

Anglo-Saxon Medicine: Cures or Catastrophe?

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Today, historians and laypeople alike often look upon medicine from the Anglo-Saxon period (550-1066 A.D.) with horror and derision. One seems to conjure up images of dirty rags used to clean wounds, or ground-up dung ingested to cure a headache. When one examines the actual medical remedies of the time, however, useful cures can be found. The remedies in Anglo-Saxon medical texts are extremely interesting, not merely because they give insight into the medical practices of the time, but also because they are products of a culture on the cusp of transition. The remedies demonstrate the integration of the Anglo-Saxons' pagan beliefs with those of Christianity, and so they are valuable indications of the changes permeating Britain's society during the Anglo-Saxon period. This paper shall discuss two such remedies, one from the *Lacnunga* (10th or 11th century) and the other from Bald's *Leechbook* (probably 9th century). Both texts are medical manuscripts containing various cures for Anglo-Saxon ailments which were most likely copied down by Christian scribes in Anglo-Saxon monasteries. The two remedies discussed in this paper demonstrate that Christians in Anglo-Saxon England used medicine as a means to promote the spread of their religion into areas that had held onto their Germanic or pagan backgrounds by integrating Christian themes into the native folkloric and medical practice. The cures also convey that Anglo-Saxons had a decent understanding of medicine for topical or external ailments, while their knowledge of remedies for internal symptoms was a bit lacking.

The first remedy to be discussed in this paper is a cure for what the *Lacnunga* calls a 'flying venom':

A salve for flying venom. Take a handful of hammer wort and a handful of maythe and a handful of waybroad and roots of water dock, seek those which will float, and one eggshell full of clean honey, then take clean butter, let him who will help to work up the salve melt it thrice: let one sing a mass over the worts, before they are put together and the salve is wrought up.¹

Before commencing with a discussion of this remedy, it is necessary to define what a flying venom actually was, according to Anglo-Saxons. As the name might indicate, the illness or poison seemed to fly about, which hints at the type of diseases flying venoms represent through their perceived method of spreading. Some historians believe that these were viruses because they would have spread quickly throughout Anglo-Saxon communities without a discernable cause to the people. Audrey Meaney also suggests that flying venoms could be airborne bacterial infections, since, without an understanding of germ theory, such infections were more virulent than they are today.² Because the remedy creates a salve-an ointment that would have been rubbed on irritated skin- it seems likely that Meaney's hypothesis is correct. Infections could often result in rashes or boils on the skin. Regardless of if it indicated a virus or infection, it seems that the term 'flying venom' was used to describe an illness without a perceivable cause that spread quickly and could affect many people and cause visible irritations of the skin.

Whether this cure originated in English medical practice or if it was brought over from the Mediterranean is difficult to determine because the origins of the herbs are hard to pin down. Chamomile, for example, is one of the nine sacred herbs in Anglo-Saxon medical practice and appears in the famous "Nine Herbs Charm," and so would seem to have originated in England.³ Chamomile could also be found in Egypt and the Roman Empire long before the Anglo-Saxons came to England.⁴ Also, the "Nine Herbs Charm" is in the *Lacnunga*, and so it is difficult to determine whether this charm is copied down from folklore or something composed by the Christian scribe writing the text. Because the charm calls upon Germanic gods such as Woden it probably has Germanic origins, causing questions of how an herb like chamomile might fit into it. In this flying venom remedy, all of the text is in Latin except for the herb names, which are in Old English, indicating that the scribe was probably copying down the cure from another source and did not have a Latin translation for the herb names. Perhaps herbs such as chamomile had been present in England for such a long time that they had acquired Old English names, which Latin-speaking Christian missionaries would have been unfamiliar with. This theory would require some kind of loss of contact between the English-speaking and Latin-speaking people, unless those who spoke Latin did not speak Old English as well. Chamomile could have been

¹ *Lacnunga* 6, trans. by Elanour Sinclair Rohde.

