

# Ælf, Ælfsīden, Ælfād, Ælfsogoþa: Elves and Disease in Anglo-Saxon Leechbooks

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## MAGIC AND MEDICINE IN ANGLO-SAXON ENGLAND

From the Latin *super-naturalis*, indicating “beyond nature” or “beyond God”, the supernatural and, more precisely, demons, monsters, ghosts, dragons, elves, and many other uncanny creatures considered as such, have found a wide expression in our collective imagination, thanks to the huge literary and cinematographic repertoire. Even if the representation of strange creatures has predominated starting from the 19th century, actually the supernatural sphere finds its roots in the ancient times, namely the medieval era, when beliefs in magical beings and superstitious practices were widely spread among the tribes.<sup>1</sup>

In the context of Anglo-Saxon England, and especially in the field of medicine, the presence of supernatural beings, considering the heathen past of the territory, was particularly frequent when it came to healing illness or justifying divine punishment.<sup>2</sup> People of the period created and practised remedies for various ailments.<sup>3</sup> In general, during the Middle Ages, there was no distinction between medical and magical practices, because these shared a common purpose: the resolution of a problem. For this reason, medieval medicine was practised by people in different professions: there were sorcerers, witches, thaumaturgists, necromancers, but there was also a particular figure, the so-called *læce*, a sort of doctor or physician in medieval England. Moreover, the Old English word referring to “medicine” was *læcedom*, derived from *læce* and translated by Cockayne<sup>4</sup> as “leechdom”.<sup>5</sup>

What are the origins of Anglo-Saxon medicine? The medical practices of that period in England were greatly influenced by the Germanic past on the one hand and by classical medicine on the other, thanks to Christianization. Among the factors contributing to the rise of Anglo-Saxon magic, Payne mentions:

1. A herbal medicine founded on a wide knowledge of native plants and garden herbs, which was an original achievement of the Anglo-Saxon leeches, and only in part derived from Latin or other books.
2. A body of doctrine derived from classical medicine, chiefly from Latin translations of Greek authors, but not always traceable to its original source.  
[...]
4. A superstitious element, consisting of charms and superstitious rites connected with medicine [...] an indeterminate amount that may represent Teutonic and Celtic folklore.<sup>6</sup>

Consequently, it is necessary to bear in mind that the Germanic heathen roots of the Anglo-Saxons continued to survive simultaneously with Christian ideas: the result was a mixture of classical medical doctrines and pagan superstitious beliefs, such as the conception of the demoniac attacks and elf-shot as the causes of disease.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, the idea of disease was connected sometimes to the doctrine of the four humours,<sup>8</sup> sometimes to the intrusion of supernatural creatures, or even to divine intervention because of sin. To heal any illness, the Anglo-Saxon *lece* could apply an herbal remedy, could make an amulet or could recite a charm, and this would explain the presence of some spells among the remedies in Anglo-Saxon medical manuscripts.<sup>9</sup>

**ANGLO-SAXON MEDICAL MANUSCRIPTS:**

Royal 12.D.XVII and Harley 585

What remains of Anglo-Saxon medical knowledge and practices are some compilations of texts, some fragments like the Wellcome fragment, and some marginalia, whose purpose was to offer support to the treatment of diseases by resorting to the botanical and herbal practices of the time. Specifically, the corpus of Anglo-Saxon medical expertise includes four collections of medical texts and remedies, transmitted in two manuscripts preserved at the British Library in London: codex Royal 12.D.XVII and codex Harley 585.<sup>10</sup> These are known as *Bald's Leechbook*, *Leechbook III*, *Lacnunga* and the *Old English Pharmacopoeia*,<sup>11</sup> but only the first three will be considered for analysis because of their references to elves.

*Royal 12.D.XVII: Bald's Leechbook*

The codex known as London, British Library, Royal 12.D.XVII, was written in a continuous hand probably in the scriptorium of Winchester around the 10th century. The manuscript consists of 128 folios of medieval parchment measuring 270×205 mm, containing medical texts and charms in Old English. There are some added inscriptions in Latin which seem to belong to a later date, probably to the 12th or 13th century.<sup>12</sup>

*Bald's Leechbook*<sup>13</sup> occurs in the ff. 1r-111r and it includes a number of remedies not always of a medical nature; the presence of some prayers and Biblical fragments is significant because it relates to the healing power of God. The work consists of two books, each beginning with a table of contents: Book I (ff. 1r-64v) deals with the treatment of internal diseases almost following a *capite ad calcem* order,<sup>14</sup> while Book II (ff. 65r-111r) focuses first on general anatomical structures and then on external illnesses.<sup>15</sup>

