

# **DEGREE IN ENGLISH STUDIES**

**English and German Philology and Translation and  
Interpretation Department  
2019/2020 Academic Year**

**End-Of-Degree Project:**

## **THE REPRESENTATION OF MAGIC IN THE GERMANIC LITERATURE OF THE MIDDLE AGES**

**Nahia Cantalapiedra Arana**

**Supervisor: Miguel Ayerbe Linares**

**ABSTRACT**

Magic is something that has always been known and has always been performed. There are many different kinds of this practice such as witchcraft, astrology or tarot, that have been explored from various perspectives. But little has been said about the magical charms. And even more when we talk about charms found in the Germanic literatures of the Middle Ages. This essay emerged as a response to this matter. The aim of this paper is to provide a comparative point of view concerning literature and regarding the topic of the representation of magic in three different texts from three different Germanic literatures of the Middle Ages. To do so, the researcher has decided to focus on the “charms” which are a little part of everything that is considered to be magic. The texts that are going to be analysed are the *Nine Herbs Charm* (English literature), the *Second Merseburg Charm* (German literature) and the runic inscription that can be found on the so-called *stone of Eggja* (Nordic literature). The key concepts (“magic”, “charm” and “rune”) are going to be explained so that it is easier for the reader to understand the magical aspects of the texts before moving on to analysing them. Once this is clear, the texts are going to be presented both in the original version and on a selected translation to Modern English. Whenever it is possible, the texts are going to be studied using the original versions composed in Old English, Old High German and Elder Futhark/Old Norse. After this step is finished, the main point of the paper arises: the comparative perspective. The three texts are going to be analysed individually at first so that it is easier to comment the different aspects of each of them. Special attention is going to be paid to the following topics: content, form, characters, usage and consequences. The result of every one of the texts is going to be compared and the similarities and the differences between the three texts are going to be specified and analysed as a total. Findings indicate that different literatures can, and actually do, share some aspects and practices, at least to some extent.

**Keywords:** Comparative literature, Middle Ages, magic, charms, English literature, German literature, Nordic literature

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>1 – Introduction</b> .....	6
1.1 – Historical Background.....	6
1.1.1 – England.....	7
1.1.2 – Germany.....	7
1.1.3 – Scandinavia.....	7
1.2 – Goal of the paper.....	8
1.3 – Methodology.....	8
<b>2 - Magic</b> .....	10
2.1 – Charms.....	10
2.2 – Runes.....	11
<b>3 - Texts</b> .....	14
3.1 – English Literature: Metrical Charms.....	14
a – Nine Herbs Charm.....	14
3.2 – German Literature: Merseburg Charms.....	16
a – Second Merseburg Charm.....	17
3.3 – Nordic Literature: Runic Inscriptions.....	17
a – Stone of Eggja.....	17
<b>4 – Comparative Perspective</b> .....	19
4.1 – Content.....	19
4.1.1 – Nine Herbs Charm.....	19
4.1.2 – Second Merseburg Charm.....	20
4.1.3 – Stone of Eggja.....	20

4.1.4 – Similarities and Differences.....	21
4.2 – Form.....	21
4.2.1 – Nine Herbs Charm.....	22
4.2.2 – Second Merseburg Charm.....	23
4.2.3 – Stone of Eggja.....	24
4.2.4 – Similarities and Differences.....	25
4.3 – Characters.....	25
4.3.1 – Nine Herbs Charm.....	26
4.3.2 – Second Merseburg Charm.....	27
4.3.3 – Stone of Eggja.....	29
4.3.4 – Similarities and Differences.....	29
4.4 – Usage.....	30
4.4.1 – Nine Herbs Charm.....	30
4.4.2 – Second Merseburg Charm.....	31
4.4.3 – Stone of Eggja.....	31
4.4.4 – Similarities and Differences.....	32
4.5 – Consequences.....	32
4.5.1 – Nine Herbs Charm.....	33
4.5.2 – Second Merseburg Charm.....	33
4.5.3 – Stone of Eggja.....	34
4.5.4 – Similarities and Differences.....	34
<b>5 - Conclusion.....</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>6 – Limitations and Future Research.....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>7 - Bibliography.....</b>	<b>39</b>

**TABLE OF FIGURES**

<b>1 – Figure 1:</b> Elder Futhark to Latin Alphabet.....	12
<b>2 – Figure 2:</b> Anglo-Frisian Futhorc to Latin Alphabet.....	12
<b>3 – Figure 3:</b> Younger Futhark to Latin Alphabet.....	12
<b>4 – Figure 4:</b> Stone of Eggja.....	18
<b>5 – Figure 5:</b> “Alu” formula.....	21
<b>6 – Figure 6:</b> Runes from the stone of Eggja.....	24

Poetry is a potent tool of magic technique  
that should never be ignored by any vitki<sup>1</sup>.

Edred Thorsson, *Futhark: A Handbook of Rune Magic*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Literature is something that everyone has enjoyed at least once in their life. Perhaps our parents read stories to us when we were little kids, maybe we were obliged to read certain books when we were in school, or we just really enjoyed reading (and still do). When we really enjoy literature, a huge road unfolds ahead of us: classic literature, modern literature, Western literature, Asian literature, novels, poetry, plays, children books... There are thousands of millions of books willing to be read by someone that may or may not enjoy them, but that for sure will learn something thanks to them.

If we were talking about space, we could say that the term “literature” is the whole universe, and this particular paper is going to talk about a tiny part of a tiny galaxy: Germanic literature of the Middle Ages. This particular galaxy that we are going to focus on is formed by two big stars: charms and poems. Each of them has three different planets with some different moons each: English literature, German literature and Nordic literature.

### *1.1 – Historical Background*

The Middle Ages (also known as the Medieval Period) is a period of time of European history that lasted from the 5<sup>th</sup> century, with the fall of the Roman Empire, to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, with the beginning of the Renaissance.

In general terms, when it comes to religion, Paganism was the norm in almost every territory. But with the Middle Ages, the Catholicism become the most powerful institution of the epoch. This is something important and that can be noticed on different texts of the time because they stopped talking about Pagan Gods to begin talking about God, Jesus and many other Biblical references.

One of the most important historical events of the time that has to do with the topic of the paper is the witch-hunt. Most of the witch trials, and the most important ones, began in the Early Modern period, but were already being accused of witchcraft and being

---

<sup>1</sup> “Magician” in the Old Norse culture.

## *The Representation of Magic in the Germanic Literature of the Middle Ages*

prosecuted due to that matter. Using herbs, knowing about astrology (or simply astronomy), practising any kind of “magic” were things that lead a person to have a bad reputation or were enough reasons to litigate someone.

Before moving on to the next section, I will briefly mention some key aspects of the historical background of each of the three cultures studied on this paper.

### *1.1.1 – England*

During the Middle Ages, England did not exist as we know it nowadays. The land was occupied by Anglo-Saxon tribes whom did not speak the English language that we speak today. The language of these people was the so called ‘Old English’, formed by four main dialects: Kentish, Old Mercian, Old Northumbrian and West Saxon.

When it comes to literature, the most remarkable aspect of it is that it was not written or composed in a single language. Most of the texts of that time are composed in Latin, but there are different manuscripts in Old English, Celtic, Saxon and some other languages too. The text that is going to be compared on this paper was written in Old English and in Anglo-Saxon runes.

### *1.1.2 – Germany*

Germany during the Medieval period was similar to England: it was not the country that we know nowadays and it was inhabited by some different tribes. The languages used by them were known as Old Low German in the north, and Old High German in the south. The text that is going to be mentioned is written in this last mentioned language.

### *1.1.3 – Scandinavia*

Scandinavia is the most complex region of the three that are going to be studied because, to begin with, it is not that simple to locate or to delimit. The term is actually used to talk about the kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. But some researchers include four other territories: Åland Islands, Faroe Island, Finland and Iceland. The two main countries that are going to be mentioned on the paper are Norway and Iceland.

