

# PASTORAL CARE AND PROGNOSTICS IN THE CAROLINGIAN PERIOD

THE CASE OF EL ESCORIAL, REAL BIBLIOTECA  
DI SAN LORENZO, MS L III 8

‘The first day of the moon is useful for doing all things. Whoever falls sick will languish for a long time, and will have to bear a long illness, and whatever is seen in a dream will be for joy, and if you see yourself conquered, you will defy all your enemies, and a child born on this day will be vigorous.’<sup>1</sup>

This remarkable bit of information, followed by a day-to-day continuation for the remaining 29 days of the moon, can be found in a manuscript written between 860 and 870, possibly in Senlis, which is nowadays known as EL ESCORIAL, *Real Biblioteca di San Lorenzo*, ms L III 8.<sup>2</sup> It is a text labelled ‘general lunary’ by modern scholars,

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1. EL ESCORIAL, *Real Bibliotheca di San Lorenzo*, ms L III 8, f. 184r: ‘Luna I. Haec omnibus agentibus utile est. In lectio qui inciderit diu languescit et longa infirmitate patitur et somnus quicquid uidetur in gaudium conuertitur et si uideris te uinci tu uincis omnes inimicos tuos et infans si fuerit natus uitalis erit.’ This is my own transcription, which has not been corrected into ‘proper Latin’. Capitals and minimal punctuation have been added where needed, however, and abbreviations have been silently resolved. As far as I know, this text in this manuscript has thus far not been noted by those studying prognostic texts. A close but 12<sup>th</sup>-century copy of this text, equally unknown in the scholarly literature, can be found in TRIER, *Bibliothek des Priesterseminars*, ms 40, f. 15r-16v. I thank Becca Große for finding this manuscript and sharing it with me. Similar, but still different versions of this text have been printed in Emanuel SVENBERG, *De Latinska lunaria. Text och studier* (Göteborg, 1936); Christoph WEISSER, *Studien zum mittelalterlichen Krankheitslunar. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte laienastrologischer Fachprosa*. Würzburger medizinhistorische Forschungen, Band 21 (Hanover, 1981); R.M. LIUZZA, *Anglo-Saxon prognostics. An edition and translation of texts from London, British Library, ms Cotton Tiberius A.III* (Cambridge, 2010); László Sándor CHARDONNENS, *Anglo-Saxon prognostics. A study of the genre with a text edition*, PhD-thesis, Leiden 2006. A history of Latin prognostics that covers the European mainland still needs to be written.

2. For a description of the manuscript see Susan A. KEEFE, *Water and the word. Baptism and the education of the clergy in Carolingian Europe II* (Notre Dame, 2002), pp. 19-23; Arno BORST, *Schriften zur Komputistik im Frankenreich von 721 bis 818 I*, MGH Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters 21 (Hanover, 2006), pp. 228-229; Rudolf POKORNY, *MGH Capitula episcoporum III*

and considered to belong to a wider genre of so-called 'prognostics'.<sup>3</sup> What this lunary does is describe certain characteristics of each day, depending on the age of the moon. It is, therefore, not so much a text that foretells the future, but rather one that describes patterns which were believed to repeat themselves with the cycle of the moon, and were therefore predictable. The manuscript as a whole is a 189 folio long compilation of dozens of texts, including liturgy, canon law, *computus*, penitentials, episcopal statutes, theological expositions and a substantial set of homilies.<sup>4</sup> Apart from the lunary, the manuscript contains another prognostic text known as the *Subputatio Esdrae*, and a later hand added a list of so-called Egyptian days in an empty space.<sup>5</sup> The bulk of the manuscript was written by one hand, while at least six other people added short texts in empty spaces, practiced writing, corrected, and occasionally annotated, which continued into the twelfth century.<sup>6</sup> The lay-out of the book is rather no-nonsense: the hands are functional rather than beautiful, there is some hierarchy of scripts, and hardly any decoration. This is, in other words, a practical book that had a long and active life. In the scholarly literature, it has been called, respectively, a *Sammelhandschrift*, a bishop's pastoral manual, as well as a handbook for a local priest.<sup>7</sup> Pastoral care of a lay flock is evidently its main theme, which would make it

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(Hanover, 1995), pp. 78-9; Susan A. KEEFE, *A catalogue of works pertaining to the explanation of the Creed in Carolingian manuscripts*, *Instrumenta Patristica et Mediaevalia* 63 (Turnhout, 2012), pp. 232-33; Bernhard BISCHOFF, *Katalog der festländische Handschriften (mit Ausnahme der Wisigotischen)* I (Wiesbaden, 1998), no. 1195.

