# Magical *Charaktêres* in the Carolingian World: A Ninth-Century Charm in MS Vat. lat. 5359 and Its Broader Cultural Context

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*Abstract:*
There has been a common assumption among medievalists that the magical signs deriving from Eastern occult practices and known in Latin as *caracteres* first appeared in Western European manuscripts with the rise of "learned" magic in the high Middle Ages, and with the translation of relevant materials from Hebrew and Arabic. This paper questions this assumption by presenting a charm, hitherto overlooked, that contains occult signs of Eastern origin, recorded along with an exorcistic incantation deviating from normative Christian formulas, on the final page of a ninth-century Carolingian legal manuscript from northern Italy (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 5359, fol. 146v). Thereafter, the paper sets this unique charm within a broader cultural context of eighth- and ninth-century Western Europe, where both laypeople and clerics continued to deploy graphic signs originating from Eastern occult traditions for apotropaic and healing purposes, despite the repeated criticism of this practice in normative Christian discourse.

To a specialist in late antique and medieval magic,[1] the title of this paper may seem to be a contradiction in terms. Magical *charaktêres* (from Greek, χαρακτῆρες), powerful signs originating from Roman Egypt and subsequently influencing occult practices across the late antique East, have been recorded on *lamellae* (small, thin plates) in various metals with provenance from the western provinces of the Roman

It was by lucky chance that I first encountered the text discussed in this paper at the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library at Saint John's University in 2002, while browsing the microfilms of early medieval manuscripts with liturgical texts. This would never have happened without financial support from the A. A. Heckman Endowed Fund. It took fifteen years before I was able to get access to the original manuscript in the Vatican Library in May 2017, and I would like to thank the director of the Department of Manuscripts in that library, Paolo Vian, for his assistance in my investigation of MS Vat. lat. 5359. I am also grateful to Catherine Anne Bradley, Richard Gordon, Patrick Geary, and the anonymous readers of this journal whose comments on earlier drafts of this paper helped me improve its argument. Unless indicated otherwise, all translations into English are my own, as are all remaining inconsistencies.

[1] The definition of magic and its difference from religion have been a matter of scholarly debate in recent years; see, e.g., Harold Remus, "'Magic,' Method, Madness," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 11, no. 3 (1999): 258–98, at 268–72; Bernd-Christian Otto, *Magie: Rezeptions- und diskursgeschichtliche Analysen von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit*, Religionsgeschichtliche Versuche und Vorarbeiten 5 (Berlin, 2011) and Bernd-Christian Otto, "Historicising 'Western Learned Magic': Preliminary Remarks," *Aries* 16, no. 2 (2016): 161–240; and Theodore de Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian: Artefacts, Scribes, and Contexts* (Oxford, 2017), 14–16. In this paper, I primarily employ this term as a normative category of Christian discourse.

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Empire and the late antique Latin West.[2] Medievalists have also commented on the use of such mysterious signs in textual amulets recorded in Western European manuscripts from the late eleventh century onward and usually referred to in Latin as *caracteres* or *characteres*.[3] Otherwise, these occult signs have attracted little attention in academic discourse on magic in early medieval Europe,[4] nor do they feature in scholarly publications discussing visual evidence deriving from the early medieval West. The Carolingian and Ottonian periods in particular have been viewed as the time of rupture in the use of such occult characters in the Latin West, and their reappearance in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin manuscripts has been explained with reference to the rise of "learned" magic in the high Middle Ages and the translation of relevant materials from Hebrew and Arabic.[5]

In his recent detailed overview of the *charaktêres* in the ancient and medieval worlds, Richard Gordon has epitomized this academic status quo by implying that the early medieval Coptic use of such occult characters did not have any bearing on magical practices in the concurrent Latin West, and suggesting that signs of this kind were reintroduced into Western magical practices in the high Middle Ages from Byzantine and Islamic textual sources.[6] He acknowledges that such characters were already recorded in late-eleventh-century occult texts of western Europe, but concludes that "the origin of the individual signs in these early texts is indeterminable."[7] This conclusion remains true; yet a hitherto overlooked charm from ninth-century northern Italy, partly preserved in a manuscript (Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 5359, fol. 146v)—transcribed and analyzed in the first section of this paper—suggests that occult *charaktêres* deriving ultimately from the Greco-Egyptian tradition were adapted in the early medieval Latin West as late as the Carolingian period. Moreover, the use of graphic signs of occult nature to empower this unique incantation fits well with the sketchy evidence of Latin written sources—examined here in the second section—indicating that occult graphic *caracteres* commonly associated with angels and King Solomon continued to be deployed for apotropaic and healing purposes in eighth- and ninth-century Western Europe.

[2] David Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing and the Writing of Magic: The Power of the Word in Egyptian and Greek Tradition," *Helios* 21, no. 2 (1994): 189–215, at 205–11 and Roy Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets: The Inscribed Gold, Silver, Copper, and Bronze Lamellae*, Part 1, *Published Texts of Known Provenance*, Abhandlungen der Nordrhein-Westfälischen Akademie der Wissenschafften, Sonderreihe Papyrologica Coloniensia 22 (Opladen, 1994), nos. 1–10 and 14–16.

[3] Don C. Skemer, *Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages* (University Park, 2006) and Benoît Grévin and Julien Véronèse, "Les 'caractères' magiques au Moyen Âge (XIIe–XIVe siècle)," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 162 (2004): 305–79.

[4] For example, Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1991), 53, 62, 150, 244–45, and 301, mentions them in passing while discussing relevant early medieval texts.

[5] Grévin and Véronèse, "Les 'caractères' magiques," 305, and Gideon Bohak, "Jewish Magic in the Middle Ages," in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West: From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. David J. Collins (Cambridge, UK, 2015), 268–99, at 278–80.

[6] Richard Gordon, "*Charaktêres* between Antiquity and Renaissance: Transmission and Re-invention," in *Les savoirs magiques et leur transmission de l'Antiquité à la Renaissance*, ed. Véronique Dasen and Jean-Michel Spieser, Micrologus' Library 60 (Florence, 2014), 253–300, at 271–80 and 290–92. His conclusion derives largely from Grévin and Véronèse, "Les 'caractères' magiques," 344–62.

[7] Gordon, "*Charactêres* between Antiquity and Renaissance," 292.

## Marginal texts in Vat. lat. 5359

Vat. lat. 5359 is a manuscript well known to scholars of early medieval liturgy and law. It comprises 146 folios in quarto, some of which (fols. 1–50, 53–118, and 139) have hidden the fragmentary palimpsest text of a psalter produced in northern Italy around 700 and slightly corrected in the early ninth century (fols. 51–52).[8] The manuscript contains the text of the Lombard laws, and its final gathering of four folios (fols. 143r–146r) preserves two Italian capitularies of Charlemagne's grandson, Lothar I, issued in 825 and 832. The final page of that gathering (fol. 146v) has the same ruling format as the preceding legal texts, but it is filled with barely visible texts of a different nature. These marginal texts are written in the same script as the previous legal compilation, which further corroborates that it was added to the final page at the same time as the preceding capitularies or soon thereafter. The final gathering originally consisted of six folios, but the two folios preceding fol. 146 were cut off, leaving their stubs, which indicates that whoever was involved in the final stage of the manuscript's production did not want to waste available parchment and filled the last page with texts deemed useful for its producer and/or recipient.

Guiscardo Moschetti attributed this Carolingian legal compilation to the early ninth century, but the contents of its final gathering indicate that it was completed in the decades following the year 832—possibly in the second half of the ninth century, as Hubert Mordek suggested.[9] Most scholars who have worked with this codex and its texts, including Bernhard Bischoff,[10] agree that it was produced in the northern Italian city of Verona or nearby, which is compatible with its late medieval provenance from the Church of San Zeno Maggiore, which lies in the suburbs of Verona. Saint Zeno was venerated as the holy confessor of Verona, and the monastery established around his shrine in this church always had a close relationship with local bishops. In the early ninth century, Charlemagne's son King Pippin of Italy rebuilt the church, making it larger than the cathedral of Verona. Thereafter, the monastery enjoyed the royal patronage of Carolingian rulers as well as later Ottonian and Salian emperors.[11] This close proximity to secular rulers may explain the appearance of a manuscript with Lombard and Carolingian legislation in monastic holdings, although it is more difficult to ascertain whether it was originally copied in this monastery or later traveled there. The Church of San Zeno Maggiore was burnt during the Hungarian raid of 951, but the written sources indicate that during that assault the abbot and monks of San Zeno took the relics of the saint and other precious objects inside the city walls.[12] They could have saved some manuscripts too.

[8] *Codices Latini Antiquiores: A Palaeographical Guide to Latin Manuscripts Prior to the Ninth Century*, vol. 1, *Vatican City*, ed. Elias Avery Lowe (Oxford, 1934), no. 23.

[9] Guiscardo Moschetti, *Primordi esegetici sulla legislazione longobarda nel sec. IX a Verona, secondo il cod. Vat. Lat. 5359*, Centro Italiano di Studi sull'Alto Medioevo 1 (Spoleto, 1954), 15–25 and 39–42, and Hubert Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium regum Francorum manuscripta: Überlieferung und Traditionszusammenhang der fränkischen Herrschererlasse*, Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Hilfsmittel 15 (Munich, 1995), 881–83.

[10] Bernhard Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften des neunten Jahrhunderts (mit Ausnahme der wisigotischen)*, 3 vols. (Wiesbaden, 1998–2014), 3:452–53, nos. 6903–4.