Regarding literature and the language that it was composed in, we need to talk about Old Norse, which was used in the two countries that have been mentioned. To write in Old Norse, people used two different alphabets: the runic alphabet (the Young Futhark version, also known as Scandinavian runes) and the Latin alphabet.

### *1.2 – Goal of the paper*

The main goal of this paper is to analyse the representation of magic in the three different literatures that have already been mentioned. More precisely, the magical aspect that is going to be studied is the charms, which are going to be defined later.

Magic has been studied by different scholars: Kieckhefer (1976, 1989, 1997), Flowers (a.k.a. Thorsson) (1984, 1989, 1992, 2012), MacLeod (2006), Rance (2017), Wyldwood (2014), Lecouteux (2003, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016)... But all of them have written about each of the cultures separately. There is no work (as far as I know) that compared different cultures, and more specifically the three cultures that are mentioned here. There is no study of the matter from a comparative literature perspective. And that is the new point of view that this paper is intended to purpose.

### *1.3 – Methodology*

The first thing that I am going to do is to define what ‘magic’ is and what aspects of it are going to be essential for the matter, because magic is an umbrella term that covers concepts such as astrology, witchcraft, gemmotherapy or divination.

As it has been seen, there are many types of magic, so there has been a lot written about each different kind of magic. That is why, prior to the composition of this text, I read a lot of different books. As I mentioned before, each culture has been studied independently. And not only that, but the different types of magic have been studied singly too, so the documentation part has taken quite a long time.

After being guided to a certain practice, and after being aware of it being sufficiently documented in the three cultures and literatures, I kept reading about that particular topic.

The texts coming from the English and the German literatures were very clear from the beginning, but the Scandinavian one was not that simple to find. At first, I was focusing



*The Representation of Magic in the Germanic Literature of the Middle Ages*

on manuscripts and on regular texts, but the most interesting documents regarding magic and the Norse literature were not written in paper until the 16<sup>th</sup> century at the earliest. So I decided to give a twist to the aspect and I come up with the idea of the runic inscriptions. I was aware that the Bryggen inscriptions were recognized, so I decided to keep investigating that aspect. But this was not an easy road because most of the transcriptions are very short or are not easy to interpret. After some more thorough documentation, I finally found some runic inscriptions long enough to be able to analyse, and to compare with the texts from the other two literatures.

So, regarding the texts that are going to be compared, for the English literature part I chose the so called ‘Metrical Charms’. There are twelve different ones, but I am going to focus on the largest one: “*The Nine Herb Charm*”. Moving on to the German literature, the text chosen is the second of the “*Merseburg Charms*”. And finally, talking about the Nordic literature, I have chosen a runic inscription known as the *Stone of Eggja*.

Once this was finally clear, I began to analyse the different texts individually, paying special attention to the formal aspects. And, finally, I compared the results of each of the texts with the other excerpts regarding every aspect that has been studied.

## 2. MAGIC

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English*, ‘magic’ is the power of apparently influencing events by using mysterious or supernatural forces.

Throughout history, if someone used magic for any purpose magic, good or bad, she or he was considered a witch. Literature and history have shown us that most of the people accused of witchcraft was a woman, and that in most of the cases they ended up being burnt or hung.

Literature, and specially cinema, made us to have an image of witches that, in most cases, is not the real one. Witches are portrayed as ugly old women (or maybe young and beautiful, if we talk about cinema), usually with a black cat and a broom. But this is far from reality. Witches, and people that practised any kind of magic, were “normal people”. Your neighbour could practice magic, your teacher could practice magic, even the priest could practice magic. And the same happens nowadays. Magic is not the stereotyped concept that we have always seen. Or, what is more, the things we have been calling “magic” are not that. They are innocuous practices used to improve our life. There is nothing wrong with trying to protect yourself or someone you love by using any kind of charm. There is nothing wrong with trying to see your future by using tarot cards, oracles, runes... Witches and people that practice magic have been, and in some cultures still are, prosecuted for “crimes” that are not so.

Going back to the ideas mentioned on the introduction, there are many types of magic that can be used for a lot of different purposes. In this case, the forces that are going to be mentioned (and explained right away) are the charms and the runes.

### 2.1– Charms

The definition of ‘charm’ found on the *Encyclopedia of Norse and Germanic Folklore, Mythology and Magic* says the following (Lecouteux, 2016, p. 72):

*A very ancient form of verse used for the conjuration of gods and spirits. They are especially common in Old High German and in Old English. [...] In England the charms fall under the heading of folk mythology and are intended to provide protection from dwarves and the shot they fire, as well as from the Æsir, nightmares, and witches.*

Related to the matter that concerns us, charms are verses used for protective aspirations. They are written in three different languages, and they have some similarities and differences that we are going to see further in the paper.

## 2.2– Runes

For the term ‘rune’ we are going to focus on the definition provided by *The Element Encyclopedia of the Psychic World* (Cheung, 2006, p. 558):

*Ancient Norse and Teutonic alphabet **sigils** that are believed to have magical and divinatory properties. The term rune comes from the Indo European root ru, which means secret mystery.*

*Rune **divination** consists of a set of 24 or 25 small tablets or stones with Norse symbols inscribed on them. Typically the runes are kept in a small drawstring bag. [...]*

*Each rune character is made up of a combination of vertical and diagonal lines each with symbolic meaning. [...]*

*Archaeological finds show that runes were created by the Germanic peoples, the Saxons and Scandinavians, sometime between 1300 and 1200 BC. Typically they were made of wood, metal or stone and the act of inscribing the name of a natural element was thought to endow the rune with sacred power. This made runes popular for divination and as protective **amulets**. They were also used in weather rites, fertility, birth and death rights and to seal contracts, and in the writing of poetry. Each rune was also associated with a different Norse deity who was thought to serve as a guiding spirit to the person using them.*

*Runes began to disappear from use around the fourteenth century when the Christian Church started to persecute rune casters and Northern **Pagans**, who were burned at the stake until the seventeenth century.*

We are going to be talking about the two senses of the word: the alphabetical one, as the Nordic texts are written using this format; and the divinatory one, as some specific runes are mentioned (in relation with their magical properties) on the texts that are going to be analysed.

Regarding the alphabetical aspect it is necessary to mention that there are three different runic alphabets: the Elder Futhark, the Anglo-Frisian Futhorc and the Younger Futhark.

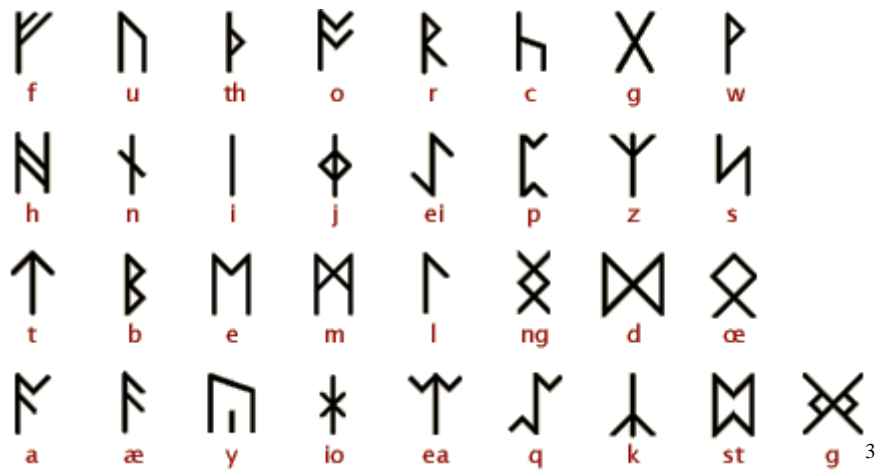
In general terms, the three runic alphabets are similar to the Latin alphabet. Some of the letters are the same but with straighter lines (for example, /b/ or /s/) because they were

meant to be craved in the previously mentioned materials. Most of the runic symbols have their corresponding Latin letter:

