
Conference Report

Ritualisierte Praktiken: Formeln – Zeichen – Rezeptarien

Organizer: Theresa Holler, Universität Basel; Tina Terrahe, Universität Greifswald; Katja Trippett, Universität Leipzig

Date, Venue: 07.11.2024 – 08.11.2024, Basel

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The second meeting of the academic DFG network "*Wort – Wirkung – Wunder: Sprache und Macht in der Vormoderne zwischen Religion, Magie und Medizin*" focused on ritualized practices, particularly image and language symbols attributed with transformative significance, as essential elements of practical actions. The discussions also explored the principles that alter effects, which can be identified through formulas, prayers, recipes, and scriptural symbols preserved on various artifacts. Special attention was given to pharmacological texts and manuscripts from the University Library of Basel, including early vernacular evidence of Old High German. These manuscripts reflect knowledge transfer practices while simultaneously illustrating linguistically ritualized performativity.

ALETTA LEIPOLD (Leipzig) opened the first thematic session—held in the University Library of Basel and primarily dedicated to early medieval objects, including manuscripts from the Basel collection—with a lecture on incantations and their earliest transmission in the German language. She demonstrated that texts like the *Merseburg Charms* attempted to restore balance in a disrupted world. She pointed out the superficial Christianization of these texts, noting that their archaic thought patterns had been preserved. As an example of analogical magic, she analyzed the *Second Merseburg Charm*, in which past events are cited and related to the present. She emphasized the importance of spoken words over written ones, as seen, for instance, in amulets.

Following this, ALMUT MIKELEITIS-WINTER (Leipzig) delved deeper into the famous *Basel Recipes* and the context of their manuscript transmission (*Basel, UB, Cod F III*). A striking feature is the lack of intertextual connections between the Latin text and the German passages. The collection contains various remedies for diseases, such as fever, but lacks systematic disease classifications. From a linguistic-historical perspective, the *Basel Recipes* continue to raise many questions.

After the break, ANDREAS NIEVERGELT (Zurich) introduced the medieval source genre of stylus glosses (*Griffelglossen*). These glosses, inscribed with a stylus into parchment, appear in both Latin and Old High German. Often interlinear and serving as vernacular translation aids, they were also added to margins without direct reference to the main text. According to Nievergelt, stylus glosses are of great importance for the history of Old High German vocabulary transmission. He also highlighted two challenges in researching them: their visibility, which depends on specific lighting conditions, and the resulting difficulties in readability.

Subsequently, MONIKA STUDER (University Library of Basel) and KRISTINA DOMANSKI (Basel) presented several manuscripts from the University Library of Basel, including stylus glosses in *Cod. F III 15c*, recipe collections (*F III 15a*), and other medical texts such as the *Antidotarium Magnum* (*Cod. D III 14*) and a facsimile of the *Herbarium* (*Ms 296*).

The afternoon sessions, as well as the remainder of the workshop, took place at the *Forum eikones*. The first presentation was given by JAN KÖNIG (Lüneburg), who introduced his preliminary research on the magical symbolism of Germanic ethnonyms. He emphasized how ethnic designations functioned as carriers of symbolic power in the context of myths and rituals. Using the example of the Lombards, he questioned whether their name not only marked ethnic identity but also served a narrative function and conveyed magical and social meanings.

Next, KLAUS-DIETRICH FISCHER (Mainz) lectured on early medieval remedies against worms. He highlighted that the term *worm* was used both for actual parasites and symbolically for various pathogens. The idea of a "worm in the flesh" stemmed from visually observable disease symptoms, such as skin conditions. Fischer referenced sources including Isidore of Seville and his comments on worms, noting that some of these beliefs were rooted more in folk tradition than in scientific medicine.

The final session of the first day featured ILDAR GARIPZANOV (Oslo), who presented the interdisciplinary project *MINiTEXTS* (*Minuscule Texts: Marginalized Voices in Early Medieval Latin Culture c. 700–c. 1000*). He argued that minuscule texts—short Latin texts embedded in medieval manuscripts—represented a unique corpus of practical knowledge deeply integrated into early medieval social practices. Often appearing as marginal glosses or later additions, these texts provide insights into the social and cultural practices of the time. The project aims to contribute to a reevaluation of early medieval heterogeneous culture and ongoing scholarly debates on medieval cultural history.

A highlight of the conference was the public evening lecture by CHRISTOPH AUFFARTH (Bremen), titled "*The End of Magic: The Banning of a Social Practice and the Paradigm Shift in Worldview*." In an engaging presentation, he traced the transformation of the magical worldview from the 15th / 16th centuries to the 20th century. Auffarth showed that during the Reformation, the concept of magic became distinct from religion. Reformers questioned the effectiveness of traditional Christian practices, emphasizing *sola fide* (faith only). This led to an expansion of the term *maleficium*, encompassing not only rituals, sacraments, and blessings of the "old" Church but also curses and exorcisms, all of which were redefined as superstition and criminalized. Magic thus became synonymous with superstition, both of which were to be eradicated from the reformed Christian society. According to Auffarth, the term *magic* in the 16th century became a polemical tool in the Reformers' struggle for theological dominance. It was only with the Enlightenment at the end of the 17th century that magic and magical thinking were replaced by a scientific worldview. Auffarth concluded that magical practices continue to exist in various societal groups today (e.g., Neopaganism and Wicca), competing with institutionalized religion.

