning and Masculinity in Manuscripts of Ritual Magic of the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 38.1 (2007), 49–76; Sophie Page, *Magic in the Cloister: Pious Motives, Illicit Interests, and Occult Approaches to the Medieval Universe* (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013); Laura Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic in Fifteenth-Century England' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2012).

[2] Carrie Griffin, *Instructional Writing in English, 1350-1650: Materiality and Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2021); Carrie Griffin, 'Reconsidering the Recipe: Materiality, Narrative and Text in Later Medieval Instructional Manuscripts and Collections', in *Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe 1350-1550: Packaging, Presentation and Consumption*, ed. by Emma Cayley and Susan Powell (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 135–49.

thought of as reflecting 'real life'; instead, they can be considered as performative, representing what Griffin describes as a 'narrative wish-list', a 'fantasy', or a 'record of aspirations'.[3] Scribes may not always have copied these texts with the intention of using them, but they signify possibilities, possibilities which speak to the way in which their copiers and collectors wished to position themselves in the world. We can therefore interpret the copying of these texts as an assertion of – or reflection of the desire for – a particular type of agency. Ionuţ Epurescu-Pascovici has recently demonstrated the potential of studying agency as a part of social history.[4] Epurescu-Pascovici positions agency in a conceptual triad with structure and power, noting that the latter two have been the subjects of a vast body of scholarship.[5] This scholarship typically reaffirms the notion that medieval society adhered to a rigid social order, but as Epurescu-Pascovici notes, the evidence for this 'comes mostly from normative and ideological sources that are not so much descriptions of social practice as elaborations of the elites' political programme'.[6] Studying how individuals negotiated with and navigated around the structural features of society allows us to see more clearly the realities of social practice, and to allow agency to come to the fore. This strategy for the study of medieval social relations is useful here: as we will see shortly, many of the texts examined here resonate with contemporary social practices, but in a way which allows the assertion of individual agency. By operating within the constraints – or according to the rules – of the social order imposed by ideological writing and the elite agenda, the texts are not overtly subversive. However, they provide the opportunity for the practitioner to assert agency by manipulating the behaviours that form part of such accepted institutions or structures, and to control the outcomes of conventional behaviours or practices.

Social mobility and status anxiety in the later Middle Ages

Social historians have grappled with how best to understand and define the later medieval period. Trends in scholarship have ranged from labelling the fourteenth and

[3] Griffin, 'Reconsidering the Recipe', pp. 142, 148.

[4] Ionuţ Epurescu-Pascovici, *Human Agency in Medieval Society, 1100-1450* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2021).

[5] Epurescu-Pascovici, *Human Agency in Medieval Society*, p. 3.

[6] Epurescu-Pascovici, *Human Agency in Medieval Society*, p. 10.

fifteenth centuries as an age of ambition, opportunity, and social mobility, a period of decline, and a time of transition and transformation.[7] There is a tendency for scholars to search for a satisfactory word with which to sum up the general trajectory or defining characteristic of the period. And yet in reality, an examination of the different facets of society reveals many of these conflicting concepts at work simultaneously: there was both the opportunity for social mobility for the middling sort while at the same time there was a trajectory of decline in the power held by the aristocracy.

As is only natural for such a significant and catastrophic event, the Black Death has long been a focal point for discussion, as well as for analysis of social change in the later medieval period. The apocalyptic death rate, which may have wiped out as much as fifty percent of the population, and the physical and psychological impact that this would have had on people, families, agriculture, and administrative operations cannot be underestimated.[8] Interpretations of the impact of the Black Death on society towards the end of the fourteenth century have been heavily influenced by the idea that the high death rate led to a shortage of labour, which in turn gave peasants the negotiating power to demand higher wages and better working conditions. This, along with the space created by deaths across all strata of society, seemingly presented more of an opportunity for social mobility.[9] In support of the hypothesis for upwards social mobility, historians have been attracted to the stories of career knights or men like William de la Pole, the son of a merchant who was elevated to the rank of duke, and yet in recent years it has been pointed out that such cases of significant social ascent were few and far between.[10] It is true that factors such as a growth in lay literacy, expansion of government, regular warfare, and an ongoing high mortality rate may have widened opportunities for people to pursue more ambitious aspirations, and

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[7] F. R. H. Du Boulay, *An Age of Ambition: English Society in the Late Middle Ages* (London: Nelson, 1970); S. H. Rigby, 'English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Deference, Ambition and Conflict', in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350-c.1500*, ed. by Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), pp. 25–39; Sandro Carocci, 'Social Mobility and the Middle Ages', *Continuity and Change*, 26.3 (2011), 367–404; Christopher Dyer, 'The English Medieval Village Community and Its Decline', *Journal of British Studies*, 33.4 (1994), 407–29; Christopher Dyer, *An Age of Transition?: Economy and Society in England in the Later Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); John A. F. Thomson, *The Transformation of Medieval England, 1370-1529* (London: Longman, 1983).

[8] Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), p. 3.

[9] Du Boulay, *An Age of Ambition*.

[10] Carocci, 'Social Mobility in the Middle Ages'; Philippa C. Maddern, 'Social Mobility', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. by Rosemary Horrox and W. M. Ormrod (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 113–33.

that this may have increased the internal mobility within specific social groups.[11] However, actual transcendence of that specific group would likely have been rare.[12] Instead, it is now widely suggested that social *im*mobility was more the norm, or otherwise that the trajectory may have instead been downwards, especially for those within the lower gentry classes.[13] The pressure to maintain one's social status underpins A.T. Brown's exploration of the fear of downwards social mobility and how it is represented in contemporary literature.[14] Status anxiety and fear of social decline are pervasive in surviving literary texts; Brown draws a distinction between the two, elaborating that:

> [T]the former tend[s] to reflect the broad preoccupations of society, from worries about the parvenu to the fickleness of friends and the relentless obsession with reputation; whereas the latter tend[s] to coalesce around specific, often urgent matters, particularly concerning debt and destitution, highlighting the undeniable importance of wealth to social status.[15]

Brown's definitions of, and evidence for, status anxiety and social decline are particularly useful for this chapter. Indeed, Brown touches on many of the issues and concerns that will be discussed below – slander and gossip, enemies and unreliable friends – and demonstrates that they, and anxiety about the impact that they could have on status, permeated society. Furthermore, Brown makes clear, using the case of the Paston family who will be particularly important for my own analysis, that ambition and social aspiration could go hand in hand with a fear of social decline; a family could be continuously striving to better itself while simultaneously overwhelmed by a sense of insecurity in their position.[16] In fact, Brown demonstrates that this type

[11] Rigby, 'English Society in the Later Middle Ages', p. 33.

[12] Carocci, 'Social Mobility in the Middle Ages', p. 385.

[13] Carocci, 'Social Mobility in the Middle Ages', p. 383; Maddern, 'Social Mobility', p. 133. David Herlihy, 'Three Patterns of Social Mobility in Medieval History', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 3.4 (1973), 623–47 (p. 641).

[14] A. T. Brown, 'The Fear of Downward Social Mobility in Late Medieval England', *Journal of Medieval History*, 45.5 (2019), 597–617.

[15] Brown, 'The Fear of Downward Social Mobility', p. 599.

[16] Brown, 'The Fear of Downward Social Mobility', p. 602.

of status anxiety was often experienced by those very people who *were* in positions of power and authority, and could be experienced even if those positions were not particularly under threat.[17]

The charms and experiments which will be discussed in this chapter are all related, either indirectly or very explicitly, to this preoccupation with status and social mobility. But studying them in isolation can only tell us so much about how they resonate with the real experiences and concerns of the medieval populace. Using the literary and documentary evidence of the period – including many of the sources drawn on by Brown to support his argument for status anxiety – I will explore how a comparison of the literary sources with the charm texts can deepen our understanding of how people may have attempted to assert agency in the fraught and complicated world of medieval social relations.

Literary and documentary sources for social relations in the Middle Ages

We can learn much about both the private and public concerns of people in the Middle Ages – the issues which affected interpersonal relationships, domestic, professional and political life, and the broader community – from surviving literary and documentary sources. Literary historians have mined the creative outputs of medieval authors for evidence of contemporary attitudes and analysed recurring literary themes and tropes for representations of society. 'Estates' and 'Complaint' poetry, satire, and urban dramas, in particular provide rich fodder for such analyses. 'Estates' poetry is rife with nostalgia for simpler times when people acted according to their estate – decreed by God – and frequently makes appeals for traditional social hierarchy to be maintained, particularly in the face of turbulence and change. In a similar vein, poetry of 'complaint' bears witness to fears around false friends, betrayal, and a downturn in social fortune. While caution must be exercised when asserting that these themes and tropes provide an accurate reflection of society, their prominence from the late fourteenth century onwards suggests that they do represent some of the fears and prejudices experienced, in particular, by elite society.[18]

[17] Brown, 'The Fear of Downward Social Mobility', p. 615.

[18] John Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath of the Black Death', *Past & Present*, 144, 1994, 3–35 (pp. 12–13).

Court records reveal the prevalence of some of the social concerns that charms and experiments were designed to address. For example, they record social crimes, and periods where these crimes appear prolifically in records suggest moments of increased anxiety among the population. An examination of records from Church courts, the leet court, and local and manorial borough courts, for example, reveals a prevailing preoccupation with the consequences of malicious speech and defamation. Defamation cases contribute to a significant proportion of litigation in the Church courts, while ordinances prohibiting abusive speech can be found in the records of local and borough courts.[19] In the later Middle Ages, reputation was becoming increasingly linked with social mobility: malicious gossip could signify impending social decline, while a good reputation was fast becoming more important than wealth or success in business when it came to promoting one's own interests.[20] Marjorie McIntosh has demonstrated how fifteenth-century court records bear witness to increasing anxiety around malicious gossip, which threatened to undermine social order.[21]

This anxiety around speech, and particularly the potential for damage caused by negative or untrue speech, is also reflected in pastoral texts and sermonic literature. Discourses on 'Sins of the Tongue', though they found their origins in pre-plague writings, were becoming widely read and disseminated from the mid-fourteenth century onwards.[22] In other pastoral texts, backbiting or slander was frequently discussed within the context of the sin of envy. It was argued by some contemporary writers, such as the author of the Worcester Chapter, that an increase in malicious speech around the turn of the fifteenth century was fostered by envy of the people who were enjoying the benefits of success and increased material wealth, while others found themselves less fortunate.[23] Identifying prominent and recurring themes in

[19] R. H. Helmholz, 'Canonical Defamation in Medieval England', *American Journal of Legal History*, 4, 1971, 255–68 (p. 256); Sandy Bardsley, 'Sin, Speech, and Scolding in Late Medieval England', in *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Thelma S. Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 145–64 (p. 148).

[20] Brown, 'The Fear of Downward Social Mobility', p. 605; Carocci, 'Social Mobility in the Middle Ages', p. 382.

[21] Marjorie K. McIntosh, 'Finding Language for Misconduct: Jurors in Fifteenth-Century Local Courts', in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 87–122 (p. 87).

[22] Bardsley, 'Sin, Speech, and Scolding in Late Medieval England', p. 145.

[23] McIntosh, 'Finding Language for Misconduct', p. 94.

pastoral literature is useful for developing a richer insight into some of the most prevalent social concerns of the period. By recognising commonalities between the issues discussed in pastoral texts and the utilities of charms and experiments in personal manuscripts, we can begin to understand both public and private methods of attempted social control.

All of the literary and documentary sources outlined above can be interrogated for evidence of dominant attitudes and anxieties. However, some of the most useful sources are surviving personal letters, such as those of the Paston family of Norfolk and the Plumptons, a northern gentry family, both active during the fifteenth century. The nature of the Paston archive in particular – an incredibly rare survival of over one thousand letters, as well as wills, inventories, and bibliographic details which have allowed the positive identification of at least two of the codices from the Paston's personal library – means that this small gentry family from East Anglia has had great influence on our present-day understanding of the fifteenth century. Not only do the Paston papers record political events of great significance, such as the events leading up to and surrounding the Wars of the Roses, but the personal correspondence between father and son, brother and brother, and wife and husband, opens a window onto the private and domestic lives of both men and women of the period.

The Paston family are an invaulable case study for research into the social anxieties of the late Middle Ages. Though the Pastons attempted to lay claim to a more distinguished origin story, the family was from humble beginnings. However, in the space of just a couple of generations, they rose from holding lands only by servile tenure to an affluent position among the Norfolk gentry. Facilitated by the successful legal career of their patriarch William Paston (1378 – 1444), the family's rise exemplified the opportunities for social advancement typically associated with careerists in the later Middle Ages.[24] William's son John, and two of his grandsons, also both called John, were similarly raised to the legal profession and over the years the family acquired land and manors in the region of East Anglia, such as Caister Castle, attained through the family's relationship with Sir John Fastolf who bequeathed the property to the Pastons in his will.[25] Such a generous bequest aroused the

[24] Colin Richmond and Roger Virgoe, 'William Paston', in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. by H. C. G. Matthew, B. Harrison, and L. Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[25] Richard William Barber, *The Pastons: A Family in the Wars of the Roses* (Woodbridge: Boydell, 1993), pp. 74–75.

suspicions of the Pastons' enemies, and the subsequent decade witnessed an ongoing struggle for possession of Caister Castle between opposing parties.

This battle over Caister Castle was not the only tussle over property experienced by the Pastons. They encountered both legal and physical battles over their manor at Gresham, at times experiencing forcible eviction by rival claimants as well as prolonged litigation.[26] Repeated assaults – both physical and verbal – from enemies, as well as this unrelenting threat of litigation, ensured that the Pastons maintained a heightened awareness of the fragility of their position. However, it is not just a fear of ruination by one's enemies that leaps out of the pages of the documents in this archive. As we witness, for example, the attempts of John Paston III to establish himself at court, we understand the importance of patronage and favour, of personal connections and the ability to impress those closest to the king. The Pastons have long been recognised as a family that was perpetually striving to maintain their new position: their letters are coloured by the sense of status anxiety described by Brown, and the fear of sliding back down into the ignominy from which they had emerged permeates their exchanges. Identifying the social anxieties commonly expressed in the Paston archive, as well as the other material sources outlined above, helps us to understand why charms and experiments that address these problems circulated with such regularity among manuscript owners of the time.

These manuscript owners become the focus of the second half of this chapter. Having established the core themes of the most prevalent charms and experiments in the first part of this chapter, I will move on to examining these texts in context, focusing on three manuscripts which were known – or likely – to have been in the possession of members of the gentry. I will demonstrate that the utilities of these charms and experiments align closely with the broader interests revealed by the accompanying reading material in these three manuscripts, and suggest that these texts were collected both as a means of self-posturing or self-fashioning an identify, as well as reflecting the desire to exert agency in an unpredictable world.

Controlling relationships

Conquering enemies and adversaries

[26] Barber, *The Pastons*, pp. 31–44.

I marvayll gretly that ye send me no word how that ye do, for your elmyse [enemies] *be-gynne to wax right bold, and that puttith your frendes bothyn in grete fere and dought. There-fore purvey þat thei may have summe comfort, that thei be no more discoraged, for if we lese our frendes, it shall* [be] *hard in this trobelous werd* [world] *to kete them ageyn.*

Margaret Paston to Sir John Paston, 1467.[27]

In 1467, Margaret Paston writes to her eldest son, Sir John Paston, informing him that Caister Castle, recently inherited by the Pastons in slightly dubious circumstances, is under threat from a rival claimant to the property.[28] Her letter illustrates, not only that the machinations of the family's enemies posed a threat, but that they were at risk of losing the loyalty of their allies, too. Signing off, Margaret invokes the Trinity to bestow aid on her son and to 'send [him] the victory of [his] elmyse, to [his] hertes eas and there confusyon'.[29] This is not the only time that Margaret makes such an appeal at the end of a letter. While the majority of the Paston letters conform to the traditional conventions of medieval letter writing, instances where there are deviations from this standard formula highlight particularly heightened moments of crisis for the family. These conventions were prescribed by the *dictatores*, the authors of letter-writing manuals or the *ars dictaminis*, which emerged in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. These manuals established that a letter should be comprised of five parts: the *salutatio*, that is, the greeting; the *benevolentiae captatio*, which sought to secure the goodwill of the recipient; the *narratio*, or assertion of the purpose of the letter; the *petitio*, or argument; and the *conclusio*, or sign-off.[30] Writing to her close family members, Margaret Paston does not always adhere to this formal structure. However,

[27] Paston Letters and Papers, no. 199; all documents from the Paston archive are cited from *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Norman Davis, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), I; *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Norman Davis, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), II; *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Richard Beadle and Colin Richmond (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[28] G. A. Lester, *Sir John Paston's 'Grete Boke': A Descriptive Catalogue, with an Introduction, of British Library MS Lansdowne 285* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1984), p. 140.

[29] Paston Letters and Papers, no. 199.

[30] Jennifer Douglas, '"Kepe Wysly Youre Wrytyngys": Margaret Paston's Fifteenth-Century Letters', *Libraries & the Cultural Record*, 44.1 (2009), 29–49 (p. 36).

while she adopts a more informal style in the body of her letters – the place in which she communicates the information that is of interest to her husband or sons – this is typically still bookended by the standard opening and closing statements (or the *salutatio* and *conclusio*) prescribed by the *ars dictaminis*.[31] At times, however, Margaret's *conclusio* is altered to reflect an instance of heightened threat from the family's enemies. For example, in one item of correspondence, she writes to her husband – also named John – asking for an update on an ongoing feud between him and the Duke of Norfolk. Perhaps moved by fear for her husband as he finds himself in opposition to this powerful magnate, Margaret signs off: '[t]he blyssyd Trinite have yow in hys kepyng, and send yow þe better of all your adversariis'.[32]

Later, a different conflict, this time between John Paston senior and Sir John Howard, results in the imprisonment of John Paston in The Fleet. Margaret writes to her husband at a crucial moment when John Howard's influence at court is waning, increasing the likelihood of John Paston's liberation from prison. At this particularly anxious moment, during which the Pastons anticipate that the downfall of their enemy may prompt a change in fortune, the language of Margaret's sign-off is once again informed by the threat of the current situation: 'the blyssyd Trynyte have yow in hys kepyng, and send yow good sped in all yowyr mateyrs, and send þe vyctory of all yowyr enmyis'.[33] At another moment of crisis for the family, Margaret is prompted to amend her typical *salutatio* as well as her sign-off. In a letter from 1465, she greets her husband with the hope that 'be þe grase of God that ye shall overcome your enemys and your trobelows maters ryght welle'.[34] In the same letter, her closing statement reinforces this desire, asking again that God will 'send þe victory of your enemys'.[35] These examples show how the language of the Paston letters, even within the most formulaic sections which adhered to the rules of the *ars dictaminis*, was influenced by the situation and, more importantly, the particular threat facing the family. This provides us with an insight into when similar invocations – in the form of charms – or other practices to ensure victory over enemies may have found their

[31] Malcolm Richardson, 'Women, Commerce, and Rhetoric in Medieval England', in *Listening to Their Voices: The Rhetorical Activities of Historical Women*, ed. by Molly Meijer Wertheimer (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), pp. 133–49 (pp. 136–38).

[32] Paston Letters and Papers, no. 159.

[33] Paston Letters and Papers, no. 163.

[34] Paston Letters and Papers, no. 191.

[35] Paston Letters and Papers, no. 191.

application. Furthermore, as I will now demonstrate, the specific language of the appeals made by the Pastons, which seek not just passive protection but a guarantee that their adversaries will be overcome, mirrors the language used by many charms and *experimenta* found in medical compendia and household books.

The linguistic match between the *conclusiones* of the Paston letters and charms is perhaps most obvious in texts where the lines between charm and supplicatory prayer are more blurred. This is most obvious in versions of the 'Charlemagne charm' and another similar text-type, usually classified as 'measurement charms'. These charms are both textual, but their power is typically exerted, not through reading, or close engagement with the words themselves, but rather through either being carried on the body, or otherwise activated by the glance of the user. Both types of charm offer their user numerous benefits, among which are most commonly found: protection from death in battle; protection from fire, water or an iron instrument; safe delivery in childbirth; and victory over enemies.[36] Measurement charms – like the Charlemagne charm – usually have a rubric that delineates the different uses to which they can be put. However, their power is consolidated by the inclusion of devotional images such as the nails of the crucifixion, or a purportedly to-scale drawing of the Cross, which relates by measurement to the height of Jesus. One such example, found in a prayer roll now housed in the Morgan Library, features a Latin invocation, preceded by a lengthy Middle English rubric which lays out the benefits harnessed by 'this cros [which] .xv. tymes metyn is þe trew lenth of our lord Ihesu Criste'.[37] The Latin invocation asks:

> *Tribue michi famulo tuo .N. humilitatem. et virtutem gloriose longitudinis tue. Et venerabilis crucis tue. Preciosique corporis et sanguinis tui. Et omnipotencias. Et virtutes tuas. Et per intercessionem sanctorem tuorum concedes michi triumphum omnium inimicorum. Ut et possim semper retinere constanciam*.

[36] Rosanne Hebing, '"Allmygti God This Lettyr Sent": English Heavenly Letter Charms in Late Medieval Books and Rolls', *Studies in Philology*, 114.4 (2017), 720–47; Peter Murray Jones and Lea T. Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England, 900–1500', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 89.3 (2015), 406–33; it is these earthly uses for these texts which tend to set them apart from prayers, despite the devotional language of the accompanying invocations.

[37] New York, Morgan Library Glazier, MS.G-39.

> [Grant to me your servant [Name] humility, the virtue of your glorious length and of your venerable cross and of your precious body and blood and your omnipotence and your excellence. And by the intercession of your saints, grant to me *victory over all enemies*, and that I may always retain perseverance.][38]

A similar petition can be found in the version of the Charlemagne charm found in the well-known commonplace book of Robert Thornton:

> *Domine Deus omnipotens Pater et Filius et Sanctus da michi .N. Roberto famulo tuo victoriam contra omnes inimicos meos*...
>
> [All-powerful lord God, father and son and holy [spirit], give me your servant Robert *victory against all my enemies*.][39]

The language of both the Paston *conclusiones* and these charms goes beyond seeking protection from the threat of enemies, and instead actively seeks to overcome this threat. In certain ways, this plea for victory bears a resemblance to many of the psalms, in which enemies are often cited as a source of tribulation. In reference to the psalms, John Bossy, for example, has noted that they do not petition for the patience to bear such tribulation, but instead seek a means to eliminate it.[40] While there are certainly parallels between the language of the psalms and the charms cited above, the specific contexts of these charms reveal a creative adaptation of, or altered application for, this language. Lea Olsan notes, regarding the use of devotional language in healing charms, that, 'in contexts like vernacular remedy books (in contrast to learned doctors' treatises) liturgical forms are very readily transferred to private healing rituals. These rituals slip from one social environment and intentionality

[38] Transcription and translation provided in Suzanne Sheldon, 'Middle English and Latin Charms, Amulets, and Talismans from Vernacular Manuscripts' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tulane, 1978), pp. 139–41, italics my own for emphasis.

[39] Lincoln, Cathedral Chapter Library MS 91 (A. 5. 2), fols. 176v – 177r, italics my own for emphasis.

[40] John Bossy, 'Prayers', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 1 (1991), 137–50 (pp. 140–41).

to another'.[41] The structure and language of the charms make this transfer, or altered application, more evident: it aligns them less with devotional prayer or supplication, and instead presents them more like recipes to follow in order to achieve a specific effect. This is consolidated by the rubric, which informs the user that if they follow the instructions for use, their goal – whether to avoid death in childbirth, or to vanquish their enemies – will be attained.

This convergence between the language of supplicatory prayer and the format or structure of recipes is more evident in texts known as 'Angels' Names' charms. These invoke the power of specific angels to address a range of needs, such as to ensure safe conduct during a journey, or for protection from inclement weather.[42] Occurring in a number of languages, a fourteenth-century Anglo-Norman version of the charm instructs the user to call on 'Saint Uriel when your adversary moves against you, and you will overcome him'.[43] A late-fifteenth century English 'Angels' Names' charm includes a Latin invocation to be addressed to the celestial agent at the moment of crisis:

> When ȝe se ȝoure enmys before ȝow sey þis and ȝe schall over come þem: *Sancte Uriel defende me contra potestatem istius vel istorum* [defend me against the power of him or them].[44]

Though these charms are succinct, their linguistic features show that they adhere to the textual form of a recipe: these features include the use of imperative verb forms, instructions delineated according to a temporal sequence, and finishing with a

[41] Lea T. Olsan, 'The Corpus of Charms in the Middle English Leechcraft Remedy Books', in *Charms, Charmers and Charming: International Research on Verbal Magic*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 214–37 (p. 229).

[42] Typologised by George Keiser as 'Angels' Names' charms in *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, ed. by Albert E Hartung and John Edwin Wells (New Haven, Conn.: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1998), x, pp. 3876–77.

[43] 'Seint Uriel com toun adversarie toi acountera, et tu le venqeras'; Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS C.814, f.1v; transcribed by Tony Hunt in *Three receptaria from medieval England: the languages of medicine in the fourteenth century*, ed. by Michael Benskin (Oxford: The Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 2001).

[44] New York, Columbia University Library, Plimpton Add. MS 02, fol. 2r; transcribed in Marjorie Harrington, 'Magi and Angels: Charms in Plimpton Add. MS 02', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 16 (2013), 1–23 (p. 15).

formulaic phrase that describes the end result.[45] Their deployment of the future tense when describing the outcome (you *shall/will* overcome him) makes a confident guarantee that, if the charm is performed correctly, the practitioner's desire will be achieved.[46]

This guarantee of victory is replicated in other texts to conquer enemies: ones which do not rely on the power of language, but instead on the properties of herbs, stones and animal parts. For example, in the *Liber aggregationis*, the tract of experiments apocryphally attributed to the thirteenth-century Dominican friar Albertus Magnus, the herb celandine is credited with the power to vanquish enemies:

> *Hanc herbam cum corde talpe si quis habuerit devincet omnes hostes et omnes causas et lites et prevalebit.*
>
> [If one holds this plant with the heart of a mole, he will overcome all enemies and will succeed in all situations and quarrels.][47]

This specific use for celandine is borne out in the *Tretys of Diverse Herbis*, a Middle English rhyming herbal which lists the virtues of twenty-four herbs.[48] While a drink made with celandine is recommended to treat jaundice, the poem also advises the reader:

> And he on him celidonye bere
> No prison schal him holde ne dere
> He schal over come alle is enymys
> And ascape hure strive and hure malys.[49]

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[45] Ruth Carroll, 'The Middle English Recipe as Text-Type', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 100.1 (1999), 27–42 (p. 38).

[46] Harrington, 'Magi and Angels: Charms in Plimpton Add. MS 02', p. 9.

[47] London, British Library, Sloane MS 3564, fol. 35v; for more on the *Liber aggregationis* see Isabelle Draelants, *Le Liber de virtutibus herbarum, lapidum et animalium (Liber aggregationis): un texte à succès attribué à Albert le Grand* (Firenze: SISMEL, edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007).

[48] George Keiser, 'Vernacular Herbals: A Growth Industry in Late Medieval England', in *Design and Distribution of Late Medieval Manuscripts in England*, ed. by Margaret Connolly and Linne R. Mooney (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2008), pp. 292–307; Anke Timmermann, 'Scientific and Encyclopaedic Verse', in *A Companion to Fifteenth-Century English Poetry*, ed. by Julia Boffey and A. S. G. Edwards (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), pp. 199–211 (pp. 204–5).

[49] London, British Library, Sloane MS 2457, fol. 6r.

The *experimenta* of pseudo-Albertus Magnus usually circulate as a full tract, but occasionally certain experiments are extracted from the longer text and copied into manuscripts as standalone items, alongside other recipes. This is the case in London, British Library, Harley MS 2253 which will be discussed later in this chapter, and in which the above experiment with celandine is copied alongside just one other text from the *Liber aggregationis*, perhaps reflecting key concerns of the copyist and/or compiler. In another manuscript, one from the turn of the fifteenth century which was owned by the medical practitioner Robert Taylor of Boxford, the properties of the hoopoe (a type of bird), usually listed as part of the *Liber aggregationis*, are found located in a recipe collection, situated between texts to cure toothache and headache:

> Upapa [*hoopoe*] is a byrde. If þou myt have þat birdis eyen þou xuld over come alle þin enmys, and if þou bere þe birdis hedde in þin purse þou xalt not be decevid of no marchaunt.[50]

Laura Mitchell has suggested that the inclusion of this text in the manuscript, which is otherwise exclusively devoted to medical recipes, reveals the everyday concerns of Robert Taylor: the desire for social advancement and protection from fraud, perhaps as he promoted his medical skills in the medieval marketplace.[51]

The altered *conclusiones* of the Paston letters provide us with an insight into the specific moments of crisis where the need for victory over enemies is most imperative, moments where, we could speculate, a medieval practitioner might use one of the practices discussed above. Interestingly, another item in the Paston archive, this time not a letter but a text in the Paston's 'Grete Boke', describes another practical application for charms and experiments against enemies. The 'Grete Boke', a title used by the scribe William Ebesham in a bill sent to John Paston II in which he requests payment for copying the manuscript, has been identified by means of certain bibliographic analysis as London, British Library, Lansdowne MS 285.[52] It contains materials – primarily in English and French, though there are several in Latin – on

[50] San Marino, CA, Huntington Library, MS HM 1336, fol. 13r.

[51] Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic', p. 200.

[52] Lester, *Sir John Paston's 'Grete Boke'*.

subjects that would have been of particular interest to someone of John Paston II's status. These include guidance on how to conduct ceremonial occasions, descriptions of jousts and tourneys, instructions for the performance of certain forms of pageantry, and ordinances governing war and judicial combat. It is these instructions for judicial combat that are of most interest here. Across folios 11r to 15r, we find a copy of the regulations for trial by combat. These were issued during the reign of Richard II in the name of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, who was Constable of England at that time. This relatively short tract lays out the regulations and the etiquette for judicial duels, including the responsibilities of the king, constable, marshal, and the appellants or combatants. One of the key regulations laid out in this text prohibits the combatants from relying on any 'stone of vertue ne herbe of vertue ne charme ne experiment ne carocte ne othir inchauntment by the ne for thee by the which thou trusteth the bettir to overcome […] thyne adversarie.' The inclusion of such a prohibition is quite striking. It suggests that the use of charms and experiments to ensure victory over enemies was sufficiently known of, and widespread enough, to merit official regulation in situations of judicial importance. While a comparison between the language of some of the Paston letters sent at moments of crisis and the language of charms and experiments reveals the more private and personal moments during which the use of charms and experiments against enemies may have been most appropriate, the mention – and prohibition – of these practices in texts intended to govern judicial processes suggests that these practices had a widely known application at moments of social significance and, more specifically, at moments of heightened threat or crisis.

This text in the Pastons' Grete Boke shines a light on broader concepts of enmity, as well as conventions around social conflict and dispute. The judicial process described above was tightly governed, and the regulations outlined by the Constable of England demonstrate that honour and reputation were intimately connected with practices to resolve conflict. The prohibition of the use of charms and experiments during judicial combat shows that these practices had the potential to circumvent traditional – or official – forms of conflict resolution. Yet the wording of other experiments to vanquish enemies muddies the waters a little in this respect. This is best demonstrated by one of the *experimenta* included in the *De corio serpentis*, or

Twelve Experiments with Snakeskin.[53] The preface to the twelve experiments asserts that if the skin of a green adder is burnt into a powder when the moon is full and in the first degree of Aries, this powder can be put to a number of uses, including to drive away enemies:

> If þou strowe this powdyr in thyn enmyes hows, he and all hese meny schal flen and so þou schalt mown dryvyn hem owt of this town þere þou dwellyst in, and þan schalt þou ben in pes.[54]

Enmity in the medieval period was considered an institution.[55] Much like judicial combat as described above, it was governed by a recognised set of behaviours and interactions. Daniel Lord Smail has suggested that hatred between adversaries was a form of cultural capital: having enemies was a sign that you had attained a certain social status, while it also strengthened the bonds of kinship and friendship between the members that formed each opposing group.[56] Enmity, therefore, extended beyond the individual, to encompass the kinsmen, lords, household members, and dependents of the two opposing sides.[57] The ritual with snakeskin cited above reflects this reality. The language of the text points towards a personal feud between the practitioner and his ('thyn') enemy; however, deployment of the experiment requires unmitigated access to the enemy's house. This required transgression of the domestic threshold extends the ritual beyond settling personal scores and the impact of the experiment touches the entire household: it is not just the enemy that will be forced to flee, but 'all hese meny' too.

The final word of the text, 'pes' (peace), suggests a restoration of harmony, not only liberating the practitioner from an ongoing conflict, but perhaps also returning the community as a whole to a state of equilibrium. While enmity might be recognised as a social institution which followed certain conventions, it was nevertheless disruptive.

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[53] Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1923), vol. 2, pp. 794 - 6.

[54] London, British Library, Additional MS 12195, fol. 122v.

[55] Daniel Lord Smail, 'Hatred as a Social Institution in Late-Medieval Society', *Speculum*, 76.1 (2001), 90–126.

[56] Smail, 'Hatred as a Social Institution in Late-Medieval Society'.

[57] Paul R. Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003), p. 23.

The medieval community was ideologically founded on harmonious relations, but the experiment described above paints an illustrative picture of the disintegration of community relations and of conflict between those living and operating within the same networks or physical spaces.[58] This one small word 'peace' hints at the desire to restore harmony, albeit in a way which favours the practitioner. Similarly, the small nuances revealed by the language used in the other charms and experiments for enemies cited above provide additional context for the circumstances in which they may have been used. The 'strife and malice' and 'quarrels' described by the experiments using celandine, for instance, reiterate the disruptive potential of enmity and the threat it could pose to the stability of the medieval community.

These texts, then, perform an interesting role. We might consider the collection of recipes to conquer enemies to be a means of laying claim to the social capital of enmity, and as an assertion of the copyist's or compiler's desire to play a role within an established social convention. However, the resolutions offered by these charms and experiments, vanquishing enemies and restoring peace, also conform to the ideological foundations of medieval society, where harmony between neighbours was promoted. Numerous social historians have described the different ways – both official and unofficial – in which conflict was resolved in medieval society, including informal processes to settle disputes, arbitration and mediation by impartial parties, and the role of jurors, patriarchs, household leads and magnates in maintaining peace and controlling misbehaviour.[59] We can therefore understand these texts to conquer enemies as one such informal or unofficial means of conflict resolution: in this way we can interpret them as reinscribing social conventions or norms. And yet, they specifically offer the practitioner the means to manipulate the outcomes of this conflict resolution, tipping the scales in their favour and ensuring success. Therefore, they represent the simultaneous re-inscription and circumvention of social norms. This theme of both reinforcing and bypassing social conventions or hierarchies recurs in

[58] Marjorie K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 188.

[59] See for example McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*, pp. 24, 57; Marjorie K. McIntosh, 'The Diversity of Social Capital in English Communities, 1300-1640 (With a Glance at Modern Nigeria)', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 29.3 (1999), 459–90 (p. 462); Shannon McSheffrey, 'Men and Masculinity in Late Medieval London Civic Culture: Governance, Patriarchy and Reputation', in *Conflicted Identities and Multiple Masculinities: Men in the Medieval West*, ed. by Jacqueline Murray (New York: Garland, 1999), pp. 243–78 (p. 245); and the chapters in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. by Rosemary Horrox and W. M. Ormrod (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

many of the texts discussed in this chapter and throughout this thesis more broadly. As we will see shortly, many of the charms and experiments which address social problems perform both of these roles at the same time.

Discerning friends from enemies

Enemies were certainly a threat, but they were a known quantity. While friendship should stand in direct opposition to enmity, in the Middle Ages gentry relationships could prove to be more complex. Networks operated within the confines of shared goals and mutual reward, and alliances could form, shift, and dissolve depending on the individual fortunes of key players.[60] As such, anxiety around distinguishing between true and false friends, or passages bemoaning the fickleness of friends, are prominent in the literature of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[61] The anonymously authored poem 'Complaint of a Prisoner Against Fortune' laments the fickleness of friends:

> Suche feyned friendis, Lord, there be ful many
> Fy on theyre flateryng! They are nat worth a peny![62]

This is not just a literary trope with an emotive potential that was duly exploited by authors. Letters in the Paston archive show that friendship could be dissimulated and trust misplaced. The Pastons' friend Sir John Fastolf writes to his man Thomas Howys to warn him that he is facing arrest by those whom he took for 'true frendys'.[63] Similarly, Margaret Paston counsels both of her sons to be cautious of the company they keep: 'be ware of symulacion, for thei wull speke right fayr to you þat wuld ye ferd [*fared*] right evyll'.[64] Margaret Paston offers this advice in response to a rumour that her son

[60] This has been vividly described by Christine Carpenter as 'a riot of mutual backscratching' in 'The Beauchamp Affinity: A Study of Bastard Feudalism at Work', *The English Historical Review*, 95.376 (1980), 514–32 (p. 525).

[61] Brown, 'The Fear of Downward Social Mobility', p. 604.

[62] Anonymous, 'Complaint of a Prisoner Against Fortune', in *The Kingis Quair and Other Prison Poems*, ed. by Linne R. Mooney and Mary-Jo Arn, TEAMS Middle English Texts, Online Edition (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), ll. 83–84.

[63] The Paston Letters and Papers, no. 1015.

[64] The Paston Letters and Papers, no. 213.

John Paston III has been poisoned: when it came to placing trust in friends or allies, bad judgement could be life-threatening.

The risk posed by false friends could therefore be just as severe as that presented by enemies. Another experiment using powdered snakeskin speaks to this particular concern and provides the means to discern true friends from foes:

> If þou takeke this powdyr and watyr and wasche þerwit þi face, þin enmyes xal not dorn a bydyn to lokyn in thi face but flen fro the, and thi frendis schul drawyn to þe, and ther by thou xalt knowyn thy frendys fro thyn enmyes.[65]

Much like the experiment to make enemies flee, the wording of this text is quite revealing about the social contexts within which it might have been applied. Physical access to those whom you wish to target is required: literally face-to-face interaction in this instance, the experiment does not work at a distance. The fact that the experiment operates at such close proximity may well reflect the same fear of dissimulation that Margaret Paston counsels her sons to be wary of, whereby an enemy might 'speke ryht fayr to you' when in your presence, but privately wish you ill. Meanwhile, the experiment provokes either a repellent or magnetic effect on the practitioner's acquaintances, which reveals their true nature. Potential 'feyned frendis' will no longer be able to flatter, or pretend at friendship, instead they are compelled to flee, a response which is almost premonitory of the abandonment which they might enact at any point for the sake of political expediency. Further to this, however, the recipe also suggests that it has the potential to provoke shame or guilt, or perhaps even to arouse fear. Paul Hyams notes that feuds between members of society involved elements of public ritual, enacted to shame enemies or to bring them into disrepute.[66] The performance of this experiment with snakeskin which is, by necessity, a public one, conforms to this convention by revealing the true nature of its targets before a host of witnesses. Furthermore, while it drives away false friends, it draws true allies towards the practitioner, therefore consolidating and reinforcing the bonds of true or authentic friendship and allegiance during this process of discernment.

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[65] London, British Library, Additional MS 12195, fol. 122v.

[66] Hyams, *Rancor and Reconciliation in Medieval England*, p. 11.

Securing friendship and favour

Friendship and allegiance were one of the mainstays of bastard feudalism, in which the gentry's desire for favour, protection and financial reward found reciprocity in the greater magnates' need for retainers and service.[67] Networks of reliable allies were particularly important at times of crisis. The surviving letter collection of the Plumptons, a northern gentry family of similar status to, and contemporary with, the Pastons, makes this clear. Sir William Plumpton, the addressee of the bulk of the letters, was knighted in 1430 and suffered the 'ineluctible burden' of knightly status and the concomitant extravagant lifestyle it demanded. The result of this was a continual scarcity of ready funds and a constant struggle to protect or augment the family's wealth and status.[68] The letters themselves bear witness to this struggle, and frequently illustrate the importance of shoring up support from friends and allies at times of crisis. For example, in a letter addressed to Sir Robert Plumpton, John Pullein alerts him that he is at risk of litigation from a great magnate, and counsels him to draw on his expanded social circle and associates for support.[69] Requests for favours were couched in the language of friendship but were often driven by necessity, and frequently operated on a *quid pro quo* basis. A letter from the earl of Northumberland, Henry Percy, to Sir William Plumpton asks for a particular office to be granted to his servant Edmund Cape. He assures Sir William that he will return the favour in due course, promising: if 'ye will fulfil this my desire […] I will be as well-willed to doe thinge for your pleasure'.[70]

But while alliances were often made based on working together towards a mutually desired outcome, sometimes they were secured through the less legitimate means of cash bribes. There is surviving evidence of many instances where Fastolf, for example, paid the relevant people in order to bring his own cases to court more

[67] Carpenter, 'The Beauchamp Affinity', p. 532; see also Dyer, *An Age of Transition?*, p. 44.

[68] *The Plumpton Letters and Papers*, ed. by Joan W. Kirby (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1–3.

[69] Letter no. 152, Kirby, *The Plumpton Letters and Papers*, p. 143.

[70] Letter no. 21, Kirby, *The Plumpton Letters and Papers*, p. 45.

quickly.[71] It was also common for litigants to target ministers and men who were high up in the king's favour to secure their support and the Pastons openly discuss the strategic importance of acquiring allies at moments when they are under threat.[72] John Paston III, for example, explains in a letter to his mother how he plans to use those in the king's close circle to secure the king's support in one particular quarrel:

> [I will] spek wyth my Lord Chamberleyn, and to wynne by hys meanys my Lord of Ely, if I can. And if I may by eny of ther meanys cause the Kyng to take my servyse and my quarell to-gedyrs, I wyll; and I thynk that Syr George Brown, Syr Jamys Radclyff, and other of myn aqueyntance whyche wayte most upon the Kyng and lye nyghtly in hys chamber wyll put to ther good wyllys.[73]

In another letter, John Paston III writes to his brother John Paston II of his attempts to intervene – to the Pastons' advantage – in the dispute over the lands left by Fastolf in his will, explaining that he has laboured the point with the king and queen, as well as with a number of other influential magnates at court, in order to secure the inheritance.[74]

The transparency of these discussions provides us with an insight into the way families of a similar social standing would have operated in order to increase their own fortunes. These letters also show that those seeking to secure favour and patronage could not merely rely on the process to be a meritocratic one. Reliability and efficiency were not always recognised; reward could be based on a lord's personal preference rather than service, and this could trigger resentment, jealousy, and attempts to circumvent the process or secure favour by other means.[75] It is no surprise, therefore, that charms and experiments to win favour or achieve a favourable response to a

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[71] Edward Powell, 'Law and Justice', in *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Rosemary Horrox (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 29–41 (p. 37).

[72] S. H. Rigby, 'English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Deference, Ambition and Conflict', in *A Companion to Medieval English Literature and Culture c.1350-c.1500*, ed. by Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2007), pp. 25–39 (p. 33).

[73] The Paston Letters and Papers, no. 383.

[74] The Paston Letters and Papers, no. 333.

[75] Rosemary Horrox, 'Service', in *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes: Perceptions of Society in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Rosemary Horrox (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 61–78 (p. 73).

request are numerous in manuscripts of the period. The extent to which these practices seek to manipulate outcomes for their practitioners varies. At the more passive end of the scale, they simply seek to increase the appeal of their users to peers and superiors, for example the properties of the kite, listed in the *Liber aggregationis*:

> *Miluus est avis cuius, si caput accipiatur et feratur ante pectus, dat amorem et gratiam omnium hominum et mulierum.*
>
> [The kite is a bird whose head, if taken and carried before the breast, grants the love and favour of all men and women.][76]

The eleventh experiment with snakeskin promises to deliver a similar outcome: 'if one carries this powder in his hand, he will appear friendly to everyone'.[77]

While these texts are general in their application, that is, they can be used to win the favour of any man or woman, others state more specifically that they can be used in interactions with social superiors. Many of the 'Angels' Names' charms cited earlier perform such a function. For example, a fifteenth-century English version of the charm instructs the practitioner: 'wen yow wylt come unto any lord or pryns have in thy mynd Sant Tubiell and Saynt Rachyell and all thing shall fall well to the'.[78] Another version of the charm – which includes an invocation to be recited – provides additional detail about the effect that the charm will have:

> When ȝe go before eny kynge or iuge sey thys: '*Sancti Tobiel Sobriel et Barachiel facite me placere in conspectu istius vel istorum' et favebunt vobis in omnibus peticionibus oris*.

[76] Cambridge, Trinity College, O. 1. 57, fol. 75v; transcription in Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic', p. 123.

[77] *Si quis hoc pulvere in manu sua portaverit apparebit omnibus amicabilis*; London, British Library, Additional MS 12195, fol. 123v.

[78] New York, Morgan Library MS 775, fol. 279r; transcription in Harrington, 'Magi and Angels: Charms in Plimpton Add. MS 02', p. 10.

> ['Make me pleasing before him or them', and they will support you in all oral petitions.][79]

A similar guarantee is made by a recipe which states that whoever carries the herb vervain on their body 'schal have love of gret maisters and þai schul not refuse his askynges but graunt hym wat good wil þat he wil aske'.[80]

A more complex ritual for a similar purpose is found in at least two fifteenth century manuscripts, and exploits the power of the *sator arepo* formula. The *sator arepo* formula consists of a series of palindromes, often placed in a square formation. It has been found in pre-Christian contexts but, in what seems to be complete coincidence, forms an anagram of the *Pater Noster*. [81] Perhaps for this reason, the formula was absorbed into a Christian context, and it circulated extensively in Europe from antiquity into the early modern period. In England, the formula is most commonly associated with textual charms to assist with childbirth.[82] However, there are two instances in which it has been appropriated to perform an alternative function: to enable the practitioner to have his or her requests granted. The Middle English version of the text instructs the user:

> If þou wylt have ony thyng of lord or lady, wryte þese wordys aforseyd *Sator Arepo Opera Rotas* wit the blod of a dowe, and þanne strenkele þer on haly water and þanne ley it iij dayes on an autere, and þanne bere it wit þi right hand, and what þou axe ryghtfully thou xal have it wit owtyn dowte.[83]

These instructions are accompanied by a rubricated illustration, which demonstrates how to lay the words out in the correct square formation. While the other charms and experiments cited require either the simple performance of an invocation, or for the

[79] Columbia University Library, Plimpton Additional MS 2, fol. 2r-v.

[80] Cambridge, Trinity College, O. 1. 13, fols. 7v – 8r.

[81] Rose Mary Sheldon, 'The SATOR Rebus: An Unsolved Cryptogram?', *Cryptologia*, 27.3 (2003), 233–87.

[82] For discussion of the charm in this context see Jones and Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth'.