3. For an explanation of the term and relevant older literature see LIUZZA, *Anglo-Saxon prognostics*, pp. 1-2.

4. In what follows I will rely on Keefe's description of the manuscript, as well as on my own study of its microfilm.

5. In addition to the 'general lunary' cited above, the manuscript contains the *Subputatio Esdrae* (f. 7r-v), which forecasts the weather for a whole year depending on the day of the week on which January 1<sup>st</sup> falls. Inserted later on f. 41v is a list of so-called 'Egyptian days', which were understood as general unlucky days. The El Escorial manuscript is unknown to E. Ann MATTER, 'The *Revelatio Esdrae* in Latin and English traditions', *Revue Bénédictine* 92 (1982), pp. 376-392.

6. For instance *maniculae*, which replaced the earlier 'nota' sign from the twelfth century onwards at f. 15v-16r. I thank Irene van Renswoude for pointing this out to me.

7. '*Sammelhandschrift kanonistischer, patristischer und liturgischer Texte*': Peter BROMMER, *MGH Cap.ep.* I (Hanover, 1984), p. 24; 'bishop's pastoral manual': KEEFE, *A catalogue*, p. 232; '*Handbuch für den Landpfarrer*': Rudolf POKORNY, *MGH Cap.ep.* IV (Hanover, 2005), p. 9. Originally the book was longer, for at least one quire is missing between f. 29v and 30r, and one or more pages have gone between f. 69v and 70r, and between f. 117v and f. 118r.

a collection suitable for bishops and priests both, while yet another possibility is that the book was used for teaching future priests in episcopal schools.<sup>8</sup> What is striking about it, is the fact that we find prognostic texts in a manuscript intended for pastoral care. After all, what use would a Christian pastor have for such texts? Reading the night sky was, after all, the terrain of *mathematici*, *haruspices*, and other sinister people, who turn up regularly in contemporary prescriptive texts, with a warning to all Christians to steer clear of such practices. A reader of the eighteenth or nineteenth century was clearly surprised by his encounter with the lunary in this otherwise respectable pastoral collection, and wrote an indignant '*fabula*' in the margin. Even today, early medieval prognostic texts are often interpreted as 'pagan remains' or superstitions disapproved of by ecclesiastical authorities.<sup>9</sup> So how are we to interpret the presence of not one but three prognostic texts in the El Escorial manuscript?

In what follows, I will try to answer this question in three phases, which will come together in an examination of the manuscript as a whole. In the first place, I will analyse the most important recent scholarly approaches to texts designated as prognostics, which will show how conceptions of 'good Christianity' versus 'bad paganism' or 'superstition' play a significant role and often predetermine such interpretations. One way to finding a less binary, alternative interpretation, is, secondly, a careful re-reading of those prescriptive texts warning against 'pagan practices' and 'superstitions'. This will show that the prescriptions do not automatically imply that all practices listed were considered to be bad, superstitious or pagan, but rather that it was forbidden to Christians to be involved in such

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8. Compare, for instance the Vatican manuscript Pal. lat. 485, which according to Paxton was used in an episcopal school to train future clergy for the surrounding diocese. See Frederick S. PAXTON, 'Bonus liber: A late Carolingian clerical manual from Lorsch', in *The two laws: studies in medieval legal history dedicated to Stephan Küttner*, eds. Laurent MAYALI and Stephanie A.J. TIBBETS, *Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Canon Law* (Washington, 1990), pp. 1-30. Also Faith WALLIS, 'Medicine in medieval calendar manuscripts', in: Margaret R. SCHLEISSNER, *Manuscripts sources of medieval medicine. A book of essays* (New York/London, 1995), pp. 105-143 at 111-22.

9. See, for instance, Ludo MILIS ed., *De heidense middeleeuwen* (Brussels/Rome, 1991), translated as *The pagan middle ages* (Woodbridge, 1998); Valerie FLINT, *The rise of magic in early medieval Europe* (Oxford/Princeton, 1991); Jean-Claude SCHMITT, *Bijgeloof in de middeleeuwen* (Nijmegen, 1995), which originally appeared as chapter 4, 'Les superstitions' of Jacques LE GOFF and René RÉMOND eds., *Histoire de la France religieuse: des origines au XIV<sup>e</sup> siècle. Des dieux de la Gaule à la papauté d'Avignon* (Paris, 1988).

affairs if practiced by the wrong people. This, thirdly, opens the way to a closer look at the extant Carolingian manuscripts containing prognostic texts. Especially in the context of medical and computistical collections, such texts were intentionally copied among material that was, in fact, very similar, but firmly beyond suspicion. What is more, prognostics were clearly perceived to be not only unproblematic, but even useful, showing how some forms of belief in predictable patterns of health, fate and character could be perfectly acceptable if based on learning and expertise. A closer analysis of the single case of the El Escorial manuscript will underline this, and show how a collection of texts for pastoral care (including prescriptions against 'pagan practices') could include prognostic texts without any problem.