According to Talbot and Cameron, the primary source for these two Leechbooks is the Salernitan compilation *Passionarius*<sup>16</sup> but, some other influences have been identified in *Physica Plinii*, Oribasius, Pseudo-Antonius Musa, Celsus and the late Latin translations of Soranus of Ephesus, namely Esculapii and *Liber Aurelii*. Moreover, other sources for Book II are the Pseudo-Galenic *Liber Tertius* and the Latin *Practica Alexandri*.<sup>17</sup>

*Bald's Leechbook* ends with a Latin colophon in six verses, from which it is known that the manuscript was compiled by the scribe "Cild" for a certain "Bald",<sup>18</sup> the owner of the book, and from which, consequently, it derives its name:

Bald habet hunc librum Cild quern conscribere iussit,  
 hic precor assidue cunctis in nomine Cristi  
 Quo nullus tollat hunc librum perfidus a me  
 Nec ui necfurto nec quodam fame falso.  
 Cur? Quia nulla mihi tam cara est optima gaza  
 Quam cari libri quos Cristi gratis comi.<sup>19</sup>

### *Royal 12.D.XVII: Leechbook III*

In the same manuscript, after the colophon, *Leechbook III* (ff. 111r-127r) begins with a table of contents. The repetition of some textual material between the first two books of Bald and the third Leechbook highlights the possibility that the works were originally conceived as two different compilations, probably drawing from the same sources, then copied by another scribe in this manuscript. Leechbook III contains 73 chapters and it is structured like both Book I and Book II.<sup>20</sup>

### *Harley 585: Lacnunga*

Harley 585 is a parchment codex of unknown provenance, dating

back to the 10th or 11th century, consisting of 194 folios measuring 192x115 mm. It is bound in red with the title Anglo-Saxon Charms and Receipts.<sup>21</sup> It is the oldest manuscript witness for the *Old English Herbal* (ff. 1r-129v) and it also includes two other significant medical works, namely the Anglo-Saxon translation of *Medicina de Quadrupedibus* (ff. 101v-114v) and *Lacnunga* (ff. 130r-193r). From a palaeographical point of view, the manuscript is written in a “rough square Anglo-Saxon minuscule”, hence it was conceived for practical work.<sup>22</sup>

*Lacnunga*, literally meaning ‘remedies’, is a compilation of almost two hundreds prescriptions, recipes, prose and metrical charms mainly in Old English but also including Latin invocations, and Old Irish and Old French attestations.<sup>23</sup> The work has been divided into two sections because of the different periods of compilation: the first section (ff. 130r-179r) dates back to the late 10th century, the second section (ff. 179v-193r) dates back to the early 11th century.<sup>24</sup>

The remedies are mostly herbal lotions, drinks, and syrups, addressed to the cure of health problems and disorders, often obtained through the use of animal substances and inspired by the teachings of classical sources, some of which are shared with *Bald’s Leechbook*.<sup>25</sup> Ten sources have been identified for the texts comprising the compilation: Pliny’s *Historia Naturalis*, *Medicina Plinii*, *Physica Plinii*, Marcellus’ *De Medicamentis Liber*, Pseudo-Apuleius’ *Herbarium*, Sextus Placitus’ *Medicina ex Animalibus*, *Practica Alexandri Latine*, *De minutione sanguinis, sive de phlebotomia*, *Virtutes Iohannis*, Isidore of Seville’s *Etymologiae*.<sup>26</sup>

Among the recipes, which generally are very short, there is a series of alliterative charms, for which critics described the content of *Lacnunga* as “Semi-Pagan” or as “folk medicine”. Actually, the compilation cannot be entirely defined as “pagan” because some charms contains Christian references but mostly, disease in *Lacnunga* is conceived as a problem caused by supernatural creatures: dwarfs, worms, demons, dragons and elves.<sup>27</sup>

## CONTEXTUALIZING ELVES IN GERMANIC LITERATURE

Generally depicted as human-like creatures, with pointed ears, white skin and extraordinary powers, elves have always been very popular in literature<sup>28</sup> and their conception has changed over the years, from being associated with deities and monsters to being compared to other creatures like nymphs, fairies, leprechauns and sprites.