[83] London, British Library, Additional MS 12195, fols. 126v - 127r; a similar, Latin, version of this text can be found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Wood Empt. 18, fol. 32r.

user to carry a powerful substance on their body, this particular practice involves more complex ritual components which need to be followed in order to achieve the desired outcome. The use of a dove's blood, the ritually significant three days required for the parchment to be left on an altar, and holding the parchment in one's right hand, all constitute ritual 'taboos' which enhance the efficacy of the formula used.[84]

Like the 'Angels' Names' charm for support in oral petitions, or the utility of vervain, this ritual operates within the context of a spoken request put to a social superior. These texts not only promise that the practitioner's personal appeal will be elevated, but they also assert that any such requests will be granted. As with the practices to conquer enemies discussed above, these charms and experiments to win favour occupy a complicated position within the broader field of medieval social relations. In certain ways, they fit within traditional social conventions: that is, the expectations of bastard feudalism, lord-retainer service and reward, and the typical process of 'laboryng' – as the Pastons describe it – certain lords and ministers for support. But at the same time, they diminish the agency of the person being petitioned, and circumvent the fraught or arduous process of attempting to secure such support. Like the experiments to conquer enemies, they find their application within moments, occasions, or behaviours that are typically associated with medieval social relations, particularly between members of the gentry and their superiors. And yet, in a similar fashion, they undermine these behaviours, tipping the scales in the favour of the practitioner and – albeit secretly – eliding or collapsing the hierarchies relied upon to maintain social order.

Controlling speech

Influencing the outcome of courtroom pleading

As stated, several of the texts cited above are intended to be used to intervene in situations specifically related to speech, ensuring that the practitioner's spoken requests are favourably answered. In this way, there is a suggestion that they will either manipulate the way that the practitioner's speech is delivered, or the way that it is received by a social superior. There are a number of other charms and experiments

[84] For more on ritual taboos, see Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 67.

that betray a similar concern with speech: either the desire to manipulate the reception of the practitioner's speech, or otherwise to control the speech of others. A further Middle English version of the 'Angels' Names' charm, for example, provides a precise context in which one might come up against an adversary: 'ȝif þou spekist wiþ þi adversary have Uriel in þi mynde, and þou shalt ovyrcum hym'.[85] This rules out a number of scenarios for use, such as in battle, or – as experienced on numerous occasions by the Pastons – during a physical skirmish over a property.[86] The charm narrows its applicability to a situation in which the practitioner is speaking with their adversary: this suggests that the charm has the power to control the way that speech is either delivered, by the practitioner, or received by their opponent. This text is just one of many found in the manuscripts studied which suggests that it can have a transformational effect on speech, or that it may even possess the power to prevent certain types of speech completely. One experiment in the *De corio serpentis* claims to be able to ensure that the practitioner's speech will be received well:

> If a man be clepyd to cownsel and he put of this powdyr undyr the solis of his in his schon, and what so ever he spekyth he schal ben herd and han meche thank for his speche.[87]

A Latin version of this text adds further information about the effect that sprinkling this powder in one's shoe will have:

> *Si aliquis in consilium vocatus sit et de pulvere illo sub pedibus suis aspereserit* [sic] *quecumque loquetur audientur et exaudientur et si fatue loqueretur*.
>
> If someone is called to counsel and sprinkles this powder beneath their feet, whatever they say will be heard and they will be agreed with, *even if they were speaking foolishly.*[88]

[85] London, British Library, Sloane MS 2584, fol. 37r.

[86] See Davis, *Paston Letters and Papers of the Fifteenth Century*, I, pp. xl–lxxiv.

[87] London, British Library, Additional MS 12195, fols. 122v-123r.

[88] London, British Library, Harley MS 2369, fol. 49r, italics my own for emphasis.

Here, the recipe not only suggests that it will guarantee a positive reception for any speech made by the practitioner, but it also makes clear that this is not dependent on the quality of the speech delivered. Even if the practitioner is speaking foolishly, the listeners will agree with what is being said.

The meaning of the term 'cownsel' or 'counsel' used in these texts can be wide-ranging, opening up a number of potential scenarios in which this experiment could have been applied. These range from a civic council meeting to the assembly of the Privy Council, or a convocation or convention of religious figures or guild members.[89] In any of these settings, the experiment could certainly be used as is described above, to ensure that the spoken requests of the practitioner are granted favourably by social superiors. However, the term can also denote a courtroom setting, and the text therefore represents the potential to manipulate the outcome of a lawsuit or of litigation. For the men in the Paston family who made their living in the legal profession, such a possibility would have had obvious appeal. But the attraction of such practices was not necessarily confined to those who practiced law for a living. Recourse to the law was a common means of settling disputes, and attendance in court was something experienced by those from most strata of society.[90] Though not in the legal profession like the Paston men, the letters of the Plumptons provide ample evidence that Sir William and his descendants were shrewd operators of the judicial system. However, prolonged litigation could be damaging, both to a family's finances, and to their reputation. The Plumptons regularly opted to move against those of inferior social status, rather than taking legal action against those with greater power and influence, in order to increase their chances of success.[91] This was not the only means of manipulating the outcomes of legal action, however. Gifts and cash bribes were regularly used to encourage judges to reach a favourable decision, or to persuade clerks to assemble sympathetic juries.[92] There were other forms of more implicit bribery such as the litigant bestowing lavish entertainment on members of the jury, or inviting influential 'well-willers' to the courthouse during the trial, which was intended

[89] See 'counseil' in *Middle English Compendium*, ed. by Frances McSparran et al., Online Edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2018).

[90] Simon Walker, 'Order and Law', in *A Social History of England, 1200-1500*, ed. by Rosemary Horrox and W. M. Ormrod (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 91–112 (p. 98); Powell, 'Law and Justice', p. 29.

[91] Kirby, *The Plumpton Letters and Papers*, p. 5.

[92] Walker, 'Order and Law', p. 103.

to put pressure on jurors to reach a particular outcome.[93] Such tactics demonstrate that it was routine to try and manipulate the outcomes of a lawsuit in order to aid social advancement or to avoid the risk of sustained losses in court.

Two Latin charms in a fifteenth century manuscript specify that they are to be used to win lawsuits. Both require the user to recite a particular psalm prior to facing their opponent in the courtroom:

> *'In te domine speravi'. Si in placitum ire debeas dic hunc psalm antequam ingrediaris ad iudicem et vinces adversarios tuos.*
>
> ['I put my trust in You, Lord' [Psalm 71]. If you have to go to court, say this psalm before you go before the judge and you will overcome your opponents.][94]
>
> *'Letatus sum in his'. Si quis invisticiam tibi fecerit et contra te litegaverit dic hunc psalm usque sederunt sedes in iudicio antequam vades ad iudicium et vinces eum.*
>
> ['I am glad' [Psalm 122]. If any man trespasses against you, and moves the law against you, say this psalm until they sit in the seat of judgement, before you go to trial, and you will defeat him.][95]

The purpose of these charms aligns with the multitude of other practices intended to favourably manipulate the outcomes of legal action. For example, another fifteenth-century manuscript of primarily medical material contains a Middle English recipe to influence the outcome of a trial.[96] The experiment involves performing an invocation over a '*solsequia'* – the Latin term for sunflower or marigold – and calls on a range of sanctified personae such as Saint John the Baptist, John the Evangelist, and Saint Katherine, as well as all holy virgins and martyrs, confessors, and the Apostles, to secure the practitioner 'victori in wrestelyng or in pletyng and of alle maner odir

[93] Walker, 'Order and Law', p. 103.

[94] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS D 252, fol. 125r.

[95] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS D 252, fol. 125v.

[96] London, British Library, Sloane MS 121, fol. 109r.

theynges'. 'Pletyng' can be broadly understood as an argument or dispute, but a more precise definition is 'legal pleading, litigation [or] lawsuit'.[97] After performing the specified invocation over the sunflower, the practitioner is instructed to place the plant in their mouth; while it remains there, the practitioner is able to exploit the occult properties of the plant which have been activated by the prior invocation. Here, the location in which to place the substance – directly adjacent to the practitioner's tongue – appears especially relevant to the experiment's promise to influence the outcome of legal pleading: it will enhance the practitioner's speech in court.

Preventing malicious speech and defamation

Solsequium does not just feature in recipes to influence how the speech of a practitioner is received, however. It is also the primary ingredient in a recipe which instead seeks to control the speech of others and, more specifically, to prevent malicious speech. The Middle Ages were afflicted with what A.T. Brown describes as a 'relentless obsession with reputation'.[98] Anxiety about the negative consequences that malicious speech could have on a person's reputation has left wide-reaching traces on the literature and documentation of the medieval period. Protagonists of poems cry out, finding themselves victims of rumour-mongering, while pastoral manuals warn of the spiritual damage caused by participating in gossip, and legal documents reveal a struggle to establish the best process for dealing with increasing concerns about the disruption caused by malicious gossip within communities.

While reputation more broadly is established through behaviour, manners, and the maintenance of a certain lifestyle, evidence suggests that during the medieval period the talk of others was the most fundamental component in the creation of a – good or bad – reputation. Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail demonstrate how inseparable talk and reputation were, through an unpacking of the term *fama* and its use during the medieval period. They highlight that while the term can be understood to mean reputation more broadly – most obviously fame or infamy – it was also used to imply idle talk, rumour, and 'the things people say'.[99] Fenster and Smail further

[97] See 'pleting' in McSparran et al., *Middle English Compendium*.

[98] Brown, 'The Fear of Downward Social Mobility', p. 599.

[99] 'Introduction', in *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Thelma S. Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 1–11 (p. 2).

develop this link between talk and *fama* or reputation to highlight how it is in the hands – or voices – of others, rather than the subject: 'for although *fama* as reputation appears to "belong" to the person being spoken about, it is often presented as if it "belongs" to the voices who make it – and in a very real way, of course, it does'.[100] The notion that *fama* is controlled by those who are speaking, rather than by those who are being spoken about suggests that there was limited personal agency when it came to controlling or influencing one's own reputation.

The link between talk and reputation is explored by the authors of 'Complaint' literature. The protagonist of the anonymously authored 'Complaint of a Prisoner Against Fortune', for example, mourns his loss of reputation through slander:

> The worst of al, that grevith me so sore
> Is that my fame is lost, and eke goode loos [*reputation*]
> And spredith wide, ever lenger the more
> As wele among my friendis as my foos
> For wykked sclaundre will in no wise be close
> But with the wynges of envy fleeth aloft
> Thereas goode loos slepith and lith ful soft.[101]

Similarly, the imprisoned protagonist of George Ashby's 'Complaint' charges his friends with 'putting on [him] many fals lesyng' and 'revylyng [him] with unfyttyng langage'.[102] The personae of both of these poems make a causal link between the malicious speech of others and their eventual downfall. Similarly, the Paston letters demonstrate how language could be used to discredit a legal or a political opponent through the levelling of specific accusations. A missive from James Gloys to John Paston I warns:

> There is reysed a slandrows noyse in this countre up-un my Mayster
> Yelverton and you and my Mayster Alyngton, which I suppose is do to

[100] Fenster and Smail, 'Introduction', p. 6.

[101] Anonymous, 'Complaint of a Prisoner Against Fortune', ll. 64–70.

[102] George Ashby, 'Complaint of a Prisoner in the Fleet', in *The Kingis Quair and Other Prison Poems*, ed. by Linne R. Mooney and Mary-Jo Arn, Middle English Texts (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005), ll. 26 and 74.

> bryng you ought of the conceyte of the pepyll, for at this day ye stand gretly in the countreys conceyte.[103]

Malicious talk had the potential not just to impact one's reputation, but to bring about downfall and even death. Thomas Denyes, who experienced prolonged litigation when he purportedly married above his station and found himself in a battle over his wife's wealth, wrote to John Paston I that a certain Watte Ingham had paid one of Denyes' servants to spread defamatory gossip about Denyes and his wife.[104] Denyes ended up in prison (albeit after commanding a brutal attack on the aforementioned Watte Ingham, which left him maimed for life) and was eventually murdered.[105]

We can see from this small selection of extracts how talk could be weaponised. It was provocative, and inevitably led to retaliation through further (allegedly) 'fals' accusations, 'sclaundres' and 'defamacyones'. The potential for social disruption explains why other genres of text from the period grapple with inflammatory or disruptive talk and attempt to discourage it. Pastoral literature in particular explores how gossip and false speech can be understood as sinful. Robert Mannyng's *Handlyng Synne*, a translation and re-working of the Anglo-French poem *Manuel des Pechiez*, explores the repercussions of malicious speech frequently throughout its sixty-six narrative exempla, asserting that 'to speke vyleyny' is to 'slaghter gostly'.[106] Mannyng also explores the sin of 'bakbytyng' – a term which, while not regularly used in modern English speech, was comparatively prominent in the Middle English lexicon. Defined as 'the sin of detracting from someone's good name behind his back because of envy; defamation, slander', it is inherently linked with reputation.[107] As with other forms of malicious speech, Mannyng equates backbiting with manslaughter and stresses how pervasive it is: 'yn bakbytyng, as ȝe han herde/ As many one are now yn þys werlde.'[108] Didactic literature, however, is not our only evidence of attempts to regulate or suppress malicious speech. From the mid-fourteenth century onwards, prosecution for crimes involving speech were on the increase. Defamation cases

[103] The Paston Letters and Papers, no. 532.

[104] The Paston Letters and Papers, no. 492.

[105] The Paston Letters and Papers, no. 161.

[106] Robert Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall, Routledge Revivals (London: Routledge, 2019), ll. 1535–36.

[107] See 'backbiting' in McSparran et al., *Middle English Compendium*.

[108] Mannyng, *Handlyng Synne*, ll. 1515; 3555–6.

contribute to a significant proportion of litigation in the Church courts, while ordinances prohibiting abusive speech can be found in the records of local and borough courts.[109] Marjorie McIntosh has demonstrated how the local court records of the fifteenth century bear witness to increasing anxiety around certain forms of social misconduct, with malicious gossip particularly prominent.[110]

Experimenta to prevent malicious speech suggest that there was anxiety around the damage that it could cause. Thus, we return to the *solsequium* mentioned earlier. A ritual using this herb in the experiments of pseudo-Albertus Magnus claims that it will prevent the practitioner's adversaries from speaking badly of him or her:

> *Si colligatur in estate sole existente in virgine scilicet in Augusto et involvatur in foliis lauri et similiter addatur dens lupi, et scias quod nullus poterit habere potestatem loquendi contra ipsum nisi verba pacifica.*
>
> [If it is collected in summer when the sun appears in Virgo, which is in August, and it is wrapped in laurel leaves and likewise accompanied by a wolf's tooth, you shall know that no one will be able to have power to speak against you, except peaceful words.][111]

The *Tretys of Diverse Herbis* provides similar virtues for the plant marigold:

> And ȝif thou on the it so bere
> Ffro ilke perel hit wol the were
> Man ne woman schal have no myȝth
> To speke aȝen the no þinge bot ryȝth
> And frend and fo the schal grete
> With wordes faire and swete.[112]

[109] Helmholz, 'Canonical Defamation in Medieval England', p. 256; Bardsley, 'Sin, Speech, and Scolding in Late Medieval England', p. 148.

[110] McIntosh, 'Finding Language for Misconduct', p. 87.

[111] London British Library, Sloane MS 3564, fol. 34r-v.

[112] London, British Library, Sloane MS 2457, fol. 7r; marigold is often used as a translation for *solsequium* instead of sunflower and these two texts may well be talking about the virtues of the same plant. Links between the source material for the verse herbal and the pseudo-Albertus Magnus tract have been spotted by Jake Morrissey in 'An Unnoticed Fragment of "A Tretys of Diverse Herbis" in

Rather than transforming how the speech of the *practitioner* is received, as the recipes to win favour claim to do, here these experiments seek to control the speech of *others*. Compelled to use only benevolent language, those who would use malicious speech against the bearer of marigold will find themselves unable to spread the kind of 'slandrows noyse' which concerns the Pastons, and will speak only 'ryȝth' or the truth. This word 'ryȝth' also carries connotations of morally correct behaviour, suggesting that this recipe inhibits sinful practice, such as the backbiting described by Mannyng.[113] Furthermore, the use of the words 'myȝth' in Middle English and 'power' or *potestatem* in the Latin text connote the disruptive force or potential that language has. By rendering those who seek to use language for malicious purposes impotent, the experiment seeks to regulate or suppress that disruptive power.

In a similar fashion, a Latin charm in one late-thirteenth century manuscript is accompanied by instructions to write a series of letters and characters on a metal plate and place it beneath one's right foot, so that 'your enemies are silent before you and have no power over you'.[114] Two further textual charms in fifteenth century manuscripts promise to protect their users against malicious speech and a damaged reputation. One instructs the practitioner to write certain letters on a linen cloth and carry it with them to protect 'against all enemies, visible and invisible, and all evil powers, and against bad reputation'.[115] The other, atypically, serves both a medical and a non-medical purpose:

> *Carmen pro febribus et ad defendendum aliquem ab infamiam* [sic] *qualicumque cuiuscumque operis fuerit et operationibus malis contra se qui hoc carmen portaverit*.

British Library, MS Sloane 2460, and the Middle English Career of Pseudo-Albertus Magnus' "De Virtutibus Herbarum"', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 115.2 (2014), 153–61 and will be discussed further in a forthcoming article by myself.

[113] See 'ryȝth' in McSparran et al., *Middle English Compendium*.

[114] '*Ut inimici tui sint ante te muti et non possent ante te prevalere scribe hos k[arakteres] in lamina stangnea* [sic] *et absconde sub pede tuo dextero*', Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS e Mus. 219, fol. 186v.

[115] '*Contra omnes Inimicos visibiles et invisibiles omem* [sic] *potenciam malam pestilenciam et malam famam porta tecum has litterias* [sic] *in uno panno lini et albo quia oyson Angelus Dei ipsas detulit Regi Karolo proporanti ad bellum et circumprecepit ex parte Dei ut secum deferat litterias* [sic] *sequentes* [characters]', Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS D 252, fol. 95r.

> [A charm for fevers, and to defend someone from any slanderous accusation, whoever it comes from, and from evil acts against the person who carries this charm.][116]

This text requires the practitioner to write certain powerful words on parchment and carry this on their body. The utilities of these texts resonate loudly with the anxiety about reputation expressed in literary sources, as well as the number of court records related to the effects of malicious speech. Just as the court evidence shows that towards the end of the Middle Ages there was an upsurge in legal action in response to claims of defamation, Sandy Bardsley has argued that pastoral literature devoted to issues around speech also increased in popularity during the late-fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, reflecting rising anxiety around the social disruption that could result from malicious speech. While these tracts had been in circulation prior to the Black Death, Bardsley suggests that, from the mid-fourteenth century onwards these discourses were 'increasingly employed to reinscribe traditional social hierarchies and discourage disruptive and inflammatory speech. Invoking *fama* and reminding everyone of its importance […] helped to ensure that elite worlds were not turned as far upside down as they feared'.[117] We can therefore interpret charms and *experimenta* to regulate disruptive speech as performing the same function as this literature, which sought to maintain the *status quo* and ensure social cohesion. At a surface level, much like the other texts discussed above to conquer enemies, win favour, and influence lawsuits, these practices to prevent slander are operating within the confines of traditional social hierarchies and conventions, and thus appear to reinscribe them, conforming to the agendas of contemporary ideological writings on social structure. Yet, again, within the tramlines of these accepted conventions is room for manoeuvre, room which the practitioner is able to exploit for their own benefit. The other texts discussed in this chapter serve the purpose of asserting the practitioner's own agency; however, given that slander and malicious speech are propagated by others rather than by the victim, these practices to prevent disruptive speech instead minimise the agency of the other, rendering them powerless, impotent, unable to speak anything except 'wordes fair and swete'.

[116] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Wood Empt. 18, fol. 32v.

[117] Bardsley, 'Sin, Speech, and Scolding in Late Medieval England', p. 146.

Texts in context

The first half of this chapter has examined different categories of social interaction, centring its investigation on two specific areas: the manipulation of interpersonal relationships and the manipulation of the way that speech is either delivered or received. The charms and experiments discussed are plucked from their manuscript contexts and instead analysed in respect of their specific utilities and how these resonate with the social concerns, anxieties and desires revealed by other literary and documentary sources. This tells us much about the particular instances in which the collectors or copiers of these texts might have considered these practices to be useful, or even the occasions on which they might have deployed them. But who were the collectors and copiers of these texts? The last half of this chapter will look more closely at the manuscript contexts for some of the texts discussed here, as well as other charms and experiments which also correspond closely with social concerns. In particular, it will examine manuscripts that were owned by the middling sort or gentry, those of a social status much like the Pastons and their peers. Two of these manuscripts are particularly well known among historians and scholars of medieval English literature alike, but in the majority of cases, the presence of these charms and experiments has gone unremarked or received only the briefest attention. The charms and experiments in these manuscripts – outside of those for medical purposes – reveal that the owners of these codices were preoccupied by the same concerns explored above. I contend that the presence of these texts in these manuscripts expands our understanding of the way in which members of the gentry or those who aspired to a particular social status might have experienced, and sought to respond to, the desire for social mobility, status anxiety, and fear of social decline.

London, British Library, Harley MS 2253

London, British Library, Harley MS 2253 is, without a doubt, one of the most well-known surviving medieval manuscripts in England, particularly to scholars of English literature. Copied between about 1326 and 1340, the codex contains the largest body of secular English lyrics – many of which are unique to the manuscript – to have

survived from the fourteenth century.[118] However, the manuscript is trilingual, and also includes a substantial collection of texts in Anglo-Norman and Latin. As a whole, the codex contains a diverse range of material, from fabliaux and romances, to political songs and poems, bible stories, prayers, and a small collection of charms and *experimenta*. But it is not only this extensive collection of literary texts that has attracted the attention of scholars: the scribe of Harley MS 2253 himself has been the subject of much study. As a whole, the manuscript is made up of three hands: the first, and earliest, of these hands, wrote the opening sections (fols. 1 – 48), while the third, latest hand added a few additional texts including a recipe for dyeing linen. The second hand is that of the principal scribe who wrote the majority of the texts. Harley MS 2253, however, is not the only place in which this particular scribe's hand appears. It has also been identified in two other surviving manuscripts: London, British Library, Harley MS 273, and London, British Library, Royal MS 12 C XII.[119] Furthermore, extensive research by Carter Revard has identified this hand, which has come to be known as that of the 'Harley scribe' in forty-one surviving legal documents. These documents, which span a period of years, are dated, allowing more precise palaeographic analysis; this enabled Revard to conclude that Harley MS 2253 was compiled over a number of years.[120] The identification of the Harley scribe's hand in these other places has allowed scholars to gain insights into the political and social milieu of the scribe, as well as about the other exempla that he likely had access to. While, unfortunately, we do not have a firm identity for the scribe, he can be located to Ludlow in the Welsh Marches where he worked – at least on a partial basis – as a legal scrivener. In addition to this role, scholars think it likely that he was a chaplain, perhaps under the patronage of Joan Mortimer and her son John Talbot, or otherwise another wealthy local family.[121] The trilingual nature of the manuscript certainly suggests that he was

[118] Jason O'Rourke, 'Imagining Book Production in Fourteenth-Century Herefordshire: The Scribe of British Library, MS Harley 2253 and His "Organizing Principles"', in *Imagining the Book*, ed. by Stephen Kelly and John J. Thompson (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005), pp. 45–60 (p. 46); Carter Revard, 'Scribe and Provenance', in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253*, ed. by Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 21–110.

[119] Susanna Fein, 'The Four Scribes of MS Harley 2253', *Journal of the Early Book Society*, 16 (2013), 27–49; Revard, 'Scribe and Provenance'.

[120] Revard, 'Scribe and Provenance'.

[121] Fein, 'The Four Scribes of MS Harley 2253'; Revard, 'Scribe and Provenance'.

in the service of one, or a number, of polyglot households who were linked by shared literary and political interests.[122]

The manuscript has been very well-studied, and it is therefore not my intention to conduct an in-depth exploration of the various themes and compositional patterns that are particularly pronounced in Harley MS 2253. However, two points are worth establishing before diving into an analysis of the charms and *experimenta* which are of more specific interest. Firstly, the scribe had agency in the selection of texts that make up the manuscript. Though likely working on behalf of a patron, he is usually credited both with the selection of texts, as well as the way in which they are presented.[123] The codex, then, represents the combined tastes of the scribe and those of his presumed patron. Secondly, the socio-political milieu of the scribe and his patron fed into this selection of texts. Whether copied down for performance or for practical use, these texts represent the concerns and interests of the gentry and manor lords of Ludlow and their social circles. The network of relationships inherent in bastard feudalism are reflected in many of the political poems found in Harley MS 2253, while others pass comment on the previous and current ruling administrations.[124] Other of the poems and literary works deploy humour to explore and defuse contemporary anxieties around social mobility.[125] These two factors are inextricable from any analysis of the contents of Harley MS 2253: as we shall see shortly, this goes for the charms and *experimenta* as much as it does for the lyrics, poems, and bible stories that fill the rest of the manuscript.

So, what are these charms and *experimenta*? They begin with the final entry in quire 14, where there is a noticeable shift in the focus of the material compiled, perhaps in anticipation of the texts in quire 15.[126] This final text (numbered as Article

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[122] O'Rourke, 'Imagining Book Production in Fourteenth-Century Herefordshire', p. 51.

[123] Susanna Fein, 'Introduction', in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253*, ed. by Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 1–20 (p. 8).

[124] Carter Revard, 'Political Poems in MS Harley 2253 and the English National Crisis of 1339 - 41', *The Chaucer Review*, 53.1 (2018), 60–81; Revard, 'Scribe and Provenance', p. 23; O'Rourke, 'Imagining Book Production in Fourteenth-Century Herefordshire', p. 51.

[125] Susanna Fein, 'Compilation and Purpose in MS Harley 2253', in *Essays in Manuscript Geography*, ed. by Wendy Scase (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2007), X, 67–94 (p. 92).

[126] This is suggested by Susanna Fein in the introduction to Article 99, the final text in quire 14: Fein suggests that this prayer for various occasions is copied in anticipation of the material in quire 15 in *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, TEAMS Middle English Texts, Online Edition (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 2015), III.

99 by Susanna Fein, who edits the manuscript) styles itself as a prayer (*oreisoun*) for various crises or concerns: to ensure a peaceful journey; to receive honour, love, and grace; to calm a storm while at sea; to prevent death or wounding in battle; and to remove bewitchment. The introduction, in French, lists these uses before instructing the user to perform three psalms, followed by a Latin 'prayer'. This Latin prayer, which requires personalisation with the insertion of the petitioner's name, addresses further concerns that are not detailed in the French introduction, concerns which tally closely with those explored in the first half of this chapter:

> *Da mihi victoriam contra omnes et super omnes inimicos meos ut non possint mihi resistere nec contradicere* […] *Et da mihi sermonem rectum et bene sonantem in os meum, ut placita sint verba mea vultus et opera omnibus hominibus me videntibus.*
>
> [Grant me […] victory against and over all my foes so that they be unable to resist me or to speak against me […] and grant me speech sounding right and good in my mouth, that the words of my countenance and my deeds be pleasing to all people who see me.][127]

While styled as a prayer, Fein notes in the introduction to the text that the prescriptive nature of the instructions suggests that if they are followed correctly they will have a binding effect.[128] As discussed in the introduction to this thesis, the line between prayer and charm is particularly undefined. However, this text, which speaks more to earthly than heavenly concerns, aligns more closely with the definition of a charm.[129] Furthermore, the relationship between purpose or intention, action, and outcome, which is compounded by other features such as the use of the future tense in guaranteeing this outcome, bears close parallels to a recipe. This close alignment with the recipe as a text type is clear in the vernacular introduction to the Latin prayer, as illustrated by the below extract:

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[127] Transcription and translation provided in Fein, *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, III, Article 99.

[128] Fein, *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, III, Article 99.

[129] Following Hindley in *Textual Magic: Charms and Written Amulets in Medieval England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023), pp. 15–17.

E quy en bataille vodra aler die cest oreysoun outre la ceynture de son espé, e pus se ceynte de ce, e le myeux ly avendra. Ne ocys ne playe mortel avera.

[And one who wishes to go into battle should say this prayer over the belt of his sword, and then gird it about himself, and the best will come to him. He'll have neither death nor a mortal wound.][130]

Furthermore, the incorporation of an object – here, the practitioner's sword belt – moves this practice further away from prayer and into the realm of experiment. The belt, imbibing the power of the psalm pronounced over it, then acts as a shield for its bearer, preventing them from sustaining any mortal injury.

The suggested distinction between charm and prayer is important for how we consider the other related texts in Harley MS 2253. The opening text in quire 15 (Article 100) is an Anglo-Norman example of the 'Angels' Names' charm discussed earlier in this chapter, and which I have already noted aligns linguistically and syntactically with the style of a recipe. This particular version lists the names of angels to address eight problems: to have honour during the day; for protection from thunder; to ensure that there is abundant food and drink; for safe travel; to guarantee success when facing judgement; to receive honour at a feast; to have success before a prince or lord; and for a safe boat crossing. The proceeding text (Article 101) contains a list of different psalms to perform to address particular anxieties or situations, much like the two texts to win a lawsuit in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Rawlinson MS D 252, cited further above. This list has sixteen entries, including: for capture; for when the practitioner is surrounded by enemies; for delivery from enemies in battle; and to be pleasing when in opposition to an adversary. Five others are more general in their application, citing that they can be used at any moment of tribulation or adversity. The two subsequent texts are devotional prayers (Articles 102 and 103) while Article 104 strays very close to the territory of charm: it bears many parallels to the Charlemagne charm discussed in the introduction and earlier on in this chapter. The version in Harley MS 2253 is accompanied by a legend which asserts that it was sent to Saint Maurice, the Bishop

[130] Transcription and translation provided in Fein, *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, III, Article 99.

of Paris by the Virgin Mary, and that whoever recites it on a daily basis will 'never know shame in this world, nor encounter snares of the enemy, nor feel suffering on earth, nor his wife perish in childbirth, nor come upon misfortune, nor die unshriven'.[131] This text is followed by another prayer (Article 105) and a short text explaining why Friday is a holy day (Article 106). Article 107 provides seven rituals, one to be performed on each day of the week, in order to secure assistance for anyone who is in sadness, prison, poverty, or sickness. These seven rituals require the performance of specific Masses, the lighting of set numbers of candles, and the giving of alms. The integration of the Mass into these rituals suggests the involvement of a chaplain or priest and may therefore have been particularly pertinent to the Harley scribe, who is conjectured to have occupied such a role.[132] In a similar vein, the following text (Article 108) presents seven Masses that can be sung to ensure that whoever sings them 'will have what he asks for with true faith'. Articles 108a, 109, and 109a consist of: a prayer to the three Magi; an anonymous moralising text which likens the world to a chess board; and an extensive formula to ensure that God will hear one's prayers, which requires the daily recitation of three prayers, each to be said thirty times, for four months.

Article 110 is another list of psalms that can be used to address particular situations. However, the performance of these psalms requires additional ritual, rendering them more complex than those listed in Article 100. Here, five of the ten psalms are to be written, rather than read: two are then to be bound to the practitioner's arm, as well as one to a child's arm to stop the child from whining; one is to be cast into a fire; and one is to be fumigated with incense at a crossroad. These 'phylacteries', as they are termed in the text itself (*philatirias*) are textual, rather than spoken charms.[133] They are intended to perform the following functions: to conquer enemies; for destitution (to turn need into wealth); to resist temptation; for sickness; if you must make a plea with a greater or more powerful person; against opponents and evildoers; to get 'delight' from a person; so that whatever you demand of a prince or authority will be granted; to scatter enemies; and so that a child will not whine. There is one final item on the list which is not assigned a purpose, but specifies only that it is to be

[131] Translation provided in Fein, *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, III, Article 104.

[132] Carter Revard suggests that the power of these texts would have been appealing to a chaplain or parish priest, in '"Annote and Johon", MS. Harley 2253, and The Book of Secrets', *English Language Notes*, 36 (1999), 5–18 (p. 10).

[133] Don Skemer labels these as textual amulets in *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p. 86.

performed at the elevation of Christ's body (that is, when the host is raised during Mass).

In a similar vein, Article 111 lists twenty-three psalms and one hymn to be performed for a range of purposes, including: when surrounded by enemies; if you have fallen in need; when going into battle; when encountering an enemy or adversary; for imprisonment; and for grave illness. Articles 113 and 114 consist of a list of questions for a priest to ask the dying, attributed to Saint Anselm, and the poem *Against the King's Taxes*, perhaps mistakenly included in this section of otherwise non-poetic material because the opening line addresses God, much in the style of some of the prayers in quire 15. Articles 115 and 116 constitute a contemplation on the passion of Christ and a text on the martyrdom of Saint Wistan, respectively. However, the last article in this quire that is of specific interest here, precedes these: Article 112. Though quite different in character to the other texts listed here, which are overtly religious in nature, I believe that this difference in character actually sheds further light on the significance of the collection of texts in quire 15 as a whole, and is particularly revealing about the concerns of the scribe and/or his patron, as well as about the way in which the scribe may have selectively copied from his available exempla.

Article 112 consists of two extracts from the *Liber aggregationis* of pseudo-Albertus Magnus. More specifically, these are the first and fourth entries from the *De herbis*, the book which deals with the properties of plants. The first plant is heliotrope – also called *solsequium*, sunflower or marigold – while the fourth is celandine: both of these have already been mentioned in this chapter due to their particular properties which correlate with the social concerns revealed by other documentary sources. The full entries, as recorded in Harley MS 2253, are provided in translation below:

> There is an herb which is called *yryos* among the Chaldeans, *mauchiel* among the Greeks, *heliotrope* among Latin speakers, which is to say, marigold. If collected in summer when the sun is in Virgo (as in August the sun is said to be in Virgo) and wrapped in a laurel leaf, and if the tooth of a wolf is added, know that no one will be able to have speech against you except calm words. And if anything is stolen in the night, let it be placed under your head, and you will see the thief and all his circumstances. And if it is put in a church where there are women,

> those whose marriage vows are being broken through a failing of theirs will never be able to leave the church until it is put away.
>
> There is an herb that is called *aquibare* by the Chaldeans, *celandine* by Latin speakers. If anyone should have this herb together with the heart of a mole, he would overcome all enemies and remove all quarrels and contentions. And if it should be put under the head of a sick man, if he is bound to die of that sickness he will at once sing in a loud voice; if not, he will begin to weep.[134]

It is unusual to find texts lifted from the *Liber aggregationis* in this manner, particularly in manuscripts that were copied at the time that Harley MS 2253 was. The pseudo-Albertus Magnus tracts, written in the late thirteenth century, were relatively new when Harley MS 2253 was copied. By the late fifteenth century it is much more common to find these texts as standalone items in manuscripts, much like the virtues of the hoopoe in Robert Taylor's manuscript cited earlier in this chapter. In other instances, for example London, British Library, Sloane MS 3160, the virtues of certain herbs, drawn from the *Liber aggregationis*, are copied down, interspersed with other material. However, they have been adapted, no longer featuring the opening lines characteristic of the pseudo-Albertan texts which provide the names of the plant in Chaldean, Greek and Latin, and incorporating Christian material such as the recitation of the *Pater Noster* or *Ave Maria*, in contrast to the notably secular texts in the *Liber aggregationis*.[135] The extracted and adapted nature of these later texts is testament to their popularity and widespread circulation in the intervening years, during which the idiosyncratic nature of manuscript culture likely prompted selective copying and the elision of certain parts of the texts. The inclusion of the linguistic variations for the plant names in the Harley MS 2253 version of these texts, however, is highly suggestive that the scribe was copying from an exemplar which contained the full text of the *De herbis*, if not necessarily the entire *Liber aggregationis*.[136] It is also not the first

[134] Translation provided in Fein, *The Complete Harley 2253 Manuscript*, III, Article 112.

[135] For more on the texts in Sloane MS 3160 and their basis in the works of pseudo-Albertus Magnus see Heather A. Taylor, '*Hec Que Sequuntur Non Sunt Fide Digna* : The Censorship of Charms in Late Medieval Manuscripts', *Manuscripta*, 66.2 (2022), 239–77.

[136] It is relatively common to find the *De herbis* circulating independently in manuscripts, without the other associated tracts that make up the full *Liber aggregationis*, for example London, British Library,

occasion on which the Harley scribe copied a text from this tract. The extract on the virtues of celandine was copied into British Library, Royal MS 12 C XII nearly twenty years earlier, demonstrating that he had been aware of, and had access to, these pseudo-Albertan texts for a long time.[137]

Although we do not have definitive evidence that the scribe had access to a full exemplar, if we assume that he did, his motive for copying only these two extracts must be influenced by the specific utilities of the two plants, heliotrope and celandine. The virtues of these two plants address issues which are distinctly social in nature, as compared to the other plants included in the *De herbis*, which broadly serve more wonderous and illusory, or otherwise medical, purposes.[138] Furthermore, they correlate closely to the utilities of a large number of the charms that fill the remainder of quire 15, which fulfil equally social purposes. It is therefore my contention that the scribe selectively copied these two *experimenta* because – though different in terms of nature, secular in character and not situated in the religious framework within which the charms operate – they address similar concerns and anxieties. For the scribe, therefore, they were not only compatible with, but they complemented the other material that occupies the final quire of Harley MS 2253.

Scholars are unsure how to typologise this collection of texts; they are often absent from, or only briefly remarked upon in, the secondary literature on Harley MS 2253, even in studies which claim to analyse the manuscript as a whole. This may be because they are seen as irrelevant by those attempting to identify a coherent organising principle that the scribe has deployed. When they *are* discussed, it is typically only when they are convenient to a particular argument. For example, Susanna Fein highlights quire 15, which she labels 'a handbook of practical religion', as an example to support the assertion that the different booklets which make up the manuscript, represent topical and scribal division points.[139] While there is no evidence to suggest that these booklets once circulated independently, Fein argues that the nature of quire 15 (booklet 7) is distinct from the rest of the manuscript, proving that

Additional MS 27329, fols. 47v – 49v and London, British Library, Sloane MS 3564, fols. 34r – 39r, among others.

[137] Revard, '"Annote and Johon", MS. Harley 2253, and The Book of Secrets', p. 6.

[138] See Michael R. Best and Frank H. Brightman, *The Book of Secrets of Albertus Magnus: Of the Virtues of the Herbs, Stones and Certain Beasts, Also a Book of the Marvels of the World* (Boston: WeiserBooks, 2004); Draelants, *Le Liber de virtutibus herbarum*.

[139] Fein, 'The Four Scribes of MS Harley 2253', pp. 29–30.

the scribe did initially conceive of the manuscript in smaller, codicological units.[140] Otherwise, these texts pose somewhat of a problem. Carter Revard takes a closer look at these charms and the two pseudo-Albertan *experimenta* in his reading of the poem *Annote and Johon* which occurs earlier in the manuscript.[141] Revard's essay argues that medieval familiarity with plant lore and the Books of Secrets tradition would have facilitated a reader's understanding and enjoyment of the poem, which attributes the same wonderous virtues of certain herbs and stones to the poem's central figure, the lady Annote. However, perhaps betraying a lack of familiarity with the practical and utilitarian tracts within which these types of texts more commonly appear, his interpretation is clouded by an anachronistic and dismissive attitude towards practices which are of a more 'magical' nature. Revard describes these two *experimenta* as 'medieval plant magic that may not be relished by modern readers', and his assertion that these types of texts were 'condemned by orthodox Christian primates, yet popular with many chaplains and parish priests' lacks the nuance with which these texts are treated by scholars more familiar with medieval 'magic' texts.[142]

Michael P. Kuczynski, obligated to mention these texts as part of a chapter on the religious material in Harley MS 2253 notes that many of the psalms are prescribed for use against enemies and adversaries, but asserts that it is unclear from the context whether this implies earthly enemies, spiritual enemies, or both.[143] While it is certainly possible, even probable, that these charms were understood to be applicable against spiritual enemies, the broader context within which they occur, I would argue, makes it very clear that they are primarily intended for use against physical enemies. The other prescribed uses for these psalms, which include for imprisonment, fighting in battle, for pleading against a social superior, and to ensure petitions are granted from a lord or prince, among others, are very clearly intended for application in the earthly, rather than the spiritual, realm. Therefore, while the prayers, accounts of martyrdoms, and indeed some of the listed psalms in this 'handbook of practical religion' can certainly be understood as providing spiritual nourishment and succour, we cannot disregard that the majority of the texts in quire 15 speak to the concerns and anxieties

[140] Fein, 'The Four Scribes of MS Harley 2253', p. 30.

[141] Revard, '"Annote and Johon", MS. Harley 2253, and The Book of Secrets'.

[142] Revard, '"Annote and Johon", MS. Harley 2253, and The Book of Secrets', pp. 5, 10.

[143] Michael P. Kuczynski, 'An "Electric Stream":', in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253*, ed. by Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 123–62 (p. 149).

that might have affected the patrons of the Harley scribe on an everyday basis. We can assume that the anxieties of these patrons, who were likely a gentry family like the Pastons and Plumptons, or perhaps even of a higher social status, would have closely resembled those expressed regularly in the letter archives and other literary and documentary sources explored above.

The final point I would like to make in this brief study of Harley MS 2253, is that the two other manuscripts copied by this scribe further support the argument that the texts at the end of quire 14 and throughout quire 15 in Harley MS 2253 were very carefully selected for copying *specifically because* they provide strategies to address predominantly earthly, and furthermore, social, problems. There is certainly crossover between the contents of the three manuscripts known to have been copied by the Harley scribe, but they are largely different, both in terms of make-up and function.[144] Harley MS 273 consists of primarily devotional or instructive materials. Not all of the material is in the Harley scribe's hand. For example, an incomplete copy of the *Manuel des Péchés* is in a different hand but, likely missing or suffering the loss of the final segment when it came into the possession of the Harley scribe, it has been completed in his own hand.[145] While the manuscript was most likely used by a spiritual counsellor or perhaps a household chaplain, Harley MS 273 also contains a number of purely medical charms, suggesting that the user of the codex may also have occasionally fulfilled a role as household healer or physician. Royal MS 12 C XII, while also containing instructional and devotional materials, reveals broader interests. It also features prognosticatory material, tracts of *experimenta* and recipes for medical purposes, mathematical treatises, and courtesy literature.[146] As mentioned above, the Royal manuscript contains a version of the pseudo-Albertan text on the properties of celandine; I would speculate that here it may have been copied due to the medical nature of the final property of the plant, that it can be used to predict whether a sick person will live or die. These two other manuscripts provide evidence that the Harley scribe had access to a broad range of materials, including practical and utilitarian literature more aligned with the contents of the final quire of Harley MS 2253. These include further charms to address medical problems. Yet he chose to copy charms

[144] Revard, 'Scribe and Provenance', p. 65.

[145] Revard, 'Scribe and Provenance', p. 67.

[146] Revard, 'Scribe and Provenance', pp. 72–73.

and *experimenta* with a noticeably strong focus on conquering enemies, winning lawsuits, and getting the better of, or seeking advantage from, social superiors. This suggests a conscious choice on the part of the scribe to compile material that was not simply broadly useful, but that was useful in addressing a quite specific set of concerns, a set of concerns that would likely have been particularly pertinent for his patron, or the household within which he was established. In this way, we can also understand these texts to complement the more literary material which fills Harley MS 2253, in which the networks of bastard feudalism are illustrated, or in which fears around social mobility are expressed. If these poems represent the socio-political milieu of the Harley scribe and his patron, then so, too, do the texts in quire 15. In fact, they go one step further. Not only do they represent this milieu, but they offer practical, tangible strategies that the reader of the manuscript can deploy in order to better navigate it.

The commonplace book of Humphrey Newton

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Lat. Misc. C. 66, unlike Harley MS 2253, can be linked to a specific, named figure from the end of the fifteenth century: Humphrey Newton (1466 – 1536).[147] Newton was a member of the gentry class from Pownall in Cheshire and while – unlike the Pastons or the Plumptons – he did not preserve an extensive archive of written materials, his personal manuscript reveals much about his business activities, professional and personal interests, and his sense of place in the world. While Newton did not advance up the social hierarchy as speedily or as successfully as families such as the Pastons did – and there is no evidence that he was close to achieving knightly status – he nevertheless worked solidly to promote the interests and the social standing of his family, using marriage, the acquisition of land, and the bonds of seignorial service to secure upwards mobility.[148] His manuscript offers us an insight into the 'tactics of social advancement' that he used and the way in which he

[147] Ralph Hanna, 'Humphrey Newton and Bodleian Library, MS Lat. Misc. C. 66', *Medium Ævum*, 69.2 (2000), 279–91 (p. 279).

[148] Deborah Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536): An Early Tudor Gentleman* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2008), pp. 8–9.

consciously fashioned his own image in accordance with his social status, or the status to which he aspired.[149]

The manuscript was compiled between the 1490s and 1520s, though a slightly earlier booklet of medical material – not in Newton's own hand – has led Ralph Hanna to suggest that this was the core around which the remainder of the volume gradually coalesced.[150] While definitions of manuscript 'type' are oft-debated, the codex conforms to the typical characteristics of a commonplace book: primarily that it is miscellaneous in content, that it reflects the writer's or owner's personal interests and needs, and that it does not seem to have been systematically planned, but was instead accumulated over time.[151] The material gathered in Newton's volume reveals a broad range of interests. A cartulary preserves charters and deeds pertaining to the family's landholdings, while there are records of payments and estate accounts, and a number of legal writs and documents. Genealogies demonstrate Newton's interest in his family history; though he could not lay claim to status via the fame of his ancestors, he demonstrates the continuity of the Newton male line for over two centuries.[152] Evidence of his devotional activities is recorded in the selection of religious material, including parts of the Old Testament, extracts from the works of Saint Augustine, the collection of English sermons in Mirk's *Festial*, *Provinciale* – the Latin work of Canon Law by William Lyndwood – and a treatise on the seven deadly sins.[153] This material is augmented by the inclusion of a number of prayers and copies of indulgences purchased for Newton and his family. The medical needs of the family are addressed with the inclusion of a urinary tract, an English translation of the gynaecological tracts known collectively as the *Trotula* as well as part of a Latin version of the *Trotula*, and a wide range of medical recipes.[154] There is also a focus on conduct and courtesy, with literature detailing the correct way to serve a meal and the rules of hospitality.

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[149] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, p. 9.

[150] Hanna, 'Humphrey Newton', pp. 282–83.

[151] Derek Pearsall, 'The Whole Book: Late Medieval English Manuscript Miscellanies and Their Modern Interpreters', in *Imagining the Book*, ed. by Stephen Kelly and John J. Thompson (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2005), pp. 17–29 (pp. 23–24); Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, p. 180.

[152] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, p. 15.

[153] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, p. 107.

[154] Hanna, 'Humphrey Newton', pp. 282–83; Monica H. Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts in Middle English', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 14.1 (1992), 53–88; Monica H. Green, 'A Handlist of the Latin and Vernacular Manuscripts of the So-Called *Trotula* Texts. Part II: The Vernacular Texts and Latin Re-Writings', *Scriptorium*, 51 (1997), 80–104 (p. 87); the *Trotula* texts and their relationship to charms and experiments for social concerns is discussed in depth in Chapter Three of this thesis.