#### I. INTERPRETATIONS OF EARLY MEDIEVAL PROGNOSTIC TEXTS

As so many labels devised to describe early medieval texts, the term 'prognostics' as I use it here follows that of current scholarship, and is no more than a modern way of lumping together texts that, in one way or the other, record patterns of, for instance, health, harvest, or the weather that were believed to be repetitive and hence predictable.<sup>10</sup> No text that is currently considered to be 'prognostic' in this sense was ever called by this name in any early medieval text or manuscript. All the same, the term helps us see how these texts, at least to the modern eye, stand out from others. The term 'prognostics' is therefore useful as a category of analysis, even though early medieval people might not have viewed texts as varied as birth lunaries, Apuleian spheres and lists of Egyptian days as belonging together in any significant way.<sup>11</sup> In the older literature, such mat-

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10. CHARDONNENS, *Anglo-Saxon prognostics*, p. 7 proposes the following definition: '... a codified means of predicting events in the life-time of an individual or identifiable group of individuals, using observation of signs and times, or mantic divination.' LIUZZA, *Anglo-Saxon prognostics*, pp. 59-60 approaches the problem of definition by emphasising what prognostics are *not*.

11. It is important to note here that in Late Anglo-Saxon England, manuscripts were compiled that can be considered as collections of prognostic texts, such as LONDON, *British Library*, ms Cotton Tiberius A.III studied by LIUZZA, *Anglo-Saxon prognostics*, there p. 77 for his observations on this point. Such collections do, to my best knowledge, not exist in Carolingian manuscripts, although there are many manuscripts that contain more than one prognostic text. The common denominators in these manuscripts are, however, not prognostic, but for instance medical. A good example is ms BERLIN, *Deutsche Staatsbiblio-*



ters of definition were considered of little interest, however. Scholars of various plumage have long marvelled over prognostic texts as expressions of folklore (as opposed to 'high' or 'learned' culture) with a remarkable continuity, and the origins of these texts, long before the dawn of European civilisation, were considered more interesting than their use and function in the time in which they were copied.<sup>12</sup> The earliest prognostic texts, inscribed on clay tablets, can, indeed, be traced back to Ancient Babylonia; some three millennia later, such texts were still enthusiastically copied in almanacs of the Early Modern period.<sup>13</sup> More recently, prognostics have become the terrain of those interested in cultural and religious history, and it is here that some different approaches to the problem of the interpretation of prognostic texts can be found. Two frames of interpretation are important here, which I will discuss in turn in order to find a productive approach to the material in the El Escorial manuscript.

One frame of interpretation, that caused much discussion in the 90s of the last century, and is still influential today, is offered by scholars such as Ludo Milis, Jean-Claude Schmitt and Valerie Flint, who are not so much concerned with the manuscripts, as by what they perceive as the dynamic (and sometimes outright hostile) interaction between the Christian church and 'pagan survivals', or between accepted and forbidden 'magic' or 'superstitions'. What these authors have in common, is that they start from a black-and-white opposition between Christianity/pagan survivals, clerics/magicians, 'real Christianity'/superstitions respectively.<sup>14</sup> The other idea they share is that of the church as a well-oiled machine, in which bishops and abbots everywhere co-operated in harmonious consent and knew exactly what did, and did not, belong to 'real Christianity'. Indeed, boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable practice were redrawn regularly, as for instance Flint emphasises, but at the core of it all there was Christianity as a clearly defined and definable monolith of approved beliefs and practices. It is not my

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*thek*, Phill. 1790, a collection of late Roman medical texts, that also contains six 'medical prognostics'. Cf. BECCARIA, *I codici di medicina*, no. 50.

12. This point is eloquently expressed by R.M. LIUZZA, 'What the thunder said: Anglo-Saxon brontologies and the problem of sources', *Review of English Studies*, New Series 55 (2004), pp. 1-23 at p. 5.

13. See, for instance, Max FÖRSTER, 'Vom Fortleben antiker Sammelunare im Englischen und in anderen Volkssprachen', *Anglia* 55/56 (1941), pp. 1-41.

14. See note 9.

purpose here to discuss these views in full – this has been done thoroughly by others.<sup>15</sup> What is more interesting here is to see that practices involving prognostics are categorised by these authors as – at least initially – ‘wrong’ and non-Christian.