Apart from the many attestations of the word “elf” in the context of toponymy and onomastics,<sup>29</sup> the more ancient witnesses of the word “elf” seem to point a Germanic root. From Proto-Indo-European *\*albh-* and Proto-Germanic *\*albiz*, the word “elf” came to designate over the centuries supernatural figures like sprites, fairies, goblins and incubi.<sup>30</sup> Grimm mainly relates the word to the Latin *albus*, meaning “white”, and to the Old Irish *ailbhín*, meaning “flock”, hence associating the ancient root of “elf” with whiteness.<sup>31</sup> The Old English word for “elf”, *ælf*, also translated as “nightmare” and it acquired many forms in the dialects,<sup>32</sup> while in the other Germanic languages it is possible to recognise *álfr* in Old Norse and *alpî* in Old High German.<sup>33</sup>

In the context of Germanic literary tradition, the connotation of these creatures varies considerably from text to text. Starting from the Old Norse texts, where a wide range of attestations can be found and a more positive view of these supernatural beings emerges, elves seem to be associated with light and beauty, and put on the level of the divinities belonging to the Germanic pantheon.<sup>34</sup> *Snorra Edda*,<sup>35</sup> a treatise about Norse mythology compiled by Snorri Sturluson, is one of the north Germanic works in which a considerable portion of attestations of “elf” occurs. The word *álfr* appears in compounds in *Gylfaginning*, predominantly when Gilfi, describing the beautiful places, mentions *Álfheimr*, a place where *ljósálfar* “light elves” and *dökkálfar* “dark elves” live.<sup>36</sup> In *Skáldskaparmál*, *álfr* is associated with light mainly when the kenning *álfrøðull* is used to describe the

sun.<sup>37</sup> Around the same period, Snorri composed the *Ynglinga Saga*, the opening part of the history of the kings of Norway (known as *Heimskringla*), in which the word *álfr* appears in the epithet “Óláfr” meaning “extremely beautiful.”<sup>38</sup>

Turning to the poetic *Edda*, the instances of *álfr* are all related to the beauty and divinity of elves. *Völundarkviða* is the only poem where *álfr* refers to elves as a people: Völundr, whose neck is white and beautiful, is the only character identified as an *álfa lióði* “member of elves” and as *vísi álfa* “wise/leader of elves”.<sup>39</sup> In *Hávamál* and *Lokasenna*, elves are placed in the pantheon, juxtaposed to *ása* “æsir”.<sup>40</sup>

With regard to Skaldic poetry, the word *álfr* is often associated with kennings referring to warriors. An example is the work of Bragi Boddason,<sup>41</sup> where the king Jǫrmunrekr is called *sóknar álfr* “elf of attack” and the hero Hǫgni is defined as *raðarálfr* “elf of ships”.<sup>42</sup>

In Anglo-Saxon glossaries,<sup>43</sup> several instances of *ælfe* further underline the conception of elves as beautiful creatures. Some glosses<sup>44</sup> in the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville parallel nymphs with elves.<sup>45</sup> Another witness of this parallelism is found in the Cleopatra Glossary, in Aldhelm’s *Carmen de Virginitate*, where there is mention of *landælf* and *dūnælf*.<sup>46</sup>

Further, a frequent use of the adjective *ælfscýne* is attested in Old English poetry and particularly in *Judith* and *Genesis A*. The adjective underlines a connection with beauty and seductiveness, indicating “beautiful like an elf” or “of elfin beauty”. In *Genesis A* the adjective is used to refer to Sarah, Abraham’s wife, defined *mæg ælfscieno* “beautiful wife” (v. 1827a and v. 2731a).<sup>47</sup> In *Judith*, *ides ælfscīnu* “beautiful lady” (v. 12-14) is used to describe Judith on the divine mission to seduce Holofernes, hence stressing the conception of both angelic and seductive beauty.<sup>48</sup>

It is in *Beowulf*, that the figure of elves is mentioned among the monsters. In the section concerning Grendel’s origins (v. 102-114),<sup>49</sup> elves are included among the *untýdras* “misgotten beings”: *eotenas*

*ond ylfe ond orcneas/swylce gīgantas* “monsters and elves and sea-monsters/ likewise giants”.

### ÆLFSĪDEN: ELFISH ASSAULTS

Starting from the idea expressed in *Beowulf*, it is quite understandable that in Anglo-Saxon England, elves began to be regarded as dangerous creatures on the same level of monsters, threatening human safety and health. This view is reflected in some medical texts used for treating physical assaults or psychological manipulations, marked by a term defining this type of danger: *ælfsīden* “magic of elves”. *Sīden* only occurs in this compound, and it is likely that the closest cognate is the Old Norse *síða*, a strong verb meaning “to work magic”, stemming from the Proto-Germanic *\*sīþanam*.<sup>50</sup> The issue of *ælfsīden* is mentioned in different remedies, namely the ones in *Bald’s Leechbook I* (section 64), *Leechbook III* (section 41), and *Lacnunga* (section 29).