There are works of chiromancy, physiognomy and astrology, local histories, prophecies, didactic writings, and extracts from the *Secretum secretorum*.[155] Finally, there are nearly twenty love poems which appear to be of Newton's own composition.[156]

Deborah Youngs, in her biography of Newton, demonstrates how the interests and concerns – both personal and professional – revealed by Newton's commonplace book dovetail with what we know about the events of his life. While he did not make use of the type of ruthless tactics employed by many other members of the gentry in their efforts to get ahead, he adopted a range of strategies in order to try and better his own status, as well as that of his family and future generations. First and foremost, he made a good marriage with a local co-heiress which brought him land and an alliance with a family in possession of some power in the North West of England.[157] But he also – while not in the legal profession – made good use of the law, presiding over local sessions of frankpledge, and operating as a counsellor and arbitrator for a number of people, revealing himself to be a trusted, respected, and well-connected member of the community.[158] His thorough legal knowledge would also have been much needed when he found himself embroiled in a protracted legal dispute over land, which was not resolved until after his death.[159] Meanwhile, records of his purchases suggest that he was buying clothing which – according to sumptuary law – was for those of knightly rank or higher, pointing towards a certain level of social aspiration.[160] The albeit gentle ambition that he espoused correlates with the conscious self-fashioning witnessed by the materials gathered together in his commonplace book.

Our interest, however, is in charms and *experimenta*. Newton records a range of such texts at various points in his manuscript. Some of these are medical in nature, including charms to staunch blood (fol. 3r) and to prevent fevers (fol. 91r). The extracts from the *Trotula* texts included in the manuscript focus more on conception and generation rather than on gynaecological issues and diseases of women: this particular interest is borne out by recipes added in Newton's own hand, including 'to

[155] Griffin, *Instructional Writing in English*, pp. 89–92.
[156] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, p. 190.
[157] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, pp. 21–25.
[158] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, pp. 42, 56, 67.
[159] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, pp. 91–92.
[160] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, p. 152.

make a woman to conseyve a child' (fol. 90r), and some notes on the signs of pregnancy (fol. 87rb).[161] In the same vein, there is an experiment to know whether a woman is carrying a male or female child (fol. 129r), and a textual charm to aid childbirth by tying it around the labouring woman's right foot (fol. 40rb). In another oral charm for childbirth (fols. 73v – 74r), Newton has inserted the name of his own wife – Ellen – into the spaces left for the patient's name, pointing to the actual use of this practice during his wife's labour with their four sons and six daughters.[162] This interest in conception and childbirth points to broader concerns around dynasty and inheritance, something which is also reflected in Humphrey's detailed genealogies and family trees, and which will be discussed in more depth in Chapter Three of this thesis.

Another charm which carries evidence of use is a copy of the 'Charlemagne charm' (fol. 69r) though in Newton's book this text claims that it was sent to Pope Leo instead of the Carolingian Emperor. Most copies of the Charlemagne charm offer its bearer numerous benefits, including: protection from death in battle, as well as from fire, water, an iron instrument, malignant forces, and additionally, to ensure safe labour for a woman in childbirth.[163] Newton's version addresses only the first four of these. The format and materiality of the Charlemagne charm has attracted attention from several scholars of charms.[164] It appears in different contexts: copied into codices, including commonplace books, medical compendia, and Books of Hours, but also on prayer rolls and standalone textual amulets. The legend at the beginning of the text is regularly followed by a rubric which informs the user that carrying the written words of the charm, reading them, or even just looking at them on a daily basis will ensure protection.[165] Newton's copy of the charm offers us an extremely rare insight into how medieval users might have engaged with these texts, especially those copied into codices rather than prayer rolls. He introduces the text with the following words: 'These bee the contentes of þe writt in my purse'. We know, therefore, that he carried this

[161] Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 194–95.

[162] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 195.

[163] Jones and Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth', p. 426.

[164] Curt F. Bühler, 'Prayers and Charms in Certain Middle English Scrolls', *Speculum*, 39.2 (1964), 270–78; Hebing, 'Allmygti God This Lettyr Sent'; Katherine Storm Hindley, 'The Power of Not Reading: Amulet Rolls in Medieval England', in *The Roll in England and France in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. by Stefan G. Holz, Jörg Peltzer, and Maree Shirota (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 289–306; Skemer, *Binding Words*.

[165] Hebing, 'Allmygti God This Lettyr Sent'.

charm on a separate piece of paper or parchment to secure its benefits on a daily basis, but that he also made a copy in his book, perhaps to insure against loss of the original, or for the use of future generations.

It is not just the copy of the Charlemagne charm that demonstrates Newton's interest in protection from certain perils. On the verso of the same folio are a number of additional charms, one of which promises the user a means of obtaining anything that they desire. Further to these texts, folio 74r contains a – now only partial – list of charms and experiments in English and Latin for a range of purposes, including to calm a tempest, for protection and victory in battle, and to win the love and worship of all people. These are in a different hand, but Newton himself has made corrections and additions. Once again this demonstrates his engagement with these texts, and perhaps indicates that he had access to an alternative version which he drew on for comparison, or otherwise that he saw fit to edit them so that they were more closely aligned with his own intentions or desires. Finally, the last folio of the manuscript (129r) contains another list of practices for a variety of purposes, in a mixture of English and Latin. These are as follows: to make a woman dance when she comes into the house; to make a ring hop; to understand birdsong; to become invisible; so that neither a prison nor chains can hold you; to recover stolen goods; to know what a woman has in her stomach (i.e. the sex of a child); to make a woman speak while sleeping; to make those sitting at the table fall asleep; to make a room appear to be made of silver; two recipes to make invisible writing; to catch birds; to make golden water; and to win lawsuits, escape the malice of others, and determine whether a sick man shall live or die. This final text is the same experiment with celandine found in Harley MS 2253, though here it is acephalous and does not provide the names of the herbs in Chaldean and Greek.

These texts reflect diverse interests. There are items of a more jocular nature, such as the experiment to make a ring hop which is more akin to a modern day magic trick, achieved by filling a hollow ring with liquid mercury and then heating it, as well as other methods for creating illusions.[166] As Hannah Bower notes, these types of practices conform to the Book of Secrets tradition, offering the user the means to make objects cross boundaries or undergo transformation, and bringing a sense of

[166] For similar experiments see, for example, Marjorie Harrington, 'Science, Medicine, Prognostication: MS Digby 86 as a Household Almanac', in *Interpreting MS Digby 86: A Trilingual Book from Thirteenth-Century Worcestershire*, ed. by Susanna Fein (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2019), IX, 55–72 (p. 68).

'carnivalesque energy' to recipe collections.[167] But they also come into conversation with some of the other tracts in Newton's book. The conduct literature, including guidance on how to serve a lord, and how to host a marriage feast, reflects a concern with appropriate behaviour, and conforming to the fixed roles prescribed for each social level; the experiments, however, offer a more subversive take on hospitality, whereby women are compelled to dance on entering the house, or guests fall asleep at the dining table. In reference to another manuscript – London, British Library, Sloane MS 1315 – which also couples conduct literature with recipes for tricks and illusions, Carrie Griffin suggests that such recipes give the book a 'fictive and imaginative framework within which these texts can operate as narratives to be enjoyed'.[168] They provide the reader with the opportunity to imagine the overturning of social rules or responsibilities while, as Bower argues, 'making light of taboos and socially censured practices'.[169] In this way, these texts reflect the same social concerns revealed by the notes, records, and tracts in the rest of the manuscript, and underpin the ways in which Newton explored and asserted his place in the world.

As demonstrated, Newton clearly engaged with these texts, adding in the names of the users, carrying them on his person, and editing copies to alter their utilities to better fit with his own desires. But there is evidence that he may also have engaged with them on an intellectual level. On the folio preceding the list of experiments described above, he has transcribed around fifty lines extracted from Chaucer's 'The Parson's Tale'.[170] Within the section copied is the Parson's diatribe against 'magical' practices, in which he condemns the:

> Horrible swerynge of adiuracion and conyuracion as don þes false enchantours or nigramanciens […] þey do so cursedly and dampnabely ageynys Crist and al þe seyth of Holy Church […] Charmes for wondis or malody of men or of bestis if þay takyn any effecke it may be peraventure þat God saferth [*suffer*] it to be don.[171]

[167] Hannah Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500* (Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 202.

[168] Griffin, *Instructional Writing in English*, p. 58.

[169] Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500*, p. 202.

[170] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, pp. 120, 128.

[171] Transcribed from the copy in Newton's own manuscript, fol. 128r.

The position of this extract, immediately before Newton's own list of texts which align with many of the practices criticised by the Parson is intriguing, and demonstrates that Newton would have been aware of the problematic nature of some of the material he was copying. Youngs considers Newton's reasons for copying the extract from 'The Parson's Tale': perhaps it was because he did not agree with the message in this extract, or maybe it reflects a level of personal scepticism about the list of *experimenta* that he had copied onto the subsequent folio.[172] However, she concludes that the most likely explanation is that Newton 'recognised the difference between an appeal to God and the exploitation of the mysteries of nature'.[173] This, however, is not something that is reflected in the presentation of the *experimenta* copied by Newton, nor in the methods that some of them employ. In the experiment to become invisible, for example, the practitioner is instructed to pour boiling water into an ants' nest and then search inside it for a three-coloured stone. If no stone can be found, an appeal to God will aid the search. Similarly, the experiment to prevent imprisonment instructs the user to gather the herb celandine while reciting the *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria*. These texts combine appeals to God with the exploitation of the natural or occult properties of objects, showing that these two modes of praxis are not distinct from one another, and that Newton certainly did not consider them to be separate or incompatible. In a similar fashion, the full passage in 'The Parson's Tale' lumps together many different types of magical practice, from the operations of necromancers using basins of water or animal parts, to divination by interpreting the flight or noise of birds or through dreams, and to the use of charms to heal man and beast. It is unclear, therefore, how Youngs manages to conclude that the copying of such a passage on Newton's behalf demonstrates that he was asserting the difference between these various practices.

How, then, might we understand the juxtaposition of the lines from 'The Parson's Tale' with this tract of *experimenta*? Acknowledging that some of the texts in his manuscript might be problematic seems, to a modern reader at least, risky: Newton cannot plead ignorance or plausible deniability about the unorthodoxy of some of the material he has collected. However, the reality may not be so straightforward. A number of medieval manuscripts contain cautionary or condemnatory notices beside

[172] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, p. 115.

[173] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, p. 115.

magical texts, allowing the user to express their piety and evade suspicion, while maintaining the usability of the text.[174] For example, notes beside four separate charms in San Marino, Huntington Library MS HM 58 decry them as forbidden by the Catholic Church. The notes are in the same hand as the charms themselves, suggesting that they were all written by one scribe. Thus, we may understand these marginal notes as a means of diverting suspicion in a way which does not entail fully censoring the text, for example through crossing out or erasing the text itself.[175] Youngs suggests that Newton's manuscript, though clearly primarily for personal use, exhibits some signs that other readers, beside Newton himself, may have had access to the manuscript.[176] If Newton was anticipating that other readers might use his manuscript, he may well have prefaced this list of *experimenta* with these cautionary lines as a means of minimising suspicion about his intentions when it came to the use of these texts. This is purely speculative, but it highlights the fact that the treatment of charms and *experimenta* in manuscripts by copyists and readers was often ambivalent or ambiguous. As Hannah Bower so aptly asserts, collections of 'magical' recipes did not evoke stable or singular responses; in contrast to the more black-and-white clerical condemnations of these practices, the way that they are presented in manuscript collections offers 'a more accurate reflection of the constant negotiations and renegotiations medieval people made in the face of ambiguous boundaries and ambivalent attitudes to practices associated with magic'.[177]

The presence of charms and *experimenta* in the manuscript of Humphrey Newton has evoked derisive commentary from Ralph Hanna. Following a discussion of the various prayers, indulgences and charms included in the volume, he asserts that 'it is very easy to laugh about this sort of thing […] [b]ut, of course, it is entirely of a piece with the relatively unsophisticated sensibility which performs ceaseless enactments to convert rural acquisitiveness into a reflection of literary splendour'.[178] Accusing literary scholars of 'glamorising' the production of commonplace books, Hanna urges us to rein in our 'enthusiasm for the putative sophistication of such efforts'

[174] Catherine Rider and Sophie Page, 'Introduction', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 1–12 (p. 7).

[175] See Taylor, '*Hec Que Sequuntur Non Sunt Fide Digna*'.

[176] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, p. 185.

[177] Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500*, pp. 205–6.

[178] Hanna, 'Humphrey Newton', p. 288.

and concludes that Newton's impulse for book production should be placed 'somewhere between the pedestrian and the perverse'.[179] This damning critique of the manuscript is perhaps too focused on the literary merit – or lack of it – of Newton's codex, in particular his own lyrical creations, and it therefore minimises the social value that the volume possesses. But it also reflects an ignorance of similar surviving contemporary manuscripts. The well-known commonplace books of Robert Thornton and Robert Reynes of Acle, for example, contain versions of the Charlemagne charm, along with a number of other charms and *experimenta*, showing that there was clearly nothing 'perverse' about transcribing such texts into one's personal volume.[180] In a less condemnatory manner, Youngs suggests that the inclusion of charms and *experimenta* in Newton's manuscript shows that he shared a 'sensory and magical view of religion' with the 'non-literate and lower sections of society'.[181] However, by their very nature – existing, at least in the manuscript, in written form – these texts are very much part of literate culture. Newton himself asserts that he carries a written copy of the Charlemagne charm in his purse. As Eamon Duffy has demonstrated, the practices reflected by many of these texts were compatible with, and incorporated into, mainstream and orthodox religion, and were not part of some kind of devotional underground, 'folk' practice, or the religious belief possessed only by the lower echelons of society.[182]

Instead, however, we might return to Hanna's suggestion that the manuscript embodies a certain 'rural acquisitiveness'. While intended as a scathing remark, this assertion aptly sums up the tenor of Newton's concerns, reflected throughout the manuscript in its entirety. Youngs notes that the tracts collected by Newton reflect his efforts to 'endow his family with the necessary social polish to match and enhance their status' and that, as he gradually rose through the ranks of society, this 'may have generated uncertainties, made him a little anxious about his new position and prompted him to reach for the pen; it would explain his interests in the themes of

[179] Hanna, 'Humphrey Newton', p. 289.

[180] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Tanner MS 407, and Lincoln Cathedral Library, MS 91, see *The Commonplace Book of Robert Reynes of Acle: An Edition of Tanner MS 407*, ed. by Cameron Louis (New York: Garland, 1980); and the essays in *Robert Thornton and His Books: Essays on the Lincoln and London Thornton Manuscripts*, ed. by Susanna Fein and Michael Robert Johnston (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2014).

[181] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, p. 205.

[182] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400 - c. 1580*, Second Edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 209–98.

mutability, instability and constancy'.[183] If this statement applies to the other material in Newton's manuscript, why, then, must we instead see the inclusion of charms and *experimenta* as a foray on Newton's part into the practices of the non-literate, lower strata of society? Can we not, instead, understand them as a similar reflection of Newton's anxieties around status, social mobility, and the themes of mutability or instability? In this way, we can infer that when Newton copied down the means to find out whether his wife was pregnant with a girl or boy, to avoid imprisonment, to win lawsuits, or to have whatever he desired, he was instead looking for a way to assert agency, uncover the unknown, and counter instability. Even in the texts of a more jocular nature, such as to make women dance, or to make his guests sleep at the table, he is engaging with certain social conventions and testing their boundaries, whether simply in his own imagination or through actual practice. These practices can therefore be understood to reflect the desire to alleviate anxiety and to consolidate Humphrey Newton's sense of place in the social landscape of a member of the lower gentry.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Wood Empt. 18

The third and final manuscript to be discussed here cannot be linked to a specific person or family: we do not know the identity of the person(s) who compiled or read it. Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Wood Empt. 18 is a late-fifteenth century compilation of miscellaneous material with a strong focus on practical and instructional literature. The volume does not contain the poems or lyrics found in Harley MS 2253 or in the commonplace book of Humphrey Newton, nor does it reflect the religious or devotional interests or practices of the reader in the way that these two other manuscripts do. However, I will argue that it still reveals many of the same concerns, particularly with regard to social status, aspirations for social mobility, and anxiety around interpersonal relations.

The codex in question is made up of texts in a number of different hands: it begins with a series of medical recipes in English, interspersed with charms for healing and for protection, as well as a Latin list of the qualities of each month of the year (fols. 1 – 12). This is followed by a 'tretis of oyles and of wateres medsinabill' which is

[183] Youngs, *Humphrey Newton (1466-1536)*, pp. 209, 211.

proceeded by further medical recipes including a Latin charm for fever (fol. 22r). On fol. 27v there is a list of Arabic numerals and their Roman equivalents, followed by a series of medical and domestic recipes – such as to kill mice and rats, and to keep weevils away from grain – added by a slightly later hand. The proceeding folios contain a range of recipes, some for healing, but many to serve other purposes, and which will be discussed in more depth shortly. Folios 34 and 35 contain a tract on fortune-telling with dice. This is followed by further medical recipes and a treatise on the ten virtues of treacle. The latter half of the manuscript primarily consists of equine medicine and guidance around the care of horses, including a copy of *The Proprytees and Medycynes for Hors* and a treatise known as the *Boke of Marschalsai*.[184] The final 15 folios of the manuscript return the focus to human medicine, with further recipes and charms for healing.

The collection of texts presented in MS Wood Empt. 18, when considered as a whole, suggests a reader who was part of a particular milieu, and reflects the typical interests and concerns of a member of the landholding classes. George Keiser examines the tradition of one of the tracts of equine medicine found in MS Wood Empt. 18, *The Proprytees and Medycynes for Hors*, which survives in eight manuscript witnesses and was also printed by Wynkyn de Worde in the 1490s.[185] Keiser asserts that the treatise occurs in the company of material that conforms to the typical patterns of reading associated with the gentry: primarily texts that address both the practical needs and aspirations of their owners.[186] While in MS Wood Empt. 18 there is a particular focus on the care of horses, in other manuscripts, these tracts of equine medicine are routinely accompanied by instructional material around other knightly pursuits, including hunting, hawking, heraldry, and angling. The combination of these instructional texts in miscellaneous volumes, alongside other material such as medical recipes, represents what Raluca Radulescu describes as 'a practical interest in shaping a gentle identity'.[187] A manuscript almost contemporary with MS Wood Empt. 18, compiled by John Whittocksmead of Wiltshire (1410 – 82), features *The*

[184] George R. Keiser, 'Practical Books for the Gentleman', in *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain: 1400 - 1557*, ed. by Lotte Hellinga and J. B. Trapp (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 470–94.

[185] Keiser, 'Practical Books', p. 471.

[186] Keiser, 'Practical Books', p. 480.

[187] Raluca Radulescu, 'Literature', in *Gentry Culture in Late-Medieval England*, ed. by Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), pp. 101–2.

Proprytees and Meycynes for Hors alongside another equine treatise, as well as other texts including a technical legal manual for use by the professional classes, Latin and vernacular astrological treatises, remedy and cookery books, a herbal, and two spiritual works.[188] While more diverse in contents than the Bodleian manuscript, it reflects many of the same interests and, given that we know the identity of its original owner, it offers us an insight into the type of person who may have commissioned or used a codex such as MS Wood Empt. 18. Whittocksmead was an active member of the gentry in Wiltshire. He regularly sat in parliament and was well-connected with other members of the gentry in the West Country; he served on royal commissions and also acted as the bailiff of the Bishop of Salisbury.[189] The reading material gathered in his manuscript not only reflects the interests that would have been commensurate with his social status and professional activities, but suggests that there was significant cultural value associated with the acquisition of certain types of knowledge: this would not only have provided practical guidance, but would have allowed access to certain linguistic and cultural registers, facilitating conversation and homosocial bonding with peers and associates.[190]

A text in MS Wood Empt. 18 which represents a slightly different form of knowledge is the Latin treatise on fortune-telling by the casting of dice. While many books of divination entered Western Europe through contact with the Middle East in the twelfth century, tracts specific to divining the future through the casting of dice were hugely popular in the classical tradition too.[191] Divination was, however, a thorny issue in medieval Christian Europe. While the general tone from Churchmen and theologians regarding divining the future was condemnatory – after all, knowledge of the future was reserved for God, and God alone – the legitimacy of certain methods of prediction was open to debate.[192] This was particularly the case for lot-casting, which had a biblical precedent: The New Testament describes the Apostles drawing lots to replace Judas Iscariot as the twelfth Apostle after the crucifixion (Acts 1:23 –

[188] Yale, Beinecke Library MS 163; Keiser, 'Practical Books', p. 475.

[189] Keiser, 'Practical Books', p. 474.

[190] Ryan Perry, 'Objectification, Identity and the Late Medieval Codex', in *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and Its Meanings*, ed. by Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 309–19 (p. 312).

[191] W. L. Braekman, 'Fortune-telling by the Casting of Dice: A Middle English Poem and Its Background', *Studia Neophilologica*, 52.1 (1980), 3–29 (p. 6).

[192] Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), p. 48.

6). This cast doubt on the condemnations issued by early Church fathers on lot-casting and other activities deployed to generate answers to particular questions: why were the Apostles permitted to use lot-casting as a method to resolve certain situations if it was, in fact, wrong?[193] One tract which attracted much debate was the very text included in MS Wood Empt. 18. Originally titled the *Lots of the Saints*, by the later Middle Ages it was circulating under a new name, the *Lots of the Apostles* or *Sortes apostolorum*, a name which sought to stress its legitimacy by closer association with the actions of the Apostles after the death of Christ.[194] This particular method of divination requires the user to – after reciting a number of psalms – throw three six-sided dice, while asking a question. Fifty-six answers are listed, according to each possible combination of numbers.[195]

The suggested questions which headline the tract in MS Wood Empt. 18 and serve to pique the user's interest, are as follows:

> *Si cupias scire exitum alicuius rei utrum dives eris vel pauper vel si mercimonio lucreris vel si de inimico victor eris vel de re perdita recuperabis vel non.*
>
> [If you wish to know the outcome of certain affairs, or whether you will be rich or poor, or if you will profit from a trade, or whether you will overcome your enemy, or recover your lost items or not.][196]

The potential uses for this divinatory tract speak to many of the primary concerns which might have preoccupied members of the gentry, including those discussed in earlier parts of this chapter. But it is not just the possible utilities of this method of fortune-telling which would have made it attractive to readers of a certain social status. Many of the fifty-six answers are provided in poetic form, suggesting that the tract may have been used for entertainment, as well as enlightenment. Another surviving fortune-telling text, the *Chance of the Dice*, cites a range of well-known lovers including the knights of King Arthur, suggesting that it was as much a form of courtly entertainment

[193] Rider, *Magic and Religion*, pp. 48–49.

[194] Rider, *Magic and Religion*, p. 49; Braekman, 'Fortune-telling by the Casting of Dice', p. 7.

[195] Braekman, 'Fortune-telling by the Casting of Dice', pp. 7–8.

[196] Transcribed in Braekman, 'Fortune-telling by the Casting of Dice', p. 8, translation my own.

as it was a tool for predicting the future.[197] Thus, we can understand the inclusion of the *Lots of the Apostles* in MS Wood Empt. 18 as, like the tracts on equine care, consonant with the reading interests of the middle, or even elite, strata of society. Yet here, I would also contend that it is not only the literary form and genre of the divinatory text that would have made it popular among a gentry audience, but also the actual concerns it speaks to, or promises to provide answers for.

The charms and *experimenta* in MS Wood Empt. 18 speak to many of the same concerns. Two of them have been cited already in this chapter: the textual charm to defend whoever carries it from any slanderous accusation, and the use of the *sator arepo* formula to win favour. These are just two of many. In the earlier folios of the manuscript, among recipes for healing, a number of textual charms for protection have been copied (fols. 9r – 12r). Three of these bear similarity to the writ that Humphrey Newton carried in his purse: one claims that an angel sent a series of characters to Charlemagne while he was preparing for war, while the other two instead name Pope Leo as the recipient of a list of holy names. The majority of the protective texts across these folios are in Latin, though two are in Anglo-Norman, and they serve a variety of purposes, each one slightly different from the next, but all quite typical of this type of charm.[198] These include conquering enemies, protection from death by fire, sword, water, or the bite of an animal, safe childbirth, defence against malignant spirits, safety from fevers and illness, and ensuring that the bearer will not die unshriven. Knowing that Humphrey Newton copied the contents of the writ in his purse into his commonplace book, it is tempting to speculate that these folios in MS Wood Empt. 18 represent something similar but in reverse, perhaps serving as a series of exempla that the reader could use to copy whichever textual charm they felt would best address their concerns at a particular moment.

Folios 29r and 30r-v contain two experiments for identifying a thief. It is unusual to find either of these experiments copied into manuscripts, though there is surviving evidence of both of them having been used in practice during the medieval period.[199] The first of the two – in English – is the 'book and key' or 'key and psalter' method. In the case of the example in MS Wood Empt. 18, this requires the practitioner to write

[197] Rider, *Magic and Religion*, p. 51.

[198] See Hebing, 'Allmygti God This Lettyr Sent'.

[199] Tabitha Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure: Service Magic in England from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 55–57.

the name of the suspected thief and put the piece of parchment inside a psalter, along with a piped key. The psalter is then balanced on a finger while a psalm is recited, followed by the names of the four Evangelists repeated in different combinations. When the various incantations have been performed, if the suspect whose name has been pronounced is the perpetrator, then the book will fall down. If not, then the book will remain in place, and the experiment can be repeated with an alternative name. In her study of legal records of magical services offered – and prosecuted – in the medieval and early modern period, Tabitha Stanmore finds that this particular method is recorded as having been used in a total of seven cases between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries, making it one of the more regularly employed methods of theft detection.[200] Later evidence shows that it was still being used until at least the nineteenth century.[201] In spite of its clear popularity, the only surviving example of it in manuscript form from the medieval period – as far as I am aware – is in MS Wood Empt. 18.[202] Frank Klaassen has suggested that the disparity between court records and manuscript sources is likely because the key and psalter method was more practical and did not involve lengthy invocations that were difficult to remember: it is therefore plausible that it circulated orally rather than in manuscript form.[203]

The second method of theft detection in MS Wood Empt. 18 is a similarly rare occurrence in medieval manuscripts, with only two surviving examples, both in Latin.[204] The text in the Bodleian manuscript instructs the practitioner to draw a cross in a loaf of bread, thus dividing it into four quarters. In each quarter, a particular phrase is to be written, beginning with an invocation of the Trinity; the practitioner then takes four knives and inscribes each with a holy name such as ‘Adonay’ or ‘Emmanuel’ before placing them in each quarter of the loaf. After this, the name of the suspect is

[200] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, pp. 55–56.

[201] Richard W. Ireland, ‘First Catch Your Toad: Medieval Attitudes to Ordeal and Battle’, *Cambrian Law Review*, 11 (1980), 50–61 (p. 54).

[202] There are a number of witnesses to this method in early modern manuscripts, and it is cited by Reginald Scot in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, see Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, pp. 56–57; and Sharon Hubbs Wright and Frank Klaassen, *Everyday Magicians: Legal Records and Magic Manuscripts from Tudor England* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022), p. 40; Frank Klaassen and Christopher Phillips, ‘The Return of Stolen Goods: Reginald Scot, Religious Controversy, and Magic in Bodleian Library, Additional B. 1’, *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 1.2 (2008), 135–76.

[203] Wright and Klaassen, *Everyday Magicians*, p. 40.

[204] The other is found in Cambridge, Trinity College, O. 1. 57, fol. 126v, see Mitchell, ‘Cultural Uses of Magic’, p. 124.

written – likely on parchment or paper, though the text does not say – and placed on top of the loaf of bread. A long Latin invocation is then performed, after which presumably the loaf will turn, if the named suspect is guilty.[205] Tabitha Stanmore finds two instances where a loaf of bread is recorded as having been used to identify a thief, both from the fourteenth century.[206] Charms and *experimenta* for theft are the focus of the next chapter; in particular the social implications of these practices which – as in the case of the two in MS Wood Empt. 18 – require the user to name those who are suspected of committing the theft. The way in which these practices are to be carried out speaks to a number of known facts about theft, including that this type of crime was often committed by those living in the same community as the victim, and thus known to them. These texts therefore play into pre-existing suspicion, likely guided by established community dynamics and biases.[207]

The remainder of the texts that are of interest here are grouped together across four folios (31r – 34r) and serve a wide range of purposes. The two practices to identify a thief show an interest in uncovering the truth, and this is something which is reflected in the utilities of several other experiments in MS Wood Empt. 18. For example, the means to interrogate a man while he is sleeping by placing the heart of an owl over his closed eyes: this will compel him to tell you the answer to whatever you ask. There are a number of possible instances in which such a practice might have been used, but it resonates with the fear of false friends discussed earlier in this chapter in the way that it seeks to eliminate the possibility of false flattery, dissimulation and deception. In a similar vein, there is another experiment that will prevent the user's enemies from being able to eat with them. Here the practitioner is to simply wash their left hand in the juice of the herb vervain, but this practice recalls the ritual with snakeskin cited earlier, whereby the user is to rinse their face with the powdered snakeskin mixed with water. Both practices rely on the physical presence of the enemy in order for the act of discernment to work: while the ritual with snakeskin reveals deception by preventing an enemy from being able to look the practitioner in the eye, this experiment with vervain instead aims to prevent the practitioner's enemy from

[205] This version of the text is less explicit about how the guilt of the named suspect will manifest; the version in the Trinity manuscript states that the loaf is to be suspended from the fingers of a group of men, and will turn when the guilty name is placed on top.

[206] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, p. 55.

[207] Elizabeth Papp Kamali, *Felony and the Guilty Mind in Medieval England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 232.

accepting their hospitality. However, further to this, it speaks to social conventions around acts of lordship and fealty. Handholding was a ritual form of signing contractual obligation or of demonstrating fealty; during such ceremonies, gloves were not permitted because skin-to-skin contact between the two parties was considered to be of primary importance.[208] The requirement to wash the hand – part of the body imbued with great significance in the context of social rituals and conventions – with vervain prompts us to speculate that this experiment speaks to concerns around deception or feigned loyalty and friendship during these rituals.

The manuscript also cites the properties of the hoopoe mentioned earlier in this chapter: here the text states that if the practitioner carries the bird's eyes they will have grace in the eyes of all men, while carrying it next to one's chest will pacify enemies, and bearing its head in one's purse will protect against deception in the marketplace. As mentioned earlier, this text is usually found in the *Liber aggregationis*, but it is not the only experiment which has been extracted and adapted from the pseudo-Albertan tract. For example, the scribe has also copied the – by now very familiar to us – virtues of sunflower or marigold. As mentioned in the discussion of Harley MS 2253, as these texts circulated in the latter end of the medieval period they were often altered, particularly with the insertion of religious language or the prescription of certain invocations, deviating from the secular nature of their original form. That is the case in MS Wood Empt. 18: here the text instructs the user to collect the plant in August before sunrise while saying the *Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria*. It includes the usual assertion that carrying the plant, wrapped in a laurel leaf with – here a lion's tooth instead of that of a wolf – will prevent anyone from saying bad things about the bearer. However, this particular text takes this one step further, stating that if bad words *are* spoken, the practitioner will overcome the speaker. The text, therefore, reflects not only a concern with slander, as discussed earlier in this chapter, but also with the desire to overcome enemies.

Radulescu notes that the reading interests of the gentry were linked to their everyday concerns, the same concerns that shine through in the surviving correspondence of families like the Pastons and Plumptons discussed in this chapter.[209] These are 'mostly centred around the notion of preserving personal and

[208] Constance Classen, *The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch* (Illinois: Illinois University Press, 2012), p. 4.

[209] Radulescu, 'Literature', p. 101.

the family's worship, cultivating gentle manners, including good governance of the household and political behaviour in the locality, as well as keeping and improving alliances through marriage and through business contracts'.[210] The texts in MS Wood Empt. 18 – particularly a number of the charms and *experimenta* – reflect such concerns, offering their readers the means of preventing slander, improving alliances and winning favour, overcoming enemies, and discerning between friend and foe. The miscellaneous nature of the manuscript discussed here, with its tracts on human and equine medicine, horse breeding, and fortune-telling suggests that it may have been owned by a member of the gentry or urban classes, who may not have had the means necessary to commission large numbers of books devoted to separate topics.[211] Modest financial means are suggested by the physical nature of the manuscript, which is economically made, while the frequency of scribal mistakes, which have been crossed out and corrected in the course of copying, hint at inexperience. However, the reading material itself certainly suggests a user who had an eye to rising through the ranks of society, and the tracts on equine care and the Latin verse oracle, for example, certainly belie the inexpensive presentation of the codex. We can interpret the contents of the manuscript as a whole as being well aligned with the patterns of reading typical of the gentry classes, with its display of interest in literature that is simultaneously practical and aspirational. We can therefore understand the charms and *experimenta* in the same way: they are practical in nature but the concerns or anxieties that they address represent the aspirational desires of their compiler.

Conclusion

This chapter has – in two parts – presented some of the most prominent concerns facing the gentry and the middling classes, and how they are reflected by the most prevalent charms and *experimenta* in surviving manuscripts. The first half of this chapter explores how these concerns resonate with the fears and desires expressed or recorded in other types of documentation from the period, from literary texts to court records, personal letters to pastoral literature. Overall, the unifying theme here is social

[210] Radulescu, 'Literature', p. 101.

[211] Deborah Youngs, 'Cultural Networks', in *Gentry Culture in Late-Medieval England*, ed. by Raluca Radulescu and Alison Truelove (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), p. 127.

status: the texts discussed – to conquer enemies, secure friendships and favour, win in court, and prevent malicious gossip – all speak to fears around social decline, and these texts seek the means to uphold or augment social status. Furthermore, looking at how these anxieties are revealed or discussed within extant documentary sources has provided an invaluable insight into real-world examples in which these charms and experiments may have come into play and been utilised. This helps us to understand these ritual texts beyond their significance as surviving literary material, and instead to see how their conception, evolution and transmission may have been generated by real-life concerns. In the uncanny echo between the words used in charms against enemies and Margaret Paston's letter sign-offs it becomes apparent that the language of charms was ubiquitous, while the prohibition to use charms or experiments during judicial combat – as described in the Pastons' Grete Boke – makes clear that such practices were known to have been exploited during particularly crucial moments.

A closer examination of the language used in some of the charms and experiments explored above has revealed a clear desire of the practitioner to regulate, suppress, or control others, while the utility of some texts underpins ambition and aspiration, and the impulse to influence and enhance relationships with others. I have demonstrated that, while at first glance this might seem subversive, the parameters within which these practices would have operated are closely aligned with social conventions. Instead, then, these texts offer a practitioner the means of asserting agency in a way which conforms to, and thus re-inscribes these conventions, but in a way which assures that the practitioner will get the outcome that is desired. Thus, an examination of charms and *experimenta* which perform social functions broadens the scholarly conversation around agency in the Middle Ages. It asserts that these texts are an important source, not only for our understanding of the most prominent social concerns facing medieval people, but also to offer us a new way of understanding how such concerns may have been mitigated.

The second half of this chapter has explored the manuscript contexts of some of the charms and *experimenta* cited. Through three case studies, it reveals how these texts align closely with the typical reading patterns of the gentry and, furthermore, demonstrates that they support the contention of previous scholarship that manuscripts – and their contents – play an important part in the identity formation and self-fashioning of their owners. I argue that the lesser studied texts in the well-known

manuscript Harley MS 2253 – texts which scholars are often unsure how to typologise – actually speak to the same concerns that the more famous literary pieces reflect, and that the charms and *experimenta* on the last folio of quire 14 and throughout quire 15 have been chosen with intentionality by the scribe to offer solutions to the type of concerns that were likely to have been experienced by his gentry or noble patrons. Meanwhile, the charms and experiments in the commonplace book of Humphrey Newton can be understood in the light of the 'rural acquisitiveness' displayed by the rest of the manuscript, and reflect his interest in exploring and pushing boundaries, as well as controlling the unpredictable and maintaining stability. Finally, I demonstrate that MS Wood Empt. 18 – though compiled and read by an unknown figure – once more speaks to many of the prominent concerns of the gentry. The charms and *experimenta*, which tackle a number of issues, including many concerning social relations, resonate closely with the interests revealed by other texts in the codex, which are aspirational in nature, and suggest that the compiler was collecting texts which would facilitate integration with gentry or noble peers, as well as provide the means to uncover the unknown and to access the esoteric.

Chapter Two: Charms and *experimenta* for theft

The previous chapter delineated a series of anxieties that were experienced frequently in the medieval period around social relations and, more specifically, with regard to social status and fear of social decline. It demonstrated how the purpose or utility of charms and experiments found in medieval manuscripts reflects the same anxieties which are revealed by other contemporaneous literary and documentary sources, such as poetry, pastoral literature, and family letter archives. In doing so, it suggested that charms and experiments constitute a personal response to, or attempt to mitigate, these anxieties, and that these texts represent one strategy available to medieval people to support self-determination in the social sphere. This chapter will home in on texts centred around a different problem: theft. Texts to prevent theft or to identify thieves are prolific in medieval manuscripts, representing well over a quarter of my entire corpus of non-medical charms and *experimenta*. The quantity of texts concerning theft – and the variations in the terminology that they use, as well as the specific ways in which they are conceived to work – allows for deeper analysis. However, theft is useful to study, not just because it is the problem that stimulates the most commonly occurring texts, but because it reflects a combination of social, domestic, and economic concerns. Possessions were closely tied to social status and social identity. As Alexandra Shepard notes, 'households were constituted by their moveable property as well as by their members, in ways that encouraged slippage between people and their things in the process of social estimation'.[1] Furthermore, from an anthropological perspective, the ownership of objects can be understood in the context of interpersonal relationships: rights over property are not so much about the relationship between person and object, as they are about rights between people *in relation* to property.[2] As we shall see shortly, some texts are concerned with the identity and status of the perpetrator, some highlight anxiety around the permeability of the medieval home, while others betray a sense of bodily vulnerability. At times, we

[1]Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 35.

[2] David Warren Sabean and Hans Medick, 'Interest and Emotion in Family and Kinship Studies: A Critique of Social History and Anthropology', in *Interest and Emotion: Essays on the Study of Family and Kinship*, ed. by Hans Medick and David Warren Sabean (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 9–27 (p. 13).

can identify parallels being drawn between the external boundaries of the body and of the home or residential plot. The texts also point towards the economic impact of theft and the value placed on possessions, as well as underpinning an undeniable sense of desire for social or judicial – or extra-judicial – justice. The variety, and often esoteric and syncretic nature, of these texts demonstrates the creativity that came into play when developing practices to confront and allay fears around theft. Exploring them in more depth can shed significant light on how the practices they represent might have participated within certain social, domestic, and judicial moments, or operated within – or outside of – these contexts.

Given the plurality of contexts at play here, this chapter will rely on a plurality of methodologies in its analysis. It will draw on sociological and anthropological research – both more generally and as applied to the medieval period – around the regulation of forms of social misconduct, crime, and the settlement of disputes. Theory around objects will also inform my understanding of these texts, particularly the way in which object ownership is closely linked to social status and reputation, and how objects can be understood to create or mediate a relationship between thief and victim. I will also take on a historicist approach, exploring whether there is a relationship between the legal, judicial, and religious responses to theft in the medieval period and the specific aims of these charms and experiments. Finally, I will employ close textual analysis in order to consider the significance of language around the prevention and detection of theft, and how this can further our understanding of social or interpersonal interactions, as well as the conception of the domestic space and its goods.

Due to the abundance of surviving charms and experiments for theft, these texts have been the focus of more scholarship than those discussed in the previous chapter. Multiple examples of, or variations on, the same text-type allow scholars to investigate the evolution and transmission of certain charms for thieves in a way that is not always possible for the other texts that survive in more limited numbers. This is especially the case with those that fall outside of the corpus of common medical charms that travel in the *Leechcraft* or other similar medical tracts, and which therefore tend to be rarer, or have fewer surviving analogues.[3] Early case studies on charms

[3] A good example of where this has been possible based on the body of medical charms in the *Leechcraft* can be found in Lea T. Olsan, 'The Corpus of Charms in the Middle English Leechcraft Remedy Books', in *Charms, Charmers and Charming: International Research on Verbal Magic*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 214–37.

against thieves merely provided edited selections of the texts.[4] However, a more applied analysis of the transmission of the 'God was born in Bethlehem' charm for theft, so-labelled because this phrase forms the first line of the text in all surviving examples, can be found in T.M. Smallwood's essay of the same name.[5] Smallwood traces the transmission and evolution of this charm, identifying a number of different derivatives, primarily through following the trajectory of one key motif, the assertion that 'neither wolf nor thief' was present at Christ's nativity. The chronology of Smallwood's investigation begins with an Old English example and ends with a creative re-working of the text that can be found in an early seventeenth-century manuscript.[6] He concludes that the charm likely split into two branches during at least one moment in its transmission, leading to the mention of the wolf dropping out of use in one stemmatic line, but continuing to circulate in another.

Like Smallwood, Stephen Stallcup records and analyses various examples of just one text, in this case a ritual to identify a thief, frequently referred to as the 'Eye of Abraham' charm. This involves painting an eye on a wall, gathering those whom you suspect before it, and hammering a nail into the painting, causing the eye of the guilty party to weep and water.[7] This experiment has a surviving analogue in a fourth-century Greek papyrus, but the earliest Middle English example occurs in the mid-fifteenth century manuscript now known as London, British Library, Additional MS 34111.[8] Stallcup identifies and edits five different versions of this charm; however, though the texts diverge in the language of their invocations, with some in Latin and others in a, now unintelligible, language, as well as the specific instruments they employ – for example a copper nail or a cypress pencil to strike the painting with – he acknowledges that it is as yet not possible to determine a chronology for these five versions, nor a stemmatic relationship between them.[9]

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[4] See J. M. McBryde, 'Charms for Thieves', *Modern Language Notes*, 22.6 (1907), 168–70; Curt F. Bühler, 'Middle English Verses against Thieves', *Speculum*, 33.3 (1958), 371–72.

[5] T.M. Smallwood, '"God Was Born in Bethlehem...": The Tradition of a Middle English Charm', *Medium Ævum*, 58.2 (1989), 206–23.

[6] Smallwood, '"God Was Born in Bethlehem..."', pp. 213, 215.

[7] Stephen Stallcup, 'The "Eye of Abraham" Charm for Thieves: Versions in Middle and Early Modern English', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 10.1 (2015), 23–40.

[8] Stallcup, 'The "Eye of Abraham"', pp. 25–26.

[9] Stallcup, 'The "Eye of Abraham"', p. 26.

The texts examined in Smallwood's and Stallcup's case studies are selected based initially on their shared purpose – to prevent theft or identify a thief – and then on their shared motifs: in Smallwood's case their similarity in phraseology, the 'God was born in Bethlehem' opening line, and in Stallcup's text, the direction to paint the Eye of Abraham upon the wall. These texts have been extracted from a much larger corpus of charms and experiments concerning theft due to their commonalities, and their study has been structured based on these unifying themes. George Keiser devotes a section to charms against thieves and enemies in his survey of texts in Middle English, but his attempt to assign these texts to logical subgroups demonstrates just how difficult they are to categorise.[10] He creates categories based on motif, for example those featuring the 'God was born in Bethlehem' narrative, but also based on method, for example identification of a thief through dreams. Furthermore, he also creates a group defined by the type of invocation used: what he calls conjurations based on their use of the term 'I conjure'. But these divisions are beset by overlaps and contradictions. Keiser lists one text found in London, British Library, Sloane MS 2584 within the section 'Saint Bartholomew Charm Against Thieves' based on its motif, even though this text also uses the phrase 'I conjure' within its invocation.[11] This is just one instance where a text has been consigned to one category when it could just as easily fit within another, the inevitable product of trying to impose a rigid classification system upon a messily interpenetrating corpus of works.

Chiara Benati's case study on charms against thieves is structured around the division of these texts into three categories: those which are aimed at preventing theft, those which are designed to stop the thief and recover the stolen property, and those which aid in the identification and punishment of thieves.[12] Benati's case study spans a wide period of time – the earliest charm she considers is ninth century and the latest is from a seventeenth century source – as well as a large geographical range. This ultimately renders it more descriptive than analytical, though it does provide a useful

[10] George R. Keiser, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, ed. by Albert E Hartung and John Edwin Wells (New Haven, Conn.: Connecticut Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1998), X, pp. 3874–76.

[11] Keiser, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, X, p. 3875.

[12] Chiara Benati, 'Painted Eyes, Magical Sieves and Carved Runes: Charms for Catching and Punishing Thieves in the Medieval and Early Modern Germanic Tradition', in *Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Time: The Occult in Pre-Modern Sciences, Medicine, Literature, Religion, and Astrology*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 149–218.

synthesis of existing research into charms against thieves. Her wide remit also allows us to acknowledge the diffusion of these texts across borders and continents, and to identify similarities in methods and motifs in multiple languages, while appreciating the different supernatural or preternatural agents called upon – for example through her inclusion of texts which invoke the Norse gods and therefore do not operate within a Christian cosmology.

While the sub-categories employed by Benati primarily serve as a means for her to organise this very wide-ranging corpus into a more structured overview, they do offer a useful paradigm. Considering these texts based on the moment they might be used against a timeline of theft, that is to prevent or protect against theft, to inhibit or apprehend a thief in the act, and to identify and perhaps punish, allows us to consider how these practices might have been deployed at particular moments, and to analyse how they best align with the specific fears or intentions of their users. This chapter resists the impulse to apply rigid categories and instead looks to the ways in which these texts are designed to be activated as an entry point for study. In looking at the texts, I ask: how do they position the user in relation to their home or domestic residence, their goods and chattels, other members of their household, their neighbours and wider community, suspected criminals, and even their own body? I start by considering texts which offer a protective function – either of the body, the home and household goods, or both, before going on to consider texts which contain more proactive or offensive elements to apprehend the thief. Finally, I consider those which seek to identify, and perhaps even punish, the thief, outside of the judicial system or the typical confines of the law. While I have created three disentangled domains for the purposes of setting up a schematic organisation for my analysis, these domains are, of course, not discrete in either concept or practice, but rather tend to be synchronic.

Protection and prevention: securing the body and the home against thieves

Charms against thieves which perform a protective role only, that is, they are designed to prevent theft, but they do not specify that they will apprehend the would-be-thief in the act, make up a relatively small number. Furthermore, twelve of the fifteen

protective charms I have identified are part of the same tradition, drawing on the 'God was born in Bethlehem' motif mentioned above. The remaining three are textually different, but they are united by another common motif: the names of the two thieves crucified beside Christ which are given in the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus.[13] The majority of the 'God was born in Bethlehem' texts are found in the *Leechcraft*, a book of medical remedies which survives in at least twenty-two manuscripts.[14] It is thus named because of the rhyming prologue, which prefaces sixteen of its known manuscript witnesses:

> Þe man þat wele of lechecraft lere
> Rede on þis bok and he may here
> Many a medicyn boþ good and trewe
> To hele sores boþ olde and newe.[15]

Although the *Leechcraft* is recognised as a distinct text in its own right, its contents vary considerably. Lea Olsan's study of charms that are found in the *Leechcraft* makes clear the discrepancies between surviving witnesses to the tract. While the number of charms in the *Leechcraft* typically ranges from about fifteen to eighteen, Olsan describes seven manuscript witnesses which contain no charms at all, and three manuscripts which hold over twenty.[16] However, although the precise selection of remedies and charms differs from manuscript to manuscript, where a charm against theft is included, it is always the 'God was born in Bethlehem' text. Though Smallwood's essay on this charm highlights its long tradition, whereby it may have been altered to reflect changing priorities or concerns, the version of the text that occurs in the *Leechcraft* is very stable, making a strong case for written transmission and careful copying from remedy book to remedy book.[17] I provide below a representative example; where there are small variations in the text, these might be

[13] Benati, 'Painted Eyes', p. 151.