To Flint, any form of forecasting the future is fundamentally non-Christian divination, even though in the course of the ninth century it was grudgingly accepted, ‘Christianised’, and incorporated by the Christian church.<sup>16</sup> In part, so she argues, such ‘magic’ was absorbed into Christianity as a compromise with Christians attached to older superstitions and pagan practices, whereas other ‘magic’ was adopted for its practical possibilities in a Christian context. Medical prognostics, for instance, were accepted and incorporated (thus turning from ‘rejected magic’ into ‘accepted magic’), while practices considered more harmful (those of the *aruspices* of prescriptive texts, for instance; see below) were condemned and forbidden. In this sense, magic became an important element of early medieval Christianity, its most enthusiastic students the clergy itself.<sup>17</sup> Milis, in turn, considers early medieval Europe as essentially pagan, covered only with a thin and superficial layer of Christianity. Where the Christian religion left *lacunae*, paganism filled the gaps, while what he considers ‘real’, internalised religion was something of the future.<sup>18</sup> In the views of both authors, then, prognostic practices and, by inference, texts, belong squarely outside the sphere of Christianity, even though, in due time, some of them may have become suitably adapted and incorporated. Either as ‘magic’, as ‘pagan survival’, or as ‘superstition’, prognostics were essentially alien, and potentially hostile, to the world of Christian thought.

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15. For discussions see, amongst others, the reviews of Milis’ book by Marco MOSTERT in *Revue belge de philologie et d’histoire* 71 (1993), pp. 933–37 and by Yuri SLOYANOV in *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 44 (1993), pp. 115–116. Flint’s book has received rather more attention, for instance in reviews by Fred PAXTON in *American Historical Review* 97 (1992), pp. 830–31, by Robert MARKUS in *The English Historical Review* 107 (1992), pp. 378–380 and by Jean A. TRUAX in *Speculum* 68 (1993), pp. 768–770. Alexander MURRAY, ‘Review article. Missionaries and magic in Dark-Age Europe’, *Past & Present* 136 (1992), pp. 186–205 uses Flint’s book to open up wider discussions about the subject and cites much of the relevant literature.

16. Valerie FLINT, ‘The transmission of astrology in the early middle ages’, *Viator* 21 (1990), pp. 1–27 at pp. 17–19, an idea repeated and elaborated in her *The rise of magic*, p. 142. Cfr. LIUZZA, ‘What the thunder said’, p. 4.

17. FLINT, *The rise of magic*.

18. MILIS, *The pagan middle ages*.

Whatever one may make of such strong opposites as a frame of interpretation, they do underline the issue of boundaries, which is important to the contextualisation of prognostic texts. Especially Flint's work shows, moreover, how there were large grey areas that gave room for manoeuvre and experimentation. Whether a practice ended up as accepted or rejected was, moreover, subject to discussion and negotiation, which is an idea that remains in place even if one rejects her over-arching binary model. An issue important to both authors, that to my mind is of no relevance to the interpretation of the Carolingian material, is that of the possibly very ancient roots of these practices. Even though prognostic texts may well reflect pagan or in any event pre-Christian practices, this is not how Carolingian compilers perceived them. This is a crucial point, for it centres on the question of what early medieval people themselves thought what they were doing, and why. It is, after all, only by trying to reconstruct their ideas that we can ever hope to understand what those texts we label 'prognostic' meant to them. I will come back to this in the section about the manuscript contexts of prognostic texts.

A second, very different, frame of interpretation important here focusses on manuscripts. Faith Wallis, for instance, emphasises the 'survival by association' of prognostic texts. In her study of medical texts in early medieval computistical collections, she rightly emphasises the gravitational force of such compendia, in which all kinds of material ended up that, strictly speaking (and again, from a modern point of view), was not computistic or calendrical. Like other snippets of knowledge considered important or useful by the compilers, prognostic texts were incorporated into these compendia, which became a 'natural habitat' for some of these texts. After all, many prognostics are in form and content very close to computistical material, so the distinction between these different (modern!) categories of texts was perhaps not all that apparent to early medieval compilers and students of the manuscripts.<sup>19</sup> Wallis' views are, I think, valid and important, since her research underlines the artificiality of the term 'prognostics' as a modern category, and shows how in the context of the compendia she describes, they would not stand out as alien, odd

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19. WALLIS, 'Medicine in medieval calendar manuscripts', pp. 106-107. A similar view is expressed by Ivana DOBCHEVA, 'The umbrella of Carolingian computus', in: María José MUÑOZ, Patricia CAÑZARES and Cristina MARTÍN eds., *La compilación del saber en la edad media. La compilation du savoir au moyen âge. The compilation of knowledge in the middle ages* (Porto, 2013), pp. 211-230.

or pagan. I will return to this point below when I will try to extend her ideas to other manuscript contexts.