On folios 120v-121r of *Leechbook III*, the second remedy of section 41 is addressed to *ælcre feondes costunga 7 ælfsīdenne 7 lenctenādle*.<sup>51</sup> The association of *ælfsīden* with fever seems to involve a mental alteration or a “mind-altering affliction”.<sup>52</sup> According to Hall:

*yr̥c gōde sealf̥e* associates *ælfsīden* both with diabolical malice and fevers, but it is not necessarily identical with either. Wider evidence, however, does consolidate the remedy’s implication that *ælfe* might be associated with causing delusion or hallucination characteristic of fever.<sup>53</sup>

Moreover, Hall finds interesting the association of *ælfsīden* with *lenctenādle* and, above all, with *feondes costunga*, because it underlines the devilish nature of elves.<sup>54</sup> A similar type of remedy is found in *Lacnunga*, section 29, *wið ælfsīdene 7 wið eallum f̥eondes costungum*<sup>55</sup>

and in *Bald's Leechbook I*, section 64, against *ælcra lēodrūnan 7 ælfsidenne*.<sup>56</sup>

In section 65 (folios 107v-108r) of *Bald's Leechbook II*, after another remedy addressed in the next paragraph, *Wiþ ælfe 7 wiþ uncupum sidsan* occurs.<sup>57</sup> It does not attest *ælfsiden* but it includes *sidsan*. *Sīdesa*, or *sīdsa*, indicates a magical influence, hence underlining the mental manipulation enacted by elves, while *uncupum* translates “strange”, probably referred to the symptoms of the ailment.

In *Leechbook III*, section 61, a remedy against *ælfcyynn* “elf-kind”<sup>58</sup> that does not attest *ælfsiden*, is related to elfish nocturnal assault and it belongs to the group of recipes for treating harm caused by devils.<sup>59</sup>

## HEALING ÆLFĀDL AND ÆLFSOGŌÞA

Another evidence of *ælf* appears in one of the metrical charms of *Lacnunga*, *Wið ferstice* “Against a sudden stitch”,<sup>60</sup> opening with an epic description of craftsmen forging weapons. As Grendon stated, charms opened with an *historiola* to introduce the spell itself.<sup>61</sup> In the first part, the references to *spere* “speare”, *wælspera* “battle-spear”, *īsenes dæl* “piece of iron”, anticipate the so-called ‘elf-shot’ or projectile wound mentioned at the end, where three causes of ailment are introduced: *esa gescot* “æsir-shot”,<sup>62</sup> *ylfa gescot* “elf-shot”, *hægtessan gescot* “hag-shot”.<sup>63</sup>

*Scoten*, *gescot*, *gescoten* are all polysemic and define internal pain or projectile wounds, being cognates of *sceōtan*, meaning “to shoot”, from Proto-Germanic *\*skeutanan*. The verb is also mentioned in a remedy of *Bald's Leechbook II*, section 65, entitled *Gif hors ofscoten sīe*,<sup>64</sup> about how to cure horses from the wounds caused by projectiles. The last sentence cites *Sy þæt ylfa þe him se þis him mæg to bote* [Be the elf what it may, this is mighty for him to amend],<sup>65</sup> implying that horses can be assaulted by elves.

Some more attestations regarding elves causing internal distress can

be identified in the collection *Leechbook III*, expressed through some compounds: *ælfād̄l*, *ælfsoġoþa*, *wæterælfād̄l*. The remedy of section 62 proceeds to describe the *modus operandi* against *ælfād̄l* “elf-disease”.<sup>66</sup> *Ādl* is a term denoting sickness, from the Proto-Germanic *\*aidlō* “disease” and it is likely that *ælfād̄l* means “illness caused by elves”. Moreover, the section mentions the signs to recognise *ælfsoġoþa*, a type of *ælfād̄le*, concerning problems with liver and pancreas or digestive disorders.<sup>67</sup> Section 63 includes a cure for *wæterælfād̄l*,<sup>68</sup> This compound, like *ælfsoġoþa*, was probably an hyponym of elf-disease and it can be interpreted as *wæter-ælfād̄l* “elf-disease causing watering”, or as *wæterælf-ād̄l* “disease caused by water-elves”.<sup>69</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The fear of the unknown and the anxiety for what is ‘beyond nature’ has allowed the dissemination of many beliefs and the formulation of many explanations, in this case for disease. Associating distress with divine punishment, humours, or monsters was a product of the medieval mind that, torn between fear and superstition, found a justification for everything. A peculiar case was that of elves. Their conception has acquired a wide range in the texts belonging to Germanic tradition: from divine, heroic and fascinating figures, as attested in the Scandinavian context, to dangerous and monstrous creatures causing affliction to humankind. In this sense, Anglo-Saxon medical manuscripts provide very useful evidences of how *ælfe* were seen as evil. This idea of creatures provoking psychological and physical distress, of monsters to be fought to the extent of resorting to magical and medical knowledge, consolidates in the compounds found among these remedies: *ælfside*n, *ælfād̄l*, *wæterælfād̄l*, *ælfsoġoþa*. Either out of fear or out of desire, the uniqueness of such creatures aroused an ambiguous feeling in the medieval man that found expression in literature. Elves are wonderfully fascinating and divine, but also uncannily dangerous and *uncupum* creatures.