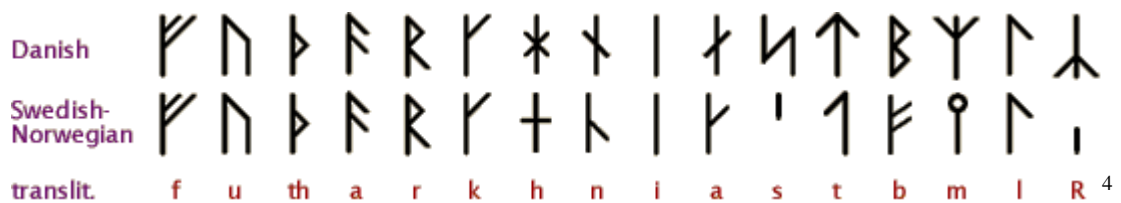
**FIGURE 1: ELDER FUTHARK TO LATIN ALPHABET**



**FIGURE 2: ANGLO-FRISIAN FUTHORC TO LATIN ALPHABET**



**FIGURE 3: YOUNGER FUTHARK TO LATIN ALPHABET**



<sup>2</sup> Retrieved May 9, 2020 from Historical Alphabets: [http://www.seansgallery.com/pages/h\\_alphabets.htm](http://www.seansgallery.com/pages/h_alphabets.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved May 9, 2020 from Historical Alphabets: [http://www.seansgallery.com/pages/h\\_alphabets.htm](http://www.seansgallery.com/pages/h_alphabets.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved May 9, 2020 from Historical Alphabets: [http://www.seansgallery.com/pages/h\\_alphabets.htm](http://www.seansgallery.com/pages/h_alphabets.htm)

*The Representation of Magic in the Germanic Literature of the Middle Ages*

But, as mentioned, this is not the only application of this alphabet: the runes can be and are actually used for divinatory purposes. Each of the symbols has its own individual meaning and power. For example, according to Throsson, the Elder Futhark rune *algiz* (Modern English *eohl*) means ‘elk’, ‘protection’, ‘yew’ or even ‘swan’, depending on the language. It is used as a protective rune. For a more divinatory meaning, Peschel (1999, p. 73) says that when we get this rune it is telling us that we are approaching a new beginning, and that we are going to notice this through new emotions.

### 3. TEXTS

#### 3.1 – *English Literature: Metrical Charms*

According to *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*, the Anglo-Saxon metrical charms are sets of instructions used to resolve situations in a magical way.

There may have been more charms, but nowadays we know twelve different ones that are composed in Old English. They can be found in different manuscripts (such as the *Lacnunga*) mainly from the 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

For this paper, we are going to focus on one of the largest metrical charms.

The next section shows the original composition next to the present day English version. Both texts are the ones provided by the *Northvegr Foundation*.

#### *a. – Nine Herbs Charm*

Also known as *Nigon Wyrta Galdor*. This charm has been taken from the *Lacnunga*, an 11<sup>th</sup> century medical manuscript.

#### **Old English**

Gemyne ðu, mucgwyrt, hwæt þu ameldodest,  
hwæt þu renadest æt Regenmelde.  
Una þu hattest, yldost wyrta.  
ðu miht wið III and wið XXX,  
þu miht wiþ attræ and wið onflyge,  
þu miht wiþ þam laþan ðe geond lond færð.  
Ond þu, wegbrade, wyrta modor,  
eastan openo, innan mihtigu;  
ofer ðe crætu curran, ofer ðe cwene reodan,  
ofer ðe bryde bryodedon, ofer þe fearras  
fnærdon.  
Eallum þu þon wiðstode and wiðstunedest;  
swa ðu wiðstonde attræ and onflyge  
and þæm laðan þe geond lond fereð.  
Stune hætte þeos wyrt, heo on stane geweoþ;  
stond heo wið attræ, stunað heo wærce.  
Stiðe heo hatte, wiðstunað heo attræ,  
wreced heo wraðan, weorped ut attor.

#### **Modern English**

Remember, Mugwort, what you revealed,  
What you arranged at Regenmeld.  
You were called Una, oldest of herbs,  
Power against three and against thirty,  
Power against poison and against venom,  
Power against the enemy who travels over the  
earth.  
And you, Plantain, mother of herbs,  
Opening from eastward, inwardly mighty;  
Over you carts creaked, over you queens rode,  
Over you brides bridalled, over you bulls  
bellowed.  
All these you weathered and withstood;  
So may you withstand poison and venom,  
And the enemy who travels over the earth.  
This herb is called Stune; it grew on stone,  
It withstands poison, withstands pain.  
It is named 'Harsh', it withstands venom,

*The Representation of Magic in the Germanic Literature of the Middle Ages*

þis is seo wyrt seo wiþ wyrn gefeaht,  
þeos mæg wið attre, heo mæg wið onflyge,  
heo mæg wið ðam laþan ðe geond lond fereþ.  
Fleoh þu nu, attorlaðe, seo læsse ða maran,  
seo mare þa læssan, oððæt him beigra bot sy.  
Gemyne þu, mægðe, hwæt þu ameldodest,  
hwæt ðu geændadest æt Alorforda;  
þæt næfre for gefloge feorh ne gesealde  
syþðan him mon mægðan to mete gegyrede.  
þis is seo wyrt ðe wergulu hatte;  
ðas onsænde seolh ofer sæs hrygc  
ondan attres oþres to bote.  
ðas VIII magon wið nygon attrum.  
Wyrn com snican, toslat he man;  
ða genam Woden VIII wuldortanas,  
sloh ða þa næddran, þæt heo on VIII tofleah.  
þær geændade æppel and attor,  
þæt heo næfre ne wolde on hus bugan.  
Fille and finule, felamihtigu twa,  
þa wyrte gesceop witiġ drihten,  
halig on heofonum, þa he hongode;  
sette and sænde on VII worulde  
earnum and eadigum eallum to bote.  
Stond heo wið wærce, stunað heo wið attre,  
seo mæg wið III and wið XXX,  
wið feondes hond and wið færþregde,  
wið malscrunge manra wihta.  
Nu magon þas VIII wyrta wið nygon  
wuldorgeflogenum,  
wið VIII attrum and wið nygon onflygnum,  
wið ðy readan attre, wið ðy runlan attre,  
wið ðy hwitan attre, wið ðy wedenan attre,  
wið ðy geolwan attre, wið ðy grenan attre,  
wið ðy wonnan attre, wið ðy wedenan attre,  
wið ðy brunan attre, wið ðy basewan attre,  
wið wyrnþgeblæd, wið wæterþgeblæd,  
wið þornþgeblæd, wið þystelþgeblæd,  
wið ysþgeblæd, wið attorþgeblæd,  
ġif ænig attor cume eastan fleogan  
oððe ænig norðan cume

It exiles the enemy, works against venom.  
This is the herb that fought with the serpent;  
This power against poison, power against  
infection,  
Power against the enemy who travels over the  
earth.  
Cock's-spur grass, though minor, overcome  
mighty poisons,  
Mighty poisons conquer minor, till he is remedied  
of both.  
Remember, Camomile, what you made known,  
What you accomplished at Alorford;  
That he never let up his life for infection,  
After Camomile was cooked with his food.  
This is the herb that is called crab-apple;  
The seal sent this over the back of the sea  
As a nostrum for other noxious poisons.  
These nine have power against nine poisons  
A worm came sneaking, it struck a man;  
Then Woden took nine wondrous staves,  
smote the snake so it split into nine.  
And there ended apple and poison  
so never again would she go in her house.  
Chervil and fennel, fearsome pair,  
These herbs were wrought by the wise lord,  
holy in heaven, there did he hang;  
He set and sent them in seven worlds  
To remedy all, the rich and the needy.  
It stands against pain, stands against poison,  
has might against three and against thirty,  
Against devil's hand and against deception,  
Against the witchcraft of the wicked ones.  
These nine herbs have power against nine horrors,  
Against nine venoms and against nine poisons:  
Against the red venom, against the running venom,  
Against the white venom, against the purple  
venom,  
Against the yellow venom, against the green  
venom,  
Against the black venom, against the blue venom,

## The Representation of Magic in the Germanic Literature of the Middle Ages

oððe ænig westan ofer werðeode.  
Crist stod ofer adle ængan cundes.  
Ic ana wat ea rinnende  
þær þa nygon nædran nean behealdað;  
motan ealle weoda nu wyrtum aspringan,  
sæs toslupan, eal sealt wæter,  
ðonne ic þis attor of ðe geblawe.  
Mugcwyr, wegbrade þe eastan open sy,  
lombescyrse,  
attorlaðan, mageðan, netelan, wudusuræppel, fille  
and finul,  
ealde sapan. Gewyrc ða wyrta to duste, mængc  
wiþ þa  
sapan and wiþ þæs æpples gor. Wyrç slypan of  
wætere  
and of axsan, genim finol, wyl on þære slyppan  
and beþe mid  
æggemongc, þonne he þa sealfe on do, ge ær ge  
æfter. Sing  
þæt galdor on ælcra þara wyrta, III ær he hy  
wyrce and  
on þone æppel ealswa; ond singe þon men in þone  
muð and  
in þa earan buta and on ða wunde þæt ilce  
gealdor, ær he  
þa sealfe on do.