More recently, scholars such as Roy Liuzza, Lorenzo DiTommaso and Sandór Chardonns have expressed a more nuanced view of early medieval religion than Flint and Milis, and have also taken the manuscript-based approach on board. What they have in common is that they all try to make sense of prognostic material in their manuscript context, much in the vein of Wallis' work. Liuzza and Chardonns have both studied Anglo-Saxon corpora of prognostic texts, while DiTommaso is interested in the complete transmission history of a few specific prognostic texts in Hebrew, Latin, Greek and vernacular traditions.<sup>20</sup> The fact that they all three focus on manuscripts, however, does not mean that they interpret prognostic texts in exactly the same way. Chardonns is the most outspoken of the three, placing these texts firmly in the world of *superstitio*, so 'outside [the] dominant religious system'.<sup>21</sup> He interprets them, much in line with scholars such as Flint, as 'bookish' superstitions interesting to monastic scholars, and firmly excludes the possibility that prognostics were used for pastoral purposes.<sup>22</sup> Liuzza, on the basis of the same Anglo-Saxon corpus, believes, however, that prognostics operated in the same world as the psalms, prayers and learned texts with which they have been transmitted, but does not discuss how.<sup>23</sup> Unlike Wallis, then, she believes that such texts might not have started out as accidental hitch-hikers that found a home in learned corpora, but should be considered as intentionally and purposefully chosen additions to these manuscripts. What is more, prognostic practices might even have been 'congruent with the world-view of monks and priests', which opens up the possibility of their use in pastoral care.<sup>24</sup> Like DiTommaso, who considers prognostic texts and

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20. Lorenzo DiTommaso, 'Greek, Latin and Hebrew manuscripts of the *Somniale Danielis* and *Lunationes Danielis* in the Vatican library', *Manuscripta* 47/48 (2004), pp. 1-42.

21. Chardonns, *Anglo-Saxon prognostics*, p. 223. His views on superstitions are informed by Harmening, *Superstitio*.

22. Chardonns, *Anglo-Saxon prognostics*, p. 247-251. He is, as far as I can see, not aware of the existence of the El Escorial manuscript.

23. Roy Michael Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon prognostics in context: a survey and handlist of manuscripts', *Anglo-Saxon England* 30 (2001), pp. 181-230 at p. 183.

24. Liuzza, 'Anglo-Saxon prognostics', p. 209.

practices as 'part of western mediaeval Christian tradition', he sees no contradiction in Christian clergy using prognostic texts.<sup>25</sup>

All in all, then, two questions remain to be answered in order to decide how to approach prognostic texts in general, and the prognostics in the El Escorial manuscript specifically. The first would be how all the prohibitions and prescriptions against practices such as reading the night sky and telling the future should be interpreted. The main point here seems to boil down to the question whether we should consider prognostics as part of Christian culture, or rather as something outside of it. The second question is in what manuscript contexts exactly prognostic texts turn up in the Carolingian period, for it is only against this background that any theories about the use and meaning of these texts can make sense.

## II. LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE: PRACTICES AND PROHIBITIONS

Even though our modern concept of prognostic texts did not exist in the early middle ages, notions of looking for patterns that extended into the future did. Two types of practices considered important and highly respectable in this sense were connected to medicine and *computus*, respectively, while we find negative connotations in prescriptions aimed against what bishops called, disapprovingly, 'superstitious practices'.

People who studied medical manuscripts in the early middle ages would surely be familiar with the idea that making informed predictions about health and disease was one of the most important skills a medical expert should master. Hippocrates, to mention just one influential example, wrote about the diagnosis and development of diseases. This text was translated into Latin in the fifth or sixth century, and became well-known in the Carolingian period.<sup>26</sup> Its very opening is important here, and I therefore quote it in full:

'It appears to me a most excellent thing for the physician to cultivate *prognosis*, for by foreseeing and foretelling the present, the past, and the future in the presence of the sick, and explaining

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25. Lorenzo DiTommaso, 'Pseudepigrapha Notes 1: 1. *Lunationes Danielis*; 2. Biblical figures outside the bible', *Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha* 15 (2006), pp. 116-144 at p. 121.

26. See Faith Wallis, 'The experience of the book: manuscripts, texts, and the role of epistemology in early medieval medicine', in: Don Bates ed., *Knowledge and the scholarly medical traditions* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 101-26 at 113.

the omissions which patients have been guilty of, he will be the more readily believed to be acquainted with the circumstances of the sick; so that men will have confidence to entrust themselves to such a physician. And he will manage the cure best who has foreseen what is to happen from the present state of matters. For it is impossible to make all the sick well; this, indeed, would have been better than to be able to foretell what is going to happen ...<sup>27</sup>

Being able to predict the course that a disease would take (called *prognosis* by Hippocrates<sup>28</sup>), or whether the patient would live or die, in other words, was considered to be a highly respectable skill, reserved for learned experts who knew what they were doing. People who mastered this knowledge commanded respect and trust in their patients. Many medical texts copied in the Carolingian period similarly describe diseases, their characteristics, their development over time and their possible treatment.<sup>29</sup> In its own way, moreover, knowledge of medicine was believed to contribute to knowledge of God's will. When a patient showed sudden recovery where that was unlikely, or suffered from unexpected afflictions without warning, for instance, it was clearly the hand of God that interfered in the predictable course of things. This is a way of thinking found in many different kinds of early medieval writings, such as hagiography and miracle stories: disease could be a divine punishment in the same way that sudden recovery could be a miracle.<sup>30</sup> Thinking ahead, and predicting what was going to happen to sick people was