² Audrey L. Meaney, "The Anglo Saxon View of the Causes of Illness", in *Health Disease and Healing in Medieval Culture*, ed. by Sheila Campbell, Bert S. Hall, David N. Klausner, (Macmillan: 1992), 16 of 12-33.

³ Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion In Late Saxon England: Elf Charms In Context* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 125.

⁴ *A History of the Noble Chamomile- Anthemis nobilis Ancient History*, <http://www.chamomile.co.uk/history.htm>, accessed 12/11/2011.

brought to England during the land's Roman occupation and cultivated by the natives after the Romans left the area, which might explain this, but ultimately, one can only speculate.

Although one may be hesitant to believe in the effectiveness of a 'cure' for a mysterious venom flying through the air, this remedy is actually quite useful in relieving superficial irritations. Considering that the herbs are combined in order to create a salve for the skin, one must assume that this remedy is meant to relieve rashes or external irritations. Because I am relying upon another historian's translation of the remedy, I cannot be completely sure that it was meant to produce a salve. After making the mixture myself, however, I found that the consistency is appropriate for a salve. Also, the herbs used all have benefits when applied topically, indicating that the mixture was likely meant to be applied externally.

The herbs used in the salve are hammer wort, maythe, waybroad, and the root of water dock. 'Maythe' or 'Maythen' is the Old English term for chamomile, which has the ability to reduce swelling and pain from inflammation when applied externally.⁵ Waybroad (today called plantain) is also useful in reducing inflammation, and has the added benefit of reducing the stinging feeling commonly associated with insect bites and skin rashes.⁶ Water dock has similar external uses, and is especially useful for relieving skin irritations that might burst such as ulcers or boils.⁷ The use of hammer wort, or pellitory, seems somewhat questionable because the herb is a rubefacient, meaning that it causes slight tingling and redness when applied externally, which does not seem helpful in healing skin irritation.⁸ The tingling and redness, however, is caused by increased superficial circulation - blood flows more easily to the area on which this herb is applied - which speeds the healing process of bruises, sores, or other wounds. Pellitory has also been used in the past to relieve pain caused by tooth ache or gum soreness because it has mild paralyzing effects when applied inside the mouth.⁹ Perhaps this occurs also when applied to the skin, which would slightly relieve the pain associated with sores or skin irritation by paralyzing the nerve endings in the region of the skin onto which the pellitory is applied. The four herbs in combination, therefore, are effective in relieving swelling and inflammation of rashes, sores, and ulcers while also relieving the pain of the patient, certainly making them a valuable cure for a variety of skin issues.

Like the herbs used, the process of creating the salve also indicates that Anglo-Saxon healers were not ignorant in their craft. The recipe specifies that *clean* honey and butter must be used, which is obviously important because anything lurking in these two ingredients would end up being rubbed on the skin in the form of the salve and might cause further irritation. The honey and butter form the base of the salve that holds all the herbs together. Both ingredients are still commonly used today to make salves, soothing lotions, and lip balms.

The medicinal purpose of melting the mixture three times is unclear, however, this part of the process might have a folkloric origin. The numbers three and nine were significant in Anglo-Saxon folklore and appear at least once in almost every remedy of the *Lacnunga*.¹⁰ The importance of the number three in the *Lacnunga* has many possible origins, from the Holy Trinity of Christianity, the writings of Classical authors such as Virgil, even the magical practices of Ireland and Wales, all of which affected Anglo-Saxon beliefs and practices.¹¹ Melting the mixture three times might also have a more practical value, such as ensuring the sterilization of the mixture. The honey and butter initially reacted like oil and water, so to get them mixed thoroughly together, the salve might need to be hardened and melted about three times. This speculation depends on whether the butter is supposed to be melted three times alone or with the honey, which is an ambiguous part of the directions. Because there are so many possible explanations for why you have to melt the mixture three times, it is somewhat futile to assign an absolute meaning to the number's use in this remedy. Three could have been chosen because of its practical value, but also because it was significant to both Christian and pagan audiences using the remedy.