## NOTES

- 1 Jacob Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology II* (London: George Bell & Sons, 1883), 439.
- 2 Joseph Frank Payne, *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1904), 11.
- 3 Susan Zàvoti, “Blame it on the Elves: Perception of Sickness in Anglo-Saxon England,” in *Medieval and Early Modern Literature, Science and Medicine* (Tübingen: Falconer & Renevey, 2013), 68.
- 4 Oswald Cockayne, *Leechdoms, Wortcunning, and Starcraft of Early England* (London: Longman, 1865), 3.
- 5 Leechdom, and so *Laecedom*, does not stem from the bloodsucking parasite (leech) but quite the opposite: what is known as leech takes its name from the medieval physician because they both drew blood.
- 6 Payne, *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times*, 61-62.
- 7 *Ibidem*, 49.
- 8 According to early Western physiology, humours (meaning ‘liquids, fluids’ in Latin) were the four fluids of the body that determined a person’s temperament. These were blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile and the varying mixtures of these fluids caused a change in temperament, and in physical and mental disposition.
- 9 Payne, *English Medicine in the Anglo-Saxon Times*, 114.
- 10 *Ibidem*, 36-37.
- 11 The *Old English Pharmacopoeia* actually comprises two works, namely the *Old English Herbarium* and the *Medicina de Quadrupedibus*, that are translations into Old English of Latin scientific treatises dating back to the 11th century.
- 12 Neil Ripley Ker, *Catalogue of Manuscripts Containing Anglo-Saxon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 333.
- 13 Some pieces of *Bald’s Leechbook* are found in other manuscript witnesses: London, British Library, Cotton Otho B XI; London, British Library, Nowell Transcript; Fragment Omont.
- 14 Book I (1-30) starts with the disorders of the head and proceeds with to eyes, ears, throat, face, nose, lips, thoracic organs, diaphragm, stomach, shoulders, thighs, knees, shins, feet and genitals; the remedies 31-60 focus on cutaneous pains, while those following deal with: (62) joints, (62-66) fever, (67) alimentation, (68) bites of spiders, (70) cures for the libido, (71) feet, (72) bloodletting, (73-77) cutaneous disorders, (78) appetite, (79 and 86) some magical remedies for a journey, (85) magical charm to win a battle, and the remaining relate some disorders like insomnia, cold, drunkenness.
- 15 Book II first deals with (1-16) stomach, (17-24) liver, (25-33) intestines, (34-45) spleen; then it proceeds with (46-51) lungs, (52-55) purgatives, (56) dysentery,

- (59) paralysis, (64) a fragmentary letter from the Patriarch of Jerusalem to King Alfred, (65) miscellaneous recipes, (66) magical properties of jet, (67) densities of fluids.
- 16 Malcolm Laurence Cameron, "Bald's Leechbook: Its Sources and their use in its Compilation," *Anglo-Saxon England* 12 (1983): 164-165; Charles Holwell Talbot, "Some Notes on Anglo-Saxon Medicine." *Medical History* 9 (1965): 156-169.
- 17 Conan Doyle, "Anglo-Saxon Medicine and Disease: A Semantic Approach," (PhD thesis, Corpus Christi College Cambridge, 2011), 44.
- 18 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, xxi.
- 19 Ibidem, xx.
- 20 *Leechbook III* first deals with diseases of the head, eyes, ears, mouth, teeth, neck; then the order is broken and it focuses on cancer and bloody sputum. It proceeds with internal complaints (11-23) and then it returns to external pains (24-36). The structure *a capite ad calcem* is interrupted when it deals with eyes (46).
- 21 "Harley MS 585," *British Library Digitised Manuscripts*, Accessed May 21, 2020, [http://bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley\\_MS\\_585](http://bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_585).
- 22 Ker, *Catalogue*, xx-xxiii.
- 23 "Harley MS 585," *British Library Digitised Manuscripts*, Accessed May 21, 2020, [http://bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley\\_MS\\_585](http://bl.uk/manuscripts/FullDisplay.aspx?ref=Harley_MS_585).
- 24 Ker, *Catalogue*, 306.
- 25 Some textual correspondences have been found between *Lacnunga* and *Bald's Leechbook*. It is likely that some parts of *Bald's Leechbook* circulated independently and then were copied in Harley 585.
- 26 Edward Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The 'Lacnunga'* (Lewiston and Lampeter: Edwin Mellen Press, 2011), 161-162.
- 27 Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies*, 27.
- 28 It only suffices to think about the rather recent fame of Tolkien's sagas that have significantly contributed to the popularity of these fantastic creatures. Being an expert of Germanic mythology, Tolkien invented the Elfish language and constructed a fantastic universe centred on elves, first in *The Silmarillion* and then in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. Nonetheless, the tendency to deal with these creatures had definitely spread even before the birth of such fantasy fiction; thanks to German writers, who represented the tradition of elves in many works and myths, for example in the myth of "Erlikönig", a character appearing in many ballads of German Romanticism, the word "elf" started to be used as a loan-word from English in modern German. During the Elizabethan period, English literature saw the rise of many works containing a reference to elves and fairies, like Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* and Shakespeare's