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27. Hippocrates, 'Prognosticon', in: *The genuine works of Hippocrates*, transl. Charles Darwin ADAMS (New York, 1868), pp. 43-44. For the transmission of this text in early medieval manuscripts see Augusto BECCARIA, *I codici di medicina del periodo presalernitano (secolo IX, X e XI)* (Rome, 1956), where he lists several Carolingian manuscripts containing this text, or even just its first chapters containing the quotation. See, for instance, ms SANKT GALLEN, *Stiftsbibliothek* Cod. 44 (BECCARIA no. 129).

28. This Greek term seems to have been the inspiration for our modern term 'prognostic', even though it carries no connotations of, for instance, planetary movements.

29. See the catalogue compiled by BECCARIA, *I codici di medicina*.

30. These themes are very common in hagiographic texts. A famous case is the work of Gregory of Tours, see now his *Lives and miracles*, ed. and transl. by Giselle DE NIE (Cambridge Mass./London, 2015). The literature on this theme is, understandably, vast, see for instance Giselle DE NIE, 'History and miracle: Gregory's use of methaphor', in: Kathleen MITCHELL and Ian WOOD eds., *The world of Gregory of Tours, Cultures, Beliefs and Traditions: Medieval and Early Modern People* 8 (Leiden, 2002), pp. 261-279; Alice-Mary TALBOT, 'Pilgrimage to healing shrines: the evidence of miracle accounts', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 56 (2002), pp. 153-173; Thomas HEAD, *Hagiography and the cult of the saints, the diocese of Orléans, 800-1200* (Cambridge Mass., 1985).

(and is), then, part and parcel of the medical science, and it was but a small step from Late Antique medical texts to what we now call ‘medical prognostics’, foretelling whether a patient would live or die depending on the day of the moon that he fell ill. That such writings found their way into medical collections, as Wallis has shown<sup>31</sup>, is therefore hardly surprising – not only do prognostics reflect the importance of predicting the course of an illness, the texts themselves also look and sound very similar to what we now consider as ‘real’ medical material.

A parallel observation can be made about computistic collections, the whole point of which was to calculate the important Christian feast of Easter, per definition a date in the future that depended on the course of both the sun and the moon.<sup>32</sup> These were not straightforward calculations that just everybody could do – *computus* needed to be studied, and mastering it took hard work and time. It was, moreover, not for everybody to become an expert. Even Bede, the author of what was perhaps the most important *computus* handbook in the early middle ages, had to concede this point, and included shortcuts for those who were unable to grasp all the calculations needed.<sup>33</sup> All the same, knowledge of *computus* was considered to be an essential skill for the higher clergy, a point specifically emphasised in texts explaining the purposes of Carolingian *correctio*, such as the *Admonitio Generalis* (789) and episcopal statutes of the time.<sup>34</sup> An important point that needs emphasis here is that *computus*, which calculates future events of the Christian calendar, presupposes a thoroughly Christian conception of time. At its heart was the Christian calendar, and the urgent need to calculate its central dates correctly.

31. See above note 19.

32. A good and accessible introduction in the art of *computus* can be found in Immo WARNTJES, *The Munich computus: text and translation. Irish computistics between Isidore of Seville and the Venerable Bede and its reception in Carolingian times*, Sudhoffs Archiv, Beihefte, Heft 59 (Stuttgart, 2010).

33. For instance the chapter titled ‘*De aetate lunae si quis computare non polest*’ in his *De temporum ratione* c.23, ed. Charles W. JONES, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina* 123B (Turnhout, 1977). This chapter was also copied as a separate fragment.

34. Hubert MORDEK, Klaus ZECHIEL-ECKES and Michael GLATTHAAR eds, *Die Admonitio Generalis Karls des Großen*, MGH Fontes Iuris Germanici Antiqui in usum scholarum separatim editi XVI (Hanover, 2012), c.70, pp. 222–24; knowledge of *computus* is prescribed by many bishops, Waltaud of Liège, ‘Episcopal statute’, c.10 and n. 24 for references to similar admonishments in other episcopal statutes, *MGH Capitula episcoporum* I, ed. Peter BROMMER (Hannover, 1984), p. 47.

*Computus* was, therefore, per definition a Christian science, and all its constituent components should be interpreted in this sense. This included calculations that were, at first sight, strictly mathematical – but even the consultation of often complicated tables, the computation of the course of sun and moon, or the mathematical operations needed to implement the consequences of leap years, cannot be separated from their all-encompassing context of Christian time.