[11] Maureen C. Miller, *The Formation of a Medieval Church: Ecclesiastical Change in Verona, 950–1150* (Ithaca, NY, 1993), 20, 123–24.

[12] Miller, *The Formation of a Medieval Church*, 69–70 n. 26.

Fig. 1. Pertz's rendition of the occult *charaktêres* in Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 5359, fol. 146v: *Italienische Reise vom November 1821 bis August 1823*, fig. II.c.

The standard summaries of this legal manuscript describe the content of its final page as prayers (*Gebete*) and one line of stylized letters,[13] a description that directly follows the first and only discussion of this fragmentary text by the founder of the Monumenta Germaniae Historica series, Georg Heinrich Pertz. He examined the entire manuscript in the Vatican during his Italian trip in the early 1820s and provided the only transcription of the text on its final page,[14] a transcription that sheds doubts on its standard modern identification as prayers:

Rogo vos omnia mala malorum per. . . . .

. . . . . petro . . . . . rogo

omnia mala quatuor . . . . . .

adamantina . . . . . .

cit allatum d . . . tismum cesarii . . .

ad hominem ll . . . . . et fil et spiritus sancti ame

G I N O

*(eine Zeile mit verzierten Buchstaben G.Tafel II.c.)*

alpha. bida. gama. dilda. .|. zida. ida . . .

α . . . . . Δ ε Z H Θ I K . .

*Weiterhin ist noch Folgendes lesbar*: oculus - - -

signamus omnipotens - - - obses . . . . .

The first text displays features one would expect from a prayer: it starts with a verb (*rogo*), mentions the Son and the Holy Spirit, and uses the interjection *amen*. Its invocations in the first three lines are reminiscent of exorcistic prayers, yet more typical of late antique incantations addressing not God or his holy intercessors but anonymous dark powers, namely, "all the evils" or "all the most wicked evils." Pertz's crude drawing of what he and his followers described as decorated or stylized letters

[13] See, e.g., "Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. Lat. 5359," Bibliotheca Legum: A Database on Carolingian Secular Law Texts, http://www.leges.uni-koeln.de/en/mss/codices/vatikan-bav-vat-lat-5359/ (last accessed 24 November 2020), which is based on Mordek, *Bibliotheca capitularium*, p. 882.

[14] Georg Heinrich Pertz, *Italienische Reise vom November 1821 bis August 1823*, Archiv der Gesellschaft für ältere deutsche Geschichtskunde 5 (Hanover, 1824), 246.

(*verzierten Buchstaben*) (Fig. 1) further questions the text's nature as a prayer: rather, it shows a line of nine *charaktêres* typical of contemporary Coptic occult practices.

Pertz's misidentification of these esoteric signs as *verzierten Buchstaben* should not surprise us, since scholarly studies of ancient magic and relevant visual signs commenced approximately two generations after he had written his short description of these "prayers." As for modern specialists in early medieval laws, they either have had little interest in the manuscript's badly preserved marginal text or have been unfamiliar with graphic signs deriving from the Greco-Egyptian occult tradition. As a result, this important binding spell has up to now been unknown to students of late antique and medieval culture.

I have examined Vat. lat. 5359 in the Vatican Library and have been able to inspect its final page under ultraviolet light, which has allowed me to expand and slightly modify Pertz's transcription of these badly preserved texts as follows:[15]

1. Rogo vos om(ni)a[16] mala malorum p(er) nom(en) d(e)i
2. quem audiat petra [. . . . . .] rogo
3. om(ni)a mala qua<e> tu<e>or a[d cora(m) d]e cela et colu[nt][17]
4. adamantina qua nota c<a>ello et e petra[18]
5. est allatum del[ec]tis<si>mum[19] <ut> ces<s>atis[20] om(ni)a ma[la]
6. ad hom(inem) il(lum) in nom(ine) pat(ris) et fil(ii) et spir(itus) s(an)c(t)i. amen.[21]
7. *a line with nine occult charaktêres*
8. alpha. bida. gama. dilda. i. zida. ida [. . . . . .]
9. Α Β Γ Δ Ε Ζ Η θ Ι Κ Λ Μ Ν ξ Ο Π Ρ C Τ
10. [. . . . . .] ro si[. . . . . phi] xi [. . . . . .]
11. Υ Φ Χ Ψ ω [. . . . . rie . . . .]
12. *an illegible line*
13. [signa?] d(eu)s cap(u)d meu(m) sicut signavi[t] d(omi)n(u)s
14. [om(ne)s? i]nfirmos in canan galilee. signa d(eu)s oc[ulos]
15. [meos] sicut signavi[t] d(omi)n(u)s oculos c<a>ecorum
16. q[ui in evangelio?] leguntur. signa m[. . .] om(ni)p(o)t(ens) d(eu)s
17. me c[. . . .] signa [. . . .] qui me [liber . .]
18. a[b o]mni[22] iniq(ui)tate(m) [ . . . . . ]
19. *an illegible line*
20. [. . . . . .] obses[. . . . . .]

[15] The manuscript has been digitized recently and is now accessible online at "Manuscript – Vat. lat. 5359," DigiVatLib: https://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.lat.5359 (last accessed 24 November 2020).

[16] Abbreviations are indicated by contraction signs.

[17] The reconstruction of this line after *omnia mala* is tentative.

[18] There is a space for one or two letters at the end of this line.

[19] Another possible reading is "*del[ige]tis mum*," but it is more problematic linguistically.

[20] The grammatically correct form should have been *cessetis*, since a request formula in such incantations following *verba orandi*, such as *rogo* and *oro*, is expressed with the second-person subjunctive form of a verb; Amina Kropp, "How Does Magical Language Work? The Spells and *formulae* of the Latin *defixionum tabellae*," in *Magical Practices in the Latin West: Papers from the International Conference held at the University of Zaragoza 30 Sept.–1 Oct. 2005*, ed. Richard L. Gordon and Francisco Marco Simón (Leiden, 2010), 357–80, at 371.

[21] The uncial letters GI[G]NO can be seen under the word *amen*—the middle letter partly crossing the upper edge of the last occult sign. These letters most likely belong to the same palimpsest text that has been discovered on other folios of this codex.

[22] The *ab omni iniquitate* formula is very common in contemporary liturgy. Hence, *ab omne* is the most natural reading of letterforms at the beginning of this line. This reading is somewhat insecure since the word *omnis* is consistently contracted on this page, with the letter *n* being omitted. At the

21. *an illegible line*
22. *an illegible line*
23. *an illegible line*

1. I call on you all the most wicked evils by the name of God,
2. whom the stone shall listen to. . . . I call on
3. all the malign spirits [that I behold in the skies and that revere?]
4. the adamantine sign that I am engraving and which,
5. the most esteemed, has been brought forth from the stone, [so that] you, all the evils, do nothing
6. to this man, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen. . . .
13. O God, sign my head as the Lord signed
14. all the sick in Cana of Galilee. O God, sign the eyes
15. of mine as the Lord signed the eyes of the blind people
16. [of whom one can read in the Gospel]. O Almighty God, sign . . .
17. . . . sign . . . which [shall liberate me]
18. from all hardship . . .

The final page of the manuscript thus contains two different texts. The first is an incantation that starts by directly addressing evil forces surrounding the amulet's producer and wearer. The first-person singular verb *rogo* in combination with *te* or *vos* (I ask/call on/implore you) was one of the standard forms of performative utterance verbalizing requests to pagan deities, angels, and other supernatural forces in Latin incantations in the Western Roman Empire.[23] It is employed, for example, on curse tablets found at the excavations of the sanctuary of Isis and Mater Magna in Mainz, dated to c. 70–130, and in the Nymphaeum of Anna Perenna, just outside the Aurelian Walls in Rome, produced in the second half of the fourth century.[24] Later this expression became a standard formula of request in early medieval Christian liturgy.

Interestingly enough, the first incantation avoids calling directly on *daemones*, whose presence in the lower air was a well-known fact in the Christian worldview.[25] But unlike in Greek and Coptic traditions, they are mentioned very seldom in the Latin curse tablets of Roman-period Europe.[26] The term for the charm's

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same time, the initial *a-* is followed by letterforms that can also be read *-kr-*. With a possible contraction sign above the *-m-*, an alternative reading can be '*akromani*', which would be a Latin transcription of the Greek compound word *akromania* (severe madness/insanity)—a transcription unique for this period. The second reading is also less likely due to the fact that the form of an *r* required for it is never used on this page and appears on the preceding folios only in the abbreviation *-r(um)*.

[23] Kropp, "How Does Magical Language Work?" 365–66, 371, and Richard Gordon, Dominique Joly, and William Van Andringa, "A Prayer for Blessings on Three Ritual Objects Discovered at Chartres-*Autricum* (France/Eure-et-Loir)," in *Magical Practices in the Latin West*, ed. Gordon and Simón, 487–518, at 504–5.

[24] Jürgen Blänsdorf, "The *defixiones* from the Sanctuary of Isis and Mater Magna in Mainz," in *Magical Practices in the Latin West*, ed. Gordon and Simón, 141–89, and Jürgen Blänsdorf, "The Texts from the *Fons Annae Perennae*," in *Magical Practices in the Latin West*, ed. Gordon and Simón, 215–44. This form of address is used on the following tablets described in a catalogue at the end of each article: in Mainz, nos. 2 and 17 (*te rogo*), nos. 7–8 (*rogo te*); in Rome, no. 5 (*rogo vos*). On the overwhelming preponderance of *rogo* in all forms of request in the post-Classical Latin of the early Roman Empire, see Eleanor Dickey, "How to Say 'Please' in post-Classical Latin: Fronto and the Importance of Archaism," *Journal of Latin Linguistics* 14, no. 1 (2015): 17–31.