The second day of the meeting began with ISABEL GRIMM-STADELMANN (Munich), who examined *Iatromagic and Ritualized Therapeutic Concepts in the Byzantine Era*. She analyzed healing rituals based on physiological and psychological concepts, emphasizing the influence of Greek-Egyptian traditions. Special attention was given to the *Testamentum Salomonis* and the *Kyranides*, both of which merge magical and medical beliefs.

KATJA TRIPLETT (Leipzig / Marburg) spoke on healing practices in Japan and East Asia. She first situated Japanese medicine within a broader East Asian context, highlighting its links to both human and veterinary medicine. Her talk focused on two hippiatric manuscripts that combine practical and esoteric knowledge for treating horses, incorporating both magical and practical elements. Plants in these texts symbolized not only physical remedies but also spiritual potency.

Next, THERESA HOLLER (Basel) discussed early medieval herbals, including the well-known *Herbarium* of Pseudo-Apuleius. She argued that plant illustrations were less about realistic depictions and more about serving as didactic tools, where medicinally relevant parts, such as roots, were often highlighted using color coding. Holler proposed that roots symbolized the *essence* of the plant and possibly served as a metonym for its overall vitality and potency.

THERESA BAYER (Zurich) addressed the legal treatment of magic in the laws of Charlemagne's era. She explained that all forms of magic, whether healing or harmful, were considered violations of divine will. However, local authorities struggled to enforce these broad regulations. Bayer described these efforts as part of a larger initiative to deepen Christian influence across society, aimed not only at the spiritual well-being of individuals but also at ensuring the stability of the empire.

The final presentation was given by ALDERIK BLOM (Marburg), who analyzed the *Gallic Curse Tablet of Chamalières*. He placed the tablet within the broader context of Roman binding magic and, through linguistic and content-based analysis, demonstrated its authenticity as a *defixio* (curse tablet). Blom discussed its historical and topographical context before guiding the audience through a detailed examination of its text.

In the context of the workshop, the focus was on the broad spectrum of functions and attributions of meaning of various ritualized practices. It became clear that both magical and non-magical rituals, signs and symbols were used in a wide variety of cultural and religious contexts. Medical healing practices in particular showed that they combine magical rituals and medical ideas. Also, the need to discuss common categories and definitions that do justice to the objects of research beyond disciplinary boundaries and thus better capture the core of effect-altering principles and rituals became clear.

Konferenzübersicht:

Theresa Holler (Basel) / Tina Terrahe (Greifswald) / Katja Triplett (Marburg / Leipzig): Begrüßung und Einleitung

Aletta Leipold (Leipzig): Beschwörungen und ihre früheste Überlieferung im Deutschen

Almut Mikeleitits Winter (Leipzig): Im Schnittpunkt der Traditionen: Die Basler Rezepte und ihre Kontexte

Andreas Nievergelt (Zürich): Verborgene Gelehrsamkeit. Die mittelalterlichen Griffelglossen

Monika Studer / Kristina Domanski (Basel): Handschriften-Autopsie mit der Handschriftenabteilung der Universitätsbibliothek Basel mit F III 15c (Griffelglossen); F III 15a (Basler Rezepte); D III 34 (Mulomedicina Chironis); D III 14 (Antidotarium Magnum); Faksimile Ms 296 (Herbar)

Jan König (Lüneburg): Magische Symbolik germanischer Ethonyme aus pragmalinguistischer, poetischer und kultureller Perspektive

Klaus-Dietrich Fischer (Mainz): Das Tier in mir

Ildar Garipzanov (Oslo): Minuscule texts at the crossroads of religion, magic, and medicine. Presentation of the MINiTEXTS project

Christoph Auffarth (Bremen): Das Ende der Magie: Ächtung einer sozialen Handlungspraxis und Paradigmenwechsel eines Weltbildes

Isabel Grimm-Stadelmann (München): Iatromagie und ritualisierte Therapiekonzepte im byzantinischen Zeitalter

Katja Triplett (Leipzig / Marburg): Rituale für die Wirkmächtigkeit bestimmter Pflanzen und Pilze: Beispiele aus der vormodernen ostasiatischen Medizin

Theresa Holler (Basel): Pflanzenkraft. Ritualisierte Praktiken in frühmittelalterlichen Herbarien

Theresa Bayer (Zürich): Norm und Praxis. Zum rechtlichen Umgang mit Heilzubern zur Zeit Karls des Großen

Alderik Blom (Marburg): Eine Prozessdefixio? Noch einmal die gallische Fluchtafel von Chamalières

Citation

Leonhard Lietz / Tim Hertogh, Conference Report: *Ritualisierte Praktiken: Formeln – Zeichen – Rezeptarien*, in: H-Soz-Kult, 21.06.2025, <https://www.hsozkult.de/conferencereport/id/fdkn-155616>