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NB: Accepted Manuscript. Originally published in *Notes and Queries*, Volume 67, Issue 1, March 2020, Pages 6–7. <https://doi.org/10.1093/notesj/gjz188>

REMEMBERED REMEDIES FROM ENGLAND? AN EARLY VETERINARY CHARM AT ST. GALL

Among the folios of a ninth-century miscellany held by the Abbey Library of St. Gall in present-day Switzerland (Cod. Sang. 732), a series of local annals known as the *Annales Sangallenses breves* (*ASb*) is accompanied by an anomalous formula, featuring in the space of four empty entries for the years 838-41:

Vnion genip[ro]n genitul catulon contristuan feruan nain nati feruna neq[ue] sonus maris
ia[m] non me tin pe.¹

Added in a separate hand and ostensibly indifferent to the surrounding annalistic account, this largely unintelligible sentence comprises various enigmatic Latin(-sounding) elements, arranged in patterns of assonance, alliteration, and rhyme. For all intents and purposes, the passage appears performative in nature, and, as such, seems to represent a type of early medieval charm or incantation.² Pondering the hand in which the formula was written down, von Arx and Pertz – in their nineteenth-century edition of the *ASb* – speculated the author to have originated in England.³ Beyond this potential connection, however, the inscription has received scant scholarly attention. As such, this note is the first to analyse the formula in the light of analogous passages from a number of Anglo-Saxon and continental manuscripts.⁴

Most prominently, MS Harley 585 – the renowned late tenth or eleventh-century compilation of remedies (*Lácnunga*) held by the British Library – includes the following record:

Geneon genetron genitul catalon care trist pābist etmic forrune naht ic forrune nequis annua
maris scāna nequetando.⁵

The formula, characterised by Grattan and Singer as a ‘gibberish veterinary charm’, is preceded by a direction (in Old English) for it to be utilised against a specific affliction of a horse’s feet (i.e. *corn on*

¹ St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 732, 177. Transcription by the author.

² It is likewise identified as such by Philipp Lenz and Stefania Ortelli (eds.), *Die Handschriften der Stiftsbibliothek St. Gallen* (Wiesbaden, 2014), III, 259.

³ *Annales Sangallenses breves*, ed. Ildefons von Arx and G. H. Pertz, *MGH SS I* (Hannover, 1826), 65. Bruckner considered the hand to be Irish, but this was disputed by Bischoff. See A. Bruckner, *Scriptoria medii aevi Helvetica* (Genf, 1938), III, 116; Bernard Bischoff, *Die südostdeutschen Schreibschulen und Bibliotheken in der Karolingerzeit* (Wiesbaden, 1980), II, 216.

⁴ These analogues have been previously noted and collated, albeit without reference to the St. Gall manuscript, by e.g. Elias von Steinmeyer, *Die kleineren althochdeutschen Sprachdenkmäler* (Berlin, 1916), 391-92; Willy L. Braekman, ‘Notes on Old English Charms III: *Corn on þa fet*’, *Neophilologus*, lxxiii (1999), 623-36.

⁵ London, British Library, MS Harley 585, f. 182r-v. Transcription from J. H. G. Grattan and Charles Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine* (Oxford, 1952), 184.

ba fet).⁶ Three additional parallels of the remedy are found on the European mainland, two of which currently reside in Zürich's Zentralbibliothek. The first of these, administered *ad equum qui se offendit* ('to a horse which has injured itself'), appears in a tenth-century miscellany noted for its connection to St. Gall (MS Car. C 176):

Union. Genibron. Genitul. Catulon. Cortrix. Uuam bambist Igne feruna. Nec te feruna. Neque sanna. Maris scamma. Nec te tangant.⁷

The second Zürich analogue occurs in a twelfth-century manuscript (MS C 58) that is likewise thought to originate at St. Gall.⁸ It calls – among other things – for the words to be uttered into the afflicted horse's ear:

[...] Vnion. geniphron. inditol. cathaloti. genepis ita n[on] ita. aran[on]. ipitara. k. x. k. Pat[er] n[oste]r.⁹

The last of these continental parallels is found in a twelfth-century miscellany held by the Bibliothèque nationale de France (MS Nouv. acq. lat. 229). It is suggested to hail from the Abbey of St. Peter and St. Paul in Wissembourg (Alsace), a community recognised for its confraternity with St. Gall.¹⁰ In this instance, the remedy is stated to combat symptoms of excessive food intake (*voracitas*) in equines:

Wamapis. union. geneprol. genetul. katulon. gortrie. uniferuna. noctiferuna. maris samna. neq[ue] samna. nec te damnet.¹¹

As argued in great detail by Braekman, the formula – in these four previously recognised renditions – may have been prescribed as a remedy against acute laminitis or other sources of lameness and stiffness in a horse's hooves, commonly caused by overfeeding and at times associated with grain-shaped abscesses (cf. the OE *corn* in MS Harley 585).¹² But even though no such medical utility is disclosed in the manuscript from St. Gall, it contains – to all appearances – an early and thus far unexplored, fifth iteration of the same charm, serving to augment this already familiar assemblage.