[25] Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 146–57.

[26] Daniela Urbanová, "Latin Curse Texts: Mediterranean Tradition and Local Diversity," *Acta Antiqua Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 57, no. 1 (2017): 57–82. As Urbanová points out, such references are more common in curses in Latin from Carthage and Hadrumetum in North Africa, which are, however,

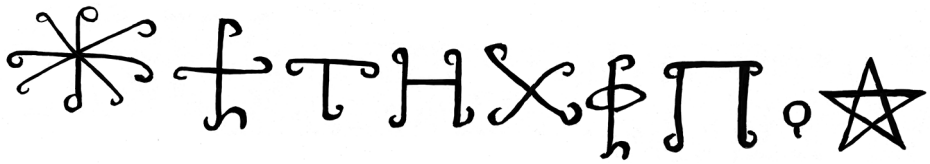

Fig. 2. Occult *charaktêres* in Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, MS Vat. lat. 5359, fol. 146v, drawn by the author.

addressee (*mala malorum*) is quite unusual, but it chimes well with the pejorative words *maleficia* (misdeeds, sorcery, etc.) and *malefici* (wrongdoers, sorcerers, etc.) frequently employed in early medieval Latin texts to designate non-Christian magic and magicians. Furthermore, in his *On Magic Arts*, written around the same time as our charm, Hrabanus Maurus describes magicians as communicating with wicked angels (*mali angeli*).[27] Our text addresses the wicked spirits through the mediation of God (*per nomen dei*), which is a standard Christian formula in the early Middle Ages, including exorcistic liturgy.[28] Yet it is reminiscent also of the late antique magical formula of addressing a pagan deity, *rogo te per maiestatem tuam*.[29]

The second line of the first text emphasizes the power of the name of God over the stone. The line probably refers to a gemstone used in the production of the protective amulet. The third line addresses *omnia mala*, an expression with which the Vulgate sometimes refers to various hardships brought on the people of Israel. Thereafter, the text mentions an "adamantine" (i.e., invincible) sign that the producer of the amulet is expected to engrave on a gemstone, as well as the power of that sign over malign spirits. The use of a singular form (*adamantina nota*) in line 4 is somewhat peculiar. It may just be a mistake, but could indicate that this formula was supposed to be repeated while each occult character was inscribed on an amulet. Finally, lines 3–6 of the text probably emphasize the power of the inscribed *charaktêres* over all malign spirits and request that the latter do not harm the amulet's owner, a request validated by the standard Christian invocation of the Holy Trinity in line 6. This part presents a direct speech act with a request formula typical of both early medieval Christian prayers and magical Latin formulas in the Roman imperial period.[30] It is noteworthy that all of the Christian invocations are heavily abbreviated with the use of contractions, which suggests that the Latin transcription of the first text was probably made by a Christian monk or cleric familiar with such formulas.

A line of nine occult *charaktêres* is drawn beneath the text of this binding spell (Fig. 2), and the ends of most of them feature little roundels—for this reason, such

based on Greco-Egyptian models; see, e.g., Auguste Audollent, *Defixionum tabellae* (Paris, 1904), nos. 229–30, 250–51, 265, 286, 291, 293–94. These curses use the term *daemones* to refer to spirit powers.

[27] Hrabanus Maurus, *De magicis artibus*, in *B. Rabani Mauri Fuldensis abbatis et Moguntini archiepiscopi opera omnia*, PL 110:1095–1110, at 1097.

[28] Daniel G. Van Slyke, "The Ancestry and Theology of the Rite of Major Exorcism (1999/2004)," *Antiphon* 10.1 (2006): 70–116, at 103–6. On the pre-Christian history of exorcism, see Christopher A. Faraone, *The Transformation of Greek Amulets in Roman Imperial Times* (Philadelphia, 2018), 222–37.

[29] For example, in Mainz, Blänsdorf, "The *defixiones* from the Sanctuary," no. 2; or near Emerita, in Spain, Henk S. Versnel, "Prayers for Justice, East and West: New Finds and Publications since 1990," in *Magical Practices in the Latin West*, ed. Gordon and Simón, 275–354, at 285 n. 38.

[30] Kropp, "How Does Magical Language Work?" 371.

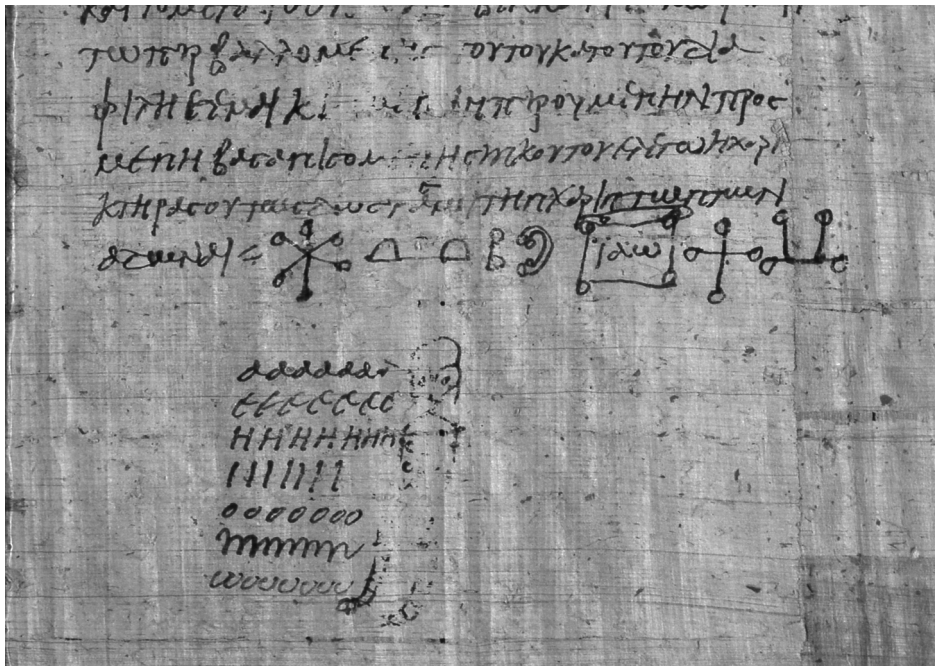

Fig. 3. Occult *charaktêres* in a magical text from Egypt, fourth century: Oslo, University Library, MS P.Oslo I 1, c.8. Courtesy of the University of Oslo Library Papyrus Collection. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

characters are also known as "ring-letters," *signes pommetés*, and *Brillenbuchstaben*.[31] Eight of the occult signs are approximately three to four times larger than the letters of the text above. All of these features are characteristic of the Greco-Egyptian tradition of *charaktêres* in late antiquity (Fig. 3), a visual tradition that was continued in the following centuries, albeit in modified forms, within both Coptic and Byzantine occult practices.[32]

The line starts with one of the most powerful late antique occult signs, an eight-armed cross or star, which has been interpreted in the context of earlier Near Eastern culture as a reference to a solar symbol or god of heaven.[33] It is very unlikely that these meanings, which derive from chronologically and geographically remote cultures, were known to the anonymous scribe who produced this text. In late antiquity,

[31] De Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*, 57–58.

[32] Gordon, "*Charaktêres* between Antiquity and Renaissance," 257–90. For more details on the wide use of *charaktêres* in occult manuals, textual amulets, and magical gems deriving from the Greco-Byzantine and Coptic traditions from the first to the seventh centuries, see Kirsten Dzwiza, "Schrifttragende Artefakte in den Praxisanleitungen zur Interaktion mit höheren Mächten aus den griechischen, demotischen und koptischen Sammelhandschriften des 1.–7. Jahrhunderts" (PhD diss., University of Erfurt, 2013) and Kirsten Dzwiza, "Magical Signs: An Extraordinary Phenomenon or Just Business as Usual? Analysing Decoration Patterns on Magical Gems," in *Magical Gems in Their Contexts: Proceedings of the International Workshop Held at the Museum of Fine Arts, Budapest 16–18 February 2012*, ed. Kata Endreffy, Árpád M. Nagy, and Jeffrey Spier (Rome, 2019), 59–84.

[33] *Sylloge gemmarum gnosticarum*, ed. Attilio Mastrocinque, 2 vols., Bolletino di Numismatica, Monografia 8.2.I-[II] (Rome, 2003–7), 1:95.

the eight-armed cross was occasionally inscribed on early Christian tombstones, for example, in Palestine,[34] and later on this sign was incorporated into early medieval Christian symbology. The same ring-letter later resurfaced in high medieval occult practices and appears, for example, in the short manual of protective amulets with *caracteres* recorded in a late-eleventh-century medical manuscript from England (London, British Library, Sloane MS 475, fol. 137v).[35] In Vat. lat. 5359, this graphic sign is followed by a cipher reminiscent of a cruciform monogram, and ends with the pentalpha, also known as pentagram, traditionally associated with King Solomon, the most renowned king in late antique and medieval magic.[36] Five ring-letters in the middle of the line are derived from the Greek letters tau, eta, chi, phi, and pi.