Against the brown venom, against the bay venom;  
Against worm-blister, against water-blister,  
Against thorn-blister, against thistle blister,  
Against ice-blister, against poison-blister.  
If any venom comes flying from the east,  
Or any from the north, .... comes,  
Or any from the west upon the tribe of men.  
Christ stood over sickness of every sort.  
Only I know the Running River  
Where the nine snakes behold it near.  
May all weeds now spring up worts,  
The seas dissolve, all salt water,  
When I blow this bane from you.  
Mugwort, plantain that is open from the east,  
lamb's cress, cock's-spur grass, camomile, nettle,  
crab-apple, chervil and fennel, old soap. Grind the  
herbs into powder, mix them with soap and apple  
juice. Make a paste of water and ashes, take the  
fennel, boil it in the paste and bathe it with a beaten  
egg, when he applies the salve, both before and  
after. Sing this spell over each herb, three times  
before he prepares them and also on the apple; and  
sing it in the mouth and both ears of the man and  
the same spell on the wound, before he applies the  
salve.

### 3.2 – German Literature: Merseburg Charms

When it comes to German literature, the most famous medieval charms are the so-called *Merseburg Charms*. Unlike the English charms, there are only two of them, and they are very much shorter than the previously mentioned ones, especially if we compare them to the *Nine Herbs Charm*.

We are going to focus on the second Merseburg charm, with no other name than *Second Merseburg Charm*.

The original Old High German version of the text has been retrieved from the book called *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*. The English translation is by Benjamin W. Fortson (2004).



*a. – Second Merseburg Charm***Old High German**

Phol ende uuodan uuorun zi holza.  
du uuart demo balderes uolon sin uuoz birenkit.  
thu biguol en sinthgunt, sunna era suister;  
thu biguol en friia, uolla era suister;  
thu biguol en uuodan, so he uuola conda:  
sose benrenki, sose bluotrenki, sose lidirenki:  
ben zi bena, bluot si bluoda,  
lid zi geliden, sose gelimida sin!

**Modern English**

Phol and Wodan were riding to the woods,  
and the foot of Balder's foal was sprained  
So Sinthgunt, Sunna's sister, conjured it;  
and Frija, Volla's sister, conjured it;  
and Wodan conjured it, as well he could:  
Like bone-sprain, so blood-sprain,  
so joint-sprain:  
Bone to bone, blood to blood,  
joints to joints, so may they be glued.

*3.3 – Nordic Literature: Runic Inscriptions*

As it has already been mentioned, the known Nordic manuscripts were written after the Middle Ages, so there are hardly no texts composed in the way that we see books nowadays. Most of the texts, and specially charms, of the time are composed as inscriptions mainly in stone and wood using runic alphabets. As it has already been explained in the “Magic” section of the paper, there are three different versions of the alphabet, but the one that we are going to see is the one known as Elder Futhark.

Unlike the previous texts, translating and interpreting runic inscriptions is not that simple. The first thing that need to be done is the transliteration, that is changing the runic symbols into Latin letters. Once this is done, the resulting text needs to be interpreted. That is why there is no “real” translation or this is the reason why every scholar provides a different version of the same text. Depending on the Old Norse version, the English translation is going to be one or the other.

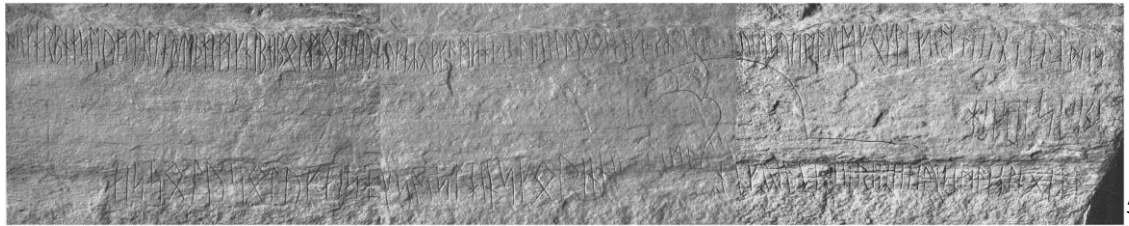
*a – Stone of Eggja*

Also known as Eggum or Eggum stone, it is a gravestone located in Sogndal, Norway. But not only that, according to Thorsson (2012), this is a curse stone too.

It was discovered in 1917 and it has the longest runic inscription (around 200 runes) that can be found in the Elder Futhark. It may have been inscribed around the 700 C.E.

This is the original runic inscription:

**FIGURE 4: STONE OF EGGJA**



The translation for both the Old Norse and the English versions are the ones by Wolfgang Krause and Herbert Jankuhn (1966).

### Old Norse

- Panel 1:

*Ni's sólu sótt ok ni saxe stæin skorinn.  
Ni (læggi) mannr nækðan, is niþ rinnr,  
Ni viltir mænnr læggi ax.*

- Panel 2:

*Hin(n) varp náséo mannr, máðe þæim kæipa í  
bormóþa húni.  
Hucæar of kam hæráss á hi á land gotna.  
Fiskr ór f(ir)na uim suim(m)ande, fogl á  
f?????? galande.*

- Panel 3:

*Alu misyrki*

### Modern English

- Panel 1:

It is not touched by the sun and the stone is not scored by an [iron] knife. No man may lay [it] bare, when the waning moon runs [across the heavens]. Misguided men may not lay [the stone] aside.

- Panel 2:

The man sprinkled this [stone] with corpse-sea (blood), with it he rubbed the tholes of the well drilled boat. As who came the army-god hither onto the land of warriors? A fish swimming out of the terrible stream, a bird screaming into the enemy band.

- Panel 3:

Protection against the wrong-doer.

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved May 1, 2020 from Arild Haugen: <https://www.arild-hauge.com/arild-hauge/no-rune-eggja.jpg>

#### 4. COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Once all the context is clear and the most important terms have been explained, it is time to analyse the texts. The three of them are studied in depth individually and regarding various different aspects. Each section is finished by mentioning how the three excerpts are similar or different to the other two.

The citations that are going to be used to illustrate the ideas provided, unless otherwise stated, are going to be the ones shown in the “Texts” section.

##### 4.1– Content

During the Middle Ages, people wrote iteratively about several topics. There is a blog about literature and general culture called *Lifeder* that discussed this topic. The author, Ana María Hernández Bedoya<sup>6</sup>, determined that the eight most frequent Middle Ages’ literature topics are the following: religion, love and war, travels and adventures, spirituality, rules of behaviour and biographies and autobiographies.

On the following section we are going to see that the charms included one or more of these main topics.

##### 4.1.1– Nine Herbs Charm

This charm talks about nine “magical” herbs that are used to treat some kind of illness. According to some scholars (MacLeod & Mees, 2006), it could also have been used to treat snakebites. These are the Latin names of those herbs according to R. K. Gordon (1962): *artemisia vulgaris*, *echinocloa crus-galli*, *stachys officinalis*, *cardamine hirsute*, *plantago*, *matricaria*, *urtica*, *malus*, *thymus vulgaris*, and *foeniculum vulgare*.