The presence of the formula in the St. Gall manuscript warrants further investigation into the circumstances of its inclusion. Although the exact provenance of the codex is ambiguous, much of its content – including the *ASb* – is thought to have been put to parchment in nearby Bavaria (possibly

⁶ *Ibid.*, 185. An attempt to decipher the wording of the charm is found in Helen Lesley Stuart, 'A Critical Edition of Some Anglo-Saxon Charms and Incantations' (PhD thesis, Flinders University, 1974), II, 847-52.

⁷ Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, MS Car. C 176, f. 153v. Transcription from Steinmeyer, *Sprachdenkmäler*, 391. A number of small, subsequent corrections to the text are outlined by Braekman, 'Notes', 624. For the link to St. Gall, see Leo Cunibert Mohlberg, *Katalog der Handschriften der Zentralbibliothek Zürich* (Zürich, 1951), I, 149; Max Büdinger and Emil Grunauer, *Älteste Denkmale der Züricher Literatur* (Zürich, 1866), 81n.

⁸ Paul Lehmann, *Mittelalterliche Bibliothekskataloge Deutschlands und der Schweiz* (Munich, 1918), I, 62, 64.

⁹ Zürich, Zentralbibliothek, MS C 58 (275), f. 47r. Transcription by the author.

¹⁰ Friedrich Wilhelm, *Denkmäler deutscher Prosa des 11. und 12. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1914), II, 127; Arno Borst, *Schriften zur Komputistik im Frankenreich von 721 bis 818* (Hannover, 2006), I, 280. For the affiliation between Wissembourg and St. Gall, see Dieter Geuenich, 'The St. Gall Confraternity of Prayer', in James C. King and Werner Vogler (eds.), *The Culture of the Abbey of St. Gall* (Stuttgart, 1991), 30-32; 'Elsaßbeziehungen in den St. Galler Verbrüderungsbüchern', in Peter Ochsenein and Ernst Ziegler (eds.), *Codices sangallenses* (Sigmaringen, 1995), 109-11.

¹¹ Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS Nouv. acq. lat. 229, f. 9v. Transcription by the author.

¹² Braekman, 'Notes', 627-31.

Freising) during the first third of the ninth century.¹³ Towards the back of the volume, a register – likely added at a later date – contains various names corresponding to monks known to have taken their vows at St. Gall between 840 and 885, suggesting the miscellany to have made its way to the monastery by the late ninth century.¹⁴ It is during this time that the veterinary charm, written in a separate hand from the contiguous Carolingian miniscule of the *ASb*, may have been added as well – whereby it would seem to represent the earliest attested iteration of the remedy.¹⁵ In support of this assumption, the passage exhibits strong similarities to Braekman’s ‘emended version’ of the formula, which was reconstructed on the basis of its other known iterations.¹⁶

In light of the long-established early English influences on the community of St. Gall, the apparent Anglo-Saxon attributes of the hand in which the charm was penned should not be disregarded.¹⁷ In fact, these properties lend support to the notion that the inscription was added by an Anglo-Saxon or associate scribe with access to an early, insular version of the charm – previously committed to memory or writing. On the other hand, its recurrent appearance in manuscripts from St. Gall and its immediate monastic network may suggest the remedy to be local or regional in origin. In this scenario, the formula may have been encountered and exported by an English scribe, only to later be included in the *Lácnunga* manuscript – bundled with various other veterinary charms.

Lacking a statement of practical utility (as present in the other manuscripts), the St. Gall inscription seems to have been included for personal use only – either in idleness, as a mnemonic device, or as a means of scribal practice or pen-trial. This assumption is affirmed by the formula’s position on an empty section of vellum in an otherwise unrelated manuscript, as well as its presence near other anomalous scribbles, including part of the Lord’s Prayer written backwards on the preceding page (in yet another hand).¹⁸

Despite the noted resemblance between the opening words of the remedy from Cod. Sang. 732 and the other manuscripts, their subsequent divergence complicates a clear-cut corroboration of the textual (or scribal) affinities between them. Nevertheless, their collective survival serves to substantiate a distinct oral tradition of phonetically recollected remedies – both at St. Gall and across its monastic network – which seems to have endured over the course of several centuries.¹⁹

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¹³ Lenz and Ortelli (eds.), *Handschriften*, III, 258-59; Bischoff, *Schreibschulen*, II, 215-16.

¹⁴ Lenz and Ortelli (eds.), *Handschriften*, III, 259-60, 264; Rupert Schaab, *Mönch in Sankt Gallen* (Ostfildern, 2003), 80, 83, 85-86, 88-91.

¹⁵ Whereas Bischoff attributed the charm to the wider ninth century, Henking considered it to be contemporary to the annals themselves. Bischoff, *Schreibschulen*, II, 216; Carl Henking, ‘Die Annalistischen Aufzeichnungen des Klosters St. Gallen’, *MvG*, xix (1884), 223.

¹⁶ Braekman, ‘Notes’, 631-35. The proposed reconstruction reads: ‘Union genebron genitul catulon cortrist uuam wam pambist igne fe/aruuu naht[!]ic forruue neque samma maris scan nec te [or nocti] tangant’.

¹⁷ See, for example, J. M. Clark, *The Abbey of St. Gall as a Centre of Literature & Art* (Cambridge, 1926), 55-70; Sven Meeder, *The Irish Scholarly Presence at St. Gall* (London, 2018), 61-62.

¹⁸ St. Gall, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 732, 176.

¹⁹ Sincere gratitude is owed to Dr Thijs Porck (Leiden University) for his assorted advice and assistance.