As mentioned above, such ring-letters were a typical feature of the Greco-Egyptian occult tradition and related textual culture (Figs. 3–4), but their use in the Latin West was rather limited. Late antique *lamellae* featuring ring-letters have been found in larger cosmopolitan towns in western parts of the Roman Empire such as Rome and Carthage.[37] In contrast, occult signs displayed on late antique *lamellae* of the same nature found in the territories of modern France, Germany, Austria, and Hungary lack little roundels at their ends.[38] Their forms often approximate Greek letters, since the latter acquired magical properties in Latin culture as a visual medium of Greco-Egyptian magical competence.[39] The ring-letters in Vat. lat. 5359 are also unique for the surviving Carolingian manuscripts, since, not unlike late antique *lamellae* from western Roman provinces, the Carolingian copies of late antique recipes giving instruction on how to produce such healing devices transcribe occult *caracteres* mostly in the form of Greek letters.[40]

Beneath the *charaktêres*, the anonymous clerical scribe transcribed the Greek alphabet, each letter character spelled out in a line above. The list of the Greek letters is followed by a note in lines 11 and 12, the meaning of which is impossible to ascertain. It may have contained a comment on the Greek abecedary. The joint occult use of *charaktêres* and letters can be observed in an early medieval Jewish binding spell written on a cloth from the Cairo Geniza, which addresses them as "holy *charaktêres*" and "all the revered letters."[41] Yet, in our case, the Greek letters are most likely not directly related to the incantation above. First of all, they are not

[34] For example, the late-fourth-century Christian tombstone from *Ghor es-Safi*: Yiannis E. Meimaris and Kalliope I. Kritikakou-Nikolaropoulou, *Inscriptions from Palestina Tertia*, 2 vols. (Athens, 2005–8), 1a: no. 45.

[35] Accessible online at "Sloane MS 475 f.125r," British Library: Digitised Manuscripts http://www.bl.uk/manuscripts/Viewer.aspx?ref=sloane_ms_475_f125r (last accessed 24 November 2020).

[36] For example, on sixth-century bronze amulets produced in Syria and Palestine, he is shown killing a demon: Jeffrey Spier, "An Antique Magical Book Used for Making Sixth-Century Byzantine Amulets?" in *Les savoirs magiques*, ed. Dasen and Spieser, 43–66.

[37] *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World*, ed. John G. Gager (New York, 1992), nos. 12 and 78, pp. 65–67 and 169–71 (both spells in Greek) and Blänsdorf, "The Texts from the *Fons Annae Perennae*," 221–27 and 235–41 (a spell in Latin).

[38] Kotansky, *Greek Magical Amulets*, nos. 1, 3, 6, 12, 14–15, and 18.

[39] Richard Gordon and Francisco Marco Simón, "Introduction," in *Magical Practices in the Latin West*, ed. Gordon and Simón, 1–49, at 42 n. 112.

[40] I discuss these manuals preserved in the Carolingian copies of Marcellus Empiricus's *De medicamentis* in the second section of this paper.

[41] *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells*, ed. Gager, no. 32, p. 107.

Fig. 4. Engraved gem with occult *charaktêres*, 100–300 CE. The J. Paul Getty Museum, 84.AN.1.71. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

mentioned in the text. More important, the transcriber separated the *charaktêres* from the Greek abecedary with a clear dividing line. Finally, this transcription was symptomatic of the period from the eighth century onward, when the Greek and other alphabets began to be copied in Latin manuscripts.[42]

The list of letters and their paleographic forms are undoubtedly Greek, and the surviving spellings of the first seven letters are characterized by iotacism common to spoken Greek. What is not common to Greek and other transcriptions of letter names in Carolingian manuscripts is that our abecedary consistently uses the consonant *d* instead of *t*: namely, *bida* for beta, *dilda* for delta, *zida* for zeta, and *ida* for eta.[43] But the consonant *t* was regularly voiced as *d* in Vulgar Latin in northern Italy and Gaul from the seventh century onward,[44] and the same aberration can be seen in the following text, which uses *capud* instead of *caput* (head) in line 13.

[42] Walter Berschin, *Griechisch-lateinisches Mittelalter: von Hieronymus zu Nikolaus von Kues* (Berne, 1980), 41–43, and Bernice M. Kaczynsky, *Greek in the Carolingian Age: The St Gall Manuscripts* (Cambridge, MA, 1988), 34–36.

[43] For Greek letter names in Carolingian manuscripts from St. Gall, see Kaczynsky, *Greek in the Carolingian Age*, 37–38.

[44] József Herman, *Vulgar Latin*, trans. Roger Wright (University Park, PA, 2000), 46–47.

These features suggest that the Latin scribe copying the Greek abecedary and corresponding spellings in Verona or nearby was familiar with spoken Greek or was assisted by a person speaking that language. The textual features of the first incantation are quite generic. Its creator could not even name a few spirits to address, which indicates a rather limited expertise in communication with preternatural forces, compared, for instance, with the producers of occult manuals in contemporary Coptic Egypt. A local Christian priest or monk could easily create such a text. Yet a proficient deployment of ring-letters fits less with this local context, in which the use of such signs had not been attested in the previous centuries, and points instead in the direction of Coptic Egypt or Byzantium.

There are several possible ways to account for the local scribe's ability to transcribe this chain of ring-letters in Vat. lat. 5359. The producer of this incantation could copy or translate the entire charm or just the chain of ring-letters from a piece of papyrus reaching Verona and its surroundings at any time between late antiquity and the ninth century. The modern find in the Benedictine abbey of Montserrat in Barcelona of a late antique papyrus fragment with a Greek textual amulet inscribed with *voces magicae* and a part of a ring-letter featuring its typical roundel indicates that such textual amulets might also have survived in, or reached, the Carolingian world.[45] Yet the unsophisticated text of our incantation and the lack of any textual feature pointing toward the Greco-Egyptian occult tradition makes this scenario less likely. It is noteworthy, for instance, that the producer of the charm did not call his ring-letters *caracteres*, although, arguably, he could have had other reasons for doing so. Furthermore, he included Solomon's pentagram in his list of occult characters. The pentagram became an especially popular occult sign in southwestern Christian Europe by the Carolingian period,[46] and its placement at the very end of the line of the nine signs suggests that this chain of *charaktêres* was most likely produced for this particular charm, probably in northern Italy, by a person who had somehow acquired a knowledge of Eastern ring-letters and their use for occult purposes.

The precise route of such transmission remains a matter of speculation. By the mid-ninth century, Venice had become the main point of contact with the Byzantine Empire,[47] and could be reached by a visitor from Verona, approximately 100 kilometers to the west, in about four days. Whereas early Byzantine evidence for the use of occult ring-letters is very slim, corresponding textual evidence from Coptic Egypt is vast and varied.[48] Amulets conflating Christian formulas with less orthodox invocations and with occult signs were widespread in Coptic society, and local Christian priests and monks were actively engaged in their production, use, and

[45] Raquel Martín Hernández, "A Magical Amulet at the Abbey of Montserrat," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 172 (2010): 220–22.

[46] I discuss this aspect in more detail in the second section of this paper.

[47] For more details, see Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy: Communication and Commerce, A.D. 300–900* (Cambridge, UK, 2001), 526–31.

[48] Gordon, "*Charaktêres* between Antiquity and Renaissance," 272–81. For more examples, see Angelicus M. Kropp, *Ausgewählte koptische Zaubertexte*, 3 vols. (Brussels, 1930–31). For a recent checklist of Coptic magical texts, including those with *charaktêres*, see Roxanne Bélanger Sarrazin, "Catalogue des textes magiques coptes," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete* 63, no. 2 (2017): 367–408.

dissemination.[49] As Adomnán's late-seventh-century *De locis sanctis* indicates, upper Egypt lay on one of the early medieval seabound pilgrimage routes to the Holy Land.[50] A Western pilgrim to the Holy Land would therefore offer another likely alternative for such direct or indirect transmission of occult knowledge. Bernard the Monk's *Itinerarium*, describing the author's pilgrimage from Italy to Jerusalem in 867, offers an illustrative example since his travel took place around the time when the above incantation was transcribed in Vat. lat. 5359.[51] Not only did the Frankish monk Bernard sail first from Bari to Alexandria but he then traveled from Damietta upstream on the Nile, thus crossing lower Egypt.[52] Some of the places he passed were populated by pious Christian people, such as the city of Tanis lying on the route from Damietta to Ferama, and, according to Bernard, *religiosi* in that city were extremely hospitable.[53] This suggests that pilgrims like Bernard mingled with local Christians on their way and could learn about the mystical powers of ring-letters and the "know-how" of their production.

Regardless of their mode or route of transmission, an anonymous Italian scribe felt it was unproblematic to copy such "adamantine signs" along with the incantation's Christian invocations on the final page of the manuscript, filling the leftover space after the transcription of royal legal texts. The second text written below the Greek alphabet confirms this interpretation, and thus deserves our attention. It is transcribed in a script similar to the first text, but in smaller letters, as if the scribe tried to fit a longer text within the limited space remaining on the parchment. Its text complies better with its original identification as a prayer. It refers in line 14 to Jesus's miracle of turning water into wine in Cana of Galilee, which John (2.1–11) describes as the first sign revealing His glory, and includes some kind of "signing" of a head and blind eyes with reference to the miraculous power of the Lord. Lines 13–16 of the second text, preserved in a better condition than its remaining part, are very similar to first sentences in the exorcistic prayer preserved in a twelfth-century pontifical (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 14833, fol. 35v): "Signo caput tuum, sicut signavit dominus omnipotens infirmos in Chana Galileae. Signa oculos tuos, sicut illuminavit dominus oculos caecorum illorum qui in evangelio leguntur" ("I sign your head as

[49] E. A. Judge, "The Magical Use of Scripture in the Papyri," in *Perspectives on Language and Text: Essays and Poems in Honor of Francis I. Andersen's Sixtieth Birthday, July 28, 1985*, ed. Edgar W. Conrad and Edward G. Newing (Winona Lake, IN, 1987) 339–49, at 343, estimates that as many as 14 percent of all Christian literary texts deriving from late antique and early medieval "Egypt, in the judgement of some editors, reflect magical ideas and practice in some way." For more details and references, see De Bruyn, *Making Amulets Christian*.