In the same way that prognostic texts ended up in medical collections, they also gravitated towards computistical collections, and it is not hard to see why. There is not much that distinguishes some ‘prognostics’ from extant computistical material, and as was the case with the medical material, it is rather unlikely that early medieval users of these manuscripts perceived much – if any – difference. Like *computus*, many prognostics centre on the age of the moon, as for instance in the quotation at the beginning of this article shows, which presupposes the ability to calculate the date of the new moon. That significant events in the future could be calculated was a given to students of *computus*, in the same way that the course of a disease could be predicted – and this is exactly what prognostic texts do too.

Now of course the early medieval medical and computistic compendia, gathered and described by Beccaria and Borst, were not accessible to just anybody.<sup>35</sup> Most of these manuscripts, as far as we know, were kept in monastic and episcopal libraries and studied there by highly educated people. Those with medical or computistical knowledge, therefore, were the educated inhabitants of, and visitors to these monasteries or episcopal courts. The vast majority of these people were clergy, but also those who stayed in monasteries or at episcopal courts for their education, among them future clergy who were getting ready to serve local lay communities.<sup>36</sup> Even though many of the manuscripts just described never left such centres of study and education, medical and computistic knowledge was not necessarily confined to these places. At least some of it travelled to

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35. BECCARIA, *I codici di medicina*; ARNO BORST, *Schriften zur Komputistik im Frankreich von 721 bis 818*, MGH Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters, Band 21, 3 vols. (Hannover, 2006).

36. See JULIA BARROW, *The clergy in the medieval world. Secular clerics, their families and careers in North-Western Europe, c.800-c.1200* (Cambridge, 2015), esp. chapter 6 and 7; CARINE VAN RHIJN, *Shepherds of the Lord. Priests and episcopal statutes in the Carolingian period* (Turnhout, 2007), chapter 5.



lay communities in manuscripts for local clergy, some more was perhaps learned by heart and transmitted orally.<sup>37</sup>

So far, we have seen two positive approaches to, as it were, looking into the future for medical and computistical purposes, which were both part and parcel of early medieval Christian learned culture. In modern discussions about prognostics, however, the historical context is usually provided by the many prescriptions and prohibitions against a whole raft of forbidden practices, amongst others forsaying the future. It is here that scholars such as Flint, Schmitt and Milis find evidence for their magicians, superstitious half-Christians and pagans, and of their competition, clash or negotiation with the Christian church. On the other hand, it is on the basis of this same material that Dieter Harmening concludes that *superstitiones* were not such a big issue in the early middle ages, and that James Palmer argues how descriptions of such practices did not describe any tangible reality, but served first and foremost to define Christianity itself.<sup>38</sup> I will leave these discussions to the side here, and instead focus on one aspect that, I think, has been overlooked thus far. It was, to my mind, not so much *what* these practices were exactly, but *who* practiced them that was the key issue to those proscribing and prohibiting. A brief discussion of some of the Carolingian prescriptive sources will demonstrate this.

Perhaps the best place to start with Carolingian prescriptive sources is Charlemagne's *Admonitio Generalis* of 789, a highly influential text containing the outlines of Carolingian *correctio*. It includes two instances with possible references to prognostic practices, a short one and a more elaborate one. The short one, taken from the fourth-century Council of Ancyra via the *Collectio Dionysio-Hadriana*, reads as follows:

c.18 To the *sacerdotes*. From the same council, that the practices of *cauclearii*, charmers (*malefici*), male and female fortune tellers (*incantatores et incantatrices*) are not allowed.<sup>39</sup>

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37. Liuzza thinks that oral transmission of some (presumably short) prognostic texts explains the baffling variation among the versions written down. See LIUZZA, 'What the thunder said', pp. 21-22.

38. Dieter HARMENING, *Superstitio. Überlieferungs- und theoriegeschichtliche Untersuchungen zur kirchlich-theologischen Aberglaubensliteratur des Mittelalters* (Berlin, 1979), this idea summarized at pp. 318-29; James PALMER, 'Defining paganism in the Carolingian world', *Early Medieval Europe* 15 (2007), pp. 402-25.

39. MORDEK a.o. eds., *Die Admonitio Generalis*, pp. 192-93, c.18: '*Sacerdotibus. Item in eodem concilio, ut cauclearii, malefici, incantatores vel incantatrices*

The longer reference repeats and elaborates this point:

c.64 To all. We also find the following direction in the law of God: *You shall not divine (auguriamini)*.<sup>40</sup> And in Deuteronomy: There shall be no-one *that consulteth soothsayers (arioli) or observeth dreams (somnia observet) and omens (ad auguria intendat)*.<sup>41</sup> And from the same: *nor charmer (maleficus), nor anyone that consulteth pythonic spirits (phitones), or fortune tellers (incantatores)*.<sup>42</sup> Therefore we order, that there should be no *cauculatores* or fortune tellers (*incantatores*) or storm makers (*tempestarii*) nor *obligatores*, and wherever they are found, they should be corrected or convicted. Also about the trees or stones or springs, where some ignorant people (*stulti*) bring lights or observe other practices, we generally order that this very bad usage, which is detestable to God, should be abolished and destroyed wherever it is found.<sup>43</sup>