The chant is addressed to the nine different herbs that are mentioned paying attention to their properties and praising their benefits, as they are very useful against poison and venom. The last part of the charm explains how to prepare the herbs for the charm.

---

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved Abril 23, 2020 from <https://www.lifeder.com/temas-literatura-medieval/>

The number nine is a very important element too. It is part of the Yggdrasil myth because of the amount of branches, but not only that. This mythical tree is the connection point of the Nine Worlds of the Norse mythology. And nine are the nights that Woden<sup>7</sup> spent hanging on the tree. There are nine herbs used against nine horrors: nine venoms and nine poisons.

#### 4.1.2– *Second Merseburg Charm*

Phol and Uuodan<sup>8</sup> see how Balder’s horse twists its foot. Uuodan wants to help this god, so some goddesses and himself help to heal the horse by chanting the following words:

<b>Old High German</b>	<b>Modern English</b>
“sose benrenki,    sose bluotrenki, sose lidirenki:	“Like bone-sprain, so blood-sprain, so joint-sprain:
ben zi bena,    bluot si bluoda,	Bone to bone, blood to blood,
lid zi geliden,    sose gelimida sin!”	joints to joints, so may they be glued.”

#### 4.1.3– *Stone of Eggja*

The inscription (figure 1) is divided into three different panels: two long ones and a much shorter one.

The first panel of the inscription describes which was the ritual followed when they wanted to inscribe a stone: the stone cannot be touched by the sun or by iron, it was forbidden to do it with a crescent moon and it must not be moved from its place.

The second panel is not that clear, but according to Grønvik (1985) it may talk about the fate of the dead person. We should not forget that the *stone of Eggja* is a gravestone.

The third panel is the most “magical” one. The English translation changes the words totally, but in the Old Norse version we can read the word “alu”. This formula is one of the most famous charms that can be found inscribed in a lot of different objects, such as stones, bracteates<sup>9</sup>, wooden sticks, combs... It is composed by the Elder Futhark runes called *Ansuz*, *Laguz* and *Uruz*:

---

<sup>7</sup> “Odin” in Old Norse.

<sup>8</sup> The Old High German equivalent for “Odin”.

<sup>9</sup> Kind of medal.

**FIGURE 5: “ALU” FORMULA**



10

At first, “alu” was the word used to talk about magical forces and inspiration, but its literal meaning is “beer”, what is very interesting because according to Lecouteux (2015) “this beverage [beer] causes an ecstatic trance regarded as magic”.

#### *4.1.4– Similarities and Differences*

It is clear that the English and the German charm are similar when it comes to characters because the two of them talk about different gods and goddesses, but this is something that is going to be analysed in more depth further in the paper.

In general, regarding the content of the charms, I would say that they are not that similar: the *Nine Herbs Charm* talks about nine curative herbs used to treat different kinds of illnesses or poisonings, the *Second Merseburg Charm* is about a chant to heal a horse with a twisted foot, and the *stone of Eggja* has an inscription that describes how these inscriptions need to be done, it is a monument for a death person, and it talks about one of the most famous magical words.

#### *4.2– Form*

Charms, in general, are conceived to be chanted, so they could be defined as something in-between poems and songs. They do not present rhyming patterns very often, but there are some charms of that actually do have some kind of pattern.

---

<sup>10</sup> Picture made by me.

Going back to the quote retrieved from *Furthark. A Handbook of Rune Magic*, poetry is a very important aspect of this type of texts. And it is even more notorious when we are talking about the runes. What is more, the three varieties of runes (Elder Futhark, Anglo-Frisian Futhorc and Younger Futhark) are presented in rune poems that form a list of all the runes with a small poem each.

Regarding the charms selected for this paper, we are going to see that all of them are presented in the form of a poem, at least to some extent. It is important to clarify that the study of the form is going to be made in the light of the original versions of the different texts.

#### *4.2.1– Nine Herbs Charm*

It is divided into two parts: a versified one and a prosaic one. The part written in verse is the longest one, with a length of (depending on the edition) sixty-three lines. The final part, the prosaic one, has six lines according to the edition presented here.

For this section, I am going to pay special attention to the first part, the poetic one, as it has different aspects that need to be commented.

The poem is full of alliteration from the beginning to the end. One of the most obvious examples is the following one, where we can clearly see that /s/ is repeated:

“[...] Sæt smið, sloh seax lytel,  
iserna, wundrum swiðe.”

Another interesting aspect of this charm is the presence of repetition. As it has already been mentioned, the composition of these magical charms was meant for them to be chanted or to be repeated so, maybe, this repetition of words and whole phrases has to do with this particular aspect.

This characteristic is very noticeable along the whole poem, but it is especially remarkable when the charm talks about the different kinds of poisons:

“Nu magon þas VIII wyrta wið nygon wuldorgeflogenum,  
wið VIII attrum and wið nygon onflygnum,  
**wið ðy readan attre, wið ðy runlan attre,**  
**wið ðy hwitan attre, wið ðy wedenan attre,**  
**wið ðy geolwan attre, wið ðy grenan attre,**

**wið ðy** wonnan **attre**,    **wið ðy** wedenan **attre**,  
**wið ðy** brunan **attre**,    **wið ðy** basewan **attre**,  
**wið** wyrngelbæd,    **wið** wætergelbæd,  
**wið** þorngeblæd,    **wið** þystelgeblæd,  
**wið** ysgeblæd,    **wið** attorgeblæd, [...]"

#### 4.2.2– *Second Merseburg Charm*

The *Second Merseburg Charm* is composed by a single part with long verses that have been divided into two shorter ones. Once again, with do not have any presence of rhymes. The charm is composed in free verse. And this is not the only thing that seems to have in common with the English charm.

The German charm is a great example of alliteration too. It may not be as iterative or as clear as in its equivalent, but it can be easily seen:

“Phol ende **uu**odan    **uu**orun zi holza.  
du **uu**art demo balderes uolon    sin **uu**oz birenkit.  
thu biguol en sinthgunt,    sunna era **su**ister;  
thu biguol en friia,    **u**olla era **su**ister;  
thu biguol en **uu**odan,    so he **uu**ola conda:  
sose **ben**renki,    sose **blu**otrenki,    sose **li**direnki:  
**ben** zi **ben**a,    **blu**ot si **blu**oda,  
**li**d zi geliden,    sose gelimida sin!”

As we can see, the most repeated sound is /uu(o)/, but there are a few instances of repetition of the sound /b/ and the sound /l/ too.

This time, the poem is quite shorter than the previous one, but we do have some cases of repetition too:

“**thu biguol en** sinthgunt,    sunna era **su**ister;  
**thu biguol en** friia,    uolla era **su**ister;  
**thu biguol en** uuodan,    so he uuola conda:  
sose **ben**renki,    sose **blu**otrenki,    sose **li**direnki: [...]"





Repetition is something present on this charm too as we can see on the inscription of the second panel. Once again, the version used for this part is the Old Norse translation written by Krause and Jankuhn (1966):

*“Ni’s sólu sótt ok ni saxe stæin skorinn.*

*Ni (læggi) mannR nækðan, is niþ rinnR,*

*Ni viltiR mænnR læggi ax.”*

#### *4.2.4– Similarities and Differences*

Regarding this particular aspect, the three different charms are very similar. They all have two main characteristics in common: the use of both alliteration and repetition.

The *Nine Herbs Charm* is the longest one of the three charms studied on this paper, so that is why there are more examples of both of these aspects. But it does not mean that the examples of the other two texts are less valuable. In general terms, after this section is complete, we may say that these characteristics are something usual in the different literatures of the Germanic languages.

There are two differences that I would like to mention. The first one is the difficulty caused due to the complications regarding the reading and interpretation of the runes of the *stone of Eggja*. If the stone were better conserved or the alphabet were easier to transliterate and to transcribe, we would be able to compare the text with the other two in an easier manner.