[50] Adamnan, *De locis sanctis* 2.30, ed. Denis Meehan, Scriptores Latini Hiberniae 3 (Dublin, 1958), 98–105, and Robert G. Hoyland and Sarah Waidler, "Adomnán's *De Locis Sanctis* and the Seventh-Century Near East," *The English Historical Review* 129/539 (2014): 787–807.

[51] Bernardus Monachus Francus, *Itinerarium*, in *Itinera Hierosolymitana et descriptiones Terrae Sanctae bellis sacris anteriora & Latina lingua exarate sumptibus Societatis illustrandis Orientis latini monumentis*, ed. Titus Tobler and Auguste Molinier, 2 vols. (Geneva, 1879), 1:307–20, and Leor Halevi, "Bernard, the Explorer of the Muslim Lake: A Pilgrimage from Rome to Jerusalem, 867," *Medieval Encounters* 4, no. 1 (1998): 24–50.

[52] Bernardus Monachus Francus, *Itinerarium* 6–9, pp. 311–13.

[53] Bernardus Monachus Francus, *Itinerarium* 8, p. 313: "Inde navigavimus ad civitatem Tannis, in qua sunt Christiani multum religiosi, nimia hospitalitate ferventes."

the Almighty God signed the sick in Cana of Galilea. Sign your eyes, as the Lord enlightened the eyes of the blind people, of whom one can read in the Gospel").[54]

A slightly different formula was copied at the end of exorcistic prayers in a Carolingian manuscript from East Francia (Cologne, Dombibliothek, Cod. 15, fol. 98v), nearly contemporary with the prayer in Vat. lat. 5359.[55] Both ninth-century texts share the same phonetic aberration, whereby the letter *d* occasionally replaces *t* at the ends of words, for instance, *fiad* for *fiat* (let [it] be) and *benedicad* for *benedicat* (let [the Lord] bless) in the prayer from Cologne. They also display nearly identical spellings of the place-name *Kanan*/*Canan Galilee* (Cana of Galilee). These features distinguish the two ninth-century versions not only from the twelfth-century text in Paris but also from another copy of the same exorcistic prayer preserved in a tenth-century liturgical manuscript (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 17027, fol. 110v);[56] the latter two copies lack such phonetic errors and name the corresponding place as *Chana Galileae*.

At the same time, the fragment of the exorcistic prayer from the Vatican has two significant differences from the version preserved in the other three manuscripts. The latter version is designed to be recited by a priest performing exorcism over another person and "signing" his or her head, eyes, and body parts with reference to the Lord's miracles as described in the New Testament. In contrast, the fragment in the Vatican presents an exorcistic and/or healing prayer for personal use, whereby its performer directly requests God to "sign" (in an apotropaic sense) his or her head, eyes, and possibly other body parts, and thus to protect him from bodily and mental harms caused by evil spirits. This feature makes this fragment similar to the protective

[54] "ALIA. Signo caput tuum sicut signavit dominus omnipotens infirmos in Chana Galileae. Signa oculos tuos sicut illuminavit dominus oculos caecorum illorum qui in evangelio leguntur. Signo omnia membra tua ut ab ipsis expellatur diabolus qui ledit omnem carnem. Benedicat te dominus sicut benedixit quinqua millia virorum extra mulieres et infantes. Benedicat te dominus sicut benedixit Abraham, Ysaac et Jacob. Fiat sanitas domini super te qui sanavit mulierem de fluxu sanguinis. Custodiant te angeli et archangeli et liberent te ab omnibus malis et artificiis diaboli. Protegat te deus Israel et adiciat sanitatem et benedictionem tibi et hic et in futuro saeculo, amen."

[55] "Singno [*sic*] caput tuum, sicut signavit dominus omnes infirmus in Kanan Galilee. Signa oculos tuos, ut ex ipsis expellatur diabolus qui letit omnem carnem. Benedicite, sicut benedixit dominus oculos caecorum qui evangelio leguntur. Signo omnia membra, ut ex ipsis expellantur diaboli qui letit omnem carnem. Benedicad te sicut benedixit dominus domum Abraham et Ysac et Jacob. Fiad sanitas domini super te sicut sanavit dominus mulierem de fluxum sanguinis. Custodiant te angeli, arcangeli; protegat te deus Israel et addiciad sanitatem et benediccionem et <h>ic et in futura secula seculorum, amen." Adolph Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter*, 2 vols. (Freiburg, 1909), 2:595, has transcribed this passage with a few deviations from the original. Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften*, 1:387, no. 1872, tentatively attributes this manuscript to the third quarter of the ninth century. For a general overview of exorcism in the early medieval West before 900, see Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter*, 2: 527–49, 574–82, and Francis Young, *A History of Exorcism in Catholic Christianity* (Basingstoke, 2016), 27–59. See also Nancy Caciola, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages* (Ithaca, NY, 2003), 228–31.

[56] "Signo caput tuum, sicut signavit dominus omnes infirmos in Chana Galileae. Signa oculos tuos, ut expellatur diabolus qui ledit omnem carnem. Benedico te in ipsius nomine, qui benedixit oculos caecorum qui evangelio leguntur. Signo omnia membra tua, ut de ipsis expellantur diaboli qui ledunt omnem carnem. Benedicat te dominus, sicut benedixit domum Abraham, Isaac et Jacob. Fiat sanitas domini super te, sicut sanavit dominus mulierem de fluxu sanguinis. Custodiant te angeli et archangeli; protegat te deus Israel et adiciat sanitatem et benedictionem suam super te, hic et in futuro saeculo, amen." See also Adolph Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter*, 2:602–3.

incantation preceding it on the final page. Both are designed to drive away evil spirits (*mala*) associated with the devil.[57] Starting with line 18, the Vatican fragment also seems to deviate from the version of the exorcistic prayer preserved in the other three manuscripts: it uses the word *iniquitas*, which is absent in the other version, and fragmentary combinations of letters discernible on its final lines are irreconcilable with the final textual lines in the exorcistic prayer preserved in the manuscripts from Cologne, Munich, and Paris.

The Christian exorcistic prayer at the end of the final page in Vat. lat. 5359 provides a good textual context for the preceding incantation with its Christian invocations and occult signs. Whoever added these two texts at the end of the legal manuscript most likely considered both of them Christian and, therefore, legitimate tools of exorcism as well as healing and protection against malign spirits. The presence of occult *charaktêres* in the first text did not apparently cause any concern on the part of their anonymous copyist, who clearly shared a belief common in Greco-Egyptian culture that, because of their ability to bind evil spirits, such "adamantine signs" were able to protect people against preternatural fiends. In doing so, the copyist from ninth-century Carolingian Italy was no different from many others in the early medieval West, whose use of magical pendants (*filacteria*/*ligaturae*) with occult signs (*caracteres*) was criticized by Christian bishops time and time again.

## Magical *caracteres* in the eighth- and ninth-century Latin West

In the Latin West, such criticism can be traced already in the works of Augustine of Hippo and Caesarius of Arles.[58] Writing on the southern shore of the Roman *mare nostrum*, Augustine had become the most influential author in Latin Christendom in formulating the orthodox Christian attitude to magic in general and to magical signs or *caracteres* in particular.[59] Yet Augustine's learned expositions against the use of such so-called deviant graphic signs seem to have had little impact on the late antique practices of interaction with preternatural forces. Composed a century after Augustine's philippics against magic, Caesarius's sermons addressed his listeners in Provence with repeated rebukes of people wearing amulets with "devilish" (*diabolici*) *caracteres*, thus indicating that such practice remained a well-known phenomenon in mid-sixth-century southern Gaul.[60] His homeland was no different from regions in the eastern Mediterranean in that some Christian clerics and religious people (*religiosi*)—"the Devil's helpers" (*adiutores diaboli*) in

[57] Note the reference to *mala et artificia diaboli* in the Paris copy of this prayer. The Cologne manuscript precedes the list of exorcistic prayers with the title *Incipiunt interdicciones Satane* (Cologne, Dombibliothek, Cod. 15, fol. 96v), whereas exorcistic prayers in the Munich manuscript has the title *Qui a demonio vaxantur* (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 17027, fol. 99v); Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter*, 2:587, 599.

[58] For a more detailed overview, see Matthew W. Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London, 2001), 308–11 and Skemer, *Binding Words*, 30–44.

[59] "quibusdam notis, quam caracteres vocant": Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana* 2.75, ed. and trans. R. P. H. Green (Oxford, 1995), 90. For more details, see Grévin and Véronèse, "Les 'caractères' magiques," 308–16.

[60] Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons* 204.3, trans. Mary Magdeleine Mueller, 3 vols. (Washington, DC, 1956–2004), 3:74.