[14] Olsan, 'The Corpus of Charms in the Middle English Leechcraft Remedy Books'; George R. Keiser, 'Verse Introductions to Middle English Medical Treatises', *English Studies*, 84.4 (2003), 301–17.

[15] Cambridge, University Library, Additional MS 9308, fol. 1r.

[16] Olsan, 'The Corpus of Charms in the Middle English Leechcraft Remedy Books', pp. 216–17.

[17] Smallwood, in '"God Was Born in Bethlehem..."' suggests, for example, that the mention of a wolf may have fallen out of use over the centuries as the likelihood of a wolf attack diminished (p.212).

revealing about the specific concerns or anxieties of the copyist, and I will address these in due course.

> A charme ageyns theves. In Bethleem God was born betwen to bestis. To reste he was leyde. In þat stede was neyther þeof ne man bot þe Holy Trinite. Þilke selve God þat þere was born defende oure bodys and oure catels fro þeves and al manere myscheves and harmes, where so we wende, be londe or be water be niȝte or be day. Be tyde or be tyme, Amen.[18]

In its request for protection, the text goes through a sort of checklist of points: identification of each of these points provides clarity about what, precisely, the practitioner is asking for. This also helps us to conceive of the types of situation in which this text might have been deployed. If we look at the crime of theft in the Middle Ages, the way and means by which it was carried out, the items typically stolen, and the types of perpetrators themselves, we can identify parallels with the specific requests made in the latter half of this charm text. Terminology used in contemporary treatises as well as trial evidence shows that the use of specific words to describe the act of theft could reflect different conceptions of the crime. For example, the term 'robbery' often implied the use of force, including physical violence, while 'burglary' typically connoted breaking into a house.[19] Meanwhile, the term 'larceny' was usually employed to signify the removal of moveable goods and chattels against the will of their owner, but not necessarily by forcible or violent entry into a property.[20] Barbara Hanawalt's deep dive into crime and conflict in the Middle Ages uses criminal court records to provide a comprehensive insight into theft – among other crimes – during the period.[21] Hanawalt's reliance on court records to draw conclusions about patterns in both the frequency of certain criminal acts, as well as the way in which they were prosecuted, is not without pitfalls, primarily due to discrepancies in the surviving

[18] London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library MS 542, fol. 15r.

[19] Elizabeth Papp Kamali, *Felony and the Guilty Mind in Medieval England* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2019), pp. 223–24.

[20] Kamali, *Felony and the Guilty Mind in Medieval England*, p. 222.

[21] Barbara Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1979).

records from different regions, as well as the level of detail they include.[22] However, it remains the most in-depth analysis of such records, particularly of those which pertain to theft, to have been conducted over the last fifty years, and is therefore an immensely valuable resource for recognising parallels between the concerns expressed by the charms and the known realities of crime in the Middle Ages.

The first petition expressed in the charm cited above – 'defende oure bodys' – demonstrates that the primary concern is bodily vulnerability, in relation to theft. Seeking physical protection, over and above the protection of property, speaks to the violent nature of theft which is underpinned by many of the surviving court records. In domestic settings, violence was usually a secondary consequence of burglary if the victim was unlucky enough to come into contact with the perpetrator. Hanawalt suggests that surprise encounters between thief and resident were relatively uncommon.[23] Around fifty per cent of burglaries were carried out either by someone from the same village or by a person who lived within a five-mile radius of the victim. They therefore likely knew the habits of their target and could plan a burglary around a time they knew that there was a higher chance that the victim would be out.[24] Nevertheless, if their calculations were wrong and they encountered the inhabitants, Hanawalt suggests that the perpetrator was more inclined to silence their victims permanently, rather than temporarily.[25] Robbery on the other hand, by its nature, was more likely than burglary to result in grievous harm or in the death of the victim. The records show that, whereas burglary and larceny were frequently carried out by local, unarmed people, robbery was more likely to be committed by strangers who were in possession of weapons of warfare, such as swords and battle axes.[26] Hanawalt finds that 7.8 per cent of recorded cases of robbery resulted in homicide, while it is likely that many more ended in personal injury to the victim.[27] Therefore, with the very real threat that theft presented to one's person, not just property, it is understandable that the primary request expressed in this charm denotes anxiety around physical harm and bodily vulnerability.

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[22] Anthony Musson and Edward Powell, *Crime, Law and Society in the Later Middle Ages:* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), p. 69.

[23] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 81.

[24] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 81.

[25] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 81.

[26] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 84.

[27] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 83.

The subsequent concern reflected in the text, however, is for 'catels'. Within the peasant economy livestock was of high value, and animals were therefore – unsurprisingly – the most commonly stolen possessions, particularly through larceny which was often the method employed both by and against those of lower social status.[28] However, while the word 'catels' can be understood as cattle or livestock, it also meant, and was used to signify, 'chattels' or goods and possessions more generally, including treasure, money, land, income and property.[29] The term, therefore, accommodates the concerns of a wide spectrum of social statuses. This is even more important when we acknowledge that those who would have possessed the manuscripts in which these charms appear would have had – at least modest, perhaps even significant – financial means, and that their anxieties around loss of property would likely have extended beyond that of livestock. Smallwood, in his analysis of the antecedents of this charm, suggests that 'catels' in this context may have specifically implied livestock in the text's earliest inceptions, but that as the centuries passed it would have been more likely to refer to chattels.[30] This suggestion is purely speculative: we cannot infer an evolution in the specific desires of the users of these texts from the static and continued use of one word. However there are later, more interpretative seventeenth-century examples of this charm type, which have exchanged the word 'catels' for 'goods'. This suggests, not necessarily an evolution in the needs or desires of the practitioner, but that at a later point this word was understood to mean possessions, rather than specifically indicating animals.[31]

The last two lines of the charm broaden its applicability. While 'þeves' are stated as the foremost threat, the text also cites other 'myscheves and harmes', expanding the utility of the charm to encompass other eventualities, reflecting a more general plea for protection. While the word 'mischiefs' may seem trivial to a modern reader, its Middle English predecessor had a more serious meaning, indicating trouble, disaster, deprivation, and even evil and sin, thus covering a wide remit.[32] Similarly, the final words 'where so we wende be londe or be water be niȝte or be day be tyde or be tyme'

[28] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p.70; p. 132.

[29] See 'catel' in *Middle English Compendium*, ed. by Frances McSparran et al., Online Edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2018).

[30] Smallwood, '"God Was Born in Bethlehem..."', p. 212.

[31] For example, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS e Mus. 243, fol. 36v.

[32] See 'mischef' in McSparran et al., *Middle English Compendium*.

add further items to the text's checklist for protection. This phrase takes the charm emphatically outside of a domestic setting: the word 'wende' very clearly denotes movement and travel, suggesting a vulnerability associated with being in transit. Robbery on the road was a routine hazard of travel, especially in areas where goods of higher value were regularly transported.[33] The threat of theft *en route* is discussed in several of the Paston letters, which make evident that such a threat was sufficient to impede the transfer and transport of goods and money between family members. Margaret Paston asks her husband to take care of a payment on behalf of her aunt, because 'she dare not aventure here money to be brought up to London for feere of robbyng, for it [is] seide heere that there goothe many thefys be-twyx this and London'.[34] Several years later, she writes to her son '[a]s fore my rowndlet of wyne, I schuld send ȝow mony there-fore, but I dare not putyt in joparte, there be so many theves stereng. John Lovedayes man was robbyd in-to hys schyrte as he cam hom ward'.[35] The use of words such as 'dare not', 'fear', and 'jeopardy' stress the very real impact that the risk of theft had on everyday life, and the anxiety that it incited. In the 'God was born in Bethlehem' charm, the extension of the protection outside of, or at least beyond, the domestic setting, differentiates it from many of the charms which perform a more defensive or proactive role, and which we will shortly see are more specific to the four walls of a residential property.

The alliterative phrase 'be tyde or be tyme', using words almost synonymous in meaning, serves as a final 'catch all' for the charm. The duality of the situations which the charm conceives of – land *or* water, night *or* day – reaches both ends of the spectrum, ensuring that the protection delivered covers any eventuality. However, this also reinforces the omnipresence of the threat of theft and evokes a sense of sustained and unrelenting vulnerability, much in the same way that the mentions of theft in the Paston letters do. This 'catch all' phrase also suggests an attempt to give the charm some permanence, or some degree of staying power. By covering a multitude of moments – both temporal and physical – in which it might be needed, it suggests that it could be performed once and its power would remain in place for a longer or more indefinite period of time, with no need to be repeated on a daily or regular basis. That

[33] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 83.

[34] Paston Letters and Papers, no. 156.

[35] Paston Letters and Papers, no. 212.

is, the broader applicability it acquires through listing the full range of situations in which it might be needed means that it is not specific to a certain moment. While we might imagine it being recited early in the morning, prior to the user undertaking a long journey by road, by virtue of the fact that it also covers sea voyages and mentions night as well as day, we can infer that the charm could be recited in order to ensure sustained protection, even if the user stepped aboard a ship or if the sun set.

As mentioned, the text of this charm is typically very stable, with minimal alterations sustained during transmission. However, there is one version of the charm which has acquired a minute change in wording. While the most common version of the charm – as outlined above – conveys a definite sense of bodily vulnerability and is less focused on domestic attacks, a text found in London, British Library, Sloane MS 962 includes fire as a potential danger, bringing the loss or destruction of goods in the home into focus: 'deffende oure bodies and oure catel fro fire, fro theves and alle oþer harmes and eveles'.[36] The addition of this word demonstrates an interjection on the behalf of the copyist to expand the affordances of the charm to include protection of material goods, and perhaps even the very fabric of the home, from what would have been another relatively common but terrifying misfortune.

One final point for consideration is the use of the first-person plural throughout. This is unusual for charm texts, which most often employ the first-person singular, suggesting that they were performed in private and to address specifically personal needs. The use of the first-person plural here is more reminiscent of prayer, perhaps even communal prayer, which addresses God in a supplicatory manner on behalf of – not just the person praying – but their family, and other fellow believers. Despite the insinuation of bodily vulnerability betrayed by the text, it is not just asking for personal protection: there is a sense of community in this use of the plural which indicates that the user of the charm is speaking on behalf of others, perhaps their family, household, or even wider network of friends and neighbours.

This study has so far largely limited itself to analysis of the latter half of the charm text. This is primarily because it is in these lines that the concerns of the user are most explicitly addressed but, secondarily, the reference to Jesus's birth has been the subject of other scholarly studies, which aim to de-mystify the recourse to this

[36] Folio 51r.

narrative or *historiola* in a charm for theft.[37] Lea Olsan has suggested that this narrative is directly related to theft because the presence of the Trinity at Christ's nativity made the place safe (and thus will do the same for one's home).[38] However, one very common tradition of a charm to staunch blood also begins by mentioning Christ's birth in Bethlehem, before going on to recount the story of his baptism in the River Jordan, during which the water stilled. It is generally accepted in the scholarship that this healing charm is understood to work based on this allusion to the Jordan: just as the river stopped flowing, so will the patient's blood. In fact many charms to staunch blood in this tradition draw this parallel themselves, such as the wording of this early-fifteenth century example: 'as þe flym stode so stonde þi blode'.[39] Smallwood suggests that this charm to staunch blood may well have originated from the same tradition as the charm against thieves which shares its first line. A charm for theft from the turn of the fourteenth century, which will be discussed shortly, begins with the allusion to the Nativity, before specifically mentioning the Baptism. It has therefore been suggested that – even in later charms for theft where mention of the Baptism has dropped out of use – the power of this biblical precedent is still being drawn on and, just as it stops the flow of the patient's blood, it will stop the movement of a would-be-thief.[40] Until now, this potential analogue has been purely speculative. However, I have recently found a seventeenth-century charm against thieves which confirms this connection. The text draws on the power of Christ's Baptism to apprehend thieves:

> By the worde that Jesus Christ sayd when he wente into the river of Jordayn and made the water to stand still until he was baptized by holy Saint John Baptist, so by the vertue of that worde, stand you still theeves as the water stoode at that tyme, so that you move not.[41]

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[37] See, among others, Smallwood, '"God Was Born in Bethlehem..."'; Benati, 'Painted Eyes'; Lea T. Olsan, 'Charms in Medieval Memory', in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 59–88; Jonathan Roper, 'Typologising English Charms', in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 128–44.

[38] Olsan, 'Charms in Medieval Memory', p. 69.

[39] London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library MS 406, fol. 4v.

[40] See Roper, 'Typologising English Charms', p. 139; Smallwood also acknowledges this potential connection in '"God Was Born in Bethlehem..."', p. 209.

[41] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS e Mus. 243, fol. 32v.

Confirmation that the phrase ‘God was born in Bethlehem’ may – indirectly – be linked to actively stopping thieves, encourages us to consider whether this text, which appears to be simply protective, may also have a less explicit but nevertheless active coercive property that was intended to constrain the thief.

Defence and apprehension: binding the would-be-thief

The fourteenth-century charm against theft which alludes to both the Nativity and to Christ’s Baptism in the Jordan is explicit, not just about protecting the user and his or her home, but that it will actually act on the body of the would-be-thief to apprehend them:

> God was iborin in Bedlem;
> Iborin he was to Ierusalem,
> Ifolewid in þe Flum Iordan,
> Þer nes inemned ne wolf ne þef.
> Crist and Seinte Trinite, Crist in Seinte Trinite,
> Child with wolf and þef ous and alle oure au[h]te
> Ane alle Godes crafte,
> Seint Huue and Seint Luc
> Withinne wowes and without;
> Seine ous alle aboute,
> Crist and Seint Iohan þe Baptist.
> Þat þou ne me smite
> Ne þu ne bite!
> Þou stond stille als a ston,
> Starc als a ded mon!
> Stond alle wey stille
> Tille hich hab be ydon mi wille![42]

[42] Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS Nouv. Acqu. Lat. 693, fol. 193r-v; transcribed in Smallwood, ‘“God Was Born in Bethlehem...”’, pp. 206–7, in the original text, the letter p has been attached to the beginning of almost every new syllable in the last six lines of the text: Smallwood suggests that this may have been intended to increase the potency of the charm.

While the opening line of this text is familiar to us in the context of the previous discussion, it quickly moves in a different direction, whereby it requests more than just protection for the user, and instead commands the thief to 'stond stille als a ston'. There are over thirty charms in my corpus which include phrasing that is suggestive of the text's potential to 'bind' thieves. The 'still as stone' motif may well find its precedence in a biblical passage from Exodus 15:16, which itself often occurs in charms for theft:

> *Irruat super eos formido et pavor, in magnitudine brachii tui: fiant immobiles quasi lapis donec pertranseat populus tuus, Domine, donec pertranseat populus tuus iste quem possedisti*.
>
> [Fear and dread shall fall upon them; by the greatness of thine arm they shall be as still as a stone; till thy people pass over, O Lord, till the people pass over, which thou hast purchased.]

In the Old Testament, these lines form part of the narrative of Moses leading the Israelites out of Egypt. The longer biblical passage from which these lines are extracted refers more specifically to the binding of enemies, and it is likely for this reason that these lines are commonly found in charms against enemies, thieves, or both, in the Middle Ages. In charms for theft, these lines from Exodus are frequently paired with a narrative of Dismas and Gesmas, the two thieves who were crucified beside Christ.[43] For example, this fifteenth-century charm in Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.5.48:

> *Contra ffures et latrones.*
> *Disparibus meritis pendent tria corpora ramis*
> *Dismas et Gesmas medio divina potestas*
> *Summa petit Dismas sed tendit ad infima Iesmas* +
> *Nos et res nostras servet divina potestas* +
> *Irruat super eos formido et pavor; in magnitudine brachii tui* + *fiant inmobiles quasi lapis donec pertranseat populus tuus domine donec*

[43] Benati, 'Painted Eyes', p. 151.

pertranseat populus tuus iste quem possidisti + introduces eos et plantabis in monte hereditatis tue firmissime Habitaculo tuo quod operatus es domine + Iesus autem transiens per medium illorum ibat + sic et me transire iubeas securum et pereant + hos versus dicas vel portas super te nec te nec tua perdas + Christus vivit + Christus vincit + Christus regnat + Christus imperat + Christus me .N. ab istis furibus et latronibus et ab omnibus malis defendat. Amen.

[Against thieves and robbers. On account of disparate merits, three bodies hang from boughs. Dismas and Gesmas, and Divine Power in the middle. Dismas reaches toward the highest [heaven], but Gesmas stretches toward the deepest [hell] + Let Divine Power protect us and our possessions + Let fear and dread fall upon them, in the greatness of your arm + Let [them] become immovable just as a stone, until your people, O Lord, pass by, until this your people, whom you have possessed, + you will bring them in and plant [them] in the mountain of your inheritance, very firmly in your habitation, which you have made, O Lord + but Jesus, passing through the midst of them, went [his way] + in such a way also command me to pass by secure and let [them] be destroyed + [if you should] say or carry upon you these verses neither yourself nor your [possessions] [would you] lose + Christ lives + Christ conquers + Christ reigns + Christ rules + Let Christ, me - *Nomen* - from such thieves and robbers, and from all evil [things], defend. Amen.][44]

Here, the text does not explicitly state that it will bind the thief, but assures the user that both they, and their personal property, will be protected if they follow the given instructions: 'say or carry upon you these verses and neither yourself nor your possessions will you lose […] Christ, defend me .N. from such thieves and robbers, and from all evils'. Another fifteenth-century Latin charm in London, British Library, Additional MS 19674 draws on both the crucifixion of Dismas and Gesmas and the

[44] Folio 10v; transcription and translation in Jack R. Baker, 'Christ's Crucifixion and "Robin Hood and the Monk": A Latin Charm Against Thieves in Cambridge University Library, MS Ff.5.48', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 14.1 (2008), 71–85 (pp. 79–80).

Exodus passage, but makes clear through its title that it will actually apprehend thieves: '*ad restringendum latrones'*, or 'to bind thieves'.[45] Similarly, these two motifs occur in Latin in a charm in London, British Library, Sloane MS 56. They are followed by a short passage of rhyming verse in Middle English, which serves both as a non-literal translation of the Latin text as well as to describe in further detail how the charm will act upon thieves:

> On bowes of tre of gret myght
> Hengene thre bodys be day light.
> Jesus henge heme betwene
> Dismas and Iesmas and þat was sene.
> Dismas to Jesus he gane calle
> And Iesmas in wanhoppe [*despair*] anone gonne falle
> This wordis þou shal say
> Be þou in towne wodde or way
> If any þeffe þe robbe or reve
> Of any goode þat ben þe leve.
> Ne stirre he no mor þan the stone
> Stot on footte motte þer ferrere goone
> Til Jesus have done his wreche
> Þat of sorowe is best leche.[46]

Other texts go beyond the promise of binding the thief and describe further punishment that the performance of the charm will set in motion. The implications of this, and the specific language associated with binding thieves – especially with regard to interpersonal relations and to personal agency – will be examined in much closer detail further on in this section. Initially however, it will be useful to explore the locations that these charm texts might specifically pertain to; this can help us to envisage the moments at which they might have been used, and to understand how they may have been deployed within certain social and domestic settings. The domestic residence might seem like the obvious primary locus for a charm against theft but, as we saw

[45] Folio 24v.

[46] Folio 100r; the text is laid out as prose in the manuscript, but I have presented it here as verse in accordance with the rhyme scheme.

with the ‘God was born in Bethlehem’ charm, protection was sought in other locations too. Similarly, the text in Sloane MS 56 quoted directly above guards against theft when in ‘towne wodde or way’, suggesting it is more suitable for use against robbery rather than burglary. This is of course compounded by its own use of the word ‘robbe’, though there was not necessarily always a differentiation between these terms, particularly outside of a legal context.[47] However, there are other charms which make specific reference to the domestic residence and its surrounding land. This sub-category of texts highlights an anxiety which centres around the transgression of a property’s boundary lines. By considering the location – and any other instructions – for performance, as indicated by the wording of the texts themselves, we can also begin to reconstruct how this performance may have looked in practice. This moves the study of these texts out of their written, or manuscript, contexts; moreover, it offers us the opportunity to make comparisons with other rituals, such as the church-sanctioned parish ritual of ‘beating the bounds’, which will be discussed in due course.

Several surviving charms against thieves include linguistic cues which make clear that they are intended for deployment specifically within the domestic space. For example, the title of one of four charms for theft that have been recorded in a manuscript from the turn of the fifteenth century, now known as London, British Library, Sloane MS 2584, specifically refers to the domestic space as the locus that is in need of protection. Rather than being described as a ‘*carmen contra latrones’* as is common, it is instead introduced as ‘*coniuracio bona pro latronibus venientibus ad domum*’: a useful charm for thieves coming into the house.[48] Similarly, the title of a slightly later, short charm in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS 1378 states that it will ‘binde a house a gaynste theffes’.[49] In other instances, charms reveal that the house is the primary locus for defence through the wording of the invocations themselves instead. A text in Cambridge, Trinity College Library, MS R. 14. 45 (916) uses the word ‘house’ three times in its invocation:

> Hous I the be ken to þe best þat ys in hevyn oure Lorde hymselve and hys apostyllys xij God and Seynt Clere and Seynt Rychere Seynt

[47] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 66.

[48] London, British Library, Sloane MS 2584, fols. 74v - 75r.

[49] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS 1378, p. 83; likely a sixteenth century hand.

> Crystofyr and Seynt Benedicte kepe thys hous and thys place thys nyȝght yff there any mann woman or chylde by hous or place þat hathe eny spyte to the he stonde as stylle as stone on hylle as stone on more as dede mann on flore.[50]

A curious fifteenth-century text that survives in London, British Library, Sloane MS 3556 makes reference to the home, but in a central passage it refines the epicentre of protection even further. In a more detailed description of the domestic space, it paints a tableau of the practitioner's bed surrounded by five divine or holy agents: Saints Peter and Paul, the Archangel Michael, God, and the Virgin Mary, primed to waylay any would-be-thief.

> Erliche in a mornynge wos I of my bedde, I fonde Cristis hiȝe name wryten on my nebbe. Hit is sooth hit is no lees/ Miȝchel and Marye and Seint Co[?] he schal wise me the weie to Seint Thomas that he mot be my leche in to domesdaie/ I wente forth by the grene weie. Þere I mette oure ladie soore wepinge. Sche bare here sone upon here arme towarde naylynge/ Peter bere me lorde quod he y dar not whie so Peter lorde for these þeefis/ Peter alle þese thefis stille schal thei stonde. As stif stake doth in londe. Ffor þei can so manye wordis as I canne / Peter that schal never be. Lete hem stonde til I bidde hem goo/ As stille schal þe thefis stonde as stif stake stonte in londe for y bydde hem goo/ Peter that schal never be lete hem stonde til y bidde hem goo/ Ffrom home I schal goo, thys place I wil be sette, ȝif enie thef heere with þou come my kynde catel or goode to fette/ I set the Holye Goost hem bi fore these thefis for to lette. Marchus. Matheu. Luke. And Ion/ That beth the foure gospeleres closid in oon the Fader and the Sone closid in oo[n] Godhede. As clerkis in here bokys doo rede Peter at the heed Poule at the foot, Miȝchel a mydde/ God and Seynt Marie stonde to fore my bedde the thefis for to lette. / These wordis that y haue seid heere schal bynde these thefis so soore/ As dyde seint Barthilmewe þe devyl with his berde so hoore/ The devyl he

[50] Cambridge, Trinity College, MS R.14.45 (916), p. 118.

bonde but never he lete/ But doun he trad him under his ffeet/ I schal bete men thus and bynde men thus of wikkyd mood/ And all thoo that wolde me oþere than good/ In the vertue of Cristis preciouse blood. And with vertu of the masse and all þe wordis more and lasse/ In the vertu of gras, erthe, and ston/ And Goddis bodie to leve upon/ I wis þere was never god but on never was nor neuer schal be/ Hit is the Fadir, Sone, and Holie Goost that beth yloke in Trinite/ Ffirst be he at our comynge. And sithe at oure endynge/ In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti Amen.[51]

This text is unusually long in comparison to other texts of this genre, and combines motifs from several other charms against thieves that usually circulate independently in the manuscript tradition, as well as other short popular rhymes. For example an antiquarian project from 1810, which provides a commentary on certain extracts of early printed texts, makes note of some handwritten 'popish rhimes' that occupy the margins of a printed *Horae* from 1502. One of these rhymes possesses a clear intertextuality with the Sloane MS 3556 text and its narrative of the Virgin weeping for her crucified son 'by the grene weie'.

The little Credo
I mett with our lady in a greene way
With a stocke and a locke I say
Shee sighed full soare for her deare sonne
Which was nayled through hande
And foote to his brayne panne
Well is the man that this creede canne
His fellowe to teache
To heaven he shall reache.[52]

[51] London, British Library, Sloane MS 3556, fol. 8v; the text has seemingly been inserted on a blank folio by a subsequent user of the manuscript (though still in what appears to be a fifteenth century hand) as it is upside down. Though at times the text approximates verse, it has been written out by the scribe as prose with the line breaks indicated, this is reflected in the transcription. Damage to the upper right corner of the folio obscures the name of the Saint referred to in the second line.

[52] Joseph Ames, *Typographical Antiquities; Or, The History of Printing in England, Scotland, and Ireland* (Albermarle Street: William Miller, 1812), II, p. 108.

Similarly, where the Sloane MS 3556 charm draws on the power of the Mass, as well as the virtues of grass, earth, and stone, it is clearly co-opting elements of another shorter charm against thieves, such as this one found in London, British Library, Sloane MS 2457, which includes the lines:

> And in the vertu of thi rith arm save and defende me fro al harm. And <be the vertu of that hie masse> þat ever was y saide more and lasse. And bi alle the vertues of word, ston, gras, and tre. And al other vertues that ever may be.[53]

The Sloane MS 3556 text is unique: it is the only extant witness for this exact version of the charm, perhaps a written record of one iteration that was in oral circulation at the time, or otherwise a creative endeavour by the scribe, who amalgamated a number of protective texts in order to create a charm of maximum power.[54] One other significant phrase it deploys, and which shows evidence of intertextuality with other charms against thieves is as follows: 'Ffrom home I schal goo thys place I wil be sette ȝif enie thef heere with þou come my kynde catel or goode to fette/ I set the Holye Goost hem bi fore these thefis for to lette'. This phrase directly correlates with a text that is usually referred to as the 'Saint Bartholomew' charm against thieves, and which in fact also incorporates the motif used later on in the Sloane MS 3556 text, which describes Saint Bartholomew binding the devil.[55] This passage consolidates the home as the locus for performance, while providing an insight into the belongings the practitioner is most afraid of losing: livestock, as well as other material possessions. But it is the words 'be sette' that are of most interest. This term, also commonly found in Middle English as one word, 'bisette', has a range of meanings, but the most

[53] Fols. 8v – 9r; the phrase 'be the vertu of that hie masse' has been scratched away, but is readable with the use of ultraviolet light.

[54] I have not identified an analogue text in my database of over 130 charms against thieves. While the Sloane MS 3556 text features passages from other common charms against thieves, there are no close matches for the Sloane charm in full.

[55] For a list of manuscripts which contain this particular charm see Keiser, *A Manual of the Writings in Middle English, 1050-1500*, X, pp. 3874–76; for a transcription of one version of this charm found in Sloane MS 2584 see Douglas Gray, 'Notes on Some Middle English Charms', in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of Rossell Hope Robbins*, ed. by Beryl Rowland (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1974), pp. 56–71 (p. 66).

relevant here is to surround or envelope.[56] The text therefore suggests that the practitioner will deploy the charm immediately prior to leaving the house, but that more specifically, their performance of the charm will cover – or envelope – the domestic residence with a sphere of protection. This conveys the sense that the words of the invocation possess the power to create a forcefield around the property. I will now consider how movement, in combination with spoken words, may be understood to anchor this forcefield in place.

A second charm against thieves in London, British Library, Sloane MS 2584, includes the supplication:

> God and Seint Trinite, save alle þinges þat is me lof, wiþinne þis hous and wit oute and alle þe way aboute. I be teche God to day and to nyȝt and to Seint Feyþfolde þat he kepe us and oure hom from alle manere of wyckede enemys and þeues.[57]

As with the texts cited above, the references to 'hous' and 'hom' make clear the practitioner's concerns for their domestic property, but the language used here also allows us to begin spatially mapping the performance of the charm. The construction of the phrase 'wiþinne þis hous and without' – particularly the use of the demonstrative pronoun 'this' – suggests that the charm could be performed from inside the property, in anticipation of a threat. As this line continues, however, the defence of the property is extended beyond the four walls of the house to encompass the full residential plot: 'alle þe way aboute'. Here, we can imagine that the practitioner stands at the centre of the web of protection, using the words of the invocation to propel the property's defence, a nebulous shield that can be expanded and stretched, as far as is desired. But by verbally touching on the different areas the charm will protect, the construction of the supplication allows us to imagine that the charm may have in fact been performed while circulating the property, crossing the threshold to encompass both the interior and the exterior of the house.

We are given an idea of how this performance might have looked in practice in Chaucer's 'The Miller's Tale', a narrative which very much revolves around the threat

[56] See 'bisetten' in McSparran et al., *Middle English Compendium*.

[57] London, British Library, Sloane MS 2584, fol. 73v.

of a household transgression, albeit one of a more sexual nature rather than a theft. When the carpenter finds his lodger Nicholas in a seemingly catatonic state, he makes the sign of the cross over him as part of a spatially specific somatic performance, before reciting a charm or 'spel':

> Therwith the nyght-spel seyde he anon-rightes
> On foure halves of the hous aboute,
> And on the thresshfold of the dore withoute:
> 'Jhesu Crist and Seinte Benedight,
> Blesse this hous from every wikked wight,
> For nyghtes verye, the white *pater-noster*!
> Where wentestow, Seinte Petres soster?'[58]

The invocation employed by the carpenter here is not an exact match with any of those found in the manuscripts studied (though charms against wicked wights are reasonably common in manuscripts of the period), but his performance of the charm in each of the 'foure halves' of his house, as well as on the threshold, has parallels with the texts discussed here.

The carpenter's recourse to a charm for protection is deployed here to comedic effect. His panicked reaction to Nicholas's feigned loss of consciousness serves to highlight his credulity, while his anxiety over the transgression of his property's boundary lines is ironic in light of the transgression he is actually facing inside the walls: an adulterous liaison between his wife and his lodger. Ryan Perry has argued that the 'spiritual inadequacy' embodied by the carpenter in this performance, and his admission that he has very limited knowledge of Christian devotional practice beyond having learnt his creed, is commensurate with his position among the lower strata of society.[59] Julia Boffey, too, notes that such 'doggerel spells' are apt in 'the mouths of simple, unlearned characters from whom we would hardly expect a rhyme royal stanza

[58] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Miller's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry Dean Benson, 3rd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ll. 3480–3486.

[59] Ryan Perry, '"Thynk on God, as We Doon, Men That Swynke": The Cultural Locations of *Meditations on the Supper of Our Lord* and the Middle English Pseudo-Bonaventuran Tradition', *Speculum*, 86.2 (2011), 419–54 (p. 421).

or a roundel'.[60] While the carpenter's use of a charm may well be a form of social commentary, it nevertheless demonstrates the currency of these practices in the contemporary culture: the audience would have been familiar with their use. Further evidence that Chaucer was relying on his audience to be familiar with charms and, in fact, charms against theft in particular, lies in his description of the lodger Nicholas immediately prior to the carpenter's performance of the 'nyght-spel': the narrator describes Nicholas as sitting 'as stille as stoon'.[61] By mimicking a common phrase used in charms against thieves, it seems Chaucer is drawing attention to Nicholas's plan to 'steal' the carpenter's wife Alison for a night.[62] He is also likely capitalising on the contemporary legal parallels between adultery and theft, whereby a wife's – herself viewed much like an object belonging to her husband – abandonment of her husband was intricately tied up with property implications and the potential for the removal of household goods.[63]

Another literary text in which the phrase 'still as stone' is used at a moment of heightened anxiety around the permeability of the home, or a transgression of its boundaries, can be found in 'The Tale of the Basin'. Like in 'The Miller's Tale', the household transgression here is more of a metaphorical theft – another adulterous liaison – than it is one of physical goods. Once again, the phrase is used with a sense of irony to describe the perpetrator:

> When alle thyng was redy, she sent aftur Sir John
> Prively at a posturne yate as stille as any ston.
> They eten and dronken as thei were wonte to done
> Till that thaym list to bedde for to gone,
> Softly and stille.[64]

[60] Julia Boffey, 'Verse and Worse in Middle English: Defining Doggerel', in *Leeds Studies in English: Essays in Honour of Oliver Pickering*, ed. by Janet Burton, William Marx, and Veronica O'Mara (Leeds: University of Leeds, 2010), pp. 33–44 (p. 40).

[61] 'The Miller's Tale', l. 3472.

[62] Suzanne Sheldon, 'Middle English and Latin Charms, Amulets, and Talismans from Vernacular Manuscripts' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tulane, 1978), p. xii.

[63] Caroline Dunn, *Stolen Women in Medieval England Rape, Abduction and Adultery, 1100-1500* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018), p. 143.

[64] 'The Tale of the Basin', in *Ten Bourdes*, ed. by Melissa M. Furrow (Kalamazoo, Mich: Medieval Institute Publications, 2013), ll. 125–129.

Sarah McGloughlin has used 'The Tale of the Basin' more broadly to look at anxiety around household transgression and its implications for good governance, particularly concerning clergy abusing their positions in order to gain access to the household.[65] The wife in the Tale is not only sleeping with the priest Sir John, but is also guilty of squandering a significant portion of her husband's income and other household goods in the name of Sir John's entertainment. Thus, their sexual relationship can be seen as a theft in both metaphorical and literal terms, because the husband is not only a cuckold but is also financially ruined by the adulterous liaison. The priest, like Nicholas in 'The Miller's Tale', of course, represents anxieties around sexual transgression but, more broadly, these two characters reflect anxieties around the violation of space and property.[66] They highlight the permeability of the home and the vulnerability of the household to outside agents. The deployment of the phrase 'as still as stone' in both tales to describe these agents who are intent on violating the domestic space is no accident: by mirroring – albeit in an ironic way – the language used in charms against thieves it heightens the sense of these characters' transgression and reflects not just their sexual offences, but their invasion of the domestic space and the privacy of the household.

Anxiety around the transgression of a property's boundary lines is further exemplified in charms which include an imperative to encircle the property in order to deploy the charm. For example, an early-sixteenth-century charm against theft – more specifically the theft of clothes – found in London, British Library, Harley MS 2389, indicates that there is a link between the recitation of the invocation and the spatial performance of the charm:[67]

> To save your clothes from stealynge all nyght.
> Jasper, Melcher, and Balthasar: stand ye my enemis, even as the sterr stode over Bethelem where Jesus was. Say this thrise goynge by the hedge over nyght.[68]

[65] Sarah McLoughlin, 'Gender and Transgression in the Late Medieval English Household' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of York, 2011).

[66] McLoughlin, 'Gender and Transgression in the Late Medieval English Household', p. 150.

[67] Clothes often featured among stolen items listed in medieval court records pertaining to burglary, see for example Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, pp. 95–96.

[68] London, British Library, Harley MS 2389, fol. 26r; transcribed in Curt F. Bühler, 'Three Middle English Prose Charms from MS. Harley 2389', *Notes and Queries*, 9.2 (1962), 48.

The injunction to circulate the perimeter, or 'hedge', of one's property while repeating the invocation, which here calls on the agency of the three magi, suggests that movement is imperative to the efficacy of the charm. The spoken words may have power, but that power can be considered transient unless it is anchored in place through movement: movement creates a relationship between the words of the invocation and the location that they are designed to protect. In circling the property while performing the charm, the words of power integrate with the space the practitioner moves through.

While such a practice may have been understood to imbibe the boundary lines with a protective power, this power has more active defensive qualities too: it will force the prospective thieves to 'stand', thus frustrating their attempt to break and enter. This concept is further propagated by the instructions of a third charm for theft in Sloane MS 2584. The Latin charm, in full, draws on several common narratives and phrases found in charms against thieves, including the two thieves Dismas and Gismas and a line from Luke 4:30: '*Jesus autem transiens per medium illorum ibat*' (but Jesus passing through their midst went on his way). The charm ends with a line which states its purpose, followed by the specific directions for its use:

> *Hoc carmen dico ut non perdam mea furto. Hos versus dicas circa domum vel faldam et si latrones intraverunt non exient donec precipis.*
>
> [I say this charm so that I will not lose my [things] by theft. Say these lines around the house or farm and if robbers enter, they will not leave until they are told.][69]

As with the text in Harley MS 2389, here too the instructions make explicit that the performance of the charm requires a perambulation of the property as well as the recitation of the invocation.

[69] London, British Library, Sloane MS 2584, fols. 74r-v; the word 'faldam' here appears to be a Latinisation of the Old English word 'ffald' becoming the Middle English 'fold' – an enclosure for sheep and other domestic animals – showing interesting ties with the vernacular in spite of the Latin language of the charm: see 'falda' in C. du Cange, et al., *Glossarium mediae et infimae latinitatis* (Niort: L. Favre, 1887) t. 3, col. 402a; and 'fold' in McSparran et al., *Middle English Compendium*.

This requirement to circulate the boundaries of the property draws an interesting parallel with the custom of 'beating the bounds.' Likely inspired by the processional walks that marked specific moments in the liturgical calendar, particularly Rogationtide, ceremonial perambulation had been practiced since the early days of Christianity in England.[70] By the later medieval and early modern periods, these open-air processions had evolved in some communities to become concerned with demarcating the territorial boundaries of a parish.[71] Not only was there a process of delineation at play, in which communities, in a way, defined and described themselves through this process of circumscription, but the performative raising of banners, handheld crosses, and ringing of bells, accompanied by the chanting of psalms and recitation of passages from the gospels which formed part of the processional activity, was designed to expel evil spirits, disease and sickness.[72] Thus, we can understand charms against thieves which require the perambulation of the domestic residence as a sort of microcosmic reproduction of this church-sanctioned ritual. Through the performance of the charm, the practitioner is delineating the boundaries of their own property: their ritual procession around the perimeter is as much a statement of ownership, or a territorial inscription, as it is a defensive tactic. Meanwhile, the recitation of the charm and its efficacious words, often calling on supernatural or preternatural agents for assistance, mirrors the performances that accompanied the beating of the bounds, where the words of the psalms and the gospel were understood to drive away evil.

Enchanting the boundaries of one's property, however, was not just performed for protective ends but, as mentioned above, it also had more offensive properties. The Harley text cited previously is designed to halt the would-be-thief before they can break in; we can imagine this as an invisible but impenetrable bubble surrounding the property. Meanwhile, the charm in Sloane MS 2584 allows the perpetrator entry, but they will be trapped inside until they are permitted to leave ('*donec precipis*'). Keeping

[70] Helen Gittos, *Liturgy, Architecture, and Sacred Places in Anglo-Saxon England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 103–45.

[71] Steve Hindle, 'Beating the Bounds of the Parish: Order, Memory, and Identity in the English Local Community, c. 1500–1700', in *Defining Community in Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Karen E. Spierling (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 205–27.

[72] Alexandra Walsham, *The Reformation of the Landscape: Religion, Identity, and Memory in Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 252–73; Hindle, 'Beating the Bounds of the Parish: Order, Memory, and Identity in the English Local Community, c. 1500–1700', p. 206.

the criminal trapped allows the victim the opportunity to identify their assailant and, if desired, exact revenge. A fifteenth-century charm found in London, British Library, Sloane MS 2457 is enacted through a similar process of encircling the property, but the protective shield it creates is described as having a slightly different effect on the potential thief. The invocation itself is in Latin, but it is preceded by a rhyming Middle English rubric which informs the practitioner:

> ȝif any man be so un sele
> That wold thi good stele
> Thi schep that ben in thi fold
> ȝounge other the hold
> Other any other good þat is in feld
> With this oureson þou schalt it scheld
> Al round thou schal gon a bout
> Be it with inne hous other with out
> And this oureson þou saie with devocion
> And þen anon as the thef is com
> Al round a bout he schal gon
> Al the nyȝt be Seint Ion
> And power he schal have non
> Awei þenne forto gon.[73]

Here, the text specifically uses the word 'scheld' or shield to describe the protective quality of the enchantment, which will surround whichever parts of the property the practitioner encircles as they perform the charm. However, there is an interesting mirroring effect at play between the performance of the practitioner and the effect this shield will have on the perpetrator. The rubric instructs the practitioner to circumscribe the perimeter of the property – 'al round thou schal gon a bout' – while reciting the invocation. However, if a thief does attempt to transgress the boundary which has been magically reinforced by the words and actions of the practitioner, they will not simply be paralysed in place until the victim returns home. Instead, mirroring the movement of the practitioner in their deployment of the charm, the thief will be

[73] London, British Library, Sloane MS 2457, fol. 7v.

compelled to circle the property – 'al round a bout he schal gon' – until the owner returns home and can exact justice. Through this mirroring effect, there is a kind of irony in the way that the would-be-thief is made to respect the boundary lines delineated by the practitioner: compelled to circumscribe them indefinitely while unable to transgress them.

This retributive element of the charm might be described by a modern reader as 'karmic', but this is not the only instance where this type of practice seeks to enact retribution or punishment. As mentioned above, there is an implicit threat in the third text cited from Sloane MS 2584, in which the perpetrator is trapped inside the property until the victim returns. But other texts discussed here are more explicit in their desire for justice. The Sloane MS 3556 text asserts: 'I schal bete men thus and bynde men thus of wikkyd mood/ And all thoo that wolde me oþere than good', while the Cambridge, Trinity College charm draws a sinister comparison between the immobilised thief and a corpse: 'he stonde as stylle as stone on hylle, as stone on more, as dede mann on flore'. The desire for punishment revealed by these texts suggests that the anxiety over the invasion of the domestic space goes beyond the fear of losing material goods and becomes personal. Barbara Hanawalt's study of fourteenth-century court records finds that robbery and burglary had a higher conviction rate than the majority of other felonies.[74] She suggests that these – then and now – are crimes in particular which the public fear: while robbery carries with it the threat of physical harm, burglary is more than a property crime, it is an invasion of privacy which results in the exposure of the intimate and interior parts of a dwelling place which are not intended to be made public.[75] Modern studies in psychology too, support the notion that the psychological impact of burglary cannot be underestimated.[76] Recent scholarship suggests that burglary should be seen as an interpersonal crime, rather than a property one: it carries with it a sense of violation and challenges the victim's feeling of control over their own territory, by extension affecting their sense of identity.[77] Thus we can understand the performance of charms

[74] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 60.

[75] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 60.

[76] See, for example, Alan Beaton and others, 'The Psychological Impact of Burglary', *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 6.1 (2000), 33–43.

[77] Simon Merry and Louise Harsent, 'Intruders, Pilferers, Raiders and Invaders: The Interpersonal Dimension of Burglary', in *Profiling Property Crimes*, ed. by David V. Canter and Laurence J. Alison (London: Routledge, 2018), pp. 31–56.

against thieves within and around the domestic property as an assertion of control, cementing the practitioner's relationship with their personal property, but furthermore, they also represent an attempt to avert the psychological damage caused by an invasion of privacy, alongside the loss of material goods.

In a consideration of the place of magical tricks and illusion in medical manuscripts, Hannah Bower notes that these tricks often make reference to the house as the locus for performance, while such specific allusion to the domestic space is unusual in recipes of a more medical nature.[78] While Bower's analysis focuses on practices of a more playful, rather than protective or defensive nature, her observation – that naming the house as a central locus for these practices plays on notions of the vulnerability of the threshold, and is provocative in the face of typical anxiety around exerting control over the domestic space – provides an interesting point of comparison with charms against thieves. Comparing the 'carnivalesque energy' of these magic tricks with medieval fabliaux that also centre around the household – including 'The Miller's Tale' – Bower suggests that the 'circumscribed, ordered, and hierarchal domestic settings make the overturning of order more palpable. In both the recipes and the fabliaux, then, the violation of social, sexual, and conceptual thresholds is mapped onto the imagined violation of physical ones'.[79]

Anxiety around the violation of external boundaries shows up more implicitly in other linguistic features of charms against thieves. Many of these texts describe themselves as a 'conjuration', or specifically employ the phrase 'I conjure' within their invocation. This terminology in itself is nothing unusual. Conjurations or adjurations, terms which are frequently used interchangeably, are common features of exorcisms, healing charms, and demonic magic, and ultimately rely on the same formula and principles but for different intent.[80] Using the verb *coniuro* or *adiuro*, synonymous with 'command', an exorcist will address a demon and, through the invocation or certain powerful and holy words, compel them to leave the body that they have taken possession of. In demonic magic, a necromancer may adopt the same formula but embellish it and instead use it to force a demon to carry out certain deeds or requests

[78] Hannah Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 202.

[79] Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500*, pp. 202–3.

[80] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 166.

at their command.[81] When it comes to healing charms, the logic of using conjurations or adjurations here is underpinned by the contemporary understanding of the aetiology and pathology of certain illnesses. Disease, in cases where humoral imbalance was not thought to be the cause, was understood as the result of a foreign presence invading the body; instead of the bacteria and viruses that we recognise today, these were demons, worms, and elves, which could wreak havoc on human physiology.[82] Healing conjurations therefore, much in the same way as exorcisms, address the invading body and command it to leave, as in this charm for a 'hawe' or growth in a person's eye:

> A charm for þe hawe in a mannys eye. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti Amen. I coniure þe hawe in þe name of þe Fader and of þe Sone and of þe Holy Goost, þat fro þis tyme forward þow greve never more þis eye of þis man. Our Lord Jesus Cryste ȝif it be þi wylle draw out þis hawe and clense þis eye of .N. þi servaunt os verrelyche as sothlyche as þow clansedest þe eye of Tobye.[83]

Conversely another common charm to staunch blood, uses a conjuration to command the blood to remain *within* the wounded body:

> In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen. When oure Lorde Jesus wos don on þe cros þan com Longius þider and smat hym wit hys spere in þe syde; blud and water com out at þe wounde and wypyd hys eghene and saw onnone throgh þe haly vertew þat god dyde þare I coniure þe blude þat þou com noght out of þis Crystyn man. In nomine Patris etc say þis thrys.[84]

[81] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 161, 166.

[82] Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 70.

[83] London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library MS 542, fol. 6r; the charm is punctuated with a series of rubricated crosses which I have not included here for ease of readability. The passage quoted above is followed by a series of powerful phrases and a recipe using white ginger to be applied to the eye.

[84] London, Wellcome Historical Medical Library MS 225, f. 143v; transcription provided in Sheldon, 'Middle English and Latin Charms', p. 184.