The remedy for flying venoms conveys the interaction between Christianity and Anglo-Saxon practices, which is evidenced by the instruction to sing a mass over the herbs. The medicinal effectiveness of singing over herbs is negligible; however, the use of any words at all in the preparation of an herbal formula should be examined. Christian and Anglo-Saxon beliefs both placed importance in words because they were believed to have the ability to

⁵ Mrs. M. Grieve, *A Modern Herbal: The Medicinal, Culinary, Cosmetic and Economic Properties, Cultivation and Folk-Lore of Herbs, Grasses, Fungi, Shrubs & Trees with their Modern Scientific Uses* (New York, NY: Dover Publications, 1971), 641.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 640.

⁷ Grieve, *A Modern Herbal*, 641.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 621.

⁹ Grieve, *A Modern Herbal*, 621.

¹⁰ Wilfrid Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England: A Study in History, Psychology, and Folklore* (London: The Wellcome Historical Medical Library, 1963), 213-214.

¹¹ Bonser, *Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England*, 213-214.

access the perceived power within natural objects.¹² Germanic peoples such as the Anglo-Saxons often had animistic beliefs, meaning that they believed that a spiritual essence resided in all nature. Christians had a similar belief, but to them, the spiritual essence was God, who existed in all things. Priests or healers used words to tap into the power of herbs that would be used for treatment. Singing a mass over the plants would have been thought to draw the healing power of the divine into the herbs, instilling them with special powers from God.¹³ The use of the mass in remedies like this one encouraged people to think of God as the supreme source of healing power rather than believing that the power was derived from the essence of the plants.

The mass also indicates that the church used medical practices to integrate itself into Anglo-Saxon culture. There are charms in the *Lacnunga* that are not in Latin, do not seem to have a Christian context, and could have been read aloud by any literate person or memorized and passed down orally by those who could not read, for example, *Lacnunga XXV (9)*, which is an old Irish prayer without discernable meaning.¹⁴ It is unlikely that the laity of Anglo-Saxon England would have been able to read and understand Latin prayers in these herbal remedies, implying that members of the local church would probably have to be sought out in order to successfully prepare this salve, thereby ensuring Christianity's involvement in Anglo-Saxon practices. Since the entire text of the remedy is also in Latin (except for the herb names), one would have had to know Latin in order to understand the cure. Finally, since the *Lacnunga* was probably written by a monk, it was probably kept in a monastery, so in order to get the cure, a person would have had to go to a monastery or church regardless. If this flying venom remedy was copied down from an originally pagan source, the original cure may have existed with the simultaneously with the new, but it was probably pushed aside and replaced by individuals wishing to promote Christianity through God's healing power.

The next remedy to be discussed comes from a very important Anglo-Saxon medical text known as Bald's *Leechbook*:

Work a salve against elf-kind and nightgoers, and the people with whom the devil has intercourse. Take eowohumelan, wormwood, bishopwort, lupin, asthroath, henbane, harewort, haransprecel, heathberry plants, croleek, garlic, hedgerife grains, githrife, fennel. Put these herbs into one cup, set under the altar, sing over them nine masses; boil in butter and in sheep's grease, add much holy salt, strain through a cloth; throw the herbs in running water. If any evil temptation, or an elf or nightgoers, happen to a man, smear his forehead with this salve, and put on his eyes, and where his body is sore, and cense him [with incense], and sign [the cross] often. His condition will soon be better.¹⁵

Like the previous remedy, this salve is supposed to cure a disease that has no apparent modern counterpart. Very few people today are likely to assume they are being attacked by elves when they succumb to an illness. In order to understand the disease this remedy tries to cure, one must have an understanding of elves in Anglo-Saxon culture. Elves were thought to be invisible (or rather, difficult to perceive) creatures that shot victims with their arrows or spears, which would cause a sudden, inexplicable pain, wound, or illness.¹⁶ Just as with the cure for flying venoms, this remedy demonstrates the Anglo-Saxon tendency to explain the inexplicable by attributing the disease to outside influences, which is quite similar to the Anglo-Saxon reaction to other uncontrollable forces (bringing to mind Gildas' sermon and the many modeled after it throughout Anglo-Saxon history that declare the pagan invasions a punishment from God).