Caesarius's eyes—were similarly involved in the production and dissemination of amulets. Hence, Caesarius pleaded his audience "not to consent to accept these wicked objects, even if they are offered by clerics. . . . Even if you are told that the phylacteries contain holy facts and divine lessons (*res sanctas et lectiones divinas*), let no one believe it or expect health to come to him from them."[61] Almost a century later, a Spanish bishop, Isidore of Seville, joined this chorus of condemnation directed against the misuse of magical characters by pagan physicians,[62] and the Fourth Council of Toledo, over which he presided in 633, threatened bishops and lower clerics that those caught consulting different kinds of magicians would lose their status and be put into a monastery to do perpetual penance (Canon 29).[63]

The situation in Gaul and Spain did not change much in the eighth century. An untitled list of superstitions and deviant practices, preserved in an early Carolingian manuscript from the Vatican Library (MS Pal. lat. 577, fol. 7r–v) and dubbed an *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum* in its Monumenta Germaniae Historica edition, mentions magical phylacteries and pendants (*De filacteriis et ligaturis*), as does Carloman's capitulary dated to 742 (*sive filacteria*).[64] Not all phylacteries necessarily had occult characters inscribed on them. But some of them definitely did, as demonstrated by another early Carolingian text, the pseudo-Augustinian *Homilia de sacrilegiis*, written by an anonymous Frankish cleric in the second half of the eighth century and preserved in a manuscript produced in Alemannia c. 800.[65] Influenced by the antimagical stance of Caesarius of Arles's sermons, the Christian homily provides a more detailed description of inacceptable popular beliefs and practices similar to those listed in the *Indiculus*. Nos. 15 and 19 in Caspari's edition of this homily are most relevant to my discussion:

> 15. Nam quicumque ad friguras non solum incantat, sed etiam scribit, qui angelorum vel salamonis aut caracteres suspendit, aut lingua<m> serpentis ad collum hominis suspendit, aut aliquid parvum cum incantatione bibit, non christianus, sed paganus est.

[61] Caesarius of Arles, *Sermons* 50.1, trans. Mueller, 1:254. For more details, see Ildar Garipzanov, *Graphic Signs of Authority in Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages, c.300–900* (Oxford, 2018), 44–45.

[62] Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies* 8.9.30, ed. Stephen A. Barney et al. (Cambridge, UK, 2002), 183.

[63] *Concilios visigóticos e hispano-romanos*, ed. José Vives, Gonzalo Martínez Díez, and Tomás Marin Martínez (Madrid, 1963), 203: "Si episcopus, aut presbyter, sive diaconus aut quilibet ex ordine clericorum magos . . . vel eos, qui profitentur artem aliquam, aut aliquos eorum similia exercentes, consulere fuerit deprehensus, ab honore dignitatis suae depositus monasterii curam excipiat, ibiqui perpetua[e] poenitentia[e] deditus scelus admissum sacrilegii luat."

[64] *Karlmanni principis capitulare 5*, and *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum* 10, ed. Alfred Boretius, MGH, Capit. 1 (Hanover, 1883), 25, 223. On the debate related to the origins and dating of the *Indiculus*, see especially Holger Homann, *Der Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum und verwandte Denkmäler* (Göttingen, 1965); Michael Glatthaar, *Bonifatius und das Sakrileg: Zur politischen Dimension eines Rechtsbegriffs*, Freiburger Beiträge zur mittelalterlichen Geschichte 17 (Frankfurt-am-Main, 2004), 439–93, and Marco Mostert, "Communicating the Faith: The Circle of Boniface, Germanic Vernaculars, and Frisian and Saxon Converts," *Amsterdamer Beiträge zur älteren Germanistik* 70, no. (2013): 87–130.

[65] *Eine Augustin fälschlich beilegte Homilia de sacrilegiis: Aus einer Einsiedeler Handschrift des Achten Jahrhunderts herausgegeben und mit kritischen und sachlichen Anmerkungen, sowie mit einer Abhandlung begleitet*, ed. C. P. Caspari (Christiania, 1886), 66–73; Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 43. For more details and references, see Nathan J. Ristuccia, "The Rise of the Spurcalia: Medieval Festival and the Modern Myth," *Comitatus* 44 (2013): 55–76, at 60 n. 19, 70–71 n. 67.

[So anyone who not only enchants against cold fever but also writes angels' or Solomon's *caracteres* and suspends them or a snake's tongue around a person's neck, or imbibes a small drink with an incantation, is not a Christian but a pagan.]

19. Quicumque salomoniacas scripturas facit, et qui caracteria in carta sive in bergamena, sive in laminas aereas, ferreas, plumbeas vel in quacumque christum vel scribi[?] hominibus vel animalibus mutis ad collum aligat, iste non christianus, sed paganus est.

[Anyone who makes Solomon's "writings" and who inscribes *caracteria* on thin leaves of papyrus, parchment, copper, iron, lead, or another material(?) and binds them to the necks of people or mute animals, he is not a Christian but a pagan.[66]]

One may argue that these passages contain anachronistic features deriving from an earlier source, such as the mentions of magical *laminae/lamellae*, the use of which was a widespread phenomenon in late antiquity, or of papyrus, which ceased to be shipped to the Frankish world by the Carolingian period. Yet the above-mentioned find in the Abbey of Montserrat of a late antique amulet on papyrus suggests that textual amulets on this material were still known in the Carolingian world. Furthermore, the Carolingian copies of the late antique medical collection of Marcellus Empiricus, *De medicamentis*, instructed its readers how to produce and apply healing *lamellae* and pieces of papyrus, some of them inscribed with occult signs.[67] The two earliest surviving copies of this text were produced in the Carolingian world, one in the monastery of Fulda in the second quarter of the ninth century (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 6880) and the other in northeastern France in the first quarter of the ninth century (Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 420). The latter codex reached the cathedral library of Laon by the mid-ninth century and was studied there by local clerical teachers such as the Irish master Martin, who left his notes in the margins of that manuscript.[68]

The "do-it-yourself" manual that Marcellus compiled in southern Gaul at the beginning of the fifth century included more than 2,500 medical remedies deriving from respected classical authors, such as Pliny the Elder, Celsus, and especially Scribonius, as well as from folk medicine.[69] The latter source explains why a number

[66] Einsiedeln, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. 281, pp. 108–9; *Eine Augustin fälschlich beilegte Homilia de sacrilegiis*, ed. Caspari, 9–11. The part "in quacumque christum vel scribi" in the second paragraph is obviously corrupt, and Caspari suggested the following emendation: "in quacumque alia materia sculpta vel scripta."

[67] On Marcellus, see *The Oxford Dictionary of Late Antiquity*, ed. Oliver Nicholson (Oxford, 2018), 959–60, and Louise Cilliers, "The *De medicina*, a 4th/5th-Century Poem of Gallo-Roman Origin, Rediscovered," *Mnemosyne* 71/1 (2018): 215–44, at 129–30. For a short overview of the textual transmission of his work in the Middle Ages, see *Texts and Transmissions: A Survey of Latin Classics*, ed. L. D. Reynolds (Oxford, 1983), 352–53.

[68] Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften*, 2:34, no. 2113, 3:119, no. 4418. On the association of the Laon manuscript with Martin, see John J. Contreni, *The Cathedral School of Laon from 850 to 930: Its Manuscripts and Masters* (Munich, 1978), 123; cf. S. Martinet, who associated that manuscript with Bishop Pardulus of Laon (848–56), in "Pardule, évêque de Laon, ami de Charles le Chauve et médecin de notre ville," *Mémoires de la Fédération des Sociétés d'Histoire et d'Archéologie de l'Aisne* 16 (1970): 159–69, at 167–69.

[69] *Marcelli De medicamentis liber* Prol. 2, ed. Max Niedermann and Eduard Liechtenhan, trans. Jutta Kollesch and Diethard Nickel, 2 vols. (Berlin, 1968), 1:2: "Nec solum veteres medicinae artis auctores Latino dumtaxat sermones prescriptos . . . sed etiam ab agrestibus et plebeis remedia fortuita atque simplicia, quae experimentis probaverant, didici."

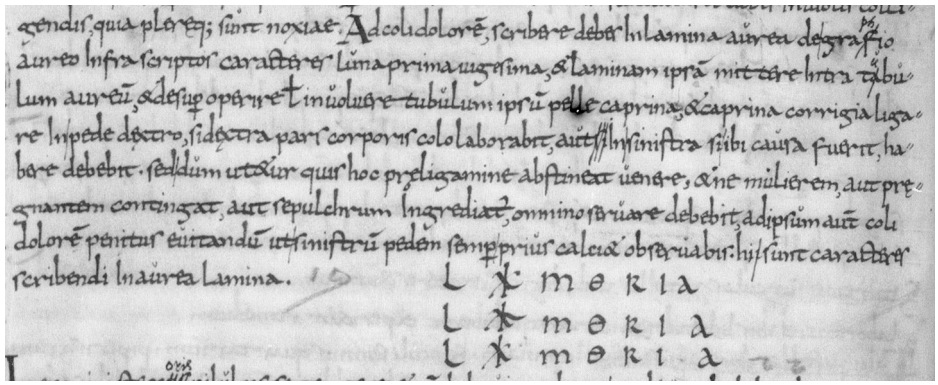

Fig. 5. Recipe with occult *caracteres* in Marcellus Empiricus's text: Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 6880, fol. 122v.

of late antique recipes that have been traditionally described as magical charms and amulets were included in this compilation. Some of these recipes instructed their users to inscribe pieces of papyrus or gold, copper, or tin *lamellae* with combinations of Greek letters devoid of any linguistic meaning and to wear them suspended from the neck in the manner condemned by Augustine and Caesarius or attached to other body parts. Marcellus presents such amulets as efficacious remedies, for example, for eye, heart, and lung problems and against bleeding.[70] Whereas some of these letterforms represented the so-called *voces magicae*, the others transcribed occult signs—lacking, unlike their Eastern counterparts, little roundels at their ends. Two of these recipes directly name such signs *caracteres* or *characteres*.