It is a whole catalogue of practitioners of undesirable and 'stupid' usages that is listed here, which explains scholarly notions that magic and paganism were everywhere in the Carolingian period (see above). Harmening and Palmer, amongst others, have, however, shown that listing series of 'superstitions' together is a theme (or even a *topos*) that turns up time and again in texts from the early middle ages. Such catalogues of 'bad practices' ultimately derive from the writings of Caesarius of Arles, who wrote about 250 years before the *Admonitio* saw the light.<sup>44</sup> In how far the *Admonitio* reflects real or imagined practices, or mere *topoi* is a question I will not address here; others have done this extensively, and better than I will be able to. What strikes the reader of these prescriptions all the same is the negative labelling of those who indulged in such practices. Was

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*fieri non sinantur.* This chapter cites the Council of Laodica (363/4), c.36. I have left '*caucelarii*' and '*cauculatores*' untranslated for lack of a good English alternative. Most dictionaries describe this as 'somebody who does magic with numbers'.

40. Leviticus 19,26. The English translations of the biblical quotations are from the Douai-Rheims bible, <http://www.drbo.org/index.htm>.

41. Deuteronomy 18,10.

42. Deuteronomy 18,11.

43. MORDEK a.o. eds., *Die Admonitio Generalis*, p. 216: 'c.64. *Omnibus. Item habemus in lege domini mandatum: Non auguriamini. Et in deuteronomio: Nemo sit, qui ariolos sciscitetur vel somnia observet vel ad auguria intendat. Item: Ne sit maleficus nec incantator nec phitones consolator. Ideo praecipimus, ut cauculatores et incantatores nec tempestarii vel obligatores non fiant, et ubicumque sunt, emendentur vel damnentur. Item de arboribus vel petris vel fontibus, ubi aliqui stulti luminaria vel alias observationes faciunt, omnino mandamus, ut iste pessimus usus et deo execrabilis, ubicumque inveniat, tollatur et destruat.*

44. PALMER, 'Defining paganism', pp. 412-13; HARMENING, *Superstitio*, pp. 49-75.

the problem, then, perhaps not so much the practices themselves, but rather the people who participated in them?

When we consult Isidore of Seville's *Etymologia*, in which he conveniently explains what all those different kinds of magicians actually did (book VIII, section ix, *De magis*), it turns out that many of those listed in the *Admonitio* in one way or the other were interested in the future (in some cases via observing the night sky), or in healing, or in both.<sup>45</sup> Isidore's work was widely copied and read, so we can assume that his descriptions were generally known in educated circles. *Incantatores*, for instance, 'pretend that they are filled with divine inspiration, and with a certain deceitful cunning they forecast what is to come for people'.<sup>46</sup> Likewise, *arioles*, *pythonissae* (which were certainly somewhat outdated in Charlemagne's day), and *augurii*, so Isidore tells us, each in their own ways claimed an ability to predict what was to come.<sup>47</sup> The *obligatores* are more mysterious since Isidore does not explain them. Blaise translates the term as 'magicians who use magical ligaments', and tells us that such ligaments are herbal concoctions that should cure the sick.<sup>48</sup> *Topos* or not, what the lists in the *Admonitio* tell us is that dubious people forecasting the future or dabbling in medicine should on no account be consulted by any sensible Christian.

More detailed information comes from Carolingian bishops, who each adapted and filled out the programme of *correctio* in their own episcopal statutes, and often show their knowledge of Isidore.<sup>49</sup> Bishop Gerbald of Liège (785/7-810), for instance, instructs his diocesan priests as follows:

'That enquiries are made whether there are *sortilegi* and *aruspices*, and those who observe months and times and those who observe dreams and those who wear *filacteria* around their necks, we don't know with what words written on them, and *veneficas*,

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45. *Isidori Hispalensis Etymologiarum sive originum libri XX*, ed. W.M. LINDSAY (Oxford, 1911); Stephen A. BARNEY, W.I. LEWIS, J.A. BEACH and Oliver BERGHOF transl., *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville* (Cambridge, 2006). The relevant part is book VIII, 'De ecclesia et sectis', section ix 'De magis'. Note that 'pagans' and 'heathen gods' have different sections (x and xi).

46. Isidore, *Etymologiae*, book VIII, section ix, c.15.

47. Isidore, *Etymologiae*, book VIII, section ix, cc.15,16,19.

48. Albert BLAISE, *Dictionnaire latin-français des auteurs chrétiens* (Turnhout, 1954-67), lemma 'obligator