The second difference is about the metrical pattern of the texts. Due to the previously mentioned difficulties it is not that easy to determine if the runic inscription found on the *stone of Eggja* follows or not any kind of meter. But, if it does, this differentiates it from the other two charms as they do not follow any meter.

#### *4.3– Characters*

Usually charms do not have characters because they do not narrate any story, so there is no need of protagonists. But the three excerpts that are being analysed here could be considered an exception as they have a narrative part that carries some characters that we are going to see now.

#### 4.3.1– Nine Herbs Charm

One of the most important things about this poem has to do with the topic of the religion. As we saw in the historical background, the Anglo-Saxons were Pagans, but Catholicism was beginning to gain its power. In general terms, the charm clearly shows that it was composed during the epoch of the Paganism being the norm. We can see how Woden<sup>12</sup> is mentioned directly:

##### Old English

“ðas VIII magon wið nygon attrum.  
Wyrm com snican, toslat he man;  
ða genam **Woden** VIII wuldortanas,  
sloh ða þa næddran, þæt heo on VIII tofleah.  
þær geændade æppel and attor,  
þæt heo næfre ne wolde on hus bugan.”

##### Modern English

“These nine have power against nine poisons  
A worm came sneaking, it struck a man;  
Then **Woden** took nine wondrous staves,  
smote the snake so it split into nine.  
And there ended apple and poison  
so never again would she go in her house.”

And not only that. Woden is mentioned indirectly too. It is not clear but, according to some scholars, the very own title could be a reference to the God. In other words, the charm mentions nine different herbs, but there is a myth that talks about how Woden sacrificed himself to himself by hanging on a tree with nine branches, the Yggdrasil, and that is how he learned the knowledge of the runes.

But Catholicism was making its way and, almost at the end of the charm, we can see how Woden is no longer mentioned and the one that takes his place is Christ:

##### Old English

“**Crist** stod ofer adle ængan cundes.”

##### Modern English

“**Christ** stood over sickness of every sort.”

The herbs can be considered characters too because the charm is addressed to them, or they are presented as if they were part of the story. We could talk about it in terms of a kind of personification as they are being referred to in second person. The narrator tells which are their properties and the illnesses that they can cure. Here is an example where the herb is the one “listening” to the poem:

---

<sup>12</sup> One of the many names that “Odin” has.

**Old English**

“Gemyne ðu, **mucgwyr**t, hwæt þu  
ameldodest,  
hwæt þu renadest æt Regenmelde.  
Una þu hattest, yldost wyrta.  
ðu miht wið III and wið XXX,  
þu miht wiþ attre and wið onflyge,  
þu miht wiþ þam laþan ðe geond lond  
færð.”

**Modern English**

“Remember, **Mugwort**, what **you** revealed,  
What **you** arranged at Regenmeld.  
**You** were called Una, oldest of herbs,  
**Power against three and against thirty,**  
**Power against poison and against venom,**  
**Power against the enemy who travels over the**  
**earth.”**

And this second example shows how the narrator simply tells us about the benefits of the herb:

**Old English**

“**Stiðe** heo hatte, wiðstunað heo attre,  
wreceð heo wraðan, weorpeð ut attor.  
þis is seo wyrt seo wiþ wrym gefeaht,  
þeos mæg wið attre, heo mæg wið onflyge,  
heo mæg wið ðam laþan ðe geond lond  
fereþ.”

**Modern English**

“It is named '**Harsh**', it withstands venom,  
It exiles the enemy, works against venom.  
**This is the herb that fought with the serpent;**  
**This power against poison, power against**  
**infection,**  
**Power against the enemy who travels over the**  
**earth.”**

This last example shows another character: the *wrym*. According to the translation that I am using, this word means “serpent” but some other translations use the word “dragon”. Another possibility is that it does not matter if it is a serpent or a dragon, it is just a metaphor to make a reference to some kind of illness. Be that as it may, the thing is that this particular herb is useful against that “creature”.

#### 4.3.2– *Second Merseburg Charm*

The *Second Merseburg Charm* is shorter than the previous one, but it has much more characters. More precisely, the charm mentions seven different gods and goddesses and a horse.

**Old High German**

“**Phol** ende **uuodan** uuorun zi holza.  
du uuart demo **balderes uolon** sin uuoz birenkit.  
thu biguol en **sinthgunt**, **sunna** era suister;  
thu biguol en **friia**, **uolla** era suister;  
thu biguol en **uuodan**, so he uuola conda: [...]”

**Modern English**

“**Phol** and **Wodan** were riding to the woods,  
and the foot of **Balder's foal** was sprained  
So **Sinthgunt**, **Sunna's** sister, conjured it;  
and **Frija**, **Volla's** sister, conjured it;  
and **Wodan** conjured it, as well he could: [...]”

As we have already seen in the “Content” section, the horse may be considered the main character of the charm as the chant by Woden is because it twists its foot.

Depending on the translation and depending on the scholar, the goddesses do or do not take part in the action of the charm. In our particular case, Sunna and Volla are mentioned just as the sisters of Sinthgunt and Frija. But if we have a look to the translation made by Berta Raposo (1999) they do conjure the foal too.

And the same happens with the explanation regarding who “Phol” is. For Raposo (1999) he may just be a mistake made by the copyist. She says that “Phol” could simply be “uolo<sup>13</sup>”. But according to Fortson (2004) he is someone that is having a walk with Woden.

Uuodan/Wodan is the equivalent to the previously mentioned “Woden”, and the two terms are a reference to the god Odin.

For the explanation of the rest of the god and goddesses I am going to use Raposo’s (1999) anthology, as she pays more attention to this aspect (compared with Fortson (2004)).

Balder is the god of the light, the Sun and the spring. But Raposo mentions that, once again, the reference to this god could be a mistake and that it is just another name given to Uuodan/Wodan.

Sinthgunt is another name of goddess that has no clear explanation. Her name may be related with a celestial body, but there is not enough information to be sure about it as she is not mentioned anywhere else.

Sunna is the female goddess related to the Sun.

---

<sup>13</sup> “Foal” in Old High German.

Frija, which is the equivalent to Aphrodite, Venus and the Norse goddess Freyja. She is the goddess of love and home.

Finally, Volla is the goddess of the abundance and plenty.

#### *4.3.3– Stone of Eggja*

Once again, the most difficult charm to analyse is the Norse one because, depending on the translation used, the resulting text shows some characters or the others. But these are the ones that we can see on the Krause and Jankuhn (1966) translation:

“**The man** sprinkled this [stone] with corpse-sea (blood), with it he rubbed the tholes of the well drilled boat. As who came the army-god **hither** onto the land of warriors? A **fish** swimming out of the terrible stream, a **bird** screaming into the enemy band.”

We cannot forget that this stone was meant to be a gravestone, so the man that the texts makes a reference to might be the dead person whose gravestone this is written in.

The meaning of the animals is not that clear, but they may be a metaphor about some kind of god. Or maybe not the gods. For example, the hither may be a representation of the death, referring that it come onto the land of the warriors to take the person that has died to the land of the dead.

But, as it has already been mentioned repeatedly, it is difficult to interpret the text because there is no consensual translation of the text and, in the first place, the inscription is not complete or cannot be read in its entirety.

#### *4.3.4 – Similarities and Differences*

The most important similarity concerning this topic is the one found between the *Nine Herbs Charm* and the *Second Merseburg Charm* as the two of them have Odin as the main character. But not only that, the inscription of the *stone of Eggja* has this characteristic in common too because, even if Odin is not mentioned, there are some references that can be interpreted as making the text part of the Nordic mythology too. The German text talks about some other gods and goddesses that are part of the mythology as well.

Apart from this part, this fact shows that the three lands shared the same religion: Paganism.

But here comes the first and most important difference: the *Nine Herbs Charm* presents a reference to Christ, something that cannot be found in the texts of the other two cultures.

#### 4.4 – Usage

Every charm has its purpose. Some of them are conceived to help pregnant women or to give birth in particular. Some others, more related with black magic, are meant to hurt one's enemies or opponents. Be that as it may be, the thing is that every charm is composed with a particular goal.