The actual illness that this passage refers to is hard to determine as the disease is not really described, except for the mention of sores. Its identity may be determined, however, by looking at its placement in the medical text. The *Leechbook* groups similar diseases together, and the elf charms are often grouped in manuscripts such as the *Leechbook* and *Lacnunga* with remedies for demonic possession, indicating an understood similarity between the two diseases in the mind of the scribe.¹⁷ The cures for both are usually similar and often involve some kind of purgation in order to exorcise the offending demon or elf.¹⁸ In her research on the elf remedies, Karen Louise Jolly concludes that the elf remedies were Christianized, which resulted in the mutation of the elves into demons and the illness into

¹² Jolly, *Elf Charms In Context*, 116.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁴ "Tigath tigath tigath calicet aclu cluel sedes adlocloes acre earcre arnem nonabiuth aer aernem nithren arcum cunath arcum arctua fligara uflen binchi cutern icuparam raf afth egal uflen arta arta trauncula trauncula." Karen L. Jolly states that this is an Old Irish prayer that has no translatable meaning in her *Elf Charms* book pg. 118.

¹⁵ *Leechbook III: lxi*, translation by Karen Louise Jolly.

¹⁶ Jolly, *Elf Charms in Context*, 133.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Jolly, *Elf Charms in Context*, 136.

demonic possession.¹⁹ The result of Christian influence can, indeed, be seen in this remedy which groups elves with creatures associated with the devil.

Another indication that this disease was similar to ‘demon illnesses’ is the use of incense to purify the patient and essentially push out the illness, which is very similar to the exorcism methods in demon remedies. Since other historians have concluded that the ‘devil-sickness’ remedies were meant to cure what we call epilepsy or schizophrenia,²⁰ elf attacks probably refer to the same diseases. The theory that the elf remedies were meant to cure epilepsy or schizophrenia makes sense in the context of the Anglo-Saxon worldview. Diseases such as these seem to occur without reason and provide no physical symptoms beyond terrifying fits of the body or mind. Anglo-Saxons, who had kept animistic Germanic beliefs in their folklore, believed in creatures such as dragons and elves that made the perfect scapegoats for these diseases. After all, if the afflicted person seemed otherwise completely healthy, as would be the case with epilepsy or mental illness, the most logical explanation could they have come up with was the patient’s being attacked by an external entity.

The combination of herbs in this remedy would not have been useful in curing schizophrenia or epilepsy (especially since they are applied externally), although they may have been effective in relaxing the afflicted patient. The first herb prescribed, eowohumele, is a bit obscure, but it could possibly be an Old English word for the ‘hop herb.’²¹ Hops are native British herbs,²² and are likely what ‘eowohumele’ refers to because they contain many beneficial elements for this remedy. When applied externally, as the salve was instructed to be, the hop herb relieves painful swelling, bruises and sores.²³ Hops are sedatives, and are thus taken internally during fits of hysteria or tension to induce sleep and relaxation.²⁴ This particular remedy does not call for the herb to be used internally, but the hop’s sedative and calming effects can still be attained externally by sleeping with a pillow into which the herb has been placed or through other means.²⁵ The calming effect could be contributed to the continual proximity of the herb to the patient’s head or nasal passages, which would allow the person to breathe in the herb. A similar effect might occur if the herb is applied in this remedy’s salve onto the forehead and eyes, much like the way we use Vick’s Vapor Rub or peppermint oil today.