- A Midsummer Night's Dream* (with the character of Robin 'Puck' Goodfellow), and a few centuries earlier, Geoffrey Chaucer introduced the elf-queen in *The Canterbury Tales* (like in the tale Sir Thopas, who desired the elf-queen).
- 29 "Ælf" was the noun widely used in the names of places and for personal names. Some examples are: Alfred, Ælfric, Alberich.
- 30 Alaric Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England: Matters of Belief, Health, Gender and Identity* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2007), 177.
- 31 Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology II*, 444.
- 32 Elf in Mercian and Kentish, *elf* in Northumbrian, *ylf* in West Saxon to translate the plural "elves", *elfen* used to designate the female elf.
- 33 Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology II*, 442-444.
- 34 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 23.
- 35 Also known as *Prose Edda* or *Younger Edda*, is a work written in Iceland around the thirteenth century, comprising three books: *Gylfaginning*, *Skáldskaparmál* and *Háttatal*.
- 36 Anthony Faulkes, *Edda: Prologue and Gylfaginning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 19; Grimm, *Teutonic Mythology*, 444.
- 37 Faulkes, *Edda: Skáldskaparmál*, 133.
- 38 Aðalbjarnarson Bjarni, *Snorri Sturluson: Heimskringla* (Reykjavík: Hið Íslenzka Fornritfélag, 1941), 79-82.
- 39 Gustav Neckel, *Edda: Die Lieder des Codex Regius nebst verwandten Denkmälern: I. Text* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1962), 116-123.
- 40 Ibidem, 44, 102.
- 41 A skaldic poet who served many Swedish kings and who wrote *Ragnarsdrápa*.
- 42 Jónsson Finnur, *Den norsk-islandske skjaldedigtning* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1912), 12.
- 43 Herbert Dean Meritt, *Old English Glosses: A Collection* (London: Oxford University Press, 1945), 61.
- 44 On folio 101r of the manuscript Leiden, Bibliotheek der Rijksuniversiteit Voccius Lat. 4° 106.
- 45 *Nymphæ: elfinni; Oreades: dūun-elfinni; Dryades: uudu-elfinne; Hamadryades: uater-elfinn; Maides: feld.elfinne; Naiades: sæe-elfinne.*
- 46 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 81-83.
- 47 Alger N. Doane, *Genesis A: A New Edition* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1978), 167.
- 48 Albert S. Cook, *Judith: An Old English Epic Fragment* (Boston: D.C.Heath & Co. Publishers, 1888), 84.
- 49 Frederick Klaeber, *Beowulf* (Boston, Heath, 1950), 5.
- 50 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 119.
- 51 Text and translation from Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, 334-335: *Wyr̅c gōde sealfe wiþ fēondes costunga . biseop wyr̅t . elehtre . harasprecel . strēawberian wīse . sio*

*clufhte wenwyr̥t eorðrima . brēm̥bel æppel . polleian . wermōd . gecnūa þā wyrta ealle āwylle on gōdre buteran wring þurh clād sete under wēofod singe .viii. massan ofer smire þone man mid on þā þunwonge. ⁊ bufan þām ēagum ⁊ ufan þæt heafod ⁊ þā brēost ⁊ under þām earmum þā sīdan . Þeos sealf is gōd wiþ alcre fēondes costunga ⁊ ælfsidenne ⁊ lenctenādle* [“Make a good salve against the temptations of the fiend. Bishopwort, lupin, viper’s bugloss, strawberry plant, the cloved wenwort, earth rime, blackberry, pennyroyal, wormwood; pound all those roots; boil in good butter; wring through a cloth; set them under the altar; sing nine masses over them; smear the man therewith on the temples, and above the eyes, and above the head, and the breast, and the sides under the arms. This salve is good for every temptation of the fiend, and for a man full of elfin tricks, and for typhus-fever.”].

52 Karen Louise Jolly, *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 132.

53 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 123.