Conjurations to protect the home therefore provide an interesting point of comparison with those for healing. Interesting avenues of exploration are opened up when we begin to consider the parallels between the human body and the domestic space, both contained within external boundaries. Mary Douglas asserts that the body, which is a bounded system, is a symbol for society more broadly:

> The idea of society is a powerful image. It is potent in its own right to control or to stir men to action. This image has form; it has external boundaries, margins, internal structure. Its outlines contain power to reward conformity and repulse attack […] The body is a model which can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious.[85]

If, as I suggest above, the domestic space is a microcosm for the parish or community space, then it can also be interpreted as a macrocosm of the human body. The notion of disease as a foreign invading body by nature gives way to a sense of the permeability and vulnerability of the human body, mirroring the permeability and vulnerability of the domestic space. Douglas later goes on to argue that it is a mistake to 'treat bodily margins in isolation from all other margins. There is no reason to assume any primacy for the individual's attitude to his own bodily and emotional experience, any more than for his cultural and social experience'.[86] Such an assertion facilitates our understanding of the shared language of charms for healing and those to protect the domestic space. Another charm that uses a conjuration is one to expel mice from a barn; like those to tackle disease, it views the object of the charm – the mice – as an invading body, reinforcing this parallel between the domestic space and the body:

> *Contra mures: Accipe .v. garbas primas que intrant in orreum et dic supra primam: 'Coniuro te, murem, ne habeas maiorem partem in hoc blado quam sacerdotis habet in missa dominicali'. Et dic ita per .iii.*

[85] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 1966), pp. 115–16.

[86] Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, p. 122.

vices. Postmodum .iii. Pater Noster, in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Et ita super unamquamque garbam.

[Against mice: take the first five sheaves of grain which come into the storehouse and say over the first 'I conjure you, mouse, that you have no larger part of this grain than the priest has of the Sunday Mass.][87]

Charms that employ conjurations have multiple agents at play. In exorcisms and healing charms these conjurations are addressed to pesky supernatural or destructive creatures and there is a process of attempting to best their power by channelling the power of far greater supernatural or preternatural agents. For example, in the charm for a growth in the eye, the power of the Holy Trinity is invoked through the conjuration in order to trump the agent that has caused the disease and expel it from the body. In performing the charm, the practitioner operates as a kind of mediator between the divine powers invoked and the malevolent force, but also between the malevolent force and the patient.[88] The object of the conjuration – the malevolent force – is clearly the inferior party in the hierarchy that also includes patient, practitioner, and the deity or holy figures invoked. Even the conjuration against mice is directed, though not at a supernatural entity, at a household pest which has no parity with any of the other stakeholders implicated within the charm. What, then, does this mean for charms against thieves, in which the conjuration is directed at a thief, a human agent, rather than a supernatural or pestilential one?

This question opens up a discussion around how these charms operate within the realm of social relations more broadly, and how their language reflects social attitudes – towards neighbours and strangers alike. One charm against thieves in London, British Library, Sloane MS 2584 specifically groups and equates thieves with the other inhuman forces mentioned above:

*Coniuro vos demones et latrones elphos et morbum caducum ut non habeatis potestatem nocere hunc famlium [*sic*] Dei* .N.

[87] London, British Library, Royal MS 12 B XII, fol. 176r; transcription in Tony Hunt, *Popular Medicine in Thirteenth-Century England: Introduction and Texts* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1990), p. 359.

[88] Edina Bozóky, *Charmes et Prières Apotropaïques* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003), p. 112.

[I conjure you demons and robbers, elves and falling evil so that you have no power to harm this servant of God.][89]

Equating thieves here with demons, elves, and *morbum caducum* ('the falling evil' or epilepsy) intensifies this parallel between the house and body: here, thieves are likened to the other invasive forces which cause disease. Furthermore, it has an othering effect on the would-be-thief.

Othering, or dehumanising the thief, is perhaps a means of legitimising the channelling of a huge amount of divine power which would, under other circumstances, be inappropriate to wield against a fellow human. Many charms invoke, for example, more than just the power of the Trinity, such as one which occurs in several manuscripts:

I coniure them in the vertu of the Fadir and the Sone and Holy Gost
In Hym is ever vertue most
In the be gynnyng and in the endynge
And by the vertue of alle thynge
By the vertue of the erbe stone and grasse and tree
And by alle the vertue þat ever may be
And by the vertue of every Masse
That ever was songe more or lasse.[90]

Appropriating the virtue of all things, the power of every herb, stone, plant or tree, and of every Mass that has ever been sung, is a significant amount of power, and could be viewed as problematic if the object of such power is not implied to be on a level with the inhuman.

The implications of directing this power at another person are deepened further by the – sometimes clearly direct, and sometimes implicit – outcome of the conjuration: binding the thief. In many ways, these charms are reminiscent of those against enemies discussed in the previous chapter, in that they are not just protective but seek

[89] London, British Library, Sloane MS 2584, fol. 73v.

[90] Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS 163, fols. 15v-16r; the text has been written out as prose as part of a longer charm against thieves, but I have rendered it in verse here in accordance with the rhyme scheme.

to *overcome* the threat. In fact many of these charms for thieves branch out to make provision for other social threats too: the charm quoted directly above covers 'al enemyes … al theves and … alle þat beth un trewe'.[91] Another, like some of the rituals discussed in the previous chapter, seeks not just to defend the practitioner from thieves and enemies, but to win them favour too: 'delyve me fro all waytynges of þevys and alle myn oder enemys and defende me in þe syght of alle myn adversaryes and grante me to have grace and love and worschyp of alle men'.[92] Binding the thief – or enemy – however, takes this desire for victory further. It removes all of the adversary's agency, literally rendering them powerless: 'they stond as stylle as eny ston, they have no powere away to gon'.[93] Much like equating the thief with instigators of disease, the 'still as stone' phrase here can also be understood as othering, reducing the thief to a motionless object. These charms, then, are claiming power for the practitioner in a way that other charms such as ones for healing do not. Rather than acting as a mediator between deity and disease as outlined above, in these charms for domestic protection the practitioner is not just invoking the power of preternatural agents, but is firmly establishing themselves as a powerful agent in their own right. This is compounded by the regular use of the first-person pronoun throughout all of these charms: 'I schal bete men thus'; 'I bynde þe nyȝt þeves and day þeves'; 'stille stonde til ich byde ȝou go', and so on.[94] The retaliatory nature of these charms, even if just by effecting simple binding, but especially when exacting punishment, reflects the social and psychological implications of theft mentioned earlier: the invasion of privacy that comes with theft makes it more than just a property crime, it becomes a personal one, and necessitates a personal response. However, while theft is clearly an offence against an individual, it carries broader significance. Theft can also be understood as a wrong against a social body and a violation of the trust that a community relies upon to function harmoniously. This is particularly striking when we consider that a great number of thefts were committed by neighbours, or otherwise by residents of nearby villages and towns.[95] Therefore the act of binding a thief can be viewed through a

[91] Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS 163, fol. 15v.

[92] London, British Library, Sloane MS 2584, fol. 46r.

[93] Cambridge University Library, Additional MS 5943, fol. 170r.

[94] Sloane 3556, fol. 8v; London, British Library, Sloane MS 2584, fols. 49r and 73v.

[95] Richard W. Ireland, 'Law in Action, Law in Books: The Practicality of Medieval Theft Law', *Continuity and Change*, 17.3 (2002), 309–31 (pp. 317–22); Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 81.

wider social lens, where it is not just a move by the victim to best the perpetrator, but is an act intended to prevent, control, or punish social disruption and conflict.

Further to this, there is also a distinction here between manifest and non-manifest theft that is worth noting, and which will feed into the proceeding section on methods of identifying thieves. Manifest theft refers to catching a thief in the act, that is 'red-handed', while non-manifest theft indicates the identification of the suspect after the offense has been committed, through other methods. By the end of the Middle Ages there had been a long history of legal distinction between the two, with harsher punishment meted out for manifest theft and, especially in the earlier medieval period, a justification for killing the thief if they were discovered in the act.[96] Richard Ireland argues that these procedural differences in the legal treatment of manifest and non-manifest theft comes down to the simple premise of proof, that is, that a criminal caught in the act cannot deny their guilt and there is no doubt as to their culpability.[97] I would contend that these charms to bind the thief until the victim returns home are therefore designed – not just to prevent the loss of goods – but to ensure that the crime is an instance of manifest theft. There is a judicial element here which, depending on the inclination of the practitioner, could result in either private and unofficial retaliation for the wrong inflicted, or otherwise public and procedural legal retribution. The possibility of – and desire for – either of these forms of retribution is something which is a key element of charms and experiments which seek to identify a thief, which I will now discuss.

Identification and punishment: finding a thief after the fact

Methods for identifying thieves are acutely interesting in the field of historical inquiry because they connect with a number of different social, legal, and anthropological areas, prompting multiple research questions. As Hanawalt notes, while the legal mechanisms around the detection, arrest, and trial for a crime such as theft are crucially important, so too is the ecological setting: 'the living conditions of the participants, their kinship and community ties, their means of livelihood, their power

[96] Ireland, 'Law in Action, Law in Books'.

[97] Ireland, 'Law in Action, Law in Books', pp. 315–16.

relationships, and the tensions they might resolve through criminal means'.[98] An understanding of this ecological setting helps us to analyse methods that aim to deal with theft in a way which falls outside of traditional legal mechanisms, and provides crucial context for the analysis which follows.

So, what might the standard recourse be for those finding themselves to be victims of theft? There was a responsibility placed on a community to detect and pursue the perpetrator of a crime through raising the hue and cry, a practice with a long antecedence that was still in use towards the end of the medieval period.[99] This required anyone who came across evidence of a felony, including stumbling upon a perpetrator in the act of committing a theft, to alert the neighbours and to collectively pursue the suspect. In such cases, the perpetrator often managed to escape rather than being apprehended during the act. If the perpetrator was not apprehended or identified as they carried out a crime, there was very little prospect of catching and punishing them. While there is evidence that, in the case of stolen livestock, it was sometimes possible to follow a trail of the goods afterwards either to retrieve them or, if they had already been butchered, to seek recompense from the thief, other material goods were often not so easy to trace.[100] If the suspect could be identified, the victim had options about how best to approach a resolution. Legal action, commonplace as it was in the medieval period, might seem like the natural recourse here, but this was not necessarily the case. There were a number of impediments to legal action, lack of evidence being one of them, but a power imbalance between the victim and the accused which made the possibility of a successful suit unlikely, was another.[101] Furthermore, legal action did not guarantee the return of the stolen goods: prior to 1529, securing a guilty verdict in court over theft would result in the forfeiture of the stolen items to the Crown, rather than their return to the victim.[102] In addition to this, theft of an item worth twelve pence or more was classed as a felony, for which the death penalty applied: prosecuting a member of one's own community, likely an

[98] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 2.

[99] Miriam Müller, 'Social Control and the Hue and Cry in Two Fourteenth-Century Villages', *Journal of Medieval History*, 31.1 (2005), 29–53; Kamali, *Felony and the Guilty Mind in Medieval England*, p. 254.

[100] Ireland, 'Law in Action, Law in Books', p. 317.

[101] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 63.

[102] Sharon Hubbs Wright and Frank Klaassen, *Everyday Magicians: Legal Records and Magic Manuscripts from Tudor England* (University Park, Pa.: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2022), p. 39.

acquaintance, perhaps even a friend or family member, would not necessarily have been an easy move to make.[103] Karen Jones has noticed a discernible reluctance to revert to legal action to deal with theft in late-medieval local court records; instead, she suggests that approaching the suspect informally and demanding the return of the stolen goods might have been a preferable resolution in many cases.[104] This kind of response was endorsed as a paragon for those living in a harmonious society. This idealised notion of society was fostered by biblical and pastoral teaching, which upheld the idea of a community in which, should problems arise, a resolution was reached either by the antagonistic parties themselves reaching terms, or otherwise with the aid of neutral third-party mediators.[105] The responsibility to settle disputes amicably also came under the remit of good household governance, in which the head of a household or a patriarchal leader within a community may have found themselves responsible for conflict resolution among their own social group, or between those whom they oversaw.[106] Legal action, over and above the fact that it defied this concept of a harmonious society, had other pitfalls. In fact, in direct opposition to harmony, recourse to the law often prompted further conflict rather than resolving it; it is possible that the judicial system was weaponised within social conflicts by those who were in more powerful positions, in order to gain control over others.[107] Hanawalt notes that further criminal activity, including thefts and assaults, were sometimes the only available response for those who found themselves inferior or powerless within the official judicial system.[108]

What part, then, do methods of theft detection – processes for catching and, on occasion, punishing thieves, outside of the parameters of the judicial system – play? These practices can be understood from opposing perspectives: as methods to avoid the social conflict generated by engagement with the legal system, or alternatively, as a means to obtain 'divine proof' of the identity of the perpetrator and to use this to justify retribution, potentially creating a cycle of conflict. Are these texts seeking power

[103] Wright and Klaassen, *Everyday Magicians*, p. 39.

[104] Karen Jones, *Gender and Petty Crime in Late Medieval England: The Local Courts in Kent, 1460-1560* (Woodbridge, UK: The Boydell Press, 2006), p. 41.

[105] Marjorie K. McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 57.

[106] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*, p. 24.

[107] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, pp. 2–3.

[108] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 176.

for those who may otherwise find themselves marginalised, or are they supporting an abuse of power for those who may already have the upper hand? Is the concern underpinning these texts an economic one, that is, is the primary objective to locate and retrieve the stolen goods, or is it a desire for justice? What do the instructions for the performance of these texts, as well as how they might have been imagined to work, reveal about social and community dynamics? As I will shortly demonstrate, many of these texts rely on familiarity with, and a pre-existing suspicion of, the perpetrator: how did household governance, suspicion of outsiders, and the potential for confirmation bias come into play when it came to identifying a suspect? As described above, theft can be understood as both a private and a public wrong, causing injury to the individual through their loss of goods and, more broadly, betraying the trust of the community; this causes a tension between treating such a crime as a personal wrong versus treating it as one committed against the social body.[109] How can we understand the performance of private versus public theft detection rituals in this context? These questions, contrasting as some of them are, will be considered more closely as the texts themselves are examined in greater detail.

A large proportion of experiments for theft detection are intended to reveal the identity of the thief while the victim is asleep, brought on a by a pre-bedtime ritual. There are five methods which involve sleep, and nearly all of them occur numerous times in the manuscript sources. Writing prescribed holy names, words or characters on virgin wax is one of the most common. The inscribed piece of wax is then placed beneath the head during sleep to bring on a vision of the thief. Occasionally there are accompanying ritual elements or actions that are found alongside this type of practice, for example, holding the piece of wax in a specific hand before placing it under the head, or otherwise sleeping with it below one's right ear. For example:

> *Experimenta pro furtis: Si vis scire quis ille sit qui res tuas furatus sit, scribe hec nomina in cera virginea et tene ea super caput tuum cum manu tua sinistra, et in sopno [*sic*] tuo videbis illum qui fecerat furtum: + agios crux + agios crux + agios crux Domini. In nomine Patris etc*.

[109] Ireland, 'Law in Action, Law in Books', pp. 317, 319.

> [Experiments for stolen goods: If you want to know who it is who has stolen your things, write these names on virgin wax and hold them above your head with your left hand, and in your sleep you will see the person who has committed the theft: '+ *agios crux* + *agios crux* + *agios crux Domini.* In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit'.][110]

While the inscription in this example is intelligible, drawing on the power of the Greek name for God and the cross of the crucifixion, in other cases the inscription is instead a series of letters and characters.[111]

In the *De herbis* of pseudo-Albertus Magnus, the experiment to identify a thief relies on *solsequium* – sunflower or marigold – as the active ingredient, and there is no inscription or invocation required, provided that the plant has been picked at the correct astrological moment:

> *Si quid furatur, in nocte subtus capud tuum ponatur videbis furem et omnes eius conditiones*.
>
> [If anything is stolen, let it be placed beneath your head at night, and you will see the thief and all his circumstances.][112]

In the Middle English rhyming herbal the *Tretys of Diverse Herbis* the instructions are similar, though the plant is to be worn around the neck rather than placed beneath the head:

> And if fro þe ought be stolne
> And þe theves wille nouthe be knowne
> Tak þis goulde woundyun and layde
> To gedere als it is before sayde

[110] Oxford, Bodleian Library MS e Mus. 219, fol. 186r; transcription and translation provided in Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), p. 25.

[111] See, for example, a charm to detect a thief using virgin wax in London, British Library, Sloane MS 121, fol. 37r which requires the inscription of a series of characters.

[112] London, British Library, Harley MS 2253, fol. 137r.

And hange aboute þi nekke on nyght
And of þe theves þou schalt have syght
Þou schalt þem bothe knawen and sene
And what þat þeire condicioun bene.[113]

The *De corio serpentis* lists theft detection as one of the twelve uses of powdered snakeskin:

> *Si aliquis de re aliqua furata scire voluerit, aspergat de pulvere super caput suum et post modum cooperiat caput suum cum capici lineo et vadat ad lectum et furem videbit sompinando*.
>
> [If someone wishes to know who stole something from someone, let him sprinkle the powder over his head and afterwards let him cover his head with a linen covering and go to bed, and he will see the thief when sleeping.][114]

Two other methods of identifying a thief during sleep occur just once in the manuscripts surveyed. One uses a similar inscription to that cited above using virgin wax, but instead is simply written on parchment:

> An experiment pervyd for a thynge y lost or stolyn: lette take and write uppon parchement these wordes *Agios Agios Agios Crux Crux Crux sancte sanctus sit amen famulo Dei*. Take and leyeth under the mannys hed that hathe lost his Goode whenever þat he goethe to his bed and he schalle dreme oun hym that hath.[115]

[113] Yale, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, MS Takamiya 46, fol. 6r.

[114] Cambridge, Trinity College, O. 1. 57, fol. 69v, transcription and translation provided in Laura Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic in Fifteenth-Century England' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2012), p. 123.

[115] London, British Library, Sloane MS 3542, fol. 62v.

The other, an Anglo-Norman text in a late-thirteenth-century manuscript, requires the practitioner to write the names of those suspected on laurel leaves, after hearing a Mass on the invention of the Cross:

> *Prenez foilles de lorir et escrivez les noune en celes foilles dount vous avez suspescioun. Li metez les foilles sus vostre chef treis nuis et gardez vous ben de toutes poluciun. Saunz deyte la terce nuit vous serra monstre le larcin.*
>
> [Take laurel leaves and write on those leaves the name of those of whom you have suspicion. Put the leaves beneath your head for three nights and keep yourself clean of any pollution. Without doubt the third night you will be shown the thief.][116]

There are several elements at play in all of these texts that are worthy of further interrogation here. Firstly, why is sleep the ideal medium through which to deploy this particular experiment? Secondly, what part might pre-existing suspicion play in the suggested efficacy of these practices? Thirdly, how do they triangulate the relationship between victim, thief, and lost or stolen item?

To tackle the first of these questions, it is necessary to situate these texts within the broader landscape of medieval sleep and dreaming, as well as to consider how they correspond to other texts of dream divination or interpretation. Sleep was considered to be one of the six non-naturals which affected humoral balance, and therefore it was a key factor in maintaining physiological health: a bodily imbalance could affect sleep, and vice versa.[117] Just as humoral imbalance or physiological symptoms could affect sleep, they could also affect dreaming. This was especially the case for nightmares, which were considered by many physicians to be caused by physiological conditions such as indigestion or drunkenness.[118] The physiological influence on somatic experience posed somewhat of a problem to theorists and

[116] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby MS 86, fol. 20v.

[117] William F. MacLehose, 'Historicising Stress: Anguish and Insomnia in the Middle Ages', *Interface Focus*, 10.3 (2020), pp. 3–4.

[118] William F. MacLehose, 'Fear, Fantasy and Sleep in Medieval Medicine', in *Emotions and Health, 1200-1700*, ed. by Elena Carrera (Leiden: Brill, 2013), pp. 67–94 (p. 73).

theologians of late-antiquity and the Middle Ages; dreams were acknowledged, even in biblical narratives, as holding the potential for divinatory significance, but they were also considered to be vulnerable to the influence of the imagination while the body's capacity for rational thinking was diminished during sleep.[119] In response to this, many of the significant treatises on dreaming devised a hierarchy, in which dreams generated by physiological processes were located at the bottom, while those constituting divine interventions or which were considered to be prophetic were situated at the top.[120]

In spite of this attempt to stratify dreams and stress the rarity of a divinatory oneiric experience, medieval 'dreambooks' – texts which offered a key to interpreting dreams – were incredibly popular, occurring in hundreds of surviving manuscripts.[121] These offered a variety of methods to unlock the mystery of dreams, from using the moment of the lunar cycle at which the dream occurred, to identifying a specific feature of the dream and looking up what consequence it might be associated with.[122] But as Frank Klaassen has pointed out, these methods for interpreting dreams in these books are passive; they are used *after* a dream has happened in order to understand its significance.[123] However, there was also dream literature devoted to provoking the onset of dreams that would be able to answer the specific questions of the dreamer.[124] Klaassen suggests that 'the texts of formulaic dream interpretation and dream provocation occupy distinctive locations in the library of magical literature. The more formulaic dream texts tend to be associated more often with astrological image magic; the more open-ended dream provocation rituals tend to be associated solely with the literature of ritual magic.'[125] However, I would argue that these experiments to identify a thief form a category that falls somewhere in the middle. The dream provocation that Klaassen elaborates on commonly involves long and complex performances prior to sleep, including the recitation of numerous prayers and, sometimes, the creation of

[119] For medieval thought on dreaming, see Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[120] Explored throughout Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, see particularly pp. 17 - 56.

[121] Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 11.

[122] Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, pp. 8–9.

[123] Frank Klaassen, 'Magical Dream Provocation in the Later Middle Ages', *Esoterica*, VIII (2006), 111–35 (p. 112).

[124] Klaassen, 'Magical Dream Provocation', p. 112.

[125] Klaassen, 'Magical Dream Provocation', p. 113.

magical figures or talismans. These manuals for dream provocation occasionally include suggestions about the type of information the practitioner might want to obtain – the identity of a thief is one such suggestion provided in some of the surviving literature – however, the ritual practices are intended to bring about an ambiguous oneiric experience which requires interpretation to understand.[126] The experiments to identify a thief during sleep cited above, on the other hand, do not rely on an interpretative key in order to understand the information that the dream has imparted. They are a method of dream provocation, but they are not as ritually complex as the practices which Klaassen describes. Similarly, the visionary experience that they *do* offer is not ambiguous and in need of interpretation, nor does it promise to deliver intellectual gifts or riches in the way that complex rituals for dream provocation do. Instead, the practitioner will simply dream of the thief, presumably in a manner whose meaning is clear, and no use of an interpretative key is required: 'in your sleep you will see the person who has committed the theft'.[127] These experiments exploit existing ideas about how dreams can be a point of contact with the numinous, and offer access to otherwise unavailable information through their potential for revelatory and visionary experiences; however, they are more streamlined and focused than other common magical texts of dream provocation and interpretation.

These methods of dream provocation to identify a thief did not seek to foretell the future, which was the common goal of most dream literature, and which was a large factor in its condemnation by religious authorities.[128] Rather, they sought to uncover the truth about the past. Nevertheless, due to the fact that they promised to reveal information which would otherwise be beyond access through natural means, they still found themselves grouped with practices of a more predictive nature when being considered – and condemned – by the Church.[129] Their alignment with more divinatory practices is also underpinned, or reinforced, by the fact that they operate at a distance. Unlike many other experiments for theft detection, they do not require the physical presence of the suspect(s) while the ritual is being performed in order to correctly determine who is the perpetrator.

[126] Klaassen, 'Magical Dream Provocation', p. 118.

[127] Oxford, Bodleian Library MS e Mus. 219, fol. 186r

[128] Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, p. 11.

[129] Rider, *Magic and Religion*, pp. 25–32.

There are three other methods for identifying a thief which function without the immediate presence of the suspect. One is these is typically referred to as the 'clay balls' method, while the other two are the experiments using a paslter and key, and a loaf of bread, both discussed in Chapter One. The clay balls method appears only twice in my corpus (though, like the psalter and key method, it appears more regularly in manuscripts from the early modern period): once in English and once in Latin. It requires the practitioner to write the names of those suspected on parchment, place the individual names in balls of clay, and then submerge the balls in a basin of holy water. After a conjuration is performed over the basin, typically the ball containing the name of the guilty person will unfurl or dissolve.[130] The experiment using a loaf of bread also occurs twice, both times in Latin, one of which proceeds as follows:

> *Item pro rebus ablatis. Recipe unum panem et fac in parte inferiori ho[c] signum. quo facto recipe iij cultellos et infiges per latera panis et primo primum dices: "Infigo te cultellum per Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum ut demonstres mihi veritatem et non falcitatem quis reus sit." Ita ut toto isto tempore dictus panis pendat per stimulum taliter factum inter digitos diversorum hominum. Deinde scribe divisim nomina de quibus habes suspectum rei ablate. Et cum scripceris* [sic] *accipies nomina singillatum dicens in anglicis verbis, "I prey to God almyty Fadur alweldyng Sone and stedfast Holy Gost os þo brake .v. lowves and .v. fyschys on schere thursday and myraclys to þy desiplys gaf gyf grace þys lof to turne aboute with þo gylty." Et cum inposuerit [*sic*] nomen rei vertet se panis*.
>
> [Likewise, for stolen objects. Take a loaf of bread and make this sign on the lower part [drawing of star]. When it is made take three knives [or, pegs] and implant [them] through the sides of the bread and at the beginning say first, 'I affix you knife by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit that you would show me the truth and not falseness who is guilty'. Thus while speaking during that entire time the bread hangs by

[130] The English version of the experiment is found in Oxford, Corpus Christi, MS 291, fol. 85v, while the Latin version is in London, British Library, Sloane MS 121, fols. 36v – 37r.

> means of the spur made in such a way [drawing of loaf hanging] between the fingers of separate men. Then write separately the names of those you suspect of stealing the object. And when you have written the names you will take each one saying in English words, 'I pray to God almighty Father, almighty Son, and steadfast Holy Ghost as you broke the five loaves and fishes on Maundy Thursday and gave the miraculous gift [of] grace to your disciples, [so] turn about this loaf with the guilty'. And when the name is placed on top of it the loaf will turn itself.[131]

In her study of service magic, Tabitha Stanmore identifies two court cases relating to theft in which this method of using a loaf of bread is cited as having been used by a magical practitioner to identify a thief.[132] Both are from the fourteenth century and, due to the absence of further records which mention this method, Stanmore posits that it died out shortly afterwards. However, the two manuscripts in which the actual procedure are recorded are from the fifteenth century, suggesting that it continued to circulate, at least textually if not in practice. There are other disparities between the methods of identifying thieves found in the manuscript sources and court records of actual practice. Owen Davies, Keith Thomas and Tabitha Stanmore have all examined these records for insight into the services offered by cunning folk, or 'service magicians' as Stanmore terms them, and note that the key and psalter method makes a regular appearance.[133] This popular form of theft detection survived in practice into at least the nineteenth century.[134] However, it only occurs once in my corpus, in Oxford, Bodleian MS Wood Empt. 18. Frank Klaassen has suggested very plausibly that the disparity between court records and manuscript sources is likely because the

[131] Cambridge, Trinity College, O. 1. 57, fol. 126v, transcription and translation provided in Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic', p. 124, the other instance of this experiment occurs in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Wood Empt. 18, fol. 30r-v.

[132] Tabitha Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure: Service Magic in England from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022), p. 55.

[133] Owen Davies, *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London: Hambledon, 2003); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England*, Repr (London: Penguin Books, 1991).

[134] Richard W. Ireland, 'First Catch Your Toad: Medieval Attitudes to Ordeal and Battle', *Cambrian Law Review*, 11 (1980), 50–61 (p. 54).

key and psalter method was more practical and was not part of more learned traditions, which were more likely to circulate textually rather than orally.[135]

The theft of an item creates a relationship between victim and perpetrator, a relationship that is triangulated by the stolen item itself. Hans Medick and David Warren Sabean describe how material property forms part of a social 'relational idiom', and that ownership of property is defined by interpersonal relationships. Quoting Jack Goody, they explain that property is concerned, not with the 'rights of a person over a material object, but rather with rights between persons in relation to a material object'.[136] Thus, when an object changes hands, whether intentionally or – as in the case of theft – against someone's will, the interpersonal dynamic is altered too. Experiments to identify a thief support this notion that the right to material property is defined by rights *between* people rather than *by* a person: many of them make locating the perpetrator the primary goal, rather than recovering the lost item, which is secondary in almost all of the texts surveyed. Of course, identification of the thief is likely the best recourse when wishing to locate the stolen goods, so the two goals are not mutually exclusive; however, the emphasis of these texts makes clear that there is a specifically social element at play. This suggests that there is more of a preoccupation with righting a social wrong than with redressing the economic impact or inconvenience of losing an item. For example, the experiment using *solsequium* does not imply in any way that the object will be recovered, only that the thief will be found: 'and if something is stolen from you, place it around the head and you will see the thief and all his circumstances in sleep'.[137] While the experiments with virgin wax do make mention of the stolen item, the focus is still very much on locating the thief: two versions of this charm end by promising the user 'you will see who has stolen your thing' and 'you will see he who made the theft'.[138] Only certain versions of the *De corio serpentis* state that the practitioner will see where the stolen item is, rather than a vision of the perpetrator, and the text still mentions that it can be used by someone who wants to know the identity of the person who has committed the crime:

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[135] Wright and Klaassen, *Everyday Magicians*, p. 40.

[136] Sabean and Medick, 'Interest and Emotion in Family and Kinship Studies: A Critique of Social History and Anthropology', p. 13.

[137] '*Et si aliquid tibi furetur, circum caput ponas et videbis furem et omnis condiciones eius in sompnis*'; Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O. 1. 57, fol. 72r.

[138] '*Illum videbis qui rem tuam furatus est*' in London, British Library, Sloane MS 121, fol. 37r)and '*videbis illum qui fecerat furtum*' in Oxford, Bodleian Library MS e Mus. 219, fol. 186r.

> Yf ony man have ony dowte of ony thyng þat is stolyn hym and he wyl wetyn who so have it lete hym strowyn the powdyr on his heed and þan wynd hym in a lynen clothe and þan go leyn hym for to sclepyn and he schal in his sclep sen where the good is that was stolyn.[139]

The emphasis that these texts place on revealing the identify of the thief, over and above the recovery of the lost item, is interesting when we consider the community dynamic within which the victim and the perpetrator likely lived. All of the experiments to identify a thief rely on the practitioner being familiar with the perpetrator, and likely play into a pre-existing suspicion. As discussed above, the practices to bring about a vision of the thief in a dream are set apart from other rituals of dream provocation because they do not come with an interpretative key. This lack of interpretative key is significant when considering pre-existing suspicion. If the dream provides a vision of the perpetrator then, in order for the dreamer to correctly understand the vision, we can assume that the thief who appears is somebody already known to the dreamer. Records show that thefts were most likely to be committed by people who were local and known to the victim.[140] This supports the likelihood that the dreamer would understand the vision without any interpretative key: they are expecting the perpetrator to be revealed as someone recognisable. Only the experiments using *solsequium* or, in the vernacular poem, marigold, leave room for ambiguity when they state how the practitioner will identify the thief. The Latin text from the *Liber aggregationis* and the Middle English poem, examples of which are cited above, both make use of the word 'conditions' when describing the vision that the dreamer will have: 'þe theves þou schalt have syght/ Þou schalt þem bothe knawen and sene/ And what þat þeire condicioun bene'.[141] The use of the word suggests that the dream will not only show the form or figure of the thief, but it will also provide other information that might shed light on their identify, such as their 'situation or state; circumstances of life or existence'.[142] We might therefore understand the term to refer to the thief's place of

[139] London, British Library, Additional MS 12195, fol. 123r.

[140] Hanawalt finds that over half of all burglaries were committed by someone resident within a five-mile radius, in *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 81.

[141] London, British Library, Additional MS 17866, fol. 7v.

[142] See 'condicioun' in McSparran et al., *Middle English Compendium*.

residence or work, or social or familial circle: all clues to aid the practitioner in tracking them down.

The clay balls and loaf of bread method require the practitioner to come up with a shortlist of suspects to be written down or recited as part of the experiment. This narrows down the pool of potential culprits, and the practitioner then relies on what is – presumably – a divinely imparted signal which confirms what the victim has, up until that point, only been able to assume. Having a prior suspicion about who might be guilty does not just reflect the fact that property crimes were likely to be committed by those who lived and worked in the vicinity: it may also point towards pre-existing tensions or conflicts within the community. Marjorie McIntosh has suggested that people who were outsiders or newcomers to an area could fall under suspicion of criminality. But she has also explored how existing members of a community who were considered to be living in a way that was not socially acceptable, described as 'badly governed, living suspiciously, or of evil reputation', might be accused of a range of wrongs, including theft.[143] When someone *had* been accused of theft, Elizabeth Kamali has shown how someone's reputation and character could play a key role during legal prosecution, during which a jury was required to decide whether or not to convict the perpetrator.[144] The process involved in identifying the perpetrator of a theft was therefore not just about uncovering an arbitrary truth, or recovering a stolen item, but it also reflected wider social and community dynamics: this likely influenced the victim's approach to identifying the culprit. Naming the suspects was just one element, but further to this, the practices themselves could be manipulated in order to 'confirm' these suspicions. Keith Thomas, for example, notes how the clay balls method could be conducted in a way which would ensure that the ball containing the name of the guilty party would be the first to unfurl when it entered the water.[145] But accusations of theft made, or proved, in such a manner could be the source of further conflict. Many of the written records we have that pertain to the use of magic to identify thieves are legal records which concern court cases around defamation and false accusations of

[143] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600*, p. 13; pp.78–9.

[144] Kamali, *Felony and the Guilty Mind in Medieval England*, p. 232.

[145] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 259.

theft.[146] The damage caused by public accusation could lead to destroyed reputations and exacerbated animosities between members of a community.[147]

The methods of theft detection discussed so far, though clearly reflecting wider social and community dynamics, were nevertheless suitable for being carried out in private. Practices involving sleep can naturally only be carried out by the victims themselves, but even the clay balls method, for example, could be done alone, or perhaps through the assistance of a professional magical practitioner. The remaining methods to be examined as part of this study cannot be carried out in private: they require the victim to not only have a pre-conceived idea about the identity of the perpetrator, but to have actual physical access to those whom they suspect and – as I will suggest – social superiority or power over the alleged thief.

Three of the texts surveyed require the victim to feed a series of characters, carved into pieces of bread, to the suspect. Two of these texts are in Anglo-Norman and one in English:

> Nowe here ys for thefte. Take and write þese lettres folowynge and ȝeve hit to eete to þo þat þou haste suspecioun to, and ȝif he be culpable hit schalle not passe hys throte [*characters*] *kla* and *gyre*.[148]

> *Pur saver de chose emble.*
> *Pur saver de chose emblee escrivez cetes lettres en pain alis et donez a manger a celui de qui vous averez sospescioun et si il est coupable de la chose ne li passer ad la gorge* [characters].

> [To know about something stolen.
> To know about something stolen, write these letters on unleavened bread, and give it to the person of whom you have suspicion to eat, and if he is guilty of the theft, it will not pass his throat.][149]

[146] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, p. 26.

[147] Wright and Klaassen, *Everyday Magicians*, p. 39.

[148] Cambridge, Trinity College, R. 14. 51, fol. 28r; the two Anglo-Norman texts are in London, British Library, Royal MS 12 B XXV, fol. 63v, and Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby MS 86, fol. 20v.

[149] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby MS 86, fol. 20v.

Inscribing letters, characters, and powerful words such as the *Pater Noster*, *ananizapta*, or the names of the three Magi is common in healing charms. Katherine Hindley has shown how apples, cheese, communion wafers, and butter, as well as bread, all made appropriate surfaces on which to write charms, specifically to treat four conditions: childbirth, fever, jaundice, and the bite of a rabid dog, though she also records the Anglo-Norman practice mentioned above for theft, as well as one to heal pigs.[150] In the case of healing charms, Hindley argues, the power of the inscribed words combines with the inherent properties of the object to enact healing, while the text, once it enters the body, may communicate with the disease and drive it out.[151] However, in the case of the theft-related experiments cited above, the text never fully enters the body, at least not when the guilty party tries to eat it, but instead chokes them. Therefore, though Hindley groups this particular example with healing charms that employ similar methods or objects, the use of inscribed bread for theft detection is in fact far more similar to a form of bodily ordeal than to healing practices, in spite of their commonalities.

Bodily ordeal as a form of legal trial was a pre-Christian practice which was incorporated into the Roman Church.[152] While it operated in many forms, there were four principle methods of ordeal: use of the hot iron, that the suspect had to carry; hot water, into which they placed their hand; cold water, in which they were plunged and would sink if innocent, or float if guilty; and the morsel test using consecrated bread or cheese, and on which the guilty party would choke.[153] These judicial methods began to lose secular confidence as well as the support of the Church and, eventually, the Church removed its sanction of trial by ordeal during the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.[154] But, in spite of this, sporadic use of such methods did endure, particularly trial by battle which, though condemned in 1215, continued to be an accepted part of the legal system, chiefly in appeals of felony or treason.[155] The experiments for theft detection cited above bear closest resemblance to the 'morsel' ordeal. These

[150] Katherine Storm Hindley, 'Eating Words and Burning Them: The Power of Destruction in Medieval English Charm Texts', in *Zerstörung von Geschriebenem*, ed. by Carina Kühne-Wespi, Klaus Peter Oschema, and Joachim Friedrich Quack (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), pp. 359–72 (p. 363).

[151] Hindley, 'Eating Word and Burning Them', pp. 362–64.

[152] Ireland, 'First Catch Your Toad', p. 50.

[153] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 259; Ireland, 'First Catch Your Toad', pp. 50–51.

[154] Ireland, 'First Catch Your Toad', p. 53.

[155] Ireland, 'First Catch Your Toad', p. 54.

experiments are interesting from a judicial perspective because they take an established – albeit outdated and no longer officially sanctioned – judicial practice and adapt it for personal use and for application in matters which – though ostensibly dealing with criminality – have eschewed recourse to the legal system as a means of resolution. It has been suggested that, in the case of trial by ordeal, 'the legal system involved supernatural agency when human powers were incapable of resolving a difficulty, [and] so too did victims of crime.'[156] This assertion applies to any and all of the methods of theft detection discussed in this chapter more broadly, but those which mirror methods of trial by ordeal are most striking, as they uphold – and seek to replicate – the efficacy of such practices in determining guilt.

The notion of guilt here is also worth our pausing to consider momentarily. The question of the guilt of the suspect – whether they are 'culpable/*coupable'* – is the primary focus of these practices. The clay balls, and loaf of bread methods too, make use of the terms 'proof' (*probandum*) and 'guilt' (gylty). Words such as guilt and proof, are more closely aligned with legal terminology, and the incorporation of such language into these practices therefore identifies them with legal processes for attaining justice. Kamali notes that, while trial by ordeal relied on divine intervention to signal the guilt of the accused, jury trial, which replaced the ordeal, instead placed the burden of determining guilt on human shoulders.[157] She argues that the responsibility of lay jurors to issue legal verdicts, verdicts which could see the accused sent to the gallows, fostered an increase in concern with understanding guilt, or the concept of *mens rea*.[158] The imperative to correctly determine guilt was compounded by concern with correct judgement: if a false or mistaken judgement was passed, this could endanger the souls of the jurors.[159] The focus on guilt in several experiments to identify thieves reflects the preoccupation described by Kamali. The similarity between the experiment using pieces of bread and the morsel ordeal might suggest a continued extra-judicial use of a method which relied on divine intervention, rather than human judgement, to confirm the guilt of a suspect. Perhaps, then, we can interpret the use of experiments to identify thieves as a displacement of the responsibility to pass judgement.

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[156] Ireland, 'Law in Action, Law in Books', p. 318.

[157] Kamali, *Felony and the Guilty Mind in Medieval England*, p. 303.

[158] Kamali, *Felony and the Guilty Mind in Medieval England*, p. 5.

[159] Kamali, *Felony and the Guilty Mind in Medieval England*, p. 273.

The final text to consider here shows a similar concern with uncovering truth or guilt, but also reveals a stronger preoccupation with justice. Taking place in a more public setting, however, it also suggests that the practitioner is seeking – not just personal justice – but the righting of a wrong that has been inflicted on the community as a whole. Furthermore, there is an element of punishment present in this final text that is not explicit in the other methods of theft detection discussed so far (though it is arguable that choking the guilty party could certainly constitute a punishment, and perhaps even be fatal). This final text-type is commonly referred to as the 'Eye of Abraham', because it requires the user to paint an eye on a wall.[160] This method of theft detection was very popular throughout the medieval and early modern periods both in England and on the continent: versions of the text occur in Germanic traditions, and are also attested in manuscripts from the Netherlands, for example.[161] As Stephen Stallcup notes, this experiment has a precedent in a text from a fourth-century Greek papyrus.[162] However, the earliest example within my corpus is a Latin version in an eleventh-century manuscript: a clumsy cipher has been used by the scribe to conceal parts of the text, making it difficult to transcribe in full.[163] Two other examples survive in thirteenth-century manuscripts, one in Anglo-Norman and the other in Latin, with three other fifteenth-century versions in Middle English.[164] A representative example of the text is as follows:

> For hem þat bereþ away þi gode and steliþ it havyng suspecion of man or woman. Tak þe white of þe silver þat is kesten a way þer from and stamp it strongliche and prene it on a walle suche an eye [*illustration*].

[160] See, for example, Stallcup, 'The "Eye of Abraham"'; Benati, 'Painted Eyes'.

[161] Sophie Page cites examples in Dutch manuscripts in 'Medieval Magical Figures: Between Image and Text', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 432–57 (pp. 434–35); Stallcup edits several versions of this text from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries in 'The "Eye of Abraham"'; Frank Klaassen and Christopher Phillips discuss this text in a later manuscript in 'The Return of Stolen Goods: Reginald Scot, Religious Controversy, and Magic in Bodleian Library, Additional B. 1', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 1.2 (2008), 135–76; Benati cites a sixteenth century Icelandic version in 'Painted Eyes', pp. 197–98.

[162] Stallcup, 'The "Eye of Abraham"', pp. 24–25.

[163] London, British Library, Sloane MS 475, fols. 110v-111r.

[164] Oxford, Bodleian Library, Digby MS 86, fol. 20v; Oxford, Bodleian Library MS e Mus. 219, fol. 186r; London, British Library, Sloane MS 3542, fol. 19r; London, British Library, Sloane MS 2721, fol. 137r-v; London, British Library, Additional MS 34111, fol. 75r.

> And þan do clepe befor þe þe names of hem þat þow hast suspecion and hym þat þow has most suspecion do hem loke upon þis eye: and ȝif he be coupable his right eye shal be watery. And ȝif þat he wille aȝeyn sege it tak a nayle þat is hedes made of copre and stik it in þe eye and smyte þer on wiþ an hamer strongliche and he shalle crie a none riȝt as þow hast ysmite hym. And þis experiment haþe be muchel assaied and yproved, and assay it whoso haþe need.[165]

When examining this text – and the practice that it represents – from a social perspective, there are three crucial elements at play: the power dynamic between victim and suspect; the suggestion of punishment, which does not factor so heavily in the experiments discussed earlier; and how performing such a practice might either settle or promote conflict.

A consideration of the first of these elements requires us to imagine how the practice itself might have been carried out. Like the experiment resembling the morsel ordeal, the Eye of Abraham requires direct access to those who fall under the suspicion of the person who has been stolen from. But while the experiment using pieces of bread can be carried out one-on-one, the Eye of Abraham method takes place before a group of people. The practitioner, therefore, would need to possess the authority to convene those who might be suspected, suggesting that the balance of power lay firmly with the practitioner. Though speculative, we could postulate that this might be the head of a household, summoning those who live and work in the vicinity to determine who might have perpetrated a theft. Karen Jones notes that, according to court records, servants within a household were often the perpetrators of opportunistic theft.[166] If not a household head, then we can imagine that the patriarchal leaders of a community might have gathered together those under their jurisdiction: there was a range of methods available to community leaders to resolve tensions or address antisocial or even criminal acts that did not involve immediate recourse to the law.[167] Whether household head or community leader, this method of theft detection

[165] London, British Library, Additional MS 34111, fol. 75r; transcription provided in Stallcup, 'The "Eye of Abraham"', p. 26.

[166] Jones, *Gender and Petty Crime in Late Medieval England*, p. 46.

[167] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior in England, 1370-1600*, pp. 2, 7.

speaks to a system of governance which placed itself outside of the judicial sphere, but which could only be enacted by those who held a dominant position in society.

There is certainly a sense of righting a personal wrong in this text, but the very public setting required – in front of a group of people, even if those people are all suspected of a crime – implies public shame. Conducting this particular experiment in public is not just about identifying a guilty suspect, it brings with it a deep sense of righting the wrong against the social body too. Furthermore, there is a clear element of retribution here. This is evidenced by the way that the guilt of the perpetrator manifests: they are marked out by the infliction of physical pain. Seth Lerer identifies parallels or blurred lines between medieval drama and records of punishments in chronicles of legal action.[168] He notes that there was 'a growing emphasis on visualization in late medieval legal practice […]. The marked and mutilated body constitutes a document to be interpreted or a text to be read, as the signs and symbols convey a specificity of legal meaning [which] defines the criminal with all the directness and specificity of a badge'.[169] The Eye of Abraham experiment reflects this meeting of drama and judicial process, between public performance and the infliction of physical punishment. Klaassen and Philips, in examining a later example of this text type, have suggested that the pain or harm inflicted by the practitioner would be understood as 'just reprisal for harm and arguably, insofar as the retribution was a way of re-establishing just social order, as protective'.[170] The other people, gathered before the wall painting, in a way take on the role of jurors, witnessing and implicitly supporting the proclamation of guilt over the crying suspect.[171] It has been noted that beyond the physical torment which the experiment seeks to produce, there is a psychological factor at play too which, at its most effective might intimidate the thief into returning what they had stolen.[172] We might also speculate that the public nature of this

[168] Seth Lerer, '"Representyd Now in Yower Syght": The Culture of Spectatorship in Late-Fifteenth-Century England', in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 29–62.

[169] Lerer, 'Representyd Now in Yower Syght', p. 34.

[170] Klaassen and Phillips, 'The Return of Stolen Goods', pp. 156–57.

[171] By which I mean jurors in the medieval sense, who are noted to have acted in the capacity of witness, as compared to assessing guilt or innocence as they do in the present day, see Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace, 'Introduction', in *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, ed. by Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. xii.

[172] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 259–63.

experiment and the fear induced by the anticipation of such a response to a theft might have acted as a deterrent to would-be-thieves.[173]

As mentioned above, the capacity for a society to 'self-regulate' and settle its own disputes through the facilitation of neutral parties or patriarchal governance was considered the mark of a harmonious community.[174] How does the Eye of Abraham, or any of the other experiments for theft detection discussed above for that matter, correspond with such a diktat for the maintenance of social harmony? It is easy as a modern reader to see opting out of official judicial procedures as subversive, though as Ireland has pointed out, this still happens in twenty-first century society, for example coming to terms with another driver after a car accident without going through insurance.[175] Unofficial processes, such as these methods of theft detection, are what social historians often refer to as 'self-help' and they were not considered unusual or subversive in the medieval period; in fact the law, manipulated as it often was in the disputes of the powerful or elite, was not optimised for controlling or reducing conflict.[176] Methods of social control or conflict resolution were not homogenous, or unified under a state apparatus and, while these systems gradually evolved throughout the medieval period to become closer to something we might recognise today, during this process many other forces were interacting and competing.[177] Thus we might understand the use of the Eye of Abraham experiment, for example, as just one such method of self-help which enforced social control through its own terms, or the terms of the practitioner in any case. In this respect, we can draw parallels with other methods of patriarchal governance, or – though smaller-scale and more informal – these self-help practices can be compared to other more formalised methods of maintaining harmony such as confession, fraternities, and guilds.[178]

As Tom Johnson has suggested, methods of revealing the identify of a thief can be understood in two ways: as one of several available strategies to resolve disputes between different parties, or otherwise, more specifically, as a means of revealing the truth. He suggests that this 'offered aggrieved parties a different ideal of popular justice

[173] Lerer suggests that the public performance of punishment would have been intended to frighten the potentially transgressive populace in 'Representyd Now in Yower Syght', p. 35.