The first is listed as a remedy against pain in the kidneys and prescribes to write nine *characteres* on a rough papyrus, enclose it with gold or copper, and tie it around the kidneys. All nine *characteres* are then rendered as Greek letters, ΚΑΡΑΒΡΑΩΘ.[71] The second recipe presents a prescription against abdominal pain. This text instructs its reader to inscribe a thin gold plate (*lamina*) three times with seven *caracteres*—L Ψ M Θ R I A—and, on the twenty-first lunar day, to put it inside a gold tube, wrap it inside a goat skin, and attach it to the foot on the side of the body experiencing pain (Fig. 5).[72] Thus, the recipes explaining how to produce healing amulets

[70] *Marcelli De medicamentis liber* 8.56–59, 10.70, 21.8, and 24.7, ed. Niedermann and Liechtenhan, 1:128, 200, 374, and 2:412, and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 6880, fols. 35r, 52r, 91v, and 100v. For a free rendering of these recipes, see Faraone, *The Transformation of Greek Amulets*, 276–79.

[71] *Marcelli De medicamentis liber* 26.43, ed. Niedermann and Liechtenhan, 2:438: "Qui renium dolore vaxabitur, in charta rudi scribat characteres infra scriptos, et auro vel cupro includat et circa renes alliget, miro remedio utetur: ΚΑΡΑΒΡΑΩΘ." Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 6880, fol. 106r.

[72] *Marcelli De medicamentis liber* 29.26, ed. Niedermann and Liechtenhan, 2:510, 512: "Ad coli dolorem scribere debes in lamina aurea de graphio aureo infra scriptos caracteres luna prima vigessima, et laminam ipsam mittere intra tubulum aureum, et desuper operire vel involvere tubulum ipsum pelle caprina, et caprina corrigia ligare in pede dextro, si dextra pars corporis colo laborabit, aut in sinistra si ibi causa fuerit, habere debebit. . . . Hi sunt caracteres scribendi in aurea lamina." Modern editions of Marcellus's work, which also include *Marcelli De medicamentis liber* 29.26, ed. Georg Helmreich (Leipzig, 1889), 310, transcribe the second letter as a Greek capital letter psi (Ψ), whereas

with *caracteres* were routinely copied in Carolingian medical manuscripts, and were produced and kept within respectable ecclesiastical settings.[73] This fact indicates that some Carolingian clerics and monks had a much more ambivalent attitude toward occult *caracteres* than advocated by the normative Christian discourse of bishops Augustine and Caesarius, despite the fact that Master Martin's contemporary, Hrabanus Maurus, reiterated the negative remarks of his predecessors regarding the medical use of occult *caracteres*.[74] Quite paradoxically, Marcellus's compilation with its occult *characteres* was most likely copied in Fulda during Hrabanus's abbacy (822–44). Thus, prescriptive Christian discourse on occult *characteres* and a more relaxed attitude to their practical usage could peacefully coexist within the same monastic confines, especially when such signs approximated Greek and Latin letterforms.

Interestingly enough, the two passages in the *Homilia de sacrilegiis* connect deviant *caracteres* with angels and King Solomon. One can of course see the *salomoniacae scripturae* in the homily's second passage (no. 19) as referring to textual spells that were carried in tubular pendants hung around necks.[75] Yet taken in combination with the following discussion of occult characters on various objects and the mention of *salamonis caracteres* in the first passage (no. 15), this reference may also imply some type of pseudo-writing attributed to the Old Testament king and accessible only to "learned" practitioners.[76] This is precisely how magical *charaktêres* were perceived when they originated in Roman Egypt in the first centuries CE.[77] At the beginning of the ninth century, Gerbald of Liège (785–809) displayed the same ambiguity in his episcopal statutes when he spoke of people carrying phylacteries around their necks inscribed with words (*verbis scriptis*) unknown to him.[78]

An eighth-century Visigothic charm inscribed on a slate near Carrio in Asturias and protecting surrounding fields against hail provides material evidence, nearly contemporaneous with the above Frankish homily. The extensive textual charm

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the Carolingian manuscripts display a sign deriving from a six-armed star (✻); Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS lat. 6880, fol. 122v, and Laon, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 420, fol. 173v.

[73] On the intrinsic connection of medical writings in Carolingian Europe with classical and late antique medicine, see Peregrine Horden, "What's Wrong with Early Medieval Medicine?" *Social History of Medicine* 24, no. 1 (2009): 5–25.

[74] "Superstitiosum est, quicquid institutum est ab hominibus ad facienda et colenda idola pertinens, vel ad colendum sicut deum creaturam partemve ullam creaturae, vel ad consultationes et pacta quaedam significationum cum daemonibus placita atque foederata . . . Ad hoc genus pertinent omnes etiam ligaturae atque remedia, quae medicorum quoque disciplina contempnat, sive in praecantationibus sive in quibusdam notis, quas characteres vocant, sive in quibusque rebus suspendiis atque inligandis, non propter vim naturae 'quodammodo ad temperationem corporum, sed ad quasdam significationes occultas aut manifestas.'" Hrabanus Maurus, *De institutione clericorum* 3.16, in *Über die Unterweisung der Geistlichen*, ed. Detlev Zimpel, 2 vols., Fontes Christiani 61 (Turnhout, 2006), 2:516, 518.

[75] Dieter Harmening, *Superstitio: Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlich-theologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1979), 239.

[76] Flint, *The Rise of Magic*, 247, does not try to translate or interpret this expression in her book.

[77] For more details, see Frankfurter, "The Magic of Writing."

[78] Gerbald of Liège, "Second Episcopal Statute," 10, ed. Peter Brommer, MGH, Capit. episc. 1 (Hanover, 1984), 1:29: "et ista filacteria circa collum portant, nescimus quibus verbis scriptis." This reminds me of a reference to *characteres* in a sermon attributed to Augustine (*Sermones* 328): "vel faciunt ligaturas vel characteres nescio quos," Cyrille Lambot, "Sermons complétés: Fragments de sermons perdus: Allocution inédite de saint Augustin," *Revue bénédictine* 51 (1939): 3–30, at 19.

continues the long late antique and early medieval tradition of magical amulets against storms and hail.[79] It addresses Satan (*adiuro te Satan*) as the head of hostile forces responsible for tempests and begs for the intercession of Saint Christopher—who was known for turning hail into rain during his martyrdom—as well as seven archangels, starting with the well-known Michael, Gabriel, and Raphael and ending with the obscure Ananiel and Marmoniel. Similar to the incantation in Vat. lat. 5359, it ends in a prayer-like manner by invoking the names of the Father, the Son, and Holy Spirit and the final exclamation *amen*, thus shrouding this magical text in the veil of respectable Christian formulas. The entire textual amulet is preceded by one pentagram and ends with three more,[80] which reminds us of the same sign closing the line of *charaktêres* in the Vatican charm. As mentioned earlier, the pentagram was the sign of Solomon, as the Spanish monk Beatus of the monastery of San Martin at Liébana explained in the late-eighth-century *Commentary on the Apocalypse*: "*caracteres*, which country people call the sign of Solomon (*signum Salomonis*), or another character (*caractera*) of this kind, which they are used to inscribe (*scribere*) and hang around the neck."[81]

Another Visigothic textual phylactery on a slate from Galinduste in Salamanca, dated to the late seventh or eighth centuries, features numerous cross signs and a couple of pentagrams. At the beginning of the text, there is a mention of *Salvatoris signum* (the sign of the Savior), most likely referring to the sign of the cross, whereas the pentagram is described as *divum signum* (a divine sign). At the end, another pentagram follows the names of archangels (seven of them are probably listed there), a sequence similar to the charm in Asturias.[82] The designation of the pentagram as a divine sign reminds us of an important late antique Greek text or, as some scholars argue, a more fluid textual tradition known as *The Testament of Solomon*; one way or another, this textual tradition was well known in the medieval Byzantine realm. According to *The Testament of Solomon*, when the Jewish king Solomon was obstructed by demons while building the Temple of Jerusalem, God granted the Old Testament king, through Saint Michael, a powerful seal or signet ring (*sphragis*). This divine seal enabled Solomon to control demons in his building project, and thus it gained the reputation of an ultimate exorcistic weapon against them.[83] This seal and its miraculous capacities became common knowledge for

[79] Francisco Javier Fernández Nieto, "A Visigothic Charm from Asturias and the Classical Tradition of Phylacteries against Hail," in *Magical Practices in the Latin West*, ed. Gordon and Simón, 551–99. Other scholars have dated it to the late ninth or tenth century: see, e.g., Isabel Velázquez Soriano, "Between Orthodox Belief and 'Superstition' in Visigothic Hispania," in *Magical Practices in the Latin West*, ed. Gordon and Simón, 601–27, at 625. See also Julia M. H. Smith, *Europe after Rome: A New Cultural History* (Oxford, 2005), 77. On weather magic in the Carolingian world, see Paul Edward Dutton, "Thunder and Hail over the Carolingian Countryside," in *Charlemagne's Moustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York, 2004), 169–88.

[80] Fernández Nieto, "A Visigothic Charm," 552–53, 590–91.

[81] "caracteres, quod signum Salomonis rustici dicunt, vel alia huiusmodi caractera, quas solent scribere et de collo suspendere." *Beati Liebanensis Tractatus de Apocalipsin* 2.Prologus.8.28, ed. Roger Gryson, CCSL 107B (Turnhout, 2012), 199.

[82] Velázquez Soriano, "Between Orthodox Belief and 'Superstition' in Visigothic Hispania," 623–24.