The next herb, wormwood, could potentially refer to any of the three different types of wormwood, all of which are present in Britain. Without further details, it is difficult to determine which type of wormwood this remedy calls for. However this is not an insurmountable problem, as all three types of wormwood have similar uses, none of which would be particularly helpful to someone suffering from hysteria or seizure.

Bishopwort (Goutweed) is significant because it shows the integration of Anglo-Saxon and Christian practices. Bishopwort has a distinct Christian context even within its name. The herb is said to have been native to Europe, although not introduced to Britain until Christian monks brought it with them and began cultivating it in their monastery gardens.²⁶ Similar to the combination of elves and creatures associated with the devil in this remedy, the existence of bishopwort conveys that Anglo-Saxon and Christian healers had somewhat fused their practices together. More proof of this interaction exists in the name choices of the herbs. Although this herb has a distinctly Christian name (because of its Christian origin in England), other herbs in the remedy, such as ‘eowohumelan,’ have kept their Old English names, indicating the fusion of the two cultures. This fusion is all the more prevalent, since the *Leechbook* was likely written by a Christian scribe in a monastery, one who could have reasonably chosen to use only Latin herb names. The actual use of bishopwort is similar to the use of eowohumelan, meaning that when applied externally it helps to heal swelling and skin irritations.²⁷

Like bishopwort, lupin did not originate in Britain, but is an herb native to the Mediterranean region,²⁸ another indication of the interaction between Anglo-Saxon and Mediterranean practices, as Christian missionaries would have travelled to Britain from this region. Peter Dendle has theorized that ingesting lupin would have helped Anglo-Saxon sufferers of epilepsy because it contains generous amounts of manganese, low levels of which can lead to chronic

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 136.

²⁰ Meaney, *The Anglo-Saxon View of the Causes of Illness*, 17.

²¹ *Plants Listed in 9th and 10th Century Medieval Manuscripts*, 2011. <http://wyrting.com/Early%20Plants/PlantsInMSS.htm>

²² Grieve, *A Modern Herbal*, 821.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Grieve, *A Modern Herbal*, 821.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Grieve, *A Modern Herbal*, 868.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Peter Dendle, “Lupines, Manganese, and Devil-Sickness: An Anglo-Saxon Medical Response to Epilepsy” in *Bulletin of the History Of Medicine* 75.1 (John Hopkins University Press: 2001), 98 of 91-101.

seizures.²⁹ His theory is certainly interesting, although not applicable here because the lupin in this remedy is applied externally. Still, lupin is often an ingredient in remedies for devil-sickness, which could indicate that medieval healers had distinguished some kind of connection between this herb and patients suffering from frequent seizures, although they may not have understood that it was only effective internally.

Out of the other ten herbs, ashthroat (vervain),³⁰ henbane, haransprecel (Viper's bugloss)³¹ and garlic are all used medicinally to relieve painful swelling, sores, or other skin conditions.³² None of these herbs are very useful externally for a patient suffering from epilepsy or hysteria, except for henbane, which is similar to the hop herb in that it helps to induce sleep.³³ Unfortunately, I was unable to find further information on harewort, cropleek, or hedgerife grains. It is possible that hedgerife grains could simply be referring to any grain-like plant that grows on hedges, for this would be similar to heathberry plants, which are defined as any kind of plant growing on a heath that produces fruit or berries.³⁴ This is the phrase's modern definition, however, so the Anglo-Saxon scribe could have been referring to a particular plant. Githrife (Corn cockle)³⁵ is not used externally today; therefore, its benefits in this salve are questionable. Fennel is one of the nine sacred herbs that appears in the Anglo-Saxon "Lay of the Nine Herbs" charm.³⁶ These herbs were thought to be especially hallowed and powerful healers by Anglo-Saxons. Throughout history, fennel has commonly been believed to have the power to prevent witchcraft and other evil influences,³⁷ which could explain its use in this remedy against demonic creatures.