##### 4.4.1 – *Nine Herbs Charm*

We already know that the charm talks about nine different healing herbs. What we do not really know is what they are for, but it is not necessary to learn how you need to prepare these plants.

Throughout the paper we have not paid special attention to the prosaic part of this charm, but now we need to do so because here it is where the narrator explains how to use the herbs:

#### Old English

“Mugcwyr̄t, wegbrade þe eastan open sy, lombescyr̄se, attorlaðan, mageðan, netelan, wudusuræppel, fille and finul, ealde sapan. Gewyr̄c ða wyr̄ta to duste, mængc wip þa sapan and wip þæs æpples gor. Wyr̄c slypan of wætere and of axsan, genim finol, wyl on þære slyppan and bepe mid æggemongc, þonne he þa sealfe on do, ge ær ge æfter. Sing þæt galdor on ælcra þara wyr̄ta, III ær he hy wyr̄ce and on þone æppel ealswa; ond singe þon men in þone muð and in þa earan buta and on ða wunde þæt ilce gealdor, ær he þa sealfe on do.”

#### Modern English

“Mugwort, plantain that is open from the east, lamb's cress, cock's-spur grass, camomile, nettle, crab-apple, chervil and fennel, old soap. **Grind the herbs into powder, mix them with soap and apple juice. Make a paste of water and ashes, take the fennel, boil it in the paste and bathe it with a beaten egg, when he applies the salve, both before and after. Sing this spell over each herb, three times before he prepares them and also on the apple; and sing it in the mouth and both ears of the man and the same spell on the wound, before he applies the salve.**”

The first part is about how to actually prepare the herbs (to grind them, to boil them...). And then we have a second part that explains how to actually use the mixture (first, it is necessary to sing the spell to each of the herbs and to the patient too, and then the mixture will be applied).

#### 4.4.2– *Second Merseburg Charm*

The German charm is intended to help to heal a horse’s foot. To do so, it is necessary to chant some “magical words”:

<b>Old High German</b>	<b>Modern English</b>
“[...] du <b>uuart</b> demo balderes <b>uolon</b> sin uuoꝥ birenit. [...]	“[...] and the <b>foot</b> of Balder's <b>foal</b> was sprained [...]
<b>sose benrenki,      sose bluoꝥrenki,      sose</b> <b>lidirenki:</b>	<b>Like bone-sprain, so blood-sprain,</b> <b>so joint-sprain:</b>
<b>ben zi bena,    bluoꝥ si bluoꝥa,</b>	<b>Bone to bone, blood to blood,</b>
<b>lid zi geliden,    sose gelimida sin!”</b>	<b>joints to joints, so may they be glued.”</b>

There is no special preparation required for the *Second Merseburg Charm*. The only inconvenience is that, according to what can be read on the charm, it needs to be sung by Uuodan/Woden himself with the help of the rest of the goddesses:

<b>Old High German</b>	<b>Modern English</b>
“ <b>thu biguol</b> en sinthgunt,    sunna era suister; <b>thu biguol</b> en friia,    uolla era suister; <b>thu biguol</b> en uuodan,    so he uuola conda: [...]”	“So Sinthgunt, Sunna's sister, <b>conjured it</b> ; and Frija, Volla's sister, <b>conjured it</b> ; and Wodan <b>conjured it</b> , as well he could: [...]”

We do not really know if it is going to work if someone else sings it.

#### 4.4.3– *Stone of Eggja*

The first panel of the stone is a description of how the stone has been prepared for the inscription, but it can also be considered as the instructions to inscribe any other stone in an appropriate way.

Once again, as the transliteration is not that simple to interpret, I am going to use the Krause and Jankuhn (1966) translation to illustrate this point:

“It is **not touched by the sun** and the stone is **not scored by an [iron] knife**. No man may lay [it] bare, when the **waning moon runs** [across the heavens]. [...]”

The stone must not be touched by the sunlight, you cannot use any tool made by iron to inscribe the stone and you cannot do it with a crescent moon.

According to some scholars, the already mentioned “alu” formula that appears in the third panel can be considered a protective runic formula:

#### **Old Norse**

“*Alu misyrki.*”

#### **Modern English**

“**Protection** against the wrong-doer.”

It may have two meanings or two intentions: the first one would be a way of protection the actual gravestone so that no one breaks it; and the second one could give it the intention of protecting the dead so that no one disturbs him.

#### *4.4.4– Similarities and Differences*

Even if it is not that easy to see, the three charms have a specific purpose. Some are easier to carry out and some are not, some of them are more “specific” than the others, but all of them express an intention.

The English and the German charms are the most similar ones because both of them are meant to heal someone: the first one a person, and the second one a foal.

The difference here is characterized by the Norse charm, as it does not have a healing purpose. Unlike the other two excerpts, it is merely protective. And not only that, but it is aimed for an inanimate object or even for a dead person.

#### *4.5– Consequences*

If a charm has a purpose, it will have or cause a consequence for sure. This following part is not going to be a “scientific” passage because, as it may be imagined, there are no actual results of the charms. We do not even know if back in the Middle Ages people



actually used these charms. We do have some information that may make us think that they did, but, as I have just said, there is no real proof of it.

What is obvious is that, of course, they were composed to get a specific result.

#### *4.5.1– Nine Herbs Charm*

No one knows what was the specific illness that this charm was intended for. As a consequence, we cannot know if it was effective or not. What we do know nowadays is that herbal medicine is still used today. A lot of people combine a regular medical treatment with some herbal pills or infusions. What is more, some of the herbs that are mentioned here are used as an alternative medicine in the present day.

It is obvious that, no mattering if we are talking about today or about the Middle Ages, the herbal treatment is the only one that a person is taking, it is quite possible that it may not be enough to heal you.

The main point here is that, with no information to confirm or to dismiss the effectiveness of this charm, we should not say that it was not useful.

#### *4.5.2– Second Merseburg Charm*

The consequences of the *Second Merseburg Charm* can be seen in two different lights.

The first one, and the easiest one, would be to consider this second charm the most implausible charm of the three that have been analysed on this paper. It is totally acceptable to believe in magic, but it is obvious that the foot of a horse is not going to be healed as if by a miracle. And, of course, it is not realistic to believe that Uuodan/Woden himself is going to help someone to treat her or his horse.

But here is where the second idea arises, idea that could be considered to be more “mystical”: it can be seen as a metaphor of the present day religion (I am not an expert on religion in general terms, so I am going to focus on the Catholicism).

Nowadays, a Catholic person may pray to God to ask for something: for protection, for achieving something, to ask Him to help some friend or family member that is suffering... And here is where the similarity relies on. Balder’s horse is hurt and Uuodon/Woden,

who is the equivalent to the Catholic God, helps him. Balder does not really ask for help, but in the end the result is the same: God has mediated on the matter, and He has helped the person in need.

If this is the message that this charm is trying to send, we cannot say that it is not obtainable. This is a trickier topic, as we are talking about being a believer or not, and that is a very personal decision. But, what is clear, if the charm is a metaphor and the horse represents any other kind of problem, we cannot say that asking God for help and having the desired result is not possible.

#### *4.5.3– Stone of Eggja*

Even if the inscription cannot be completely interpreted and, therefore, we do not know which was the actual use of the runic inscription, we can guess.

It is obvious that the text from the first panel could perfectly been used to learn how to do a proper inscription.

Regarding the second panel, it is more complicated to speculate. At this point it is more than clear that it is the most difficult part to interpret, and with no interpretation there is no clear usage.

The easiest thing regarding this inscription found on the *stone of Eggja* is to speculate about the third panel. As it has been mentioned, it contains a protective runic formula. If the intention for it was to protect the gravestone, it is quite possible that it did a great job. If the Nordic people of the Middle Ages were as superstitious as some of us are nowadays, it surely accomplished its goal. But there is no need to talk about superstitions. If people was respectful enough, it is possible that the gravestone did not suffer any harm. And the answer is the same if we move on to talk about the idea of the charm being protective but for the dead person. Humankind, in general, has not been very fond of messing with the dead.