[83] *The Testament of Solomon* 1.5–7, trans. Dennis C. Duling, in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, ed. James H. Charlesworth, 2 vols. (Garden City, NY, 1983), 1:962; *Das Testament Salomos: Die älteste christliche Dämonologie, kommentiert und in deutscher Erstübersetzung*, ed. Peter Busch, Texte und

people in the late antique Mediterranean and the Near East, including Jews and Christians.[84] According to two pilgrimage accounts to Jerusalem, the one written by Egeria in late-fourth-century Spain and the other (*Breviarius de Hierosolyma*) by an anonymous author in the sixth century, the electrum ring that Solomon had allegedly used to seal demons was kept as a relic in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, on display for late antique pilgrims.[85]

By the eighth century, the pentagram was known as the seal of Solomon not only in Visigothic Spain but also among literate Franks. The late-eighth-century monastic scribe Adallandus from the Abbey of Weissenburg was familiar with that graphic symbol. On the final page of the manuscript with Cassiodorus's commentaries on Psalms 100–150, next to the final sentence referring to commentaries on the Old Testament texts associated with Solomon, Adallandus expertly drew a pentagram beneath the monogram of Solomon (Fig. 6)—the latter imitating the form and structure of the contemporary cruciform monogram of Charlemagne.[86] Carolingian intellectuals began to liken King Charles to King Solomon as early as the 770s[87]; and the latter is the only Old Testament figure who was honored with his own monogram in the monogrammatic section of the *De inventione litterarum* composed in the southeastern areas of the Frankish kingdom, probably in the 790s. The other monograms encode the names of the apostles, the Holy Mary (*Sancta Maria*), and the Lord. Solomon's eight-armed monogram SALOMON REX with its central lozenge combining letters *O* and *A* is reminiscent of Charlemagne's royal *signum*.[88]

In short, two somewhat contradictory traditions structured the perception of Solomon in the Carolingian world. On the one hand, Christian clerical thinkers viewed him as an exemplary biblical model for Carolingian kings to emulate. On the other hand, in the eyes of the clerical critics of contemporary magic, Solomon was a clearly subversive figure, as indicated by the association of his name with deviant magical *scripturae* and *caracteres*. Yet there were definitely those who did not see any contradiction between the two faces of this Old Testament Janus, and some of those people probably regarded Charlemagne's cruciform monogram as a Christian equivalent of Solomon's *signum divum*.

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Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur 153 (Berlin, 2006), 84–93; Sarah L. Schwarz, "Reconsidering the Testament of Solomon," *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 16, no. 3 (2007): 203–37, and Ra'anan Boustan and Michael Beshay, "Sealing the Demons, Once and for All: The Ring of Solomon, the Cross of Christ, and the Power of Biblical Kingship," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 16, no. 1 (2015): 99–129.

[84] Boustan and Beshay, "Sealing the Demons, Once and for All," 100–1, 123–24. The tradition associating Solomon's seal in the form of the pentagram or hexagram with supernatural powers had a broader impact on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim cultures; for more details, see *King Solomon's Seal*, ed. Rachel Milstein (Jerusalem, 1995) and Hans Alexander Winkler, *Siegel und Charaktere in der mohammedanischen Zauberei* (Berlin, 1930), 57–65, 127–33.

[85] Egeria, *Itinerarium* 37.3, ed. Ezio Franceschini and Robert Weber, CCSL 175 (Turnhout, 1965), 81: "stat diaconus, tenet anulum Salomonis." *Breviarius de Hierosolyma* 2, ed. Robert Weber, CCSL 175 (Turnhout, 1965), 110: "Et ille anulus ibidem, unde Salomon sigillavit demones et est de electro."

[86] Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Quelf. 14 Weiss, fol. 247r. For more details, see Garipzanov, *Graphic Signs of Authority*, 283–85.

[87] Paul Kershaw, *Peaceful Kings: Peace, Power and the Early Medieval Political Imagination* (Oxford, 2011), 140, 144–47.

[88] For more details and references, see Garipzanov, *Graphic Signs of Authority*, 279–82.

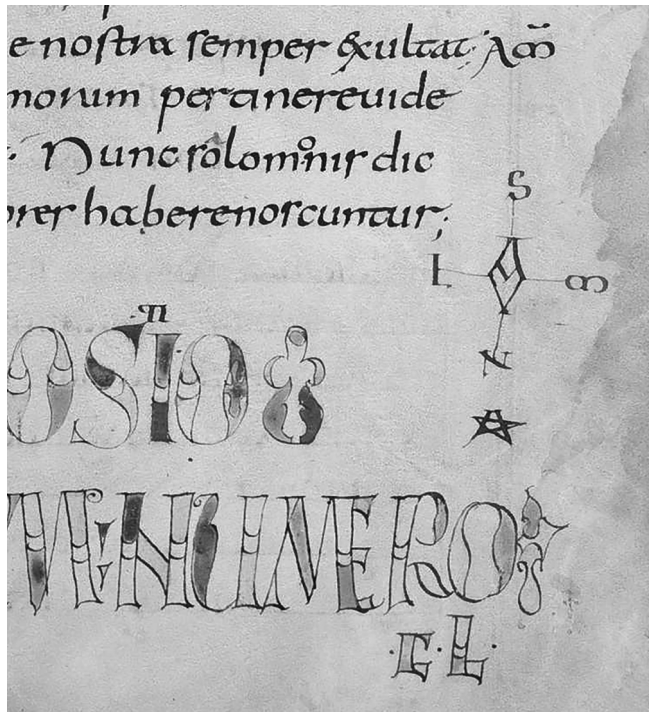


Fig. 6. Solomon's monogram and pentagram in an early Carolingian manuscript from Weissenburg: Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek, Cod. Quelf. 14 Weiss, fol. 247r. See the online edition for a color version of this image.

The anonymous transcriber of the textual charm in Vat. lat. 5359 was of this persuasion. This cleric or monk was interested in exorcistic prayers/incantations that could be deployed against evil spirits and bodily harm they might bring on a person. He evidently saw no problem in combining Christian formulas with the direct address to malign spirits in the disguise of *mala malorum*—a combination that was also typical of contemporary exorcistic prayers—and in drawing Solomon's pentagram with occult signs of Eastern origin. It might not be accidental that seven large *charaktêres* are separated from the final pentagram by a much smaller, perhaps dividing, sign reminiscent of the Greek koppa. This sequence recalls the Visigothic spell from Salamanca, discussed above.[89] Could the seven signs have been viewed as visual parallels to the names of the seven archangels associated with Solomon's seal? If the answer is yes, the textual charm from the Vatican manuscript might display *angelorum vel salamonis caracteres* ("the characters of angels or of Solomon"), whose use on pendant phylacteries was vehemently condemned by the anonymous clerical author of the *Homilia de sacrilegiis*.

All in all, the anonymous transcriber of the charm in Vat. lat. 5359 operated in the gray area of opportunities established by the literary normative condemnation

[89] The number of these *charaktêres* is identical with the seven occult characters in the medical prescription from Laon, discussed above.

of amulets with occult *caracteres* from the ivory towers of Christian bishops and the superficially Christianized tradition of centuries-long practices of interacting with preternatural forces.[90] In these practices deriving from late antiquity, graphic signs played an important role. The path that the anonymous scribe chose to take was treacherous indeed, as shown by the frequent deployment of accusations of magic against political opponents in the second half of Louis the Pious's reign and the decades thereafter.[91] After all, in 834, Lothar I had Bernard of Septimania's sister drowned in the Saône as a witch (*more maleficorum*).[92] Yet the fact that the anonymous scribe recorded the charm with occult *charaktêres* at the end of the manuscript with royal capitularies of the same Lothar indicates that laypeople, monks, and clerics could get away with such practices in the Carolingian world, just as they did in the high and late Middle Ages. Not everyone, of course, was comfortable with such practices. It is possible that subsequently someone felt uncomfortable with the presence of those marginal "prayers" in the manuscript, as can be judged from the fact that the entire text on the final folio in Vat. lat. 5359 is badly faded and perhaps has been partially scratched away to an extent that renders their practical use virtually impossible.

Still, what has survived there bears witness to exorcistic practices that in the Carolingian world were not limited to the liturgical space of the church. In those practices, incantations and enigmatic signs originating from Greco-Egyptian and Jewish occult traditions were perceived as powerful tools against malign spirits on a par with more orthodox Christian prayers. It is this broader cultural context that explains why apotropaic *charaktêres* of Eastern origin could appear in Vat. lat. 5359 side by side with an exorcistic Christian prayer.

[90] For more detailed discussion of this dichotomy in the early Middle Ages, and in the Carolingian world in particular, as well as the difficulty in drawing the line between magic and religion in this period, see Yitzhak Hen, "The Early Medieval West," in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West*, ed. David J. Collins, 183–206.

[91] Pierre Riché, "La magie à l'époque carolingienne," *Comptes rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 117, no. 1 (1973): 127–38, at 131. In that respect, the Carolingian world was not different from late antiquity; Maijastina Kahlos, "*Artis heu magicis*: The Label of Magic in Fourth-Century Conflicts and Disputes," in *Pagans and Christians in Late Antique Rome: Conflict, Competition, and Coexistence in the Fourth Century*, ed. Michele Renee Salzman, Marianne Sághy, and Rita Lizzi Testa (Cambridge, UK, 2015), 162–177, at 170–71.

[92] Nithard, *Historiae* 1.5, ed. Georg Heinrich Pertz and Ernest Müller, MGH SS rer. Germ. 44 (Hanover, 1907), 7–8: "Gerbergam more maleficorum in Ararim mergi praecepit." See also Pierre Riché, *Daily Life in the World of Charlemagne*, trans. Jo Ann McNamara (Philadelphia, 1978), 184.

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