The combination of herbs listed in the remedy would have been useful in healing and relieving any pain from skin sores while also inducing the patient into a restful sleep, which could be useful for patients suffering from hallucinations. If the disease this remedy means to cure is epilepsy or a mental illness, it is unclear what would cause the skin sores. Wounds may have been a result of epilepsy patients thrashing around or people with mental illnesses unknowingly harming themselves. Also, because elf diseases were commonly thought to be caused by the patient being shot with the elf's arrow, this must mean that the patient experienced some kind of pain or sore akin to being shot.

The process of creating the salve shows many indications of both Christian and Anglo-Saxon influence. For example, after the salve has been prepared and strained through a cloth, the leftover herbs are supposed to be thrown into running water. Throwing herbs (and sometimes even patients) into running water was a common part of many Anglo-Saxon remedies. Water had a purifying connotation to Anglo-Saxons, especially if it flowed like a river or stream, and was thought to wash off any impurities, sending them away through the water's flow.³⁸ The belief in the purifying effects of water could have originated from the Anglo-Saxons' animistic practices that involved the use of the elements and natural world. Christians during the middle ages likely believed in the purifying properties of water because of its significance in baptism. It is not strange, therefore, to see running water being employed along with various Christian elements such as the Latin mass in the remedy. Christians probably changed the Anglo-Saxon use of water into a more Christian one when trying to convert the Anglo-Saxons, an act that would have been made easier because the belief of water as a cleansing agent already existed in both practices. Evidence for this can be seen in the fact that Christians would eventually declare running water to be a protection against what they called "pagan magic,"³⁹ which is quite funny because Christians and pagans used water in similar ways.

The influence of Christian practice can be seen in the specification that the herbs be placed under a church altar, which is crafty; not only does it require the person creating the salve to rely on the church, but it also reasserts the idea of the church as a place of power and healing. The lay folk are therefore more likely to turn to their local church instead of tapping into the perceived power of natural sacred sites such as trees or wells, an act which has pagan origins. The continuing popularity of such pagan practices is evident from different Christian texts that emphasize the need to annihilate them. For example, Wulfstan's *Canons of Edgar* (written between 1005 and 1008) urges priests to "entirely extinguish every heathen practice; and forbid worship of wells... and worship of trees and worship of

²⁹ Dendle, *Epilepsy*, 97-101.

³⁰ Oswald Cockayne, *Leechdoms, wortcunning, and starcraft of early England: being a collection of documents, for the most part never before printed, illustrating the history of science in this country before the Norman conquest*, Volume 1 (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1864), 91.

³¹ Jane Roberts, Christian Kay, Lynne Grundy, *A Thesaurus of Old English*, Vol. 1 (Rodopi, 2000), 113.

³² Margaret Grieve, *A Modern Herbal*, 524; Frann Leach, "Viper's Bugloss: May Perk More Than Your Spirits Up" in *Herbal Medicine From Your Garden (or Windowsill)*, <http://www.herbalmedicinefromyourgarden.com/vipers-bugloss-health-benefits/>.

³³ Grieve, *A Modern Herbal*, 802.

³⁴ "Heathberry," *English Collins Dictionary*, <http://dictionary.reverso.net/english-definition/heathberry>.

³⁵ *Plants Listed in 9th and 10th Century Manuscripts*, 2011, <http://wyrting.com/Early%20Plants/PlantsInMSS.htm>.

³⁶ Jolly, *Elf Charms in Context*, 126.

³⁷ Grieve, *A Modern Herbal*, 476.

³⁸ Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England*, 238.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 239.

stones.”⁴⁰ Although Christianity in England in the early eleventh century was certainly prominent (Wulfstan was even an advisor to Anglo-Saxon kings), pagan practices had managed to keep a foothold in Anglo-Saxon culture as well.

Another example of church involvement is the use of holy salt and incense, which would have to be cleansed and blessed by a member of the church, and thus only available from the clergy. The salt is used on the herbs that need to be brought to the church anyway, and so would be administered there, but the incense is supposed to be administered to the actual patient, one who may not have been fit to leave the home. The local priest would probably have had to travel with the patient’s healer (if it was not, in fact, the priest himself acting as a healer) to the sick person’s home, furthering the church’s involvement in the healing process.