54 Ibidem, 121.

55 John H. G. Grattan and Charles J. Singer, *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine: Illustrated Specially From the Semipagan Text ‘Lacnunga’* (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), 108.

56 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, 138-141.

57 Ibidem, 296-297: *Wið ælfe 7 wiþ uncuþum sīdan gnid myrran on win 7 hwites recelses emmicel 7 sceaf gagates dæl þæs stanes on þæt win, drince .III. morgenas neaht nestig oþþe .VIII. oþþe .XII.* [“Against an elf and against a strange visitor, rub myrrh in wine and as mickle of white frankincense, and shave off a part of the stone called agate into the wine, let him drink this for three mornings after his nights fast, or for nine, or for twelve”].

58 Ibidem, 344-345: *Wyr̥c sealf̥e wið ælfcynne 7 nihtgengan 7 þām mannum þe dēofol mid hāmō . genim ēowohumelan . wermōd biseopwyr̥t . elehtre . æschrote . beolone . hārewyr̥t . haransprecel . hēþbergean wīsan . croplēac . gārlēac . hegerīfan corn . gybrīfe . finul . Dō þās wyrta on ān fet sete under wēofod sing ofer .viii. mæssan āwyl on buteran 7 on scēapes smerwe dō hāliges sealt̥es fela on āsēoh þurh clād . weorp þā wyrta on yr̥nende wæter . Gif men hwilc yfel costung weorþe oþþe ælf oþþe nihtgengan . Smire his andwlitan mid þisse sealf̥e 7 on his ēagan dō and þær him sē līchoma sār sīe . 7 rēcelsa hine 7 sēna gelōme his þing biþ sōna sēlre.*

[“Make a salve against the elfin race and nocturnal goblin visitors, and for the men with whom the devil hath carnal commerce; take the ewe hop plant, wormwood, bishopwort, lupin, ashthroat, henbane, harewort, vipers bugloss, heathberry plants, cropleck, garlic, grains of hedgerife, githrife, fennel; put these roots into a vessel, set them under the altar, sing over them nine masses, boil them in butter and sheeps’ grease, add much holy salt, strain through a cloth, throw the roots into running water. If any ill tempting occur to a man, or an

elf or goblin night visitors come, smear his forehead with this salve, and put it on his eyes, and where his body is sore, and cense him, and sign him frequently (with the sign of the cross); his condition will soon be better”].

59 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 126.

60 Ibidem, 2-3: *Hlūde wæran býlā hlūde dā h̄yofor pone hlēw ridan / wæran ānmōde dā h̄yofor land ridan / scyld dū dē nū þū ðysne nið genesan mōte / ūt l̄ytel spere gif h̄er inne s̄ie / stōd under linde under lēohtum scyldre / þ̄ær dā mihtigan wīf hyra mægen berēddon / 7 h̄ygyllende gāras sēndan / ic him oðerne eft wille sēndan / flēogende flāne forane tōgēanes / ūt l̄ytel spere gif hit h̄er inne s̄y • / s̄et smið slōh seax / l̄ytel iserna wund swīde / ūt l̄ytel spere gif h̄er inne s̄y / syx smiðas sētan welspera worhtan / ūt spere n̄as in spere / gif h̄er inne s̄y isenes dēl / h̄egtessan geweorc hit sceal gemyltan / gif dū wære on fell scoten oððe wære on flāsc scoten / oððe wære on blōd scoten / oððe wære on lið scoten n̄æfre ne s̄yðin lif ātāsed / gif hit wære ēsa gescot oððe hit wære **ylfā gescot** / oððe hit wære h̄egtessan gescot nū ic wille d̄in helpan / þis dē tō bōte ēsa gescotes d̄is dē tō bōte **ylfā gescotes** / d̄is dē tō bōte h̄egtessan gescotes ic d̄in wille helpan / flēo þ̄ær on fyrgenh̄æfde / h̄al westū helpe d̄in drihten / nim þonne þæt seax ādō on wētan.* [“They were loud, yes, loud, when they rode over the (burial) mound; they were fierce when they rode across the land. Shield yourself now, you can survive this strife. Out, little spear, if there is one here within. It stood under/behind lime-wood (i.e. a shield), under a light-colored/light-weight shield, where those mighty women marshalled their powers, and they sent shrieking spears. I will send another back, a flying arrow ahead in opposition. Out, little spear, if it is here within. A craftsman sat, forged a knife/knives; small as swords go, violent the wound. Out, little spear, if it should be here within. Six craftsmen sat, wrought slaughter-spears. Be out, spear, not in, spear. If there is here within a piece of iron/swords, the work/deed of h̄egtessan, it must melt. If you were scoten in the skin or were scoten in the flesh, or were scoten in the blood, or were scoten in the limb, may your life never be harmed. If it was the gescot of ēse or it was the gescot of ælfe or it was the gescot of h̄egtessan, now I want to help you. This for you as a remedy for the gescot of ēse; this for you as a remedy for the gescot of ælfe, this for you as a remedy for the gescot of h̄egtessan; I will help you. Fly around there on the mountain top. Be healthy, may the Lord help you. Then take the knife; put it in (the) liquid.”]