[174] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*, p. 57.

[175] Ireland, 'Law in Action, Law in Books', p. 311.

[176] Hanawalt, *Crime and Conflict in English Communities, 1300-1348*, p. 3.

[177] Hanawalt and Wallace, *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, p. x.

[178] McIntosh, *Controlling Misbehavior*, p. 7.

in the later Middle Ages, one rooted in knowledge rather than reconciliation'.[179] Personally, I would argue that these methods of theft detection are a means of wielding a similar amount of power as the legal system, in part by co-opting similar processes to those recognised within the legal system such as mirroring elements of an ordeal, or of a public trial with jurors. However, I see their unofficial settings as motivated by two factors. Firstly, lack of proof, which precludes the victim of the crime from utilising the legal system. Lack of proof may have been an impediment to prosecution but, as is made evident by the preceding discussion, it did not always prevent the victim from having a strong suspicion about who the culprit may have been. However, there is a hierarchy of power at play here, evidenced by the way that the different techniques for theft detection operate. While the Eye of Abraham or 'morsel' ordeals were, by their nature, limited to those who were in positions of at least some social authority, the methods involving sleep and dream provocation – carried out in the privacy of one's bed chamber – could have been adopted by those of more inferior social status who did not have the authority to convene their suspects. The second factor which may have prompted the use of these methods of theft detection is the desire to avoid the conflict that might have been prompted by resorting to legal prosecution. As Klaassen and Wright note, particularly with regard to prosecution for theft that may have resulted in capital punishment:

> The close-knit nature of late medieval and early modern communities meant that accusing someone of theft through the courts was complicated. Many victims of theft and those they suspected knew one another and were bound together in various ways, either as master and servant, friends and family, or neighbours living in the same parish […] As much as someone might hate their thieving neighbour, making a formal accusation was a complicated matter. It must have been hard to feel responsible (or to be blamed by other members of your community) for bringing about a person's death.[180]

[179] Tom Johnson, 'Soothsayers, Legal Culture, and the Politics of Truth in Late-Medieval England', *Cultural & Social History*, 17.4 (2020), 431–50 (p. 433).

[180] Wright and Klaassen, *Everyday Magicians*, pp. 38–39.

It is also important to acknowledge that recourse to an experiment for theft detection was more convenient than utilising the legal system which was subject to all sorts of procedural delays.[181] Of course, just as the legal system may have in fact generated further conflict rather than resolve it, the same can be suggested of these methods of self-help; as court cases have shown us, unfounded accusations of theft could lead to litigation to counteract what constituted criminal defamation.[182] Furthermore, once a perpetrator had been identified, in some cases the victims may have gone on to enact vengeance. Therefore, while these methods for dealing with theft might have been a way of avoiding the conflict associated with legal prosecution, they may nevertheless have contributed to ongoing cycles of conflict between different members of the community.

Conclusion

This chapter, through an exposition and analysis of the vast corpus of charms and experiments for theft, has demonstrated that there were numerous options available to those who feared losing their goods, or who found themselves victims of theft. The prolificacy of these texts suggests that anxiety around theft was one of the most pervasive concerns of the Middle Ages, and thus propagated the most extensive and diffuse response. But it is not just the quantity of methods for dealing with theft that makes this issue one of great interest. Close examination of the wording of the texts themselves can provide a multitude of insights into the specific fears experienced by medieval people when it came to theft, including a sense of bodily vulnerability, the types of goods that were at risk of being taken, and the locations in which the practitioner might have felt most vulnerable to theft. While previous studies of charms for theft have conducted close textual analysis to identify key motifs and possible routes of transmission, the study presented in this chapter takes a different approach. Here, I consider how the texts – and the practices or performances that they represent – position the user in relation to their belongings, their domestic residence, their

[181] Kamali, *Felony and the Guilty Mind in Medieval England*, p. 290.

[182] Accusations of theft were actionable in defamation cases because they implied a crime, see R. H. Helmholz, 'Canonical Defamation in Medieval England', *American Journal of Legal History*, 4, 1971, 255–68 (p. 257); for more on court cases relating to the use of magical theft detection see Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, p. 26; and Johnson, 'Soothsayers, Legal Culture, and the Politics of Truth'.

community, and the perpetrators of crime. This is where the significance of these texts with regard to social, domestic, and legal history is greatest. In the 'God was born in Bethlehem' text we find a fear, not just of the loss of goods, but of harm to the body, especially while undertaking a journey. But the use of the first-person plural suggests that this fear – and consequent desire for protection – extends beyond the practitioner, encompassing the entire family or household. Meanwhile, the performative elements of certain texts which seek to bind the thief reveal a concern with protecting the property's boundary lines through ritualistic means. The circumscription of the property's boundary lines indicated in several texts mirrors many elements of the medieval custom of beating the bounds, suggesting the appropriation and adaptation of this ritual into one which is performed on a microcosmic level. Furthermore, it reveals a similar assertion of ownership and the same desire to create a kind of protective forcefield around a property as that connoted by the ritual of beating the bounds. Reconstructing the performance that is suggested by the text also permits us to consolidate the intrinsic link between words and action, and to understand how the two in collaboration can enact an effect that words alone might not necessarily deliver. Circulating the property while reciting the charm creates a relationship between speech, movement, and location, anchoring the protection in place. This protective forcefield also has offensive properties, however, producing a number of different effects on the would-be-thief. The implicit or explicit threat of retaliation that is present in many of these charms against thieves highlights the anxiety around transgression of the threshold. Meanwhile, the language of some of the invocations used, with its similarities to charms for healing which thus equates thieves with invading or pestilential forces, draws parallels between the external boundaries of the human body and the domestic plot.

Experiments to identify a thief, on the other hand, bring with them considerations of unofficial judicial processes and how such practices might be situated within wider systems of social control and conflict resolution. Many of the methods discussed require the user to identify potential suspects, something which tallies closely with records of theft from the Middle Ages which show how common it was for property crime to be committed by neighbours and acquaintances. In practices which mirror the process of trial by ordeal, we not only see how an outdated judicial practice has been co-opted for private use, but also a possible concern around judgement, whereby the burden of correct judgement is placed back on the divine,

rather than on human shoulders. The more public Eye of Abraham experiment, on the other hand, speaks to a desire, not only for the truth, but for retribution too: the physical pain caused by the nail being hammered into the illustrated eye acts as a punishment which marks the thief out in front of other members of his or her community. These methods can be considered as one of a range of informal practices that were intended to regulate crime and anti-social behaviour; however, they may also have participated within more prolonged cycles of conflict, provocation and retaliation.

Chapter three: controlling women's bodies; controlling women

Chapter One of this thesis focused on the social climate of late-medieval England, and what other literary and documentary sources can tell us about the most prominent concerns of medieval people, particularly those of the middling strata of society. It highlighted that there was a pervasive sense of status anxiety or social precarity in these sources, and demonstrated that many of the key concerns which come to the fore in these documentary sources are also reflected in the utilities of the most prolific charms and experiments in the manuscripts of my corpus. Meanwhile, a closer examination of manuscripts associated with known figures or gentry households revealed how key social attitudes or anxieties may have influenced or shaped the texts collected and compiled by manuscript owners. Chapter Two examined the social contexts of theft, and how charms and experiments to prevent theft, or identify a thief after the crime has been committed, reveal the different ways in which these texts position their users in relation to criminals, suspected criminals, and their household or neighbours, as well as to their domestic space and personal belongings. This final chapter combines close manuscript study with a consideration of one final interpersonal relationship: that between men and women.

This chapter is therefore structured in two parts. The first part is devoted to the study of six manuscripts that were likely all owned and used by medical practitioners. These manuscripts all contain a selection of 'non-medical' charms and experiments and, based on the manuscript contexts, I will argue that although not explicitly intended for use in healing, these texts were nevertheless an intrinsic component for those who practiced, or were interested in the practice of, medicine. While the first scholars to collect and analyse the textual evidence of charms dismissed them as superstitious, or as the purview of the unlearned or illiterate lower classes, more recent studies have revealed that 'magical' healing was integrated into the services of all types of physicians, including those who were university trained, and who practiced at court.[1]

[1] For example, Lynn Thorndike, though conducting a ground-breaking study of magic in medieval manuscripts, referred to more popular practices, including charms and experiments as superstitious and barriers to rational scepticism, see *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols (New York: Macmillan, 1923); for more recent studies on the place of these practices within more learned medical

Evidence that university-trained physicians copied, collected, and likely used charms and other empirical cures survives in the manuscripts associated with well-known figures such as Gilbertus Anglicanus and John of Gaddesden.[2] Meanwhile, close studies of manuscripts that are linked to known medieval medical practitioners, such as Thomas Fayreford and John Crophill, have reinforced the notion that charms and experiments were a typical component of medical practice, and that they were not considered to be distinct from other types of cures, at least not in a way that is suggested by the codicological evidence.[3] However, the place of charms and experiments which did not serve – at least to a modern reader – an explicitly medical purpose, has been less examined. The first part of this chapter will redress this. With careful regard for the manuscript evidence, it will explore the place of these texts in medical manuscripts and alongside material of a more obviously medical nature. This will not only inform our understanding of how medieval people perceived and categorised these types of practices, but it will also shed light on how people may have sought help for problems that went beyond the health of the physical body to incorporate social, domestic, and economic concerns. The bridge between the first and second parts of this chapter will be the text(s) that unify the six manuscripts studied here: the well-known works of gynaecological literature which are collectively known as the *Trotula*. Parts, or all, of the *Trotula* feature in all six of the codices under examination here: I will consider the significance of the *Trotula* texts and question why they might have been of particular interest to the owners or compilers of these volumes. The second part of this chapter explores the variety of charms and experiments to control social and sexual relations between men and women present in these codices, and probes how this might inform our understanding of how the *Trotula* texts may have been read and used. However, it will also broaden the inquiry to consider the place of charms and experiments to incite love or lust, reveal women's

practice see Lea T. Olsan, 'Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice', *Social History of Medicine*, 16.3 (2003), 343–66; and Peter Murray Jones, 'Thomas Fayreford: An English Fifteenth-Century Medical Practitioner', in *Medicine from the Black Death to the French Disease*, ed. by Andrew Cunningham (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1998), pp. 156–83.

[2] Olsan, 'Charms and Prayers in Medieval Medical Theory and Practice'.

[3] Jones, 'Thomas Fayreford: An English Fifteenth-Century Medical Practitioner'; Peter Murray Jones, 'Witnesses to Medieval Medical Practice in the Harley Collection', *British Library Journal*, 8 (2008), 1–13; James K. Mustain, 'A Rural Medical Practitioner in Fifteenth-Century England', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 46.5 (1972), 469–76; Danielle Jacquart, 'Theory, Everyday Practice, and Three Fifteenth-Century Physicians', *Osiris*, 6 (1990), 140–60.

secrets, or uncover adultery, for example, within wider medieval society, and to understand how these texts, like those discussed in previous chapters, represent the key concerns and anxieties of the medieval populace.

The '*Trotula* group' of manuscripts

Unified by their inclusion of this group of gynaecological texts, I have come to describe the six manuscripts discussed here as the '*Trotula* group'. In surveying the broader corpus of manuscripts studied for this thesis, it became clear that there was a trend among a small group of manuscripts with respect to the content that they contained, among which the *Trotula* texts were a recurring feature. The *Trotula* texts consist of three tracts concerning women's medicine that originated in twelfth-century southern Italy, likely Salerno: *Book on the Conditions of Women (Liber de sinthomatibus mulierum)*; *Treatments for Women (De curis mulierum)*; and *Women's Cosmetics (De ornatu mulierum)*.[4] While the first and third tracts in this collection are attributed to the female Salernitan healer Trota, or Trocta, they are in fact the works of anonymous, and most likely male, authors. The second tract, *Treatments for Women*, however, does appear to reflect the practice of Trota, though it may have made its way into written record by means of oral dictation to a scribe, rather than having been composed directly by the healer herself.[5] In later circulation, these three tracts were brought into association with one another, often all attributed to Trota of Salerno and, although her authorship of all three tracts is not supported by the evidence, this attribution to Trota can be viewed as an acknowledgement of her fame as a healer.[6] Copies of the *Trotula* texts survive in over a hundred Latin and vernacular manuscripts from the Middle Ages, a testament to the enduring popularity of these tracts.[7] It is no surprise, therefore, that at times the *Trotula* texts find themselves in the company of equally popular charms and experiments. However, selecting the manuscripts for

[4] *The 'Trotula': A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*, ed. & trans. by Monica H. Green (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), pp. 17–48.

[5] Green, *The 'Trotula': A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*, pp. 48–51.

[6] Green, *The 'Trotula': A Medieval Compendium of Women's Medicine*, pp. 48–51.

[7] For a full breakdown of the extant manuscript witnesses of the *Trotula* see Monica H. Green, 'A Handlist of the Latin and Vernacular Manuscripts of the So-Called *Trotula* Texts. Part I: The Latin Manuscripts', *Scriptorium*, 50 (1996), 137–75; and 'A Handlist of the Latin and Vernacular Manuscripts of the So-Called *Trotula* Texts. Part II: The Vernacular Texts and Latin Re-Writings', *Scriptorium*, 51 (1997), 80–104.

study here based on this crossover in content allows us to identify shared interests among manuscript users and compilers which go beyond the collection of charms and experiments. It provides a discrete group for in-depth study, and also allows us to posit the theory of a discourse community, that is, 'a group of people who have texts and practices in common' or, more generally, as a group 'defined by having a set of common interests, values and purposes'.[8] Considering the readers and users of these manuscripts as part of a wider discourse community allows us to spot the connections between the manuscripts, identify evidence of shared interests and practices, and begin to sketch out and refine a picture of a certain type of physician, practicing in medieval England, who had a demonstrable interest in a specific type of knowledge. This will be explored in greater depth once I have described each of the relevant manuscripts for study here.

London, British Library, Additional MS 12195

London, British Library, Additional MS 12195 has been most thoroughly described by David Thomson in *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts*.[9] The manuscript falls into four distinct sections, all dating to the late fifteenth century: a dated note on folio 72v references the fifth year of Henry VII's reign, while the specimen forms which have been copied across the opening folios can be dated to 1477–8. These specimen forms, which occupy the first section of the manuscript (fols. 3 – 15) also mention Oxford, suggesting that this part of the volume may have been produced there. Further to this, the name 'Willelmus K' is frequently mentioned in this section, and Thomson suggests that this may reflect the teaching of the Oxford *dictator* William Kingsmill.[10] Kingsmill, whose curriculum included instruction around letter-writing and forms for business transactions, however, was active only between 1420 and 1450, so the dates do not quite align with the period during which the manuscript

[8] David Barton, *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2017), p. 57; see also Claire Jones, 'Discourse Communities and Medical Texts', in *Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English*, ed. by Irma Taavitsainen and Päivi Pahta (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 23–36.

[9] David Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts* (New York: Garland, 1979), pp. 193–211; *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum 1841 - 5* (London: British Museum, 1850), pp. 50–51.

[10] Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts*, pp. 194, 210.

was produced.[11] The second section (fols. 16 – 58) is a Carmelite compilation containing services for certain feasts and festivals, along with other liturgical notes. Thomson localises this to the Carmelite priory of Burnham Norton in Norfolk.[12] A note on folio 24v mentions the place name Dunton, which is 12 miles from Burnham, and an ownership inscription below this note claims '*iste liber pertinent fratro Georgeo Burn[ham]*' suggesting that this section of the manuscript belonged to a resident of the priory. The third section (fols. 59 – 121) is predominantly authored by a John Leke of North Creake, a village which is just a few miles from Burnham Norton; it contains grammatical tracts and notes, as well as further liturgical notes and Latin treatises on subjects such as the Seven Deadly Sins, the Ten Commandments, and the Twelves Articles of Faith.[13] Leke references himself on several occasions as 'magister', suggesting that he had a university education; however, there are no records of him at either Oxford or Cambridge from this period, nor can any reference to him be found in other documentary sources. A note at the top of folio 72v suggests that this section of the manuscript subsequently came into the possession of Edmund Herbard 'vic(arius) de Toftrys' or Toftrees, also near Dunton in Norfolk.[14] The final section (fols. 122 – 190), which is the one of interest here, is primarily a collection of medical treatises, recipes, and *experimenta*, and offers little evidence as to its provenance.[15] It is the only section of the manuscript that is authored primarily in English, and Alexandra Barratt notes that, based on linguistic features – for example the very distinctive 'xall' for 'shall' – it most probably also originated in Norfolk.[16]

It is unclear when the four distinct sections of the manuscript were first bound together. Thomson notes that the first section was definitely not bound with the rest in the sixteenth century, but that all four parts had been combined by 1770, at which point the eighteenth-century owner William Herbert signed and dated a binding leaf.[17]

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[11] *French Lessons in Late-Medieval England: The 'Liber Donati' and 'Commune Parlance'*, ed. by Rory G. Critten (Leeds: Arc Humanities Press, 2023), p. 7.

[12] Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts*, p. 210.

[13] Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts*, pp. 199–207, 210.

[14] Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts*, p. 210.

[15] Thomson is unable to offer any insight into where this section of the manuscript may have originated, or who may have authored it in *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts*, p. 211.

[16] *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing: A Middle English Version of Material Derived from the Trotula and Other Sources*, ed. by Alexandra Barratt (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), p. 17; *A Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English*, ed. by Angus McIntosh, M. L. Samuels, and Michael Benskin (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986), pp. 1, 100.

[17] Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts*, p. 211.

Barratt suggests that the final section may have originally been in the possession of a house of Augustinian Canons, presumably at the Abbey of Creake which was located between North Creake and Burnham Norton, and which was home to this particular religious order.[18]. Regardless of where this final section of the manuscript originated, the codicological evidence makes it clear that it was compiled and circulated, at least for a short while, independently of the rest of the codex. Each folio has been numbered, starting with a 1 at the beginning of the section (folio 122), something which is not replicated throughout the other three sections. The first folio of the section also shows signs of wear and tear that are not congruent with its place in the middle of a larger codex, suggesting that it initially travelled without a binding, or in a less protective wrapping. In light of this, I consider this final section and its contents as independent from the rest of the codex. The more diverse contents of the complete manuscript, as it stands today, may not have come into association until the late eighteenth century, and therefore may not necessarily reflect the interests of the original compiler or user of the final section.

The section of interest here begins with an English translation of the *De corio serpentis* or *Twelve Experiments with Snakeskin* of Johannes Paulinus, followed by several supplementary experiments and recipes connected to this text.[19] This is followed by the Middle English tract *The Wise Book of Philosophy and Astronomy*, and several medical recipes, including a charm for fevers.[20] Complementing the tract on astronomy is a treatise providing the characteristics of those born under different signs of the zodiac. Two further treatises are included: *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing,* also known as a vernacular version of the *Trotula*, which Monica Green labels 'Translation A', and an English medical treatise called *The Book of Hypocras* featuring several diagrams.[21] Other medical charms and recipes include a textual

[18] Barratt, *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, p. 5.

[19] This summary broadly follows that given by Barratt, though I have condensed it slightly. Barratt cites Thomson as the primary source for this description, in *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, pp. 17–18.

[20] For the *Wise Book* see Carrie Griffin, *The Middle English Wise Book of Philosophy and Astronomy: A Parallel-Text Edition Edited from London, British Library, MS Sloane 2453 with a Parallel Text from New York, Columbia University, MS Plimpton 260* (Heidelberg: Universitatsverlag Winter, 2013); the copy in Additional 12195 breaks off around midway through the full tract.

[21] For the *Trotula* text see Monica H. Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts in Middle English', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 14.1 (1992), 53–88 (p. 59); see also Barratt, *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, pp. 17–18; Naoë Kukita Yoshikawa, 'Embracing the Body and the Soul: Women in the Literary Culture of Medieval Medicine', in *Women and Medieval Literary Culture: From the Early Middle Ages to the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Corinne Saunders and Diane Watt (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge

charm for a woman in labour, ‘to make a watyr that good king Edward usyd’ – which instructs the maker to steep herbs including fennel, vervain, celandine, and betony in white wine, a child’s urine, and breast milk, to treat ‘alle evyl in þe eyne’ – recipes to catch ‘conyes’ or rabbits, and a list of the medical and non-medical properties of the herb vervain (*verbena*).

The *De corio serpentis*, discussed in previous chapters, draws on the properties of powdered snakeskin to perform twelve different functions, including to tell friends from enemies, to find a thief, to win a dispute, and to reveal secrets, among others.[22] The additional non-medical experiments and recipes in this manuscript include: to make adders appear in the house, and to find green adders; to make birds fall down and appear dead; to learn things in a dream vision; to become invisible; to make objects look as though they are made of gold; to have anything you ask of a lord or lady; and to make a woman love you. There is also a Latin charm to put out a fire on folio 136v, and among the listed properties of vervain on folio 149 are methods to prove whether a woman is a virgin or not, to identify a thief, and to conquer enemies.

This section of the manuscript provides minimal evidence of interaction with the texts. A small number of *nota* in the margins, as well as the annotations ‘for fyre’ beside the charm for fire, and ‘for feveres’ beside the charm for fever in a contemporary hand on folio 136v demonstrate some engagement with the texts after the compilation of this section. The English version of the *De corio serpentis* is rare; I have only found two other instances of this text in the vernacular, one in Cambridge, Magdalene College, Pepys MS 1661 – a manuscript from the first half of the fifteenth century, and the other in a late-fifteenth century manuscript, San Marino, Huntington Library MS HM 64, which will be discussed shortly. The focus of Additional MS 12195 on vernacular texts, with both this tract and the *Trotula* being copied in translation rather than a reproduction of the Latin original, does suggest a compiler with a preference for reading English texts; however, we cannot rule out that this may instead be reflective of the scribe’s access to specific exempla. In support of the latter suggestion, there is a small selection of Latin texts, including one of the experiments to make

University Press, 2023), pp. 141–59; for background on the Hippocratic tradition see Pearl Kibre, *Hippocrates Latinus: Repertorium of Hippocratic Writings in the Latin Middle Ages*, Revised edition with additions and corrections (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985).

[22] Discussed by Thorndike, though he does not mention Additional MS 12195 as a source, in *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, pp. 794–96.

yourself invisible and the charm for fire, implying that the compiler and/or reader had at least some level of Latin literacy.

London, British Library, Additional MS 34111

Like Additional MS 12195, London, British Library, Additional MS 34111 is almost entirely in English. Based on script, the volume has been dated to the second quarter of the fifteenth century by both Suzanne Sheldon and Tony Hunt; this large compendium stands at 238 folios, and contains a vast array of medical tracts and treatises citing notable authorities – like Galen and Hippocrates – as well as more dubious named figures such as 'Rusticus', 'Parisius, the Abbot of St. Marks' and 'Cophon the Leche'.[23] Almost all published scholarship on this manuscript, including the British Library catalogue itself, cites several references to a Master William (fols. 114 and 169) and to Master William Somers (fol. 174) in order to suggest that the manuscript must have been compiled by someone of this name, or under his direction.[24] Lanfranc mentions a 'Maister William Someris' in the *Science of Cirurgie* as someone who had once made a resin ointment, while Talbot and Hammond list 'William of Sumery' as a thirteenth-century physician, and many scholars go as far as to suggest that the original owner or compiler of Additional MS 34111 was this same person.[25] However, given that the manuscript is dated to the second quarter of the fifteenth century, this suggestion does not make sense: the manuscript itself could not have been compiled under the direction of a physician who was practicing two hundred years prior to its completion. While Additional MS 34111 could have been based on

[23] Suzanne Sheldon, 'Middle English and Latin Charms, Amulets, and Talismans from Vernacular Manuscripts' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Tulane, 1978), pp. 73–74; Tony Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine: Volume II Shorter Treatises* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), p. 10; Lynn Thorndike suggests that the Rusticus referred to here might be Rusticus Elpidus, physician to Theodoric, king of the Ostrogoths in Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 4, p. 803.

[24] *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years 1888 - 93* (London: British Museum, 1894), pp. 198–200; Sheldon, 'Middle English and Latin Charms', pp. 73–74; Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts', p. 60; Patrick Fordyn, *The 'Experimentes of Cophon, the Leche of Salerne'* (Brussels: UFSAL, 1983), p. 9; Stephen Stallcup, 'The "Eye of Abraham" Charm for Thieves: Versions in Middle and Early Modern English', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 10.1 (2015), 23–40 (p. 36); W. L. Braekman, *Studies on Alchemy, Diet, Medecine [Sic] and Prognostication in Middle English* (Brussels: UFSAL, 1986), p. 115.

[25] Lanfranc's reference to Wiliam Somers can be found in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS 1396, fol. 262r; C. H. Talbot and E. A. Hammond, *The Medical Practitioners in Medieval England: A Biographical Register* (London: Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1965), p. 416.

an earlier exemplar which had been in the possession of William Somers, it is more likely that he is instead one of the – albeit lesser known – authorities that the manuscript cites. The confusion of previous scholars can perhaps – in part – be explained by the way that the tract of experiments in Additional MS 34111 is introduced, whereby the recipes are attributed to Rusticus but are noted to have been proven by William Somers, rather than authored:

> *Experimenta Rustici*
> Here bygynneþ þe Experimentes of a wyseman þat was yclepid Rusticus þe whiche experimentes maystere Gylliam Somers proved be fele tymes [*repeatedly*].[26]

Tony Hunt notes that a Latin tract of experiments attributed to a William Somers appears in Cambridge, Corpus Christi MS 297, while Talbot and Hammond cite British Library, Royal MS 12 E XXIII as another extant witness; however, it seems that a direct comparison between the experiments in Additional MS 34111 and those in the Corpus Christi and Royal manuscripts remains to be made.[27] From my own preliminary investigation, I can confirm that there is definitely a relationship between the vernacular experiments attributed to William Somers in Additional MS 34111 and the Latin texts in the Corpus Christi and Royal codices, though neither of them make reference to Rusticus. Both of the Latin tracts begin with a recipe for '*tinea'* or '*tyneam'*, a disease of the skin of the head which is characterised by scabs; this recipe is absent in the Additional manuscript, which begins with a brevet or textual charm for epilepsy.[28] This brevet is the second entry in the two Latin tracts. In all three manuscripts, the charms for epilepsy are followed by an entry to treat sore and red eyes, using '*cortex bugiae*' or 'bugie', which is the bark of barberry root, and to soothe weeping eyes, using lead powder.[29] Further detailed listing of each entry in all three manuscripts

[26] Additional MS 34111, fol. 174r; another tract of experiments attributed to Rusticus can be found beginning fol. 233r, perhaps indicating scribal error or confusion.

[27] Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, p. 10; Talbot and Hammond, *The Medical Practitioners in Medieval England: A Biographical Register*, p. 416.

[28] *[T]inea* in Royal MS 12 E XXIII, fol. 113r, and *tyneam* in Corpus Christi MS 297, fol. 150r, see 'tinea' in *Middle English Compendium*, ed. by Frances McSparran et al., Online Edition (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2018).

[29] See 'bugie' in McSparran et al., *Middle English Compendium*.

followed by direct linguistic comparison would confirm the exact level of crossover between the texts, and may enable the formulation of some preliminary hypotheses as to the transmission and subsequent translation of this tract. This is something which is beyond the scope of this current thesis, but it may inform future projects.

Establishing a link between the experiments of William Somers in Additional MS 34111 and the tracts in the Royal and Corpus Christi manuscripts means that the oft-cited origins of this codex are disproved. There is one minor clue to the manuscript's provenance in the form of an ownership inscription which appears on the manuscript's final folio in a roughly contemporary hand: R. Smyth.[30] This common name provides little opportunity for identification, though it is tempting to consider that the manuscript may have passed into the hands of the surgeon Richard Smythys who Talbot and Hammond record as having been a member of medical staff during Edward IV's military expedition to France in 1475.[31] A later inscription on the first folio suggest that the manuscript may have eventually passed into the hands of Thomas Jones, Bishop of Meath (1584 – 1605).[32]

Although we do not know who the original compiler or owner of Additional MS 34111 was, the manuscript evidence is strongly suggestive that this person was a medical practitioner. Entirely in one hand, meaning that it was planned and executed as a single volume, the manuscript is carefully and clearly indexed, firstly with a list of each of the books or chapters it contains (folio 1r – v) and then by further breaking down the individual recipes found within each of the books (folios 1v – 30v). This extensive indexing provides the incipit of each text and is neatly rubricated to aid quick identification. A later hand has added folio numbers beside groups of text to further facilitate navigation. The title of each book is first given in Latin, followed immediately by an English translation. The final three books listed in the index, Macer's herbal, the *Liber urinarum*, and *Nomina herbarum*, are now missing.

The manuscript includes a vast number of *experimenta*, medical recipes, and longer tracts of therapeutic medicine. Notable inclusions are the *Speculum medicorum*, a composite collection of remedies from different authors, beginning with

[30] Folio 238v.

[31] Talbot and Hammond, *The Medical Practitioners in Medieval England: A Biographical Register*, p. 282.

[32] *Catalogue of Additions to the Manuscripts in the British Museum in the Years 1888 - 93*, pp. 198–200.

treatments for the head and working down to other areas of the body.[33] Later on in the manuscript is the *Experimenta Parisii abbatis Sancti Marcii*, a book which describes how the imbalance of the four humours causes illness.[34] The codex also includes a condensed and rearranged English translation of the *Trotula*, which it titles the *Liber Trotuli*.[35] This is followed by a collection of medical recipes attributed to 'Cophon the Leche [*leech*]'.[36] The volume also includes Hippocratic works, including the *Secreta Ypocratis* which provides a series of indicators for whether a sick person will live or die, and an extensive list of *experimenta* attributed to Galen.[37] The manuscript has several medical charms, including the brevet or textual charm for epilepsy already mentioned, as well as charms to staunch blood and for toothache (both on folio 70r) and for childbirth (folio 73r). The non-medical charms and experiments include two means of identifying a thief and one to recover lost articles, a charm to escape captivity, an experiment to make someone reveal secrets in their sleep, charms for success in battle and to cure a foundering horse, an experiment to protect the fields from birds, and a text called the *Virtutes aquile*. This final item is a long tract of natural magic which draws on the occult virtues of different parts of the eagle to address a range of medical and non-medical problems.[38]

While the manuscript as a whole has not been studied, select individual texts and tracts have been commented on, or edited by, scholars. Klaus-Dietrich Fischer briefly considers Additional MS 34111 as part of his investigation into the *Speculum medicorum*, finding that the text in the Additional manuscript is an English translation of a composite therapeutic manual which draws on the material of a number of different Salernitan authors, such as Copho (or Cophon), Asclepius, and Trota.[39] But the influence of the Salernitan school on the manuscript is not confined to this particular text: there are also separate texts attributed to both Copho and Trota. The *Liber Trotuli* of Additional MS 34111 is labelled 'Translation B' by Monica Green, who finds that it

[33] See Klaus-Dietrich Fischer, 'A Mirror for Deaf Ears? A Medieval Mystery', *Electronic British Library Journal*, 2008, 1–16.

[34] Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, p. 12.

[35] Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts', p. 68.

[36] Fordyn, *The 'Experimentes of Cophon, the Leche of Salerne'*.

[37] On the Hippocratic texts see Kibre, *Hippocrates Latinus* though this focuses on the Latin tradition, rather than the vernacular.

[38] See Suzanne Sheldon, 'The Eagle: Bird of Magic and Medicine in a Middle English Translation of the Kyranides', *Tulane Studies in English*, 22 (1977), 1–32.

[39] Fischer, 'A Mirror for Deaf Ears', p. 10.

is a unique witness and the only English translation to include many of the cosmetic recipes which are found in the Latin *Trotula* collection alongside the obstetrical and gynaecological ones.[40] Like Translation B of the *Trotula*, the 'Experimentes of Cophone' in Additional MS 34111 is the only surviving vernacular copy; here it claims to be a translation of the Latin *Liber Cophonis*, though Patrick Fordyn, who edits the text, asserts that the Middle English version bears no resemblance to the known Latin tract associated with this author.[41] Fordyn's edition includes a diplomatic transcription of the text, though he does not preface this with an of overview of the codex as a whole, meaning that the broader context of this tract and its place in Additional MS 34111 remains unexamined.[42] Outside of the group of texts associated with the Salernitan school, the *Virtutes aquile* has attracted attention from Suzanne Sheldon. The *Virtutes aquile* finds its origins in the Greek *Kyranides,* a text which provides medical recipes that use the body parts of various animals, birds, and fish.[43] Sheldon provides an edition of the text, which lists a wide range of medical and non-medical properties of the eagle, including to secure favour, for protection from enemies, and to attract the love of a man or woman.

Like many of the other tracts in Additional MS 34111, the *Virtutes aquile* is a Middle English translation of a Latin text, albeit one with its basis in Greek tradition. Tony Hunt notes that the Latin version of this text, along with several other Latin tracts including the *Speculum medicorum, Experimenta Parisii abbatis Sancti Marcii*, and a version of the *Trotula*, are also transmitted together in a thirteenth century manuscript, Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS e Museo 219.[44] This manuscript forms part of the grouping selected for consideration in this chapter and will be described in full shortly. The crossover in texts here, however, raises a question about the precise link between the two manuscripts and whether the compiler of Additional MS 34111 also had some role in the translation of the texts it contains.

Further to the tracts outlined above, several of the individual charms, experiments, and other recipes, have been edited by scholars. The experiment to

[40] Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts', p. 68.

[41] Fordyn, *The 'Experimentes of Cophon, the Leche of Salerne'*, p. 9.

[42] This is something that is pointed out by A. S. G. Edwards' review of the edition, in which several errors of transcription are also highlighted, see 'Brief Notices', *Speculum*, 59.3 (1984), 715–31 (p. 717).

[43] Sheldon, 'The Eagle: Bird of Magic and Medicine', p. 4.

[44] Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, p. 12.

identify a thief – often referred to as the 'Eye of Abraham' charm and discussed in the previous chapter – has been separately edited by Stephen Stallcup, Suzanne Sheldon, and Willy Braekman.[45] Braekman, in fact, edits a total of eighty-three recipes, including several charms, found in Additional MS 34111, though he asserts the now outdated opinion that they 'reflect the intrusion of Christianity' into pagan practice.[46] Sheldon edits nineteen of the charms and experiments from Additional MS 34111, as part of a wider project which records and transcribes such texts in both Latin and vernacular medieval manuscripts.[47]

London, British Library, Sloane MS 121

London, British Library, Sloane MS 121 is a more codicologically complex manuscript than Additional MS 34111, which was composed as a single unit, and is in just one hand. The first eight and final ten folios of the codex feature a diverse collection of notes, short verse, memoranda, sums, and an inventory of books, as well as astrological diagrams and crude chiromantic illustrations. These are all in the same (later) hand and were likely attached by a subsequent owner. The piecemeal nature of the volume is compounded by an extract of a printed text by Johann Oberndoerffer: *The Anatomyes of the True Physition and Counterfeit Mounte-banke*, dated to 1602. However, at its core, the manuscript is a composite collection of a number of medical tracts in varying fifteenth-century hands, with additional medical and culinary recipes inserted in any available gaps by contemporary, and later – sixteenth and seventeenth century – hands. It was purchased by Sir Hans Sloane in 1693, but no other information regarding its provenance is available.

The first – medieval – part of the codex consists of a *Synonyma herbarum*, or list of different names for plants and herbs. This is followed by an astrological text on phlebotomy in English and Latin, which provides guidance on when to bleed patients, according to the signs of the zodiac.[48] There are two treatises on urine, both in English,

[45] Stallcup, 'The "Eye of Abraham"', p. 26; Sheldon, 'Middle English and Latin Charms', p. 125; Braekman, *Studies on Alchemy, Diet, Medicine*, p. 139.

[46] Braekman, *Studies on Alchemy, Diet, Medicine*, p. 114.

[47] Sheldon, 'Middle English and Latin Charms'.

[48] Mentioned briefly by Rossell Hope Robbins, 'Medical Manuscripts in Middle English', *Speculum*, 45.3 (1970), 393–415 (p. 402, n. 25); and in Irma Taavitsainen, 'The Identification of Middle English Lunary MSS', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 88.1 (1987), 18–26 (p. 26).

alchemical treatises in Latin and English, and numerous recipes added in a range of contemporary and later hands.[49] There are two English translations of the *Trotula*, one only fragmentary, consisting of two parchment folios inserted from a smaller manuscript; the other identified as 'Translation D' by Monica Green, is here assigned the title *Secreta mulierum*.[50]

There is little clue as to the manuscript's provenance. The name Thomas Sety has been written into the bottom margins on folios 110v and 117v, and amongst pen trials on folio 7v is the phrase 'Robert Jones is my name'. The seventeenth-century hand that fills the quires inserted just after the opening flyleaves, and just before the closing ones, makes mention twice of a 'doctyr Turner/ doctor Tourner' (folios 3r and 128r). The texts in Sloane MS 121 have not been analysed in the *Linguistic Atlas of Late Medieval English* (*LALME*), and there do not appear to be any distinctive regional dialectical features with which to localise the manuscript. No existing description of the manuscript, principally the British Library catalogue, comments on the collation or attempts to suggest whether – at least the core – was devised and assembled as one unit. The same fifteenth-century hand appears in the blank spaces between most of the treatises, suggesting that the majority of the manuscript as it now stands was assembled by the time it fell into the hands of this owner. While there are varying hands throughout the manuscript, and within the same quires, similarities in script and rubrication style of the individual tracts suggest that much of the manuscript was produced around the same time, perhaps even in one centre or network of production. Ralph Hanna has noted that two of the tracts – one of the translations of the *Trotula* and one of the tracts on urines – in this manuscript are perhaps identical with those found in the commonplace book of Humphrey Newton, discussed in Chapter One.[51] Hanna argues that the presence of these texts in Newton's manuscript is revealing about the nature of book production.[52] He suggests that the quire in which these texts are found formed the original part of Newton's volume, around which the rest of the

[49] Sloane MS 121 is included as part of the 'Karapos' group of Twenty-Jordan texts on urine in M. Teresa Tavormina, 'The Twenty-Jordan Series: An Illustrated Middle English Uroscopy Text', *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews*, 18.3 (2005), 43–67 (p. 46); Ralph Hanna also notes similarities between one of these texts and one found in the commonplace book of Humphrey Newton in 'Humphrey Newton and Bodleian Library, MS Lat. Misc. C. 66', *Medium Ævum*, 69.2 (2000), 279–91 (p. 282).

[50] Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts', pp. 71–72.

[51] Hanna, 'Humphrey Newton', p. 282.

[52] Hanna, 'Humphrey Newton', p. 283.

codex was assembled, and that it was likely a professionally produced, bespoke, quire, rather than homemade.[53]

There are a number of non-medical charms and experiments, in addition to a process for ascertaining the answer to various questions through astrological means, added by the seventeenth century user in the final folios. There are two methods of identifying a thief and a charm to capture snakes on folios 36v – 37v; two experiments on 109r-v, one, discussed in Chapter One, to be victorious in wrestling or pleading (in court), and the other to 'wetyn how thu thi frend farit in fere cuntre', followed by an experiment to drive rabbits from one warren to another; and finally, a tract of Latin experiments known as the *Experiments of Solomon*, sometimes called the *Ludis Salamonis* or *Ludi nature.* These experiments comprise a combination of magic tricks, including sleights of hand and illusions produced by simple chemical processes and reactions, with items of natural magic.[54] They are similar to other books of experiments, such as the *Eighty-eight Natural Experiments* of Rasis, and the *Book of Fires* of Marcus Graecus, which both survive in manuscripts from the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries.[55] Roy Bruno has suggested that these types of texts are primarily concerned with 'domestic economy' including expelling vermin, and maintaining foodstuffs and domestic objects, but they have a more playful, and sometimes sinister side too.[56] As well as experiments to make a ring jump around through the house, to make letters appear gold or silver, to gather rats or fish in one place, and to carry fire in your bare hands, the copy of the *Experiments of Solomon* in Sloane MS 121 contains a longer ritual of a more necromantic nature. The final entry of the tract offers instructions to make a lead ring which will force any woman to obey you. Richard Kieckhefer considers the incongruence of this text beside experiments of a more ludic nature and, while acknowledging that the author may have been attempting to hide their interest in demonic magic among texts of a more innocent calibre (aided, too, by the use of a simple cipher), he concludes that the most likely explanation is simply that

[53] Hanna, 'Humphrey Newton', p. 282; for more on related manuscripts of scientific and medical material, see Linda Ehrsam Voigts, 'The Sloane Group: Related Scientific and Medical Manuscripts of the 15th Century in the Sloane Collection', *British Library Journal*, 16, 1995, 26–57.

[54] Laura Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic in Fifteenth-Century England' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2012), p. 55.

[55] Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2, pp. 783 - 94.

[56] Bruno Roy, 'The Household Encyclopedia as Magic Kit: Medieval Popular Interest in Pranks and Illusions', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 14.1 (1980), 60–69 (p. 65).

the author or compiler had an interest in more than one type of magic, even if one was typically considered more illicit.[57]

While the *Experiments of Solomon* in Sloane MS 121 have been briefly mentioned by several historians of magic, the remainder of the manuscript is almost completely absent from other existing scholarship. The manuscript is noted by Monica Green in her survey of witnesses to the *Trotula*, in which she identifies the two *Trotula* texts found in Sloane MS 121 as Translation D, and Translation E. While the text of Translation E, which renders several recipes from the *Trotula major* into English, is fragmentary, the copy of Translation D is more complete, though there is missing text between folios 100 and 101, likely from the loss of a leaf.[58] The text in Sloane MS 121, though titled the *Secreta mulierum*, has no connection to the tract of the same name that is allegedly the work of Albertus Magnus, and offers a reasonably literal translation of chapters selected from both the *Trotula major* and the *Trotula minor*.[59] The implications of the incorrect title assigned to this particular translation of the tract will be discussed in more detail towards the end of this chapter.

San Marino, Huntington Library MS HM 64

San Marino, Hungtington Library MS HM 64, like Additional MS 34111, is another large volume executed all in one hand, consisting of 196 folios of astrological material, medical recipes, and a vast array of charms and *experimenta*. Calendrical tables and dates of liturgical feasts locate the manuscript in the 1480s and the mention of Henry VII's conquest of England (fol. 72r) suggests that at least part, if not all, of the manuscript post-dates 1485.[60] A neat pencil annotation on the front pastedown assigns the codex the title 'Dr Dee's philosophy', while a sprawling note in pencil on the verso of the first flyleaf claims that the manuscript comes 'from the library of the famous Dr. Dee'. Perhaps these are the notes of an early curator or a much later owner, however, the catalogue, which is otherwise very thorough, makes no mention

[57] Richard Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, Second edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 171.

[58] Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts', pp. 71–72.

[59] Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts', p. 71, n. 45.

[60] C. W. Dutschke, *Guide to Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts in the Huntington Library* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1989), I, pp. 130–39.

of these notes, nor is any association with John Dee made in any of the secondary literature on this manuscript. Whether or not Dee was a one-time owner of the manuscript, there are at least seventeen late-fifteenth- and sixteenth-century ownership inscriptions which provide evidence for five different owners of the codex. Most prominent among these are the names John Eccam or Ekam, which appears six times, and John Bosgrove, which features four times, once with the accompanying statement 'John Bosgrove ys a wytte man and man of hi lerneing wythall' (fol. 81r). There are also the names John Wallton and John Han written at least once each, and the name John or Johannis occurs alone without a surname in several places too. Finally, a sixteenth century hand has written 'Hughe Drapere merchaunt' on the final folio of the codex (fol. 196v). None of these names appears in Talbot and Hammond's bibliographical register of medieval medical practitioners, though this is perhaps unsurprising given that their cut-off date is 1518.

The manuscript has a strong focus on astrological and astronomical texts. These include calendrical tables, diagrams of lunar and solar eclipses for medical purposes, tables of moveable feasts, and an illustrated vein man on fol. 8v, as well as a *Homo signorum* or zodiac man on fol. 12v.[61] There is also a copy of *The Wise Book of Philosophy and Astronomy*, purportedly translated into English from Greek, and the *Book of Destenarye*, which provides information on how the 12 zodiac signs determine male and female complexions.[62] The latter also includes instructions for making textual charms or amulets which incorporate certain magical characters and can then be worn on the body to prevent misfortune for those born under each sign. The manuscript also contains an English astronomical poem providing information on the planets and their effects.[63] Rounding out the astrological and astronomical material is advice on bloodletting according to the zodiac, as well as didactic verse in English on the days of the month and certain biblical characters born on those days: this is untitled here, though elsewhere it is sometimes called *Storia Lune*.[64]

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[61] See Taavitsainen, 'The Identification of Middle English Lunary MSS'.

[62] For the *Wise Book* see Griffin, *The Middle English Wise Book of Philosophy and Astronomy*; for the *Book of Destenarye* see Ralph Hanna, *Handlist 1: A Handlist of Manuscripts Containing Middle English Prose in the Henry E. Huntingdon Library* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007), p. 5, no. 14.

[63] See *The Digital Index of Middle English Verse*, ed. by Linne R. Mooney, Daniel W. Mosser, and Elizabeth Solopova, 2008, no. 5451.

[64] Mentioned in Taavitsainen, 'The Identification of Middle English Lunary MSS', p. 22; see also Mooney, Mosser, and Solopova, *The Digital Index of Middle English Verse*, no. 1593.

Among other texts in the manuscript are Hippocratic and Galenic works. These include an untitled tract on the four humours and how they influence the temperaments, elsewhere titled *Dieta Ypocratis*, and a Latin regimen of health attributed to Galen.[65] There is also a uroscopy, which in MS HM 64 is a conflation of two separate texts on urines: the 'Twenty Jordan' uroscopy text and the *Doom of Urines* colour text.[66] The manuscript features parts of the Latin *Trotula minor*, *De curis mulierum* and *De ornatu*, termed the 'Intermediate Ensemble' by Monica Green, and reflecting the most expansive form of the compendium of *Trotula* texts.[67] There are also approximately 55 gynaecological recipes in Latin, with authorities such as Galen, Dioscorides, Macer, and Hippocrates cited for each. Further to the gynaecological recipes there is an extensive collection of over 500 medical recipes and charms in a mixture of Latin and English, with a small number also in French. Among these there is a recipe for the palsy, which claims that it has been proved by a 'Master Swan'. The manuscript also includes parts of the herbal *Agnus Castus*, in English, and a glossary of herbs in Latin with some English and French equivalents.[68]

The manuscript contains what is possibly the largest collection of charms of any surviving codex of medical material.[69] A large number of these are for medical purposes. For example, there are ten charms for bleeding (including nosebleed), six charms for the falling evil or epilepsy, five charms and experiments for wounds, four charms for fever, and four charms and experiments for childbirth. Charms are supplied for other medical problems including toothache and headache, sprains, eye problems, and hiccups. These correspond, in the main, with Lea Olsan's list of medical problems for which charms were perceived to be an apt cure, though some cited by Olsan such as for coughing or gout are missing in MS HM 64.[70] However, in addition to this vast corpus of medical charms, there is a significant quantity of texts that are not explicitly intended for healing. Five illustrated circular seals, or *signa*, have been added into

[65] Hanna, *Handlist 1*, p. 5, no. 12.