With the singing of the nine masses, the church is once again involved in the healing process. As previously discussed, Latin masses were supposed to have the same effect as Germanic charms because the words were thought to bring the healing power of God into the herbs. The masses also indicate the integration of Christian and Anglo-Saxon practices because nine of them need to be sung. Nine, like the number three, was a significant number in pagan practice.⁴¹ It is unclear why the number nine was thought to be powerful. Perhaps it was thought to be significant because it is a square of three, and so represents three multiplied three times, which could enhance three’s perceived power.

The final palpable Christian element in this remedy is, of course, the signing of the cross over the patient. The cross and the incense work together to purge the patient of the illness or demons, while the cross also protects the patient from further attack by evil influences. The cross’s use here is similar to the function of a protective amulet. Amulets were popular forms of protection during the middle ages, and came in a variety of forms, from dead animals to plants or stones.⁴² Christians found the use of amulets to be a particularly difficult practice to extinguish due to its widespread popularity, and so as with many other pagan practices, began to instill Christian influence into the protective force of amulets. Examples of the transition into Christian amulets can be seen not only in the use of the cross in this remedy, but also in stories about saints and church figures wearing relics as amulets, such as St. Germanus, who apparently wore relics in a bag around his neck and used them to heal a demon-possessed child.⁴³ The cross was easily transferrable into Germanic practices because its four points could symbolize the four directions, elements, winds, or compass points, all of which were significant in Anglo-Saxon folklore.⁴⁴ The signing of the cross invokes God’s power to protect and heal the patient, which would emphasize both to the patient and to the people administering the remedy the healing power of God as opposed to the healing ability of their Germanic practices.

The two remedies discussed in this paper indicate the interaction of Anglo-Saxon and Christian cultures through their fusion of different beliefs and practices from both groups. This seems to indicate that medical practice in the Anglo-Saxon period was much more closely linked to religious belief than it often is mainstream society today. The remedies also demonstrate that Anglo-Saxons had a better understanding of medicine than many people today would assume, especially considering that the development of germ theory did not come until many centuries later. There are some intriguing issues that this paper was not able to discuss. For example, although the remedies in the *Leechbook* and *Lacnunga* do show Christianized Anglo-Saxon practices, they were all written down by Christian scribes. Perhaps there were a plethora of purely pagan or animistic cures that were not preserved because no one had the ability to write them down. Also, although some of the herbs used in these remedies were beneficial, it is difficult to determine whether Anglo-Saxons understood why the herbs worked or if they simply reused herbs which had worked in the past. As with most other Anglo-Saxon history, the medical manuscripts are filled with mystery. Would it have been a good idea to go to an Anglo-Saxon healer? That might depend upon whether or not you believed in elf-shots or flying venoms.

⁴⁰ Wulfstan *The So-Called ‘Canons of Edgar’* (taken from *Councils and Synods with other documents relating to the English Church*, vol. I, A.D. 871-1204, part 1, A.D. 871-1066, ed. D. Whitelock, M. Brett and C. N. L. Brooke, Oxford, 1981) Ch. 16, with background information provided by Professor Deborah Deliyannis in *Selections from “The so-called ‘Canons of Edgar,’”* <http://www.indiana.edu/~dmdhist/protected-files/CanonsEdgar.htm>.

⁴¹ Bonser, *The Medical Background of Anglo-Saxon England*, 213-214.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 231-235.

⁴³ Bede, *Ecclesiastical History* I. 18.

⁴⁴ Karen Louise Jolly, “Tapping the Power of the Cross: Who and For Whom?” in *The Place of the Cross in Anglo-Saxon England* ed. by Catherine E. Karkov, Sarah Larratt Keefer, and Karen Louise Jolly (Boydell Press, 2006), 63 of 58-79.