#### *4.5.4– Similarities and Differences*

We do not have any information to know if the charms were really useful or not, but we can guess.

*The Representation of Magic in the Germanic Literature of the Middle Ages*

In this occasion, the similarities can be seen between the *Nine Herbs Charm* and the inscription of the *stone of Eggja*. Both of them talk about more “realistic” intentions or achievable goals. It is very possible that the mixture of the herbs of the first charm were, at least to some extent, really a healing remedy. And it is quite probable that, if the intention of the runic inscription was protective, it may have accomplished its mission.

The difference regarding this topic has to do with the *Second Merseburg Charm*. As it has been stated, it can be interpreted in two different ways. If we see it as a charm that talks about unrealistic magic, it is very possible that the result is going to differ from the results provided by the previous charms. But, if we read it with the second interpretation that has been provided, we may expect the result to be accomplished, so the charm would be similar to the other two.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The English, the German and the Nordic cultures have as many similarities and differences as the texts that have been analysed on this paper. But this does not mean that the three of them cannot be examined together. What is more, it has been proved that, in fact, it can be done.

Magic is a very interesting topic that, in my opinion, is not sufficiently examined. This might only be a personal appreciation, but I think that the topic is coming back again, specially the divinatory aspect. But not only that. The main point of this paper was to focus on the comparative literature aspect, which I think is the most “abandoned” facet inside the matter of magic. Many scholars have analysed different texts from the Middle Ages that have to do with magic, but none of them has done it from a comparative perspective. And even less if we talk about comparing texts that are not from the same literature and culture.

This paper has been discussing about the, in my opinion, most important aspects when it comes to contrasting different texts. We have seen that, even if the author of these texts were thousands of kilometres apart, they composed in quite similar ways. As the popular phrase says “great minds think alike”. And it has been proven by comparing the contents, the form, the characters, the usage and the consequences of the three charms. But, of course, we have learned that there are some differences too. Especially when we compare the Nordic text with the other two texts, the first difference being that it is composed using a totally different alphabet.

All in all, once again, analysing literature from a comparative perspective shows us that back in the Middle Ages, nowadays and in the future, every literary work is going to be inspired by and, later on, is going to inspire many different texts from a lot of different cultures and epochs.

## 6. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

My way towards the goal of this end-of-degree project has not been easy. “Magic” is a very wide term, with very many sub-terms inside of it. There is a lot of information about every kind of magic that is really interesting, but it has not been easy to decide which aspect I wanted to focus on. But this is just the smallest of all the limitations that I have found on my way.

The one that can be considered the most important or the biggest limitation has to do with the Nordic literature. We can hardly find texts composed during the Middle Ages that have to do with magic. Most of them, such as the *Galdrabók*<sup>14</sup>, are composed after the 16<sup>th</sup> century, which is clearly away from the epoch. The texts regarding magic that are really composed in the Middle Ages are found, in most of the cases, in the form of inscriptions in stone, wood and many other materials. As it is logical, the conservation of these materials is not the same as the conservation of the manuscripts. Many of the stones have been buried, the wood rots, the rest of the objects broke... what leads to the inscriptions not being completely legible in most of the cases. And if they cannot be properly read, they cannot be interpreted. That is what happened with the *stone of Eggja*. It was discovered in not the best conditions so it is not easy to interpret.

Due to this, an interesting way for future research would be the runic inscriptions. More specifically, the inscriptions have to be studied from a magical perspective. Hard work is needed, and it may be frustrating, but I believe that it could contribute a lot to the topic of magic, and especially charms.

Another considerable limitation is that it has not been possible for me to talk about the different kinds of magic. I had to focus on a single variety, so there is a lot more to be explored and to be analysed. And even more if we are not limited to a single historical period. It can be very interesting to compare older charms with newer ones. Or to compare how were the divinatory usages of the tarot and how are they nowadays, as it is a method that is gaining more and more popularity each day.

To sum up, there are a lot of different unexplored roads when it comes to analysing and comparing different texts from different cultures in general terms. But it is even more notorious if we talk about the topic of magic. I do not know if it is due to it being

---

<sup>14</sup> Icelandic grimoire (book of magic that provides instructions to craft your own amulets, to perform various spells, to learn about divination and many other things).



*The Representation of Magic in the Germanic Literature of the Middle Ages*

considered “forbidden” or “dangerous” in many cultures for many ages, but I am sure that there are a lot of texts about this and many other topics willing to be studied and compared.

## 7. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Black, J., Conolly, L. W., Flint, K., Grundy, I., LePan, D., Liuzza, R. M., ... Waters, C. (2014). *The Broadview anthology of British literature*. Peterborough, Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press.
- Cheung, T. (2006). *The Element encyclopedia of the psychic world the ultimate a-z of spirits, mysteries and the paranormal*. London: HarperElement.
- Fortson, B. W. (2004). *Indo-European language and culture: an introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Giangrosso, Patricia (2016). Charms. In Jeep, John M. (ed.). *Medieval Germany: An Encyclopedia* (pp. 111–114). Abingdon, New York: Routledge.
- Gordon, R. K. (1962). *Anglo-Saxon poetry*. London: Dent.
- Grønvik, O. (1985). *Runene på Eggjasteinen: En hedensk gravinnskrift fra slutten av 600-tallet*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Braune, W., & Ebbinghaus, E. A. (Eds.). (1994). *Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer.
- Hernández Bedoya, Ana María (2019). *Los 8 Temas de la Literatura Medieval Más Frecuentes*. Retrieved April 23, 2020, from <https://www.lifeder.com/temas-literatura-medieval/>
- History.com Editors. (2010). *Middle Ages*. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-ages/middle-ages>
- Krause, W. (1966). *Die Runeninschriften im älteren Futhark*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht.
- Lecouteux, C. (2015). *Dictionary of ancient magic words and spells from Abraxas to Zoar*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- Lecouteux, C. (2016). *Encyclopedia of Norse and Germanic folklore, mythology, and magic*. Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions.
- MacLeod, M., & Mees, B. (2006). *Runic Amulets and Magic Objects*. Suffolk: Boydell and Brewer Limited.

MobiSystems. (2020). Oxford Dictionary of English (11.4.586) [Mobile application software]. Retrieved from <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.mobisystems.msdict.embedded.wireless.oxford.dictionaryofenglish>

Odhinsen, A. (n.d.). *Metrical Charm 2: The Nine Herbs Charm* (Old English). Retrieved April 25, 2020, from [http://jillian.rootaction.net/~jillian/world\\_faiths/www.northvegr.org/lore/anglosaxon\\_met/a002.html](http://jillian.rootaction.net/~jillian/world_faiths/www.northvegr.org/lore/anglosaxon_met/a002.html)

Odhinsen, A. (n.d.). *Metrical Charm 2: The Nine Herbs Charm*. Retrieved April 25, 2020, from [http://jillian.rootaction.net/~jillian/world\\_faiths/www.northvegr.org/lore/anglosaxon\\_met/002.html](http://jillian.rootaction.net/~jillian/world_faiths/www.northvegr.org/lore/anglosaxon_met/002.html)

British Literature Survey. (n.d.). *Periods: Early Medieval*. Retrieved April 19, 2020, from <https://people.umass.edu/eng2/per/earlymed.html>

Peschel, L. (1999). *A practical guide to the runes: their uses in divination and magick*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications.

Raposo, B. (1999). *Textos alemanes primitivos: la edad media temprana alemana en sus testimonios literarios*. Valencia: Departament de Filologia Anglesa i Alemanya, Facultat de Filologia, Universitat de València.

Uppsala Universitet. (n.d.). *Scandinavian Runic-text Database*. Retrieved April 30, 2020, from <https://www.nordiska.uu.se/forskn/samnord.htm/?languageId=1>

Thorsson, E. (1992). *Futhark: A Handbook of Rune Magic*. Puiseaux: Pardès.

Thorsson, E. (2012). *Alu: an advanced guide to operative runology*. York Beach, Me.: Weiser.