61 Felix Grendon, “The Anglo-Saxon Charms,” *The Journal of American Folk-lore* 22, no. 84 (1909): 112.

62 One more piece of evidence for the relation between elves and Æsir, as anticipated in the Scandinavian examples.

63 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 171.

64 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, 291-293: *Gif hors ofscoten s̄ie. nim þonne þæt seax þe þæt hæfte s̄ie fealo hryperes horn 7 s̄ien .III. arene næglas on. Writ þonne þām horse*

*on þām hēafde foran crīstes mæl þæt hit blēde . Writ þonne on þām hricge crīstes mæl ⁊ on leoþa gehwīlcum þe þū atfēolan mæge. nim þonne þæt winestre ēare þurh sting swīgende. Þis þū scealt dōn. genim āne girde slēah on þæt bæc þonne biþ þæt hors hāl. ⁊ āwrit on þæs seaxes horne þās word. Benedicite omnia opera domini dominum. Syþæt ylfa þe him sīe þis him mæg tō bōte. [“If a horse is badly pained. Take then a dagger whose haft is of fallowox’s horn and in which there are three brass nails. Write/inscribe on the horse, on the forehead, Christ’s mark, so it bleeds. Write/inscribe then Christ’s mark on the spine and on each of the limbs which you can grasp. Then take the left ear, pierce it in silence. This shall you do: take a staff; strike on the back; then the horse will be well. And write/inscribe on the dagger’s handle these words: bless all the works of the Lord of lords. Should it be ælfe’s, which is on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it.”]*

65 Ibidem, 290-291.

66 Ibidem, 344-347: *Wið ælfadle: nim bīscēopwyr̄t, fīnul, elehtre, ælfponan niþowearde, and gehalgodes crīstes mæles ragu and stor. Do ælcra hand fulle. Bebind ealle þa wyrta on claþe. Bedyp on font wætre gehalgodum þriwa. Let singan ofer .iii. massan: ane Omnibus Sanctis, oþre Contra Tribulationem, þriððan Pro Infirmis. Do þonne gleda an gledfæt and lege þa wyrta on. Gerec þone man mid þam wrytum ær undern and on niht, and sing letania and credan and pater noster, and writ him crīstes mæl on ælcum lime, and nim lytle hand fulle þæs ilcan cynnes wyrta, gelice gehalgode, and wyl on meolce. Dryp þriwa gehalgodes wætres on and sƳe ær his mete. Him biþ sona sel. [“Against elf disease; take bishopwort, fennel, lupin, the lower part of enchanters nightshade, and moss or lichen from the hallowed sign of Christ, and incense, of each a hand full; bind all the roots in a cloth, dip it thrice in hallowed font water, have sung over it three masses, one Omnibus Sanctis, another Contra Tribulationem, a third Pro Infirmis. Then put hot coals in a chafing dish and lay those plants in [it]. Smoke that person with the plants before 9 a.m. and at night, and sing litanies and credos and Pater Noster, and write the sign of the cross on each of his limbs, and take a little handful of the same plants of that kind, likewise consecrated, and boil in milk. Drip three [drops] of the holy water into [it] and sup [it] before his food. Soon he will be well”].*

67 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 105.

68 Cockayne, *Leechdoms*, 350-353: *Gif mon biþ on wæter ælf adle, þonne beoþ him þa hand næglas wonne and þa eagan tearige, and wile locian niþer. Do him þis to læcedome: eoforþrote, cassuc, fone niþowearde, eowberge, elehtre, eolone, mersc mealuan crop, fen minte, dile, līlie, artorlaþe, polleie, marbubie, docce, ellen, felterre, wermod, streawbergean leaf, consold. Ofgeot mid ealaþ. Do halig wæter to. Sing þis geador ofer þriwa [...] [“If a person has water-elf-disease, then the fingernails will be dark and the eyes teary, and he will look downwards. Give*

this to him as medicine: stemless carline thistle, reed, the lower part of flag, yewberry, lupin, elecampane, marshmallow head, water mint, dill, lily, fumitory, pennyroyal, white horehound, dock, elder, common centaury, wormwood, strawberry leaf, [and] comfrey. Soak with ale. Put holy water into [it]. Sing this incantation over [it] three times...”].

69 Hall, *Elves in Anglo-Saxon England*, 106.