[66] Tavormina, 'The Twenty-Jordan Series', pp. 47–48.

[67] Green, 'A Handlist: Part I', p. 170; Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine: The Rise of Male Authority in Pre-Modern Gynaecology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 78.

[68] Hanna, *Handlist 1*, p. 10, no. 34.

[69] This is excluding later manuscripts such as Oxford, Bodleian Library, e. Museo 243, a manuscript from 1622 purely designed to collect and record charms.

[70] Lea T. Olsan, 'Charms in Medieval Memory', in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 59–88 (pp. 65–68).

gaps on folios 17v, 21v, 34r, and 51r, though they are still the work of the original scribe. Latin rubrics written in the outer bands of the seals describe their purposes: against enemies; to prevent sudden death; for victory; to protect against fire; and against demons. Inside the circles crosses, along with other powerful characters, are deployed, as well as sacred names.[71]

Like Additional MS 12195, the manuscript has an English translation of the *De corio serpentis*, or *Twelve Experiments with Snakeskin*.[72] However, MS HM 64 adds additional detail and context to several of the experiments, unseen in the other English and Latin witnesses. For example, in Additional MS 12195, the eighth experiment, usually to uncover secrets, reads:

> ȝif ony man wyl knowyn the cownsel of man or womman whan they sclepyn, strowe of the pouder on the brest of hem and þan axe what þou wilt of hem, and he wit owytn fayle schal tellyn the.[73]

In MS HM 64 however, the text is more specific about the intended targets: 'if thou wilte knowe the prevyte or councelle of a man or of thy wiffe or sarvuauntis'. Similarly, where the purpose of the seventh experiment is usually to discover the perpetrator of a theft by sleeping with the powder in a cloth wrapped around one's head, the utility of the MS HM 64 text is broader:

> If a man doughte ought of thyngis that is to com and what schalle be falle thereof, sprynge the pouder uppon his hed and bynde hit withe a clene clothe and goo to sleepe and he schalle a see in his slepe what maner of wyse he schalle be falle.[74]

Furthermore, the standard list of twelve experiments is supplemented with three additional uses for the powdered snakeskin which are not seen elsewhere: to ease childbirth; for the skin disease called *noli me tangere*; and to soothe a sore. The final

[71] Sophie Page, 'Medieval Magical Figures: Between Image and Text', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 432–57 (pp. 440–41).

[72] Folio 143r-v.

[73] Folio 123r-v.

[74] Folio 143r.

sentence of the tract speaks to the rarity and precious nature of the ingredient used, as it cautions the reader, 'thou that gederiste this poudere kepe hit as thy liffe for thou mayste not fynde no more prophetabullere in this worlde, and more prophete to manys boodye then this is'.

While the English texts in MS HM 64, including many of the verse charms, have been thoroughly recorded in the published indices of Middle English prose and verse, the manuscript has not undergone analysis as part of *LALME*, nor has it received significant attention or engagement from scholars.[75] A number of the charms have been mentioned in some secondary literature, though typically only in footnotes or otherwise briefly alluded to.[76] While Monica Green includes MS HM 64 in her survey of manuscripts containing *Trotula* texts, it is not one of the codices that she affords closer analysis elsewhere.[77] A recent study by Hannah Bower examines the formal choices made by the scribe of MS HM 64, particularly in the 'remedy book' section of the manuscript, in which verse and prose recipes are found intermingled.[78] Here, Bower considers whether the co-incidence of verse and prose shows that the scribe believed them to be compatible, and suggests that, while the fact that the verse remedies have been copied out like prose might suggest that the scribe had little interest in form, the clear delineation of line breaks reinforces the verse nature of the recipes, indicating that the scribe intentionally preserved their form, at least through punctuation if not layout.[79] Bower does not, however, consider the intermingling of non-medical charms and *experimenta* with the otherwise typically medical content.[80]

[75] In particular see Hanna, *Handlist 1*; and Ralph Hanna and others, 'The Index of Middle English Verse and Huntington Library Collections- A Checklist of Addenda', *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, 74.3 (1980), 235–78.

[76] Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic', pp. 63–71, 74, 194; Page, 'Medieval Magical Figures', pp. 439–41; Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, Pa: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), pp. 198, 239.

[77] Green, 'A Handlist: Part I', p. 170.

[78] Hannah Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), pp. 82–83.

[79] Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500*, p. 83.

[80] At least with regard to HM 64; Bower does consider the place of some experimental texts, particularly those more akin to practical jokes, beside medical literature in other manuscripts (particularly pp. 180 – 206), this will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Nouvelles Acquisitions Latines, MS 693

Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Nouvelles Acquisitions Latines, MS 693 is another large compendium which demonstrates a significant interest in astrology and astronomy.[81] The manuscript has confounded most attempts at unequivocal dating due to the range of dates provided by the computistical and astronomical tables it contains. Such tables, more typically, aid manuscript dating, under the assumption that they were drawn up during the specific time period to which they pertain. In the case of NAL MS 693, these tables do not provide such clarity. Folios 24v through 60v present what T.M. Smallwood deems 'clear internal evidence of the time of writing': five tables of astronomical data which cover the years 1311 – 1314 onwards.[82] Smallwood finds it hard to conceive of any reason why the original scribe should set down tables for this specific date range unless they were contemporaneous with its compilation, an argument with which most scholars would be inclined to agree. And yet, another series of astrological calculations, not mentioned by Smallwood, note the equinoxes for the years 1235 and 1236, evidence which Emmanuel Poulle and Owen Gingerich find sufficient to suggest that this reflects the date at which the manuscript was copied.[83] These discrepancies might be explained if codicological evidence suggested that the manuscript were composite, however there is nothing to suggest that this is the case, and Smallwood in particular insists otherwise.[84] Putting aside minor later additions and marginal notes, there are at least fifteen different styles of handwriting, though not necessarily hands: Smallwood suggests that while the styles change at various times in the codex, this could in fact be deliberate switching by one scribe. Smallwood also asserts that these scripts can all be dated to *c*. 1300 – 30 and, while such specific identification may be overly confident, it is roughly corroborated by the analysis of other scholars who date the codex as a whole to somewhere around

[81] H. Omont, *Bibliothèque Nationale. Nouvelles acquisitions du département des manuscrits pendant les années 1898-1899* (Paris, 1900), pp. 13–14.

[82] T.M. Smallwood, '"God Was Born in Bethlehem...": The Tradition of a Middle English Charm', *Medium Ævum*, 58.2 (1989), 206–23 (p. 219).

[83] Emmanuel Poulle and Owen Gingerich, 'Les positions des planètes au Moyen Age: application du calcul électronique aux tables alphonsines', *Comptes-rendus des séances de l année - Académie des inscriptions et belles-lettres*, 111.4 (1967), 531–48 (p. 536).

[84] Smallwood, '"God Was Born in Bethlehem..."', p. 219.

the turn of, or in the early, fourteenth century.[85] This is a dating with which I am inclined to agree, supported by the fact that the earliest marginal notes, additions, and references to specific dates and events coalesce around the first half of the fourteenth century. While these are made by a separate hand and could of course represent later ownership, we can safely assume that the manuscript was already compiled and the subject of sustained readership and engagement at this time.

Issues of dating aside, the manuscript has also received some attention due to evidence of its provenance, more specifically a potential association with Wales or the Welsh Marches. Léopold Delisle's detailed description of NAL MS 693 in 1899 asserts that the manuscript has an English origin based primarily on the presence of a calendar featuring several saints belonging to the English liturgy, as well as the inclusion of several notes which refer to events in English history.[86] While the codex contains tracts in both Latin and Anglo-Norman, there is one Middle English charm, which Smallwood suggests came to the scribe already in the vernacular, as well as a few English glosses occurring at various points throughout.[87] However, Ivanov and Falileyev, in a study of the marginalia and later additions in NAL MS 693, note a strong connection with Wales, not only by the inclusion of two saints' names typically associated with Wales (Saint Teilo and Saint David), but by reference to two known figures who were active in Wales, 'Thomas Boydyn' and 'Robertus filius Richardi de Heyle sen[escallus]'.[88] In the context of NAL MS 693, Thomas Boydyn, or Boydin, is noted as having been the beneficiary of one of the medical recipes, while the less-fortunate Robert de Heyle is recorded as having been murdered in Abergavenny on the 29th January 1332.[89] These two figures were known to be in association with each other in at least one particular milieu, and their names are found adjacent to one another in a Close Roll for 1324, in which they are noted as acting as attorneys for

[85] Sergey Ivanov, 'The "Physique Rimé" in the Mediaeval Manuscript Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Nouv. Acq. Lat. 693, and Its Prologue', *Sudhoffs Archiv*, 103.1 (2019), 3–25 (p. 4); Lynn Thorndike, 'Notes on Some Astronomical, Astrological and Mathematical Manuscripts of the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 20.1–2 (1957), 112–72 (p. 160); Green, 'A Handlist: Part II', p. 91.

[86] Léopold Delisle, 'Vente de manuscrits du comte d'Ashburnham', *Journal des savants*, 1899, 317–37, 493–512 (p. 334).

[87] Smallwood, '"God Was Born in Bethlehem..."', p. 206.

[88] S. Ivanov and A. Falileyev, 'Bibliothèque Nationale De France NAL 693 and Some Episodes in the History of Monmouth in the Fourteenth Century', *The Welsh History Review*, 28.3 (2017), 457–69 (p. 459).

[89] Ivanov and Falileyev, 'NAL 693 and the History of Monmouth', p. 459.

John Hastings, second Lord Hastings and lord of Abergavenny, to settle inheritance disputes after the death of the earl of Pembroke.[90] Based on these additions and the association of these two figures with Lord Hastings, Ivanov and Falileyev suggest that the scribe of these later notes was personally acquainted with these two men, and likely a member of Hastings' inner circle, pointing to south Wales and, more specifically, the Marcher lands as a provenance for the manuscript.[91]

In addition to the calendars and computistical tables, there are wide-ranging astrological and astronomical texts with a strong Arabic influence. These include Messahala's *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, translated into Latin, and *De cogitatione*.[92] A tract that has been labelled *Vitia lune* by a later hand details the influences of the moon, and is followed by extracts from pseudo-Ptolemy's *Centiloquium* which provides aphorisms on various celestial bodies and astronomical phenomena.[93] The astrological material is interrupted by the 'Adelard Chiromancy' or *Chiromantia parva*. This includes illustrations of the right and left palms, followed by interpretative material, attributed in this instance, though likely incorrectly, to Adelard of Bath.[94] There is also an incomplete copy of Lanfranc's surgery or the *Chirurgia parva*, as well as an *Antidotarium*, which may include extracts from the *Antidotarium Nicolai* but which has been combined with entries from other sources.[95] Like the other codices described here, NAL MS 693 also features Hippocratic works, including the 'Letter of Hippocrates' and the 'Secret of Hippocrates', both of which describe signs of life and death in a patient.[96] The *Trotula* texts are here presented in French, labelled

[90] Ivanov and Falileyev, 'NAL 693 and the History of Monmouth', p. 459.

[91] Ivanov and Falileyev, 'NAL 693 and the History of Monmouth', p. 469.

[92] For an introduction and partial edition of Messahala's text on the astrolabe see Geoffrey Chaucer, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, ed. by Walter Skeat (London: Oxford University Press, 1872).

[93] David Juste, *Les Manuscrits Astrologiques Latins Conservés à La Bibliothèque Nationale de France*, Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Latinorum, II (Paris: CNRS éditions, 2015), p. 260.

[94] The text is edited by Charles Burnett in 'The Principal Latin Texts on Chiromancy Extant in the Middle Ages (X)', in *Magic and Divination in the Middle Ages: Texts and Techniques in the Islamic and Christian Worlds* (Aldershot: Variorum, 1996), pp. 1–29 (pp. 10–17) while he also discusses the attribution to Adelard in; 'The Earliest Chiromancy in the West', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 50.1 (1987), 189–95 (p. 190, n. 4).

[95] For the *Chirurgia parva*, see Joël Chandelier, Laurence Moulinier-Brogi, and Marilyn Nicoud, 'Manuscrits Médicaux Latins de La Bibliothèque Nationale de France: Un Index Des Œuvres et Des Auteurs', *Archives d'histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire Du Moyen Age*, 73 (2006), 63–163 (p. 104) and; Ivanov, 'Physique Rimé', p. 5; for the *Antidotarium*, see Chandelier, Moulinier-Brogi, and Nicoud, 'Manuscrits Médicaux' and; Ivanov, 'Physique Rimé', p. 6.

[96] Isabelle Vedrenne-Fajolles, 'Le texte de la *Capsula Eburnea*, recueil de pronostics pseudo-Hippocratiques. Approche de deux versions Françaises dans le MS. NAL 693 de la Bibliothèque nationale', in *Par les mots et les textes/ Mélanges de langue, de littérature et d'histoire des sciences*

'Redaction I' by Monica Green, and featuring only the prologue and some of the first sections on menstruation and fertility.[97] This is followed by fragments of different medical tracts, including extracts on menstruation and generation from William of Conches' *Dragmaticon*, as well as pseudo-Soranus's *De pulsibus*, and parts of a dietetic treatise.[98] There are a large number of recipes and *experimenta* for healing in both Latin and French, including the rhymed French medical verse the 'Physique rimé'.[99]

The majority of the non-medical charms and experiments are clustered around the penultimate section of the manuscript (fols. 188v – 194v), though one or two are marginal additions earlier on in the manuscript: for example, a note at the bottom of folio 44v includes a method to find out if a woman is a virgin or not. Ivanov posits that the recipes and charms in this later section may well be owners' notes that post-date the main body of texts in the codex.[100] They cover a wide range of issues: there are two charms against thieves, one – as mentioned earlier, is the only English text – the 'God was born in Bethlehem' charm, and a common Latin text referring to Dismas and Gesmas, the two thieves crucified beside Christ (fol. 191v); a charm against thunder (fol. 192r); a charm for protection from 'malveis homme' or evil men (fol. 192v); an experiment to become invisible (fol. 193r); to counteract witchcraft (fol. 191v); and several experiments to uncover secrets (fols. 191v, 192v, 192r, 193r), among others.

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS e Museo 219

Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS e Museo 219 is a medical compendium from the end of the thirteenth, or turn of the fourteenth, century.[101] The manuscript is executed in one

médiévales offerts à Claude Thomasset, ed. by Danielle Jacquart, Danièle James-Raoul, and Olivier Soutet (Paris: Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2005), pp. 793–805.

[97] Green, 'A Handlist: Part II', pp. 90–91.

[98] Ivanov, 'Physique Rimé', p. 7; the extracts from William of Conches are discussed by Joan Cadden in *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 90, 92–97, 142, Cadden connects this work to the *Prose Salernitan Questions*, a work on fertility and generation, though Ivanov suggests this is misguided.

[99] Ivanov, 'Physique Rimé'.

[100] Ivanov, 'Physique Rimé', p. 10.

[101] Richard William Hunt, Falconer Madan, and P. D Record, *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library at Oxford Which Have Not Hitherto Been Catalogued in the Quarto Series : With References to the Oriental and Other Manuscripts* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1895), II, pp. 674–76.

hand, though at least two roughly contemporary hands have added a range of supplementary recipes, glosses, and notes. MS e Mus. 219 is acephalous, missing the first 37 folios, but a rare instance of an apograph provides us with an indication of what is now missing. Oxford, Merton College MS 324, copied 150 years later, repeats all of the texts included in MS e Mus. 219, both Latin and vernacular, as well as all of the notes and glosses.[102]

Though now incomplete, MS e Mus. 219 still contains many of the – now familiar – medical treatises that find analogues in the other codices examined in this chapter.[103] These include the *Speculum medicorum* which, as well as medical materials, also contains charms against mice, flies, and other domestic pests. Supplementary items have also been incorporated into the treatise, including 'De signis mortiferis secundum Galienum' and the *Capsula eburnea*, a Hippocratic text on signs of life and death.[104] Other Hippocratic texts include the *Experimenta Ypocratis*, and the *Liber Ypocratis de urinis*; followed by a tract called *De pulsibus*.[105] These are proceeded by experiments to treat fever, including those attributed to 'Cophon', as well as the *Experimenta Parisii abbatis de febribus*. The codex also contains the *Liber de virtutes aquile*, the Latin tract on the various magical properties of the eagle, followed by a book on the virtues of a number of other animals. There is a strong focus on sex and generation in the manuscript. A copy of pseudo-Cleopatra's *Gynaecia* is followed by fragments of the *De retencione menstuorum* attributed to 'Magister Walter Agulon' [Gualterus Agilon].[106] These texts are proceeded by a Latin version of the *Trotula*, which Monica Green labels the 'Traditional Ensemble'. This version of the text has been rearranged topically, with some new material added.[107] Finally, there is a copy of Constantinus Africanus' *De coitu*, a text on sexual function and related disorders.[108] At the end of this treatise on fol. 110r another hand has added additional charms and

[102] Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, p. 2.

[103] The description provided here draws on that in the library catalogue in Hunt, Madan, and Record, *A Summary Catalogue of Western Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library*, II, pp. 674–76, as well as the detailed description provided by Tony Hunt in *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, pp. 2–6.

[104] Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, pp. 2–6; Kibre, *Hippocrates Latinus*.

[105] Kibre, *Hippocrates Latinus*, pp. 110–11; 114; 143–44; 151; 165; 223; 229–30.

[106] Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, p. 3; Green, 'A Handlist: Part I', pp. 160–61.

[107] Green, 'A Handlist: Part I', pp. 160–61.

[108] Lister M. Matheson, 'Constantinus Africanus: De Coitu', in *Sex, Aging, and Death in a Medieval Medical Compendium: Trinity College Cambridge MS R.14.52, Its Texts, Language, and Scribe*, ed. by M. Teresa Tavormina (Tempe, Ariz: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2006).

experiments relating to this subject matter, including text in cipher that elaborates on a charm to possess a woman.[109]

The final three folios of the manuscript contain an extensive collection of charms and *experimenta*. There are nearly fifty individual entries, covering a wide variety of utilities. These include four methods to identify thieves, as well as other experiments which seek to intervene in social situations: there are methods to reconcile friends who have fallen out and to make peace between a quarrelling couple, as well as to silence one's enemies and to arouse lust in a woman. But many of the other texts might be better categorised as practical jokes, tricks and illusions. There is a method to make a dead fish jump around on a plate using liquid mercury, and others to hold fire in your hands without getting burnt. Hand in hand with these tricks go two experiments to uncover the enchantments of other practitioners. One of these, entitled, '*Si vis aperte videre incantationes ioculatoris*' [if you want to openly see the enchantments of a trickster] incorporates elements of a religious nature. It instructs the practitioner:

> *Si vis aperte videre incantationes ioculatoris. Vade in nocte sancti Iohannis Baptiste ante diem in ortum et dicendo cum oratione dominica in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti amen de terra extrae porrum. Cum aliquis coram te faciet suas incantationes pone parte[m] super dicti porri in ore tuo et aperte videbit quecumque faciet.*
>
> Go in the night of St John the Baptist before dawn in the garden and, while saying the Sunday oration in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen, extract a leek from the earth. When someone makes their incantations before you, put part of the aforementioned leek in your mouth and you will clearly see whatever he will do.[110]

Richard Kieckhefer has noted that this experiment is one of four which are markedly 'pious', among recipes that are otherwise secular in nature, citing the collection as a

[109] Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, p. 4.

[110] Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS e. Museo 219, fol. 187v.

whole as an example of the intersection between devotional piety and magic.[111] The other three 'pious' texts cited by Kieckhefer are: a text that calls itself a charm and claims to be a proven exorcism passed on by a demoniac, which is implemented by writing the first words of John's gospel on parchment, scraping the words into a bowl of holy water, and giving this to the afflicted person to drink; a number of different biblical motifs or narratives to recall in order to address certain situations, such as remembering Christ's captivity if you are taken captive yourself, in order to be released; and a set of devotional acts to be performed before taking part in a duel. As Kieckhefer notes, these experiments have close parallels with petitionary prayers and, while the specific adaptation of means to ends might be viewed as superstitious, he asserts that the procedures themselves are difficult to distinguish from those tolerated or encouraged by ecclesiastical authorities.[112] However, Kieckhefer makes inferences about the compiler's understanding of the nature of these more 'pious' texts based on the company they keep within this specific section of the manuscript, suggesting that the compiler considered them in similar terms to the other, more overtly magical practices, found in the same tract.[113] I would contend that the label 'pious' is unhelpful here: none of these texts is intended to fulfil a devotional purpose, and they instead simply incorporate religious motifs, narratives, or short invocations, into their prescribed ritual actions. The integration of religious language into charms and *experimenta* is something which is widely recognised – and has been demonstrated throughout this thesis – to be perfectly ordinary and widespread. Kieckhefer is right, however, to assert that the intermingling of these four texts with other *experimenta* which are secular in nature demonstrates that the scribe is unlikely to have considered there to be any type of distinction – either in terms of process or purpose – between practices which incorporated religious language and those which did not.

'Social' charms and *experimenta* in medical manuscripts

[111] Richard Kieckhefer, 'The Devil's Contemplatives: The *Liber Iuratus*, the *Liber Visionum* and the Christian Appropriation of Jewish Occultism', in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. by Claire Fanger (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1998), pp. 250–65 (p. 251).

[112] Kieckhefer, 'The Devil's Contemplatives', p. 252.

[113] Kieckhefer, 'The Devil's Contemplatives', p. 252.

These six manuscripts tell many stories. To interrogate them from all possible angles would require an entire thesis in itself. They span a chronological range of around 200 years, a period during which medical and scientific literature underwent significant change: these six manuscripts bear the evidence of some of those changes. Most prominent is the vernacularisation of medical material. The earliest manuscript in this discrete corpus, MS e Mus. 219, is entirely in Latin; the almost contemporary NAL MS 693 is predominantly in Latin, with some French recipes, a French translation of parts of the *Trotula*, and one English charm. These two volumes conform, both linguistically, but also in much of their content, to earlier traditions of literate medicine, and their contents bear many similarities to the codices known to have been housed in religious institutions, or in universities and other centres of learning.[114] The four other manuscripts in this corpus, however, are products of the explosion in vernacular medical writing that took place from the end of the fourteenth century onwards.[115] The juxtaposition of English and Latin texts in MS HM 64 and Sloane MS 121 is evidence of the transition made by literate medicine in the fifteenth century.[116] The presence of these texts side by side also speaks to the interaction of what are typically viewed as 'high' and 'low', or learned, Latin and popular, vernacular, cultures.[117] Further to this, the manuscripts also reflect how the later medieval period witnessed a surge of enthusiasm for practical, empirical works and *experimenta*.[118] For example, while volumes such as Additional MS 34111 and HM MS 64 refer frequently to notable medical authorities, they also rely heavily on recipes and other items of experiential medicine, rather than scholarly theory.

The evidence that the manuscripts offer as material objects is also revealing about methods of book production. Sloane MS 121, for instance, is a typical example of a composite manuscript formed of booklets and assembled over a period of time. The texts of the *De urinis* and the *Trotula* in Sloane MS 121 are both in the same hand,

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[114] I use the term 'literate medicine' in line with Monica Green's definition, encompassing any written medical material, from learned medicine to recipes jotted down on flyleaves, see *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 12.

[115] Linda Ehrsam Voigts, 'Scientific and Medical Books', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Albert Pearsall (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 345–402 (p. 352).

[116] Voigts, 'The Sloane Group', p. 30.

[117] Voigts, 'Scientific and Medical Books', p. 383.

[118] Peter Murray Jones, '*Experimenta*, Compilation and Construction in Two Medieval Books', *Poetica*, 91/92 (2019), 61–80 (p. 116).

though they are in different quires and separated by 40 folios of content drafted by other scribes. The two English texts on urines span two quires, each of twelve folios, joined together by a catch word, and are followed by a short text on blood and several medical recipes, all in the same hand as the scribe who redacted the *De urinis*. Blank spaces left between these texts, and at the end of the quire, have been utilised by later readers to add supplementary recipes. The *Trotula* is the only text in a quire of just six folios, though a lacuna in the text suggests that at least one or two leaves are missing. The presence of these two texts – the *De urinis* and the *Trotula* – authored by the same scribe and in discrete quires or gatherings, subscribe to many of the diagnostic features outlined elsewhere by Ralph Hanna of booklet production.[119] Hanna argues that booklets were a particularly useful format for a compiler because they delayed the need to plan the exact shape of a codex until later in its production, allowing the contents of the volume to remain open-ended and supplemented as and when exempla became available for copying.[120] The transmission of certain medical tracts and treatises in booklet form was common in the later Middle Ages.[121] The similarity between the texts in Humphrey Newton's commonplace book and the two tracts in Sloane MS 121, as well as other codicological evidence, leads Hanna to suggest that they may have originated in the same centre or network of production, most likely as bespoke commissions. Closer investigation of the other tracts in Sloane MS 121 would likely suggest parallel modes of production, and perhaps enable links to be identified with other codices of medical material that were compiled in a similar fashion.[122]

The crossover in content between some of the manuscripts is also suggestive of particular methods of textual transmission. MS e Mus. 219 and Additional MS 34111, though separated in terms of production date by a span of 150 years, are undeniably linked by shared texts. One of these is the tract of experiments the *Virtutes aquile*: while in Latin in MS e Mus. 219, an English translation can be found in Additional MS 34111.[123] This is not the only text from MS e Mus. 219 that finds its way

[119] Ralph Hanna, 'Booklets in Medieval Manuscripts: Further Considerations', *Studies in Bibliography*, 39 (1986), 100–111 (pp. 101, 107–8).

[120] Hanna, 'Booklets in Medieval Manuscripts', p. 108.

[121] Voigts, 'The Sloane Group', p. 29.

[122] Linda Ehrsam Voigts draws on codicological evidence to identify similarities between other manuscripts in the Sloane collection, leading to the suggestion that they may all have been products of one network of production, see 'The Sloane Group'.

[123] For more on the text, its origins and traditions, see Sheldon, 'The Eagle: Bird of Magic and Medicine'.

– in translation – into Additional MS 34111. Versions of the *Speculum medicorum*, the *Experimenta Parisii abbatis de febribus*, the recipes attributed to Cophon the Leech, and the Hippocratic text *Capsula eburnea*, which contains signs of life and death in a sick person, also occur in both manuscripts.[124] Tony Hunt notes that the translation of the *Speculum medicorum* in Additional MS 34111 seems full, and matches much of the material found in MS e Mus. 219, such as the recipes against flies in the house, which are absent from other manuscript copies of the text.[125] The co-incidence of this grouping of texts in both manuscripts, albeit in Latin in one, and English in the other, may well represent clusters or 'nodes' of texts, as described by Ralph Hanna.[126] These groupings of texts which frequently, or always, travel together, may help us to identify certain reading communities, as they indicate common archetypes.[127] Textual nodes have thus far primarily been investigated in the context of literary texts; identification of similar patterns of clustering in scientific and medical codices would likely shed further light on the transmission of these texts, as well as on book production more broadly, as pertains to utilitarian literature.

While the core of each manuscript discussed in this study appears – by whatever dating evidence is available, be it script, dated notes, or calendars and computistical tables – to have been produced within a fairly narrow timeframe, each codex features textual additions made by later users, particularly charms and *experimenta*. This demonstrates the open-ended nature of book production and book ownership: the collection of texts was never static and even once bound, these manuscripts continued to change.[128] Being bound could also signify a change in function or context: the section of Additional MS 12195 that is discussed here clearly circulated on its own at first. Due to its small size it could easily have been transported in a pocket and accompanied an itinerant physician as he visited patients. Eventually,

[124] Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, p. 11.

[125] Hunt, *Anglo-Norman Medicine*, p. 11.

[126] Ralph Hanna, 'Middle English Books and Middle English Literary History', *Modern Philology*, 102.2 (2004), 157–78 (p. 167).

[127] Hanna, 'Middle English Books and Middle English Literary History', p. 167.

[128] For more on evidence of readership and later use, see, for example, Linne R. Mooney, 'Manuscript Evidence for the Use of Medieval English Scientific and Utilitarian Texts', in *Interstices: Studies in Late Middle English and Anglo-Latin Texts in Honour of A.G. Rigg*, ed. by Richard Firth Green and Linne R. Mooney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 184–202.

however, it was bound with the other three sections, which betray very different interests, perhaps those of the eighteenth-century owner William Herbert.[129]

The manuscripts thus raise, and answer, many questions about the production of medical and scientific books. However, it is the principal aim of this chapter to consider the social imperatives behind the collection and assembly of the texts which make up these six manuscripts, rather than the material nature of the manuscripts themselves. To do so, I will first consider *who* might have commissioned or owned these manuscripts. I will consider the key interests evidenced by each manuscript, in order to suggest the types of uses to which the texts may have been put. I will then turn to the non-medical charms and *experimenta*. Why are they there? What might have motivated the scribe or compiler to include such texts in otherwise medical compendia, and how does this add nuance to our existing ideas about medieval medical practice? Finally, I will explore what the inclusion of the *Trotula* in all six manuscripts might reveal about the interests and intentions of their compilers, and how these correspond to the prominent themes of many of the charms and experiments. I will examine one further social concern hitherto unexplored in this thesis: social imperatives to procreate, and, by extension, the desire to understand and control women's bodies. I will demonstrate that the presence of these texts in these six manuscripts reflects an increasing social concern in the later Middle Ages, and creates a bridge between medical writing and the literature of 'secrets', a bridge which is made more solid by the addition of charms and *experimenta* concerning male/female relations.

Towards a profile of the manuscript users

The inclusion of the *Trotula* texts in all six of these manuscripts prompts a consideration of the gender of their owners. Of the codices under examination here, two have ownership inscriptions of male names.[130] Of course, this does not entirely preclude female ownership as these inscriptions only represent the users who felt compelled to write their names into the codex. However, other evidence suggests that

[129] See Thomson, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Middle English Grammatical Texts*, pp. 193–211.

[130] MS HM 64 has the names John Eccam, John Bosgrove, John Walton, John Han and Hugh Draper recorded on a number of folios; Sloane MS 121 has the names Thomas Sety and Robert Jones inscribed.

these manuscripts were most likely to have been in the hands of men. Firstly, language. While a significant proportion of the texts in MS HM 64 are in the vernacular, the *Trotula* texts (*Trotula minor, De curis mulierum,* and *De ornatu*) are in Latin. This, along with the other Latin texts in the manuscript would likely exclude female readers, even those who were literate. By the same reasoning, it is unlikely that MS e Mus. 219, which is exclusively in Latin, found itself in the hands of a female reader. There is a strong presence of Latin texts in Sloane MS 121 and NAL MS 693, too, though their copies of the *Trotula* are in vernacular languages: Middle English in the Sloane manuscript and Anglo-Norman in NAL MS 693. Additional MSS 12195 and 34111 cannot be excluded on the same basis. Additional MS 12195, in particular, has attracted debate around the gender of its readership. The wording of this version of the *Trotula* translation, titled *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, suggests that it was intended to be read, or listened to, by women, and that the medical knowledge it contained was to be used and implemented by them. The prologue of the text in Additional MS 12195 explains:

> Every woman redet unto oþer þat cannot so do and helpe hem and concell theme in her maladis wit owt schewyng her desses unto man. And if any man rede þis, I charge theme on owor Ladys behalf, þat he redit not in despyt ner slandere of no woman ner for no caus but for þe helpe or hele of them.[131]

Audrey Eccles takes such assertions at face value and uses them to support her argument that gynaecological care was the prerogative of female practitioners, and that vernacular copies of works such as the *Trotula* were only intended for a female audience.[132] Similarly, and with specific reference to Additional MS 12195, Alexandra Barratt uses certain textual and codicological features to argue that its copy of *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* was used by women. She cites several clumsy scribal mistakes and misspellings that have been made in the copying of some of the medical and gynaecological terms as evidence that not just the reader, but even the

[131] London, British Library, Additional MS 12195, fol. 157v.

[132] Audrey Eccles, 'The Early Use of English for Midwiferies 1500-1700', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 78.4 (1977), 377–85 (pp. 377–80).

redactor, may have been female.[133] Furthermore, she describes this portion of the manuscript as featuring 'extensive rubrication', and suggests that this may have made it more easy to consult and navigate by 'those known to be relatively inexperienced with books', that is, women.[134] I would contend that neither of these observations constitutes evidence of a female readership. The 'extensive' rubrication described by Barratt, principally marking the beginning of new passages and underlining key words, is not unusual in manuscripts of medical material, and served as an organisational and navigational aid for practitioners who might need to find and consult material in haste.[135] The scribal errors are also not sufficient evidence for a female scribe or reader, and may in fact reflect the quality of the exemplar used for copying, or otherwise signify the redactor's lack of learning or familiarity with gynaecological texts.

While the translation of the *Trotula* in Additional MS 12195 states that it has been crafted specifically for the use of women – whether or not such female use was a reality – the text in Additional MS 34111 makes no such assertion. Furthermore, the masculine or neuter genitive of its title, *Liber Trotuli*, elides the claim to female authorship by Trota herself, placing the text firmly within the sphere of masculine medicine.[136] Instead of pointing towards female readership, the vernacular nature of this version of the *Trotula*, along with the other texts in Additional MS 34111, might instead reflect both the decrease in Latin literacy witnessed by the fifteenth century, alongside the increase in the copying and diffusion of medical texts in English.[137]

Eccles' suggestion that gynaecological knowledge, practice, and material texts were solely the purview of women has been thoroughly refuted by Green. She notes that the manuscript evidence itself does little to support such an argument, and instead represents more of a 'tug of war between men and women for possession of these texts'.[138] While three of the five surviving copies of *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* contain clues that they may indeed have been owned by women, Additional MS 12195 is not one of them.[139] Green argues for a chiefly male readership based on

[133] Barratt, *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, pp. 34–37.

[134] Barratt, *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing*, pp. 34–37.

[135] Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500*, p. 111.

[136] Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts', p. 68.

[137] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 145; Voigts, 'Scientific and Medical Books', p. 352.

[138] Green, 'Obstetrical and Gynecological Texts', p. 56.

[139] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, pp. 185–86.

the broader codicological contexts of Additional MS 12195, as well as codices containing the Latin *Trotula* texts, which she suggests are not typical of the pattern of reading usually associated with women: where women were literate – and even Latinate – their reading habits tended towards liturgical and devotional texts and there is only a smattering of evidence that places medical codices in women's hands.[140] This is not to say that women did not have an interest in, or access to, medical knowledge. Surviving medical volumes themselves might not contain unequivocal evidence of female ownership or readership, but other evidence such as the Paston letters demonstrates that women had a keen interest in the medical care of their families, and certainly sought out and circulated recipes and other medical knowledge among their networks.[141] Furthermore, even where they were unable to read women were not necessarily precluded from accessing texts of all genres: listening to public or private performances of literary works is something that is well documented.[142] Green, however, contests the possibility that women might have been able to access texts such as the *Trotula* ensemble as auditors: she asserts that this would have been – by necessity – mediated by men, and the intimate nature of the texts means that embarrassment or concerns of indecency would likely have inhibited a public performance of gynaecological works.[143] However, she does note that women were required to play a part in the medical care of other women due to the social impropriety that was associated with male contact with the female body: this meant that male practitioners required female assistants who, under their instruction, could implement the necessary therapeutic procedures.[144] This is one avenue whereby women might have had access – albeit indirectly – to the knowledge recorded in the *Trotula* texts: in the moments where delivering 'hands-on' care to other women was called for, knowledge transfer from male medical practitioner to female assistant would likely have taken place. Therefore, while there is no concrete evidence that any manuscripts containing the *Trotula* were either owned, or used by, women, this does not exclude

[140] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 24.

[141] Ashlee Barwell, 'The Healing Arts and Social Capital: The Paston Women of Fifteenth-Century England', *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History*, 35.1 (2018), 137–59.

[142] See, for example, Corinne Saunders, 'Women and Romance', in *Women and Medieval Literary Culture: From the Early Middle Ages to the Fifteenth Century*, ed. by Corinne Saunders and Diane Watt (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2023), pp. 299–323.

[143] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 159.

[144] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, pp. 116–17.

the possibility that women did have access to the knowledge contained in these codices, even if not necessarily as direct readers.[145]

Green has suggested that, where the *Trotula* texts are found alongside typical therapeutic tracts, we can assume that the materials as a whole were likely to have been used by professional medical practitioners.[146] Considering the other tracts that occur in these manuscripts, it seems likely that most, if not all of them, were used by practising physicians. The 'Twenty Jordan' series on uroscopy, for example, which occurs in both MS HM 64 and Sloane MS 121, was likely aimed at professional practitioners, rather than other types of reader.[147] Sloane MS 121, as a whole, is focused primarily on practical medicine, supported by some simple theoretical texts, suggesting that it was used by a physician, and the nature of the sixteenth and seventeenth century additions and annotations imply that it remained in the employ of medical practitioners until it was purchased by Hans Sloane in 1693. Mention of a Doctor Turner on two separate folios by a later hand suggests that a subsequent owner of the manuscript may have been part of a community of physicians who exchanged recipes and other knowledge.[148] *The Wise Book of Philosophy and Astronomy*, featured in both MS HM 64 and Additional MS 12195, conforms to the encyclopaedic tradition; Claire Jones notes that this aligns it more with the type of medicine practiced by 'learned' physicians, but that in these two manuscripts it is in a more accessible form which takes a more practical, rather than theoretical approach, suggesting that is has been adapted to suit a reader who may not have a university education.[149]

In light of the significant amount of astrological and astronomical material contained in NAL MS 693, Léopold Delisle suggests that this manuscript may have originally been in the possession of an English astrologer.[150] The presence of two drawn-up horoscopes on fols. 73v and 74r certainly suggest that the astrological texts

[145] Carrie Griffin notes that women may have had access to vernacular versions of the *Trotula*, especially if they were included in family books, and suggests that the version in Additional MS 12195 itself might have been suitable for oral transmission, in *Instructional Writing in English, 1350-1650: Materiality and Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2021), pp. 157–63.

[146] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 78.

[147] Tavormina, 'The Twenty-Jordan Series', p. 44.

[148] This type of network is suggested by Peter Murray Jones, and would likely have encompassed lay health practitioners too, see '*Experimenta*, Compilation and Construction', pp. 114, 116.

[149] Claire Jones, 'Vernacular Literacy in Late-Medieval England: The Example of East Anglian Medical Manuscripts' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Glasgow, 2000), p. 36.

[150] Delisle, 'Vente de manuscrits du comte d'Ashburnham', p. 337.

were put to use by the manuscript's owner. Ivanov suggests a profile for a – likely slightly later – user of the manuscript, who may also have added the bulk of the charms, recipes, and experiments.[151] Ivanov cites the 'markedly more lay character [of this material] in contrast to the learned texts constituting the core of the manuscript' to suggest that they are the notes of a practising physician who copied these brief pieces of practical information for future use.[152] Ivanov assigns the same texts referenced by Delisle to the 'lower stratum of medical learning' and considers them as part of the 'usual, quotidian practice of an Anglo-Norman medic'.[153] However, while the material referred to by Ivanov may indeed have been copied by a later user for their own personal or professional use, this does not preclude the original contents of the manuscript from holding some interest or relevance to a later user, who may have drawn on both the 'learned' and 'lay' practices embodied by the codex.

This point is worth pausing on, momentarily. As the brief summary of secondary literature presented directly above makes clear, scholars are quick to assign texts, or entire manuscripts, to categories of 'lay' and 'learned', typically corresponding to the level of education a practitioner might have attained, the use of the vernacular versus Latin, and the presence of theoretical tracts versus experiential ones. This also applies to the treatment of texts of a more magical nature too, which are frequently associated with lower registers of medical learning. In such a manner, Suzanne Sheldon, in her edition of the *Virtutes aquile*, claims that the tract is:

> [S]trangely out of place in a compendium of medical luminaries such as Galen, Hippocrates, Alexander (of Thralles), and the practitioners of Salerno. […] unlike other materials in the MS, which have some claim to medical validity, *Virtutes aquile* quite obviously derives entirely from pagan magic and the superstitious practices of folk medicine.[154]

[151] Sergey Ivanov, 'Cat's Brain and Cryptography: Two Notes on Medieval Recipes from the MS BNF NAL 693', *Indo-European Linguistics and Classical Philology*, XXII (2018), 540–56 (p. 457).

[152] Ivanov, 'Cat's Brain and Cryptography', p. 457.

[153] Ivanov, 'Cat's Brain and Cryptography', p. 457.

[154] Sheldon, 'The Eagle: Bird of Magic and Medicine', p. 4.

Such an assertion reflects an ignorance of the other materials in the manuscript, including the charms and experiments to bring about extra-medical results, but also of the relationship between magic and medicine, the status of 'folk' medical practice and the incorporation of 'pagan' practices into orthodox religious ritual.[155] It also raises questions about how we assign 'medical validity' to medieval texts: is this something attained purely by association with known and named authorities, or through a supposed level of efficacy? Sheldon's dismissal of the *Virtutes aquile* does not take into consideration that the presence of such tracts, for example the *Liber aggregationis* of pseudo-Albertus Magnus which includes a tract on the magical properties of animals, is common in medieval medical manuscripts, and that they very much appear to reflect complementary interests.

Manuscripts such as Additional MS 34111 and NAL MS 693 demonstrate that the two categories of 'lay' and 'learned' could coexist and were not mutually exclusive. Similarly, MS HM 64 contains a large quantity of vernacular tracts and a high volume of recipes, charms, and other *experimenta* that appear compatible with typical definitions of lay medicine; however, these are complemented by several Latin tracts, including the *Trotula* texts. It is therefore reductionist to see lay and learned medicine as binary, or incompatible, and it is certainly artificial to consider the use of Latin versus English as the dividing line between the two. Particularly towards the end of the Middle Ages, there is evidence that learned practitioners were in possession of simple vernacular medical texts, and that similarly, there was a demand for more learned or theoretical texts among vernacular readers who may not have had such exalted training.[156] Furthermore, the vernacularity of a text does not automatically render it accessible to any reader, nor indicate that its reader was less competent in the fundamental tenets of medical practice; vernacular medical texts often still required their reader to be familiar with the modes of learning and systems of explanation typical of more learned or Latinate medicine.[157] The mix of Latin and the vernacular and the blending of theoretical and experiential texts in these manuscripts is indicative of the diverse nature of medieval medical practice. What we can ascertain from the six

[155] This assertion is also unusual coming from Sheldon, who herself edited a number of the charms and experiments in Additional MS 34111 as part of her doctoral thesis, see Sheldon, 'Middle English and Latin Charms'.

[156] Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500*, p. 10.

[157] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 145.

volumes examined here is that their readers were comfortable operating in both English and Latin, and that they did not see the intermingling of different registers as problematic. In fact, the diversity of texts in these manuscripts may have been a strategy by the commissioners or owners of these volumes to bolster their status and increase their competitive edge in the medieval medical marketplace. It is through this lens that I will now explore the 'non-medical' charms and *experimenta* in these six codices, and what their presence might reveal about the nature of medieval medical practice and the interests or concerns of both the manuscript users and their patients or clients.

The medical marketplace in the Middle Ages

The options available to people in the Middle Ages when it came to healing were diverse; as Monica Green succinctly summarises, they had 'an array of choices that ranged from learned medicine to the passing empiric to the saint's shrine down the road'.[158] Monastic houses were the primary locus for medical learning until the start of the thirteenth century; thereafter the accumulation and transmission of medical knowledge predominantly took place outside of the cloister.[159] While medical learning flourished at certain universities on the continent, in England, medicine formed part of the curriculum for those obtaining an arts degree, but it did not become a subject in its own right until the fourteenth century and, even after this date, the number of university-trained doctors remained fairly low.[160] This, however, did not signify limited options when it came to sourcing assistance from medical professionals. Outside of university-trained physicians there were, of course, those who had attended university without completing a medical degree, but they were in competition for clients with self-taught practitioners or 'leeches', barber surgeons, and apothecaries.[161] We know that there was a substantial increase in the number of non-university-trained physicians in England by the early-fifteenth century because it prompted a petition submitted by

[158] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 318.

[159] Faye Marie Getz, *Medicine in the English Middle Ages* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), p. 15.

[160] Julie Orlemanski, *Symptomatic Subjects: Bodies, Medicine, and Causation in the Literature of Late Medieval England* (Philadelphia, Pa: University of Pennsylvania press, 2019), pp. 21, 50.

[161] Orlemanski, *Symptomatic Subjects*, p. 22.

graduate doctors in 1421 to prevent those without a university qualification from practising medicine.[162] While this was passed in law in 1428, it proved impossible to enforce; however, the attempt to suppress lesser-qualified physicians makes clear that there was competition between those with differing levels of learning and education.[163]

Regardless of how medical knowledge was attained and practiced, the number of self-professed physicians who declared medical practice to be their main occupation remained low.[164] More frequently, such services were offered by people who combined medical practice with other occupations. One of the few surviving witnesses that we have for the medical practice of a known practitioner is the personal manuscript of John Crophill.[165] The fifteenth-century manuscript provides details of the patients that Crophill treated; however, we also know that alongside the provision of medical services he acted as a bailiff for the priory of Wix in Essex, and was also an ale-taster.[166] Crophill's medical practice supplemented the income generated by his other duties. The fifteenth-century manuscript of another known practitioner, Richard Trewythian, is also of interest here.[167] Like Crophill, Trewythian performed several other professional roles alongside medicine: he was a moneylender, a bookdealer, and – most pertinent for the current study – an astrologer. His notebook reveals that he treated patients from diverse backgrounds, and the surviving records of his astrological consultations reveal much about the common anxieties of his clients: these include fertility and pregnancy, marital relations, whether arguments might be resolved, and the identity of thieves.[168] The fifteenth-century commonplace book of the medical practitioner Thomas Fayreford provides further insights into medieval medical practice.[169] Fayreford's notes reveal that he travelled some distance in the course of his medical practice, that, like Trewythian, he treated patients from a wide range of social backgrounds, that he treated both men and women, and that he offered

[162] Robbins, 'Medical Manuscripts in Middle English', p. 394.

[163] Justin Colson and Robert Ralley, 'Medical Practice, Urban Politics and Patronage: The London "Commonalty" of Physicians and Surgeons of the 1420s', *The English Historical Review*, 130.546 (2015), 1102–31.

[164] Getz, *Medicine in the English Middle Ages*, p. 6.

[165] London, British Library, Harley MS 1735.

[166] Mustain, 'A Rural Medical Practitioner in Fifteenth-Century England', p. 472.

[167] London, British Library, Sloane MS 428.

[168] Sophie Page, 'Richard Trewythian and the Uses of Astrology in Late Medieval England', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 64 (2001), 193–228.

[169] London, British Library, Harley MS 2558.

treatment for diseases and ills that varied in complexity, from simple thorns, burns, and fractures, to – of interest to this chapter more broadly – gynaecological problems, including 'suffocation of the womb'.[170] These sources all demonstrate that literate medicine was not solely the purview of university-educated physicians, nor was it only available to higher status patients.

While not linked to a known practitioner, the inclusion of a banns which advertises the services of an itinerant leech in a manuscript of medical material provides a rare insight into the monetisation and marketing of medical services in the fifteenth century.[171] Linda Ehrsam Voigts links each item advertised in the banns proclamation to a recipe or other piece of practical knowledge copied down on other folios of the manuscript. In making these connections, she suggests that the body of knowledge contained in the manuscript might be a reliable indicator of the actual services administered by the practitioner, rather than just representing a repository of information.[172] The banns also tells us that there was a need for self-promotion when it came to recruiting patients and clients for treatment. Such self-promotion was reliant on what kind of skills – or knowledge – the practitioner could lay claim to, and thus advertise to any interested public. The acquisition of knowledge, or possession of particularly coveted skills, therefore, could provide practitioners with an edge over their competition. Thomas Fayreford notes in his manuscript that he was paid money by barbers to share a recipe that uses the skin of a green frog to remove teeth.[173] From this, we can surmise that the possession of coveted knowledge could prove lucrative, but also that other practitioners were prepared to invest money to acquire a new skill or recipes which had proved to be efficacious. The acquisition of remedies or practices not explicitly for healing may therefore have been motivated by similar economic incentives.

The most lucrative of these practices was theft prevention or detection.[174] The identification of thieves was an integral part of the practice of cunning folk, as

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[170] Jones, 'Witnesses to Medieval Medical Practice in the Harley Collection', p. 3.

[171] London, British Library, Harley MS 2390; the banns is on fol. 106v.

[172] Linda Ehrsam Voigts, 'Fifteenth-Century English Banns Advertising the Services of an Itinerant Doctor', in *Between Text and Patient: The Medical Enterprise in Medieval & Early Modern Europe*, ed. by Florence Eliza Glaze and Brian Nance (Firenze: SISMEL, Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2011), pp. 245–79.

[173] Peter Murray Jones, 'Harley MS 2558: A Fifteenth-Century Medical Commonplace Book', in *Manuscript Sources of Medieval Medicine: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Margaret R. Schleissner (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 35–54 (p. 52).

[174] Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012), p. 66.

described by Owen Davies, but there is evidence that it was performed by other types of practitioner too.[175] The manuscript of the medical practitioner and astrologer Richard Trewythian mentioned above shows that theft detection was one of his most frequently employed services.[176] Tabitha Stanmore's examination of late medieval and early modern records of what she terms 'service magic' – that is, magic that was performed by practitioners for a fee – reveals that identifying thieves and locating stolen goods was the most common service offered after healing.[177] She also notes that, at least according to surviving records which mention payment, practitioners charged more for this service than for healing.[178] Methods to prevent or detect theft are recorded in all six of the manuscripts discussed here. In Additional MS 12195 and MS HM 64 these form part of longer tracts on the virtues of certain substances. In Additional MS 12195, the seventh experiment in the *De corio serpentis* involves sprinkling the powdered snakeskin on one's head and then wrapping it in a linen cloth; then, during sleep, a vision of the thief will appear.[179] The ability to identify a thief is also one of the listed virtues of the herb vervain which, if touched against every man in a group, will force the guilty party to exclaim aloud and produce the stolen goods.[180] The same property is ascribed to the herb betony in MS HM 64.[181] The seal to protect against fire on fol. 34r in MS HM 64 also asserts that it will protect the house from theft. In a similar vein, NAL MS 693 does not include any method to *identify* thieves, but it features two charms to *prevent* theft, one drawing on the 'God was born in Bethlehem' motif, and the other drawing on the narrative of Christ's passion and the two thieves who were crucified next to him, Dismas and Gismas.[182]

Sloane MS 121 contains two means of identifying a thief. The first requires the practitioner to write the names of the suspects on parchment and secrete them inside balls of clay. Normally, when these balls are placed in holy water, the name of the guilty party will be the first to emerge as the clay disintegrates, though in Sloane MS

[175] Owen Davies, *Cunning-Folk: Popular Magic in English History* (London: Hambledon, 2003), p. 96.

[176] Page, 'Richard Trewythian', p. 205.

[177] Tabitha Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure: Service Magic in England from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 51, 90.

[178] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, pp. 51, 90.

[179] Folio 123r.

[180] Folio 149r-v.

[181] Folio 108v.

[182] Folio 191v.

121 the text instead claims that the ball containing the name of the perpetrator will not be able to enter the water at all. The second involves writing certain characters on virgin wax and placing it beneath the head during sleep in order to prompt a vision of the thief.[183] Ms e Mus. 219 has four texts detailing methods for theft identification: these include the 'Eye of Abraham' method, which involves painting an eye on the wall, gathering the suspects before it, and hammering a nail into the painting; writing characters in virgin wax and sleeping with it beneath your head; and writing symbols on pieces of bread which will choke the guilty party.[184] These are all relatively common methods for theft detection, and discussed at greater length elsewhere in this thesis. The fourth, however, is much more unusual, perhaps unique: it involves reciting several *Pater Nosters* and *Ave Marias* over a piece of rope, as well as making the sign of the cross and invoking the Trinity and the names of several saints. After this, when the guilty party's name is mentioned, the rope will suddenly become shorter.[185] Additional MS 34111 contains both the 'Eye of Abraham' experiment and the charm which requires words or characters to be inscribed in virgin wax to incite a vision during sleep.[186] It also includes a ritual to recover lost articles, which instructs the practitioner to think on the cross of the crucifixion while giving four loaves of bread to poor men.[187] Both the 'Eye of Abraham' experiment and the charm using virgin wax are highlighted with large marginal *maniculae*, suggesting that they were consulted frequently. As argued in Chapter Two of this thesis, theft was a particularly prominent social concern and the prevention of theft or the identification of a thief penetrated many different aspects of social and community relations. The inclusion of practices to tackle theft in the six manuscripts examined here suggests that their users may have acquired these skills in order to address a key social, economic, and domestic concern, and to thus generate additional custom and income.

The possession of texts that promised to address key social concerns may have set the practitioner apart from competition in the medical marketplace, but the nature of these texts, which contained the key to manipulating the occult properties of stones, herbs, and animal parts, or to understand and interpret the movements of the stars

[183] Folios 36v – 37.

[184] All folio 186r.

[185] Also folio 186r; I have yet to find any analogue for this text in any other manuscripts I have studied.

[186] Folios 75r and 70v, respectively.

[187] Folio 71v.

and planets, would have further enhanced their status. In reference to manuscripts of ritual magic, Frank Klaassen argues that the possession of occult knowledge contributed to the construct of masculinity, and that it presented the practitioner as 'intelligent, materially successful, controlled, and bold'.[188] The texts in the six volumes discussed here do not contain instructions to conjure and control demons as ritual magic does, but they still provide the practitioner with access to the numinous that would have enhanced their status. This is particularly the case for practices which involve uncovering secrets, identifying thieves, or prophesying future events through occult means. Writing esoteric characters on wax for a victim of theft to place under their pillow, or using animal parts to reveal someone's secrets during sleep demonstrated that the practitioner possessed the means to access information that was not available to ordinary people. In this way, the contents of these codices represent a specific form of cultural capital.[189]

The strong focus on astrology and astronomy in MS HM 64, NAL MS 693, and, to a lesser extent, in Additional MS 12195 and Sloane MS 121, aligns the manuscript users with a form of esoteric knowledge that was closely connected to elite culture. Sophie Page has argued that it was the opportunity for contact with this form of elite culture that was attractive to the clientele of astrologer Richard Trewythian. While he saw clients with diverse occupations and backgrounds, they mostly belonged to the middle stratum of society, and Trewythian's appeal was increased by their eagerness for social mobility, something which might be facilitated by association with someone who practiced the astrological arts.[190] Notes by a slightly later user of NAL MS 693 provide us with evidence of the type of social – or professional – milieu that they were a part of. References to two known figures, Thomas Boydin, who is recorded as receiving one of the medical recipes in the manuscript, and Robert de Heyle, whose murder on 29th January 1332 is noted, links the manuscript with the inner circle of John Hastings, second Lord Hastings and Lord of Abergavenny.[191] These associations

[188] Frank Klaassen, 'Learning and Masculinity in Manuscripts of Ritual Magic of the Later Middle Ages and Renaissance', *The Sixteenth Century Journal*, 38.1 (2007), 49–76 (p. 65).

[189] For more on the possession of books and cultural capital see Ryan Perry, 'Objectification, Identity and the Late Medieval Codex', in *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and Its Meanings*, ed. by Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson (London: Routledge, 2016), pp. 309–19 (p. 311).

[190] Page, 'Richard Trewythian', p. 16.

[191] Ivanov and Falileyev, 'NAL 693 and the History of Monmouth', p. 459.

suggest that the later owner and user of NAL MS 693 may have offered their services to those who hailed from the middling and upper echelons of society.

Tabitha Stanmore finds that the majority of practitioners who offered magical services for a fee were the middling sort – around fifty percent could profess some level of education or ecclesiastical training – and, like Thomas Fayreford and Richard Trewythian, their clientele came from diverse social backgrounds.[192] However, Stanmore finds that when it came to working with the nobility there was a definite increase in the status and learning of the practitioner. Surviving records show that many were highly educated and literate, frequently hailed from religious or medical professions, and many could lay claim to either university or clerical training.[193] Their increased level of learning corresponded with the practice of more elaborate and expensive magic including complex rituals, astrology, and natural magic or *experimenta* drawing on the properties of stones and other objects: many of the types of practices we find represented in the manuscripts discussed above. Stanmore suggests that a practitioner's recourse to books when providing these services increased the confidence and trust of their noble clientele.[194] However, it was not just the *types* of magic commissioned by noble clients that differed from the lower and middling strata of society, but the *tenor* of the commissions, and the types of concerns that magic was employed to address. In Chapter One of this thesis, I argue that many of the non-medical charms and *experimenta* included in medieval manuscripts reflect the social concerns of the gentry and those aspiring towards upwards social mobility. Records of the nobility's encounters with the 'service magic' described by Stanmore show that the practices commissioned correspond to their social concerns in a similar way: to gain favour, incite love, and win at gambling are all utilities which feature among the practices commonly offered.[195] Practitioners who had a noble client base often had an official position within the household – not as a magical practitioner but usually as a physician or confessor. These roles required them to be discrete and were, by their nature, intimate: this generated a high level of trust between practitioner and client.[196] The evidence suggests that while clients may have initially contracted a

[192] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, pp. 85–86.

[193] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, p. 225.

[194] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, pp. 226–27.

[195] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, pp. 188–90, 195, 203, 213.

[196] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, pp. 224, 256.

physician or confessor to take care of their bodily or spiritual needs, once this trust was established, the customer may have commissioned services to address other concerns. Eleanor Cobham and Alice Perrers, both involved in high profile cases where magic was prosecuted, acquired their alleged magical services from physicians. Eleanor Cobham claimed, as part of her defence, that she had been using fertility magic; Stanmore argues that this may have been intended to garner sympathy, but the level of detail provided in the case shows familiarity with the methods that formed a part of fertility magic, suggesting that it was common and widely tolerated.[197] It is therefore plausible that Eleanor Cobham did initially contract a physician to help with her fertility, before expanding into other areas. This evidence, from real instances where magic was used, is interesting because it provides us with a hypothesis about how and why the 'non-medical' charms and *experimenta* may have been included in the manuscripts discussed here. The medical core of the manuscript reflects its owner's role as a physician, but the extra-medical content points towards an expansion into other areas, perhaps in response to the most prominent concerns or demands of their clients.

Controlling women's bodies; controlling women

The progression from contracting a practitioner to provide assistance with fertility to commissioning other types of magic is particularly interesting here given the strong focus on gynaecological and reproductive literature in the six manuscripts studied. The final section of this chapter will examine the inclusion of this material from a social perspective, before considering what the presence of other – non-medical – texts alongside this material might reveal about medieval attitudes towards, and anxieties about, women.

Fertility and generation became an area of academic interest in the mid-thirteenth century with the adoption of Aristotelian science; however, it became an increased area of focus for medical writing in Europe after the devastating depopulation caused by the combination of the Black Death with the occurrence of frequent famines.[198] Written around the turn of the fourteenth century, before the Black

[197] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, pp. 198, 225.

[198] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 91.

Death ravaged Europe, NAL MS 693 and MS e Mus. 219 both pre-date these catastrophes, but they nevertheless show a strong preoccupation with reproduction, perhaps instead a product of the thirteenth-century intellectual debates on generation. This is reflected in choices made by the scribe or compiler about what to copy into the manuscript. The extracts from the *Trotula* copied into NAL MS 693, for example, include only the parts which contain information on menstruation and fertility; there is no guidance concerning other gynaecological issues, including childbirth, which is unusual, and suggests that conception was the primary concern. Further reflecting this interest, these extracts are immediately followed by additional recipes (not part of the *Trotula* works) to test or promote fertility.[199] In a similar fashion, the extracts from William of Conches' *Dragmaticon* chosen for inclusion in NAL MS 693 purely focus on questions of sex and generation.[200] MS e Mus. 219 reflects a comparable preoccupation with these matters, but – uniquely of the manuscripts studied here – it does so for both genders. While the *Gynaecia* of pseudo-Cleopatra and the *Trotula* texts – which are more comprehensive here than in NAL MS 693 – cover the female side of conception and reproduction, these tracts are complemented by the inclusion of Constantinus Africanus' *De coitu*, a treatise on sexual intercourse specifically relating to men. The tract begins by considering the biological necessity of intercourse, the origins of the sexes, and the production of semen, before listing a large quantity of recipes for electuaries with an aphrodisiac effect, accompanied by several ointments for external use on a man's body to aid sexual stimulation.[201] We see one of these electuaries played out in a literary scenario in Chaucer's 'The Merchant's Tale', in which the old knight January, anxious to perform well on his wedding night, consumes a number of aphrodisiacal ingredients '[s]wiche as the cursed monk, daun Constantyn/ Hath writen in his book *De coitu*'.[202] Maurice Bassan has suggested that the epithet 'cursed' assigned to Constantinus Africans by Chaucer here may be because the *De coitu*, and its associated remedies for impotence, had achieved a certain level of infamy by the time the *Canterbury Tales* were being written.[203]

[199] Green, 'A Handlist: Part II', p. 91.

[200] Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages*, p. 90.

[201] Matheson, 'Constantinus Africanus: De Coitu', p. 229.

[202] Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Merchant's Tale', in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry Dean Benson, 3rd ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), ll. 1810–11.

[203] Maurice Bassan, 'Chaucer's "Cursed Monk", Constantinus Africanus', *Mediaeval Studies*, 24 (1962), 127–40 (p. 139).

Monica Green argues that the increased interest in fertility in the later Middle Ages placed a focus on making the female body a 'properly functioning locus of reproduction'. This required guidance on different ways to control the female body; as in NAL MS 693, material about treating disease was eliminated from gynaecological tracts, while instructions on 'restoring' virginity and ascertaining and augmenting fertility, as well as making women more attractive, were retained.[204] This last element, female attractiveness, is something that is reflected in Additional MS 34111, which contains the only English translation of the *Trotula* ensemble to retain many of the cosmetic recipes found in the wider *Trotula* collection. Similarly, the Latin *Trotula* texts in MS HM 64 include parts of the *De ornatu,* the section of the work which focuses on how to preserve and improve women's beauty.[205] While cosmetic potions and procedures would likely have been of interest to women themselves, the format of these texts closely aligns them with the more therapeutic parts of medical practice, and in some cases their accompanying prologues suggest that they should only be accessed by women through the mediation of a learned, male, physician.[206]

These texts all speak to the biologic imperative to procreate, but they also reflect the social and economic anxieties that would have been exacerbated by depopulation. Men, especially those who aspired to upwards social mobility, as well as the nobility, would have placed significant importance on the production of heirs. They would likely have consulted physicians to assist when conception did not come easily, something which is corroborated by multiple sources. A marginal note in a fifteenth-century French codex recalls a priest in Montpellier who garnered a reputation for his successful ability to treat infertility, while Richard the Englishman notes how Salernitan physicians were called on to treat the sterility of Joanna, the Queen of Sicily in the latter half of the twelfth century.[207] The fifteenth-century practitioner Thomas Fayreford records successfully treating ten patients for 'suffocation of the womb', a diagnosis whose identity has been much debated, but which may have been applied in cases of apparent infertility.[208] Similarly, the astrologer Richard Trewythian notes a number of consultations with clients who were

[204] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, pp. 205, 210, 214.

[205] Green, 'A Handlist: Part I', p. 170.

[206] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 48.

[207] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, pp. 85–91.

[208] Jones, 'Thomas Fayreford: An English Fifteenth-Century Medical Practitioner'.

concerned with fertility.[209] But ultimately, dynastic continuity was something which men could not exert full control over, and the reliance on women to play their part in producing children may have been a source of anxiety. The *Trotula* texts in two of the manuscripts studied here, Additional MS 12195, and Sloane MS 121, provide more insight in this respect.

The translation of the *Trotula* in Sloane MS 121 is titled *Secreta mulierum*. The *Secreta mulierum* or *Secrets of Women*, composed towards the end of the thirteenth century, was a tract apocryphally attributed to Albertus Magnus. The text, which discusses sex and reproduction, was hugely popular on the continent, particularly in Germany, but did not circulate widely in England.[210] In terms of content, the Sloane MS 121 text bears no relation to the *Secreta mulierum*, but its title aligns this translation of the *Trotula* ensemble with the 'secrets' tradition that underpins the pseudo-Albertan text. Monica Green argues that the 'secrets' alluded to in the title of this text are not described as such because they are simply hidden processes, but that they are – more specifically – hidden from men, and this creates suspicion towards women.[211] The pseudo-Albertan text does not just provide medical and philosophical discussion on generation, but it also casts aspersions on women, accusing them of being able to fake virginity or pregnancy. In this way, the secrets of women's bodies are not just inaccessible to men, but they are dangerous; therefore, the only means of exerting control over women and their bodies is to fully understand them.[212] While the mistitled Sloane MS 121 tract is not the pseudo-Albertan text, the fact that it assigns the *Trotula* texts to the 'secrets' tradition is revealing about the way that the scribe or compiler may have read and understood its contents or perceived its function as a text. Rather than, or in addition to, enabling the physician to provide therapeutic assistance to women, the text represents the ability to understand and thus control parts of women's lives that were typically hidden from, and inaccessible to men.

The translation of the *Trotula* in Additional MS 12195 corroborates this, though from a different perspective. While, as discussed above, this translation, titled *The Knowing of Woman's Kind in Childing* is contained in a manuscript that was most probably owned by men, the text itself warns men off, suggesting that the translator

[209] Page, 'Richard Trewythian', p. 204.

[210] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 228.

[211] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 218.

[212] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 219.

was aware of the masculine interest in, and misuse of, such gynaecological texts.[213] Its prologue displays overt hostility to men who might look to use the *Knowing of a Woman's Kind* in this way, and warns:

> If any man rede þis, I charge theme on owor Ladys behalf, þat he redit not in despyt ner slandere of no woman ner for no caus but for þe helpe or hele of them.[214]

The assertion that the tract should only be used for healing reflects an awareness of an alternative – misogynistic – use for its contents, whereby men sought to learn the secrets of women in order to exert greater control over reproduction, and to prevent the type of deception that women were purportedly capable of deploying.[215]

This way of reading the *Trotula* texts provides us with additional context for their inclusion in the manuscripts studied here, but it also helps to inform our understanding of some of the other charms and *experimenta* that travel in these volumes. While there are texts reflecting a vast array of extra-medical concerns, such as those for preventing or identifying a thief described above, as well as for success in battle, against enemies, for victory, and many others, there is a strong focus on influencing relations with women and uncovering their secrets. For example, NAL MS 693 includes several experiments to uncover secrets, with at least two specifically making reference to uncovering the secrets of women.[216] A written Latin charm on folio 192v is titled 'if you want to know the secrets of a sleeping woman' and an on folio 193r, 'so that a sleeping woman speaks'.[217] It is not possible to ignore that here, uncovering a woman's secrets – during sleep – is intrinsically linked to a locus symbolic of marriage, or the duties of marriage: the marital bed. This underpins the sexual anxiety or jealousy that might motivate their use. The first of these texts also requires the charm, inscribed on virgin wax, to be placed between the woman's breasts, further implying that the secrets to be uncovered are of a sexual nature. Such a reading is compounded by the other texts in the manuscript which seek to control the social or sexual relations

[213] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, pp. 184–85.

[214] London, British Library, Additional MS 12195, fol. 157v.

[215] Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine*, p. 206.

[216] Fols. 191v, 192r-v, 193r.

[217] '*Si vis scire secrata mulieris dormientis'* and '*Ut mulier dormiens loquatur*', respectively.

between men and women. For example, to make a woman hate her husband (fol. 191v), to undo impotence that may have been caused by witchcraft or *maleficia* (fol. 191v), and to win a woman's love by anointing the male member with fox blood (fol. 193r).[218]

The final folio of the *De coitu* in MS e Mus. 219 is supplemented with a number of experiments that complement the rest of the tract and its focus on copulation.[219] These include instructions for making an unguent from the heart of a hoopoe and smearing it on the breast of a woman who will then allow you to interrogate her, as well as further recipes for aphrodisiacs, and a charm, in cipher, to take possession of a woman. The latter reveals a desire that goes beyond anxiety around sexual performance and correlates with some of the experiments found in NAL MS 693, as well as with the other experiments included in the final folios of MS e Mus. 219 as a whole. Between these folios (186r and 188r) there are instructions to arouse lust in a woman by soaking wool with bat's blood and placing it beneath her head, to bring shame on a woman in the bath – perhaps by exposing her nudity – using ants' eggs, and to make peace between a man and his wife if they are quarrelling by writing certain characters on parchment and placing it beneath the threshold of the house. A number of the practices in these two manuscripts are of a more sinister nature, with their desire to bring shame on women or to bring about sexual relations in a way that appears far from consensual. The use of a cipher in the charm to possess a woman at the end of the *De coitu* in MS e Mus. 219 certainly suggests that the scribe was aware that this text was not entirely appropriate for copying. The final text in the *Experiments of Solomon* in Sloane MS 121 is for a similar purpose. In this manuscript, the tract specifically aligns itself with love and courting, suggesting that the experiments can be used to impress women: it opens with the line 'here begin certain experiments which King Solomon composed for the love and courting of a certain noble queen'.[220] However, the final text is not as wholesome as this incipit suggests: it includes instructions to make a lead ring, which, after a ritual of fasting and the sacrifice of a dove, whose blood should be used to inscribe the name of an angel on the skin of a

[218] For more on magic to cause or cure impotence, see Catherine Rider, *Magic and Impotence in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

[219] Folio 110r.

[220] '*Incipiunt quedam experimenta que Salamon rex composuit ob amorem et implorationem cuiusdam excellentissime Regine*'.

hare, will force any woman to obey you.[221] Again, a simple cipher is used here to disguise, albeit poorly, the purpose of the experiment, and suggests that the scribe was aware that this final text was of a more suspect nature than the rest of the tract.[222]

Additional MS 34111, Additional MS 12195, and MS HM 64 all also contain methods to uncover a woman's secrets while she is sleeping. In line with the anxiety around female deception outlined above, MS HM 64 and Additional MS 12195 also reveal concerns with chastity or virginity. MS HM 64 contains three experiments concerning virginity: one to fake or 'restore' virginity, which falls within the *Trotula* ensemble; one to determine whether a woman is a virgin or not by placing the herb betony where she sits, and if she is not chaste she will immediately get up, and another using powdered jet and almonds, '[t]o awite whether a woman be a mayde or no'.[223] Additional MS 12195 suggests putting vervain under a seated woman and she will not be able to stay sitting there unless she is a 'maydyn'.[224] Finally, while making allowances for use with both genders, Additional MS 12195 includes a charm to 'have ony thing of lord or lady', which involves drawing the *sator arepo* formula – more traditionally used for childbirth – on a piece of parchment in the blood of a dove, sprinkling it with holy water and leaving it on an altar for three days.[225] After this, whoever carries it in their right hand will be given whatever they ask for.

The matters described above are quite personal, and it could be argued that they only reflect the concerns of the manuscript owner or compiler. In her study of Oxford, Bodleian Library, Ashmole MS 1435, a manuscript that is replete with experiments to control women, many of which are overtly sinister in nature, Laura Mitchell suggests that the manuscript consciously constructs an aggressively masculine identity for its user.[226] However, Ashmole MS 1435 is a personal notebook or commonplace book; its contents specifically speak to the insecurities of its user and

[221] Described in more detail in Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 171; for more on the association of this particular text with love and courting, see Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic', p. 57.

[222] Identified by Kieckhefer, in *Magic in the Middle Ages*, p. 171.

[223] Folios 33v, 108v, and 141v, respectively.

[224] Folio 149r.

[225] Folio 126v; for use of the *sator* square in childbirth see Peter Murray Jones and Lea T. Olsan, 'Performative Rituals for Conception and Childbirth in England, 900–1500', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 89.3 (2015), 406–33; for the *sator* formula more broadly, see Rose Mary Sheldon, 'The SATOR Rebus: An Unsolved Cryptogram?', *Cryptologia*, 27.3 (2003), 233–87.

[226] Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic', p. 157.

his desire for masculine dominance.[227] Hannah Bower has argued that copying such texts, regardless of whether they were actually intended to be used, provided relief from, or gratification of, everyday needs, including social, sexual and economic, because they represent fulfilment, even if only through imagination.[228] This is certainly a pertinent point, and coheres with Mitchell's assessment of Ashmole MS 1435. However, the manuscripts discussed here were all likely – as I argue above – owned and used by medical practitioners. This does not, of course, mean that some of the texts copied into them cannot have been for the compiler's own personal interest, rather than for therapeutic use. Nevertheless, when these texts are considered in their full manuscript contexts, accompanied by texts which would have certainly been used within medical practice – for diagnosis, prognostication, and treatment – it seems likely that these charms and *experimenta* were, like the methods of theft detection discussed above, recorded because they spoke to a prevalent, extra-medical concern of the practitioner's clientele. The desire to control women that underpins these texts, therefore, likely also represents the desire of the medieval patient.

This suggestion is supported by the cases cited by Stanmore, in which assistance – either medical or magical, there is often little distinction – with fertility escalated into other types of love magic. Stanmore uses the term 'love magic' to include, not just fertility magic, but also practices to arouse love or lust, incite hatred, and win friendship and favour.[229] She finds several instances from the fifteenth century in which love magic was provided by a service magician, including to procure husbands or lovers, to cause impotence, to bring about a happy marriage, and to make a husband obedient to his wife's will.[230] Stanmore finds that, contrary to stereotyping, this type of magic was most frequently performed by men, and that practices concerned with sexual gratification were also more likely to be commissioned by men.[231] She also finds that it was a preoccupation that was more specific to the upper classes, perhaps due to the political and financial significance of marriage and

[227] Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic', p. 154.

[228] Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500*, p. 197.

[229] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, pp. 61–62.

[230] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, p. 62.

[231] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, p. 90; for more on the gendered implications of love magic, see Catherine Rider, 'Women, Men, and Love Magic in Late Medieval English Pastoral Manuals', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 7.2 (2012), 190–211.

childbearing.[232] Stanmore's findings represent real-life instances in which the texts found in the manuscripts studied here might have been used, and corroborate the suggestion that these practices were offered to clients by practitioners, not simply recorded to reflect personal interest. The charms and *experimenta* to control women may therefore be considered, like the methods for theft detection, as another way for the practitioner to generate income, motivated by the anxieties – albeit predominantly patriarchal – of their patients and clients.

Conclusion

A close examination of medical manuscripts containing a large range of charms and *experimenta* has afforded us the opportunity to explore some of the wider contexts for these texts. Through a study of volumes that were most likely in the possession of medical practitioners – rather than members of the gentry, as described in Chapter One – we are given an insight into the role that these charms and *experimenta* may have played as part of a physician's wider repertoire of therapeutic practices. Building on the work of Peter Murray Jones and Lea Olsan in particular, I have demonstrated that these texts – and the practices they represent – were not confined to 'folk' or illiterate practitioners, but sat alongside tracts more typically associated with 'learned' medicine, therefore eliding the division or boundary between these different registers of medical learning.

I have argued that the inclusion of certain texts in these volumes reflects concerns that we know preoccupied the medieval populace, and that – if a practitioner possessed the means to address these concerns – could prove lucrative. While the discussion in this respect mainly focuses on theft detection, other practices such as a charm for success in battle in Additional MS 34111 or for victory in MS HM 64 reflect other concerns that we know were prominent during that period. Richard Trewythian, for example, records being asked questions about the outcome of battles during his own consultations, perhaps due to the civil war that ravaged England during the mid-fifteenth century.[233] I suggest, also, that medical practitioners may have collected these texts to boost their reputation and status. Claiming access to esoteric knowledge

[232] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, p. 190.

[233] Page, 'Richard Trewythian', p. 202.

and the ability to manipulate the occult virtues of objects would have given them an edge in what was a crowded and competitive marketplace.

A consideration of the place of the *Trotula* texts in these codices, the work that unites all six volumes, has provided us with a deeper understanding of other concerns and anxieties – ones not yet explored in this thesis – that may have preoccupied people in the Middle Ages. Here, drawing on Monica Green's extensive research, I have suggested that the appeal of the *Trotula* – at least in the manuscripts discussed in this chapter – went beyond its use in treating women's diseases or assisting with childbirth, and actually lay in its promise to uncover women's secrets, particularly women's secrets that posed a threat to men, dynastic continuity, and the patriarchy. This insight grants us further perspective on the inclusion of numerous charms and *experimenta* that speak to similar concerns. These frequently revolve around virginity and chastity, uncovering women's secrets – likely pertaining to adultery – and to arouse lust, cure impotence, and to control women. While these charms and *experimenta* speak to intimate concerns, surviving records show that these were problems that medieval medical and – as outlined by Stanmore – known magical practitioners did, in fact, provide solutions to.

Conclusion

I began this thesis with a question: what might medieval people have done when faced with common but pressing social challenges? In the chapters which follow on from this question, I have demonstrated that one particular category of texts, charms and *experimenta*, reveal a range of strategies or practices that would have been available to mitigate anxiety, assert ambition, and exercise agency with regard to social and interpersonal relations. These strategies have been little studied, not only by social historians, who have focused on other methods of social determination such as inter-dynastic marriage, land acquisition, legal action, and the mechanisms of bastard feudalism, but by scholars of magic – including of charms and *experimenta* themselves – whereby 'magical' modes of healing have taken centre stage. This thesis brings these two disciplines – social history and history of magic – thoroughly into conversation, demonstrating that these texts are important sources for our understanding of the strategies available to medieval people as they strove for agency and self-determination in the social sphere.

Extensive archival research has allowed me to demonstrate the prevalence of these texts, with over 500 non-medical charms and *experimenta* identified. The identification and assembly of such a large corpus not only demonstrates that the use of these texts must have been ubiquitous in the Middle Ages, but has also allowed me to pursue a number of themes or threads of research. The structure of this thesis is guided by the most prevalent utilities of these texts: to conquer enemies; to identify false friends; to win favour; to influence lawsuits; and to prevent malicious speech are the core themes of Chapter One, while preventing theft or identifying a thief is the subject of the second chapter, and methods to control women are a key focus of Chapter Three. However, while these chapters pivot around these specific utilities, there are other threads of research which run throughout all three chapters, directing routes of inquiry and, ultimately, leading to the identification of common themes, anxieties, and desires, which underpin all of the texts studied, regardless of their purpose.

The first of these themes is that of status anxiety and the fear of social decline. This is the central argument of Chapter One, whereby I demonstrate – through both an exploration of contemporary documentary and literary evidence, as well as

manuscript case studies – that these particular fears were strongly associated with the gentry and the middling strata of society. However, this theme also emerges in the two remaining chapters of this thesis, though to a lesser degree. In my third chapter I suggest that the inclusion of experiments to control women in manuscripts – typically medical in nature – which contain copies of the *Trotula* texts suggests anxiety around fertility and procreation, and the danger that the secrets of the female body – and by extension female behaviour such as adultery – might pose to dynastic continuation. Thus, although less directly, these texts are still closely aligned with the same desire for upwards social mobility or fear of social decline that is represented by those examined in Chapter One. Similarly, the texts to prevent theft or identify thieves examined in Chapter Two must be studied with the acknowledgement that possessions and material goods were intrinsically linked to social status, and thus their theft represents more than just the loss of property.[1]

Texts which seek to manipulate interpersonal relations or social situations appear at first glance – at least to the modern reader – to be subversive. But a second theme which is drawn out throughout this thesis is the way in which the practices which these texts represent operate within the parameters of established social conventions, traditions, or behaviours. Methods for gaining favour, for example, do not seek to overturn power structures, or the components of these structures, such as fealty and service. Instead, by offering the practitioner the means to ensure that their petitions are heard favourably, or that they will win the affection of their overlord, these texts recognise and reinscribe the importance of the social conventions of fealty and service. In this way, these practices conform to the description of agency in relation to structure, as laid out by Ionuţ Epurescu-Pascovici, whereby he contends that '[s]tructures are not necessarily constraining forces on the individual's agentive potential, they are also enabling, because an individual's capacity for action is constituted by structural conditions'.[2] While some of the practices studied operate within these structural conditions, others mimic them. For example, as described in Chapter Two, the Eye of Abraham experiment to identify a thief can be understood as imitating methods of civic governance and social control, as well as public – and

[1] Alexandra Shepard, *Accounting for Oneself: Worth, Status, and the Social Order in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 35.

[2] Ionuţ Epurescu-Pascovici, *Human Agency in Medieval Society, 1100-1450* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2021), p. 10.

corporal – punishment. Meanwhile, the experiment using pieces of bread – for the same purpose – which will choke the guilty party, bears a strikingly close resemblance to the once-sanctioned practice of trial by ordeal, suggesting the appropriation of official processes by victims in order to solve their problems in an unofficial or extra-judicial way.[3]

The public and performative nature of many of these practices, and how this relates to established conventions, also emerges as a key theme throughout this thesis. The public nature of the Eye of Abraham experiment – as I argue in Chapter Two – reflects the parallels between drama and judicial practice found in chronicles of legal action, as described by Seth Lerer.[4] The nature of this particular experiment, which ultimately mutilates the body of the perpetrator if they are resistant to admitting their guilt, marks them out before other members of their community in a way which takes on even more significance if we consider theft to be a crime, not just against an individual, but against the community as a whole. Though less violent than the Eye of Abraham experiment, with its insinuation of retribution and corporal punishment, other practices discussed in this thesis involve elements of public shame. The means of discerning friends from enemies using powdered snakeskin, discussed in Chapter One, draws those who are loyal towards the practitioner, while repelling those who are not. Similarly, the experiment with vervain to prevent the user's enemies from being able to dine with them, cited in my study of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Wood Empt. 18 – which requires the user to wash their hand in the juice of the plant – points towards an inversion of the public ritual of proclaiming fealty. Experiments to discover a woman's secrets or to uncover a wife's adultery are similarly performative in a way which aligns closely with their purpose. For example, if the plant *solsequium* is suspended over the door of a church, an adulterous woman – if inside – will be unable to leave: there is a poetic symmetry in the way in which the unfaithful wife will find herself prohibited from crossing the threshold of the place where she likely once performed her marriage vows.

[3] Richard W. Ireland, 'First Catch Your Toad: Medieval Attitudes to Ordeal and Battle', *Cambrian Law Review*, 11 (1980), 50–61.

[4] Seth Lerer, '"Representyd Now in Yower Syght": The Culture of Spectatorship in Late-Fifteenth-Century England', in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Barbara Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 29–62.

The present study has also demonstrated the value of examining instructional writing or practical literature, a genre which incorporates texts such as charms and *experimenta*. Building on the work of scholars such as Carrie Griffin and Hannah Bower, it has shown that these texts can tell us much more about medieval society than what might be immediately apparent.[5] While throughout this thesis I have privileged the function or utility of the texts as a means of categorisation, my analysis of the texts themselves goes beyond their mere function, revealing how – for example, in some charms to prevent theft – the language used to describe a thief others them, equating them with invasive disease or domestic pests such as rats. This sheds light, not only on the way that the practitioner of such a charm might conceive of themselves in relation to the dehumanised criminal, but it also reveals an interesting parallel between charms against theft and charms for healing. This parallel is just one instance where we are forced to recognise that there is significant slippage between the categories of 'medical' and 'non-medical' when it comes to the examination of these texts. At the beginning of this thesis, I noted that the majority of scholarship on charms and *experimenta* had thus far focused on those for healing. Therefore, in order to rectify this imbalance, and to shine a light on texts which served other purposes, it was necessary to create the category of 'non-medical' texts, which would enable me to identify and record texts which addressed concerns beyond the medical. Throughout this thesis, and particularly in Chapter Three where I explore charms and *experimenta* for a range of concerns, but which occur in manuscripts with otherwise almost exclusively medical content, it has been necessary to resort to the term 'non-medical' to continue to make a distinction between the functional purposes of these different texts. Nevertheless, Chapter Three, in particular, in demonstrating that charms and *experimenta* for social problems are frequently found in medical codices, makes clear that the division between medical and non-medical is one that – while perhaps convenient to modern scholars – does not necessarily reflect the conceptualisation or categorisation of these texts that would have made most sense to their medieval copiers and users. Surviving evidence of the services offered by practitioners, such as

[5] Carrie Griffin, 'Reconsidering the Recipe: Materiality, Narrative and Text in Later Medieval Instructional Manuscripts and Collections', in *Manuscripts and Printed Books in Europe 1350-1550: Packaging, Presentation and Consumption*, ed. by Emma Cayley and Susan Powell (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 135–49; Carrie Griffin, *Instructional Writing in English, 1350-1650: Materiality and Meaning* (London: Routledge, 2021); Hannah Bower, *Middle English Medical Recipes and Literary Play, 1375-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022).

the court records explored by Tabitha Stanmore, supports the conceptual integration of the medical and non-medical: a number of the cases cited by Stanmore reveal that practitioners were initially consulted for assistance with medical issues before being contracted to provide solutions to other problems, including those concerning social relations.[6] However, we can only break down the current boundaries between these categories of texts by first identifying, and paying the attention that has so far been primarily reserved for healing practices, to texts for other purposes. This thesis makes a substantive contribution in this respect, and will foster further research into how modern scholarship may want to reassess its definition of 'medical' when it comes to the study of the Middle Ages.

The manuscript case studies in this thesis have served to elaborate and illustrate many of the themes described above. Most importantly, they highlight not only the existence, but the prevalence, of charms and experiments in medieval manuscripts, a prevalence which has hitherto been belied by their sparse treatment in current scholarship, especially in the field of manuscript and book studies. The six manuscripts examined in Chapter Three demonstrate the specific place of charms and *experimenta* in medical manuscripts, and the integration of social and medical concerns, particularly with regard to fertility, conception, and male-female relationships. Meanwhile, the codices studied in Chapter One support the argument that these texts are particularly aligned with the concerns of the gentry, because they were all known to have been – or, in the case of MS Wood Empt. 18, likely to have been – owned by this specific stratum of society. Not only do the charms and *experimenta* align with the typical reading patterns of gentry users but – more specifically with regard to their utilities – in the way that they speak to the gentry fixation on status and social mobility, they support readings of these manuscripts as representative of the concerted and calculated efforts of their users to curate their own self-image and assert their place in the world.

Future avenues of research

[6] Tabitha Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure: Service Magic in England from the Later Middle Ages to the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2022), pp. 198, 225.

The source base identified and gathered together for this thesis has significant potential for further research. There is the opportunity to analyse the prominent motifs of these texts, as Lea Olsan has done for medical charms: this would enable us to identify key semantic links between texts which might serve different purposes, but which draw on similar biblical *historiolae* or call on the same supernatural agents.[7] Similarly, pursuing one particular motif might allow us to identify hitherto undiscovered routes of transmission or stemmatic relationships between different texts, just as T.M. Smallwood was able to do by tracing two key motifs in the 'God was born in Bethlehem' charm for theft and bleeding.[8] There is also the possibility of identifying further parallels between texts for healing and those for other purposes, beyond shared motifs. In Chapter Two, I demonstrate that there are close parallels between certain charms for theft and those for – for example, eye problems, or rats in the granary – and the way in which they use language to address these invading forces. There are likely to be similar linguistic matches between texts which address other problems. These texts might seem disparate at first, as charms for a 'hawe' in the eye and for theft seem disparate, but the identification of linguistic parallels between them points towards the existence of a structural framework which governs many of these texts, regardless of their specific function or utility. This is something which has not yet been explored beyond those for medical purposes.

It has been beyond the scope of this thesis to examine whether the purpose, or other features of these texts, are subject to change over time. Investigating change over time is made difficult by the sheer prevalence of these texts in manuscripts from – for example – the fifteenth century, as compared to those from the thirteenth. It is difficult to disentangle this from increases in literacy rates, the explosion in medical and scientific writing towards the end of the Middle Ages, and the increase in vernacular authorship and translation of utilitarian texts by the end of the period studied here.[9] Nevertheless, it would be interesting to examine whether texts to

[7] Lea T. Olsan, 'Charms in Medieval Memory', in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 59–88.

[8] T.M. Smallwood, '"God Was Born in Bethlehem...": The Tradition of a Middle English Charm', *Medium Ævum*, 58.2 (1989), 206–23.

[9] Päivi Pahta and Irma Taavitsainen, 'Vernacularisation of Scientific and Medical Writing in Its Sociohistorical Context', in *Medical and Scientific Writing in Late Medieval English*, ed. by Irma Taavitsainen and Päivi Pahta (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), pp. 1–22; Linda Ehrsam Voigts, 'Multitudes of Middle English Medical Manuscripts, or the Englishing of Science and Medicine',

address certain concerns increased or decreased in prevalence over the period studied, or – perhaps through methods of quantitative analysis – whether particular motifs, ingredients, or ritual actions became more or less popular at different points in time. The way in which the use of language in charms changed – for example between Latin and the vernacular in spoken charms – or remained static – such as the use of Latin in written charms – over time is one of the most notable findings of Katherine Hindley's recent study.[10] However, Hindley almost exclusively focuses on charms for healing. It would likely be enlightening to apply Hindley's methodologies to the sources studied here, to see if they are subject to the same changes, or whether there are any significant deviations from Hindley's own findings.

This study has focused on medieval England; however, where scholars have compared English charms with those from continental Europe, the results have been fruitful.[11] We know that the experiments of pseudo-Albertus Magnus were hugely popular across Europe: was there a similar dispersal of other tracts of experiments, or otherwise standalone recipes and charms?[12] Similarly, comparison between the utilities and motifs of charms from England with those from continental Europe would likely reveal both striking similarities and interesting disparities. European projects to create databases of charms, such as *Carminabase*, the database of French charms by Béatrice Delaurenti and colleagues, as well as the fast-developing field of digital humanities will allow for the cross-comparison of these texts between different regions, nations, and continents.[13]

Finally, the relationship between gender and the users of the texts discussed in this thesis is an area which would merit further research. The examination of gender

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in *Manuscript Sources of Medieval Medicine: A Book of Essays*, ed. by Margaret R. Schleissner (New York: Garland, 1995), pp. 183–96.

[10] Katherine Storm Hindley, *Textual Magic: Charms and Written Amulets in Medieval England* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2023).

[11] See for example Smallwood, '"God Was Born in Bethlehem..."'; Chiara Benati, 'Painted Eyes, Magical Sieves and Carved Runes: Charms for Catching and Punishing Thieves in the Medieval and Early Modern Germanic Tradition', in *Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Time: The Occult in Pre-Modern Sciences, Medicine, Literature, Religion, and Astrology*, ed. by Albrecht Classen (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 149–218; and the essays in *Charms and Charming in Europe*, ed. by Jonathan Roper (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) and Jonathan Roper, *Charms, Charmers and Charming International Research on Verbal Magic* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

[12] Isabelle Draelants, *Le Liber de virtutibus herbarum, lapidum et animalium (Liber aggregationis): un texte à succès attribué à Albert le Grand* (Firenze: SISMEL, edizioni del Galluzzo, 2007).

[13] Béatrice Delaurenti et al., *Carminabase*, online database, l'EHESS (Centre de Recherches historiques), https://carminabase.ehess.fr/.

in relation to magic has been well-studied, though there is significant focus either on the male use of learned or ritual magic, or the association of women with witchcraft.[14] My study is firmly rooted in the manuscript evidence, and it is therefore intrinsically tied to education, literacy, and often Latinity, all of which are frequently associated with men. As I acknowledge in Chapter Three of this thesis, this does not mean that women would not have had access to these texts, if not as readers themselves then as auditors. Regardless, there is very little concrete evidence of female engagement with these texts. Laura Mitchell examines one rare case study of a fifteenth-century manuscript copied and owned by the Haldenbys, a Northamptonshire gentry family; the volume contains many of the texts examined in this thesis, such as the *experimenta* of pseudo-Albertus Magnus and the *De corio serpentis* as well as a large number of charms.[15] Mitchell posits that the women of the Haldenby family may well have copied some of these texts into the manuscript, although there is no definitive proof; nevertheless, they definitely engaged with the volume as readers, if not as scribes. However, similar evidence in other volumes is rare. We do know from trial records that women both contracted magical practitioners and were themselves practitioners of magic: similarly pastoral writing, when discussing magic, describes both male and female practitioners.[16] However, we cannot easily draw a link between the practices used by those cited in trial records, or by pastoral writers, and the specific texts in the manuscripts studied here. Further research is needed to understand to what extent the texts studied here might have been accessed – either directly or indirectly – and used by women, and how this correlates with social status or specific social concerns or anxieties.

While there remain many avenues of research which this thesis has been unable to explore, it nevertheless demonstrates quite unequivocally that charms and *experimenta* were a significant component in the self-determination and social realisation of medieval people. It reveals the broad range of concerns that these texts were designed to address, far beyond healing, and how they typically operated within

[14] For a useful summary of the field of scholarship in this area see Catherine Rider, 'Magic and Gender', in *The Routledge History of Medieval Magic*, ed. by Sophie Page and Catherine Rider (London: Routledge, 2019), pp. 342–54.

[15] Laura Mitchell, 'Cultural Uses of Magic in Fifteenth-Century England' (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 2012), pp. 96–132.

[16] Stanmore, *Love Spells and Lost Treasure*, pp. 73–84; Catherine Rider, *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012); Catherine Rider, 'Women, Men, and Love Magic in Late Medieval English Pastoral Manuals', *Magic, Ritual, and Witchcraft*, 7.2 (2012), 190–211.

the confines of established social structures. The study of these texts has fallen victim to a pervasive idea – at least among scholars outside of the history of magic – that they are marginal, but their sheer prevalence shows that they were ubiquitous during the Middle Ages. This, along with the diverse utilities which they represent, makes clear that these texts reach far into a number of disciplines: social history, history of medicine, gender studies, and legal history. This thesis demonstrates that these texts are valuable sources to mine, and that they can provide new or alternative facets of understanding within these fields. If they remain absent from the discussion, this keeps one core component of medieval life in shadow, limiting our understanding of personal agency and social relations in the Middle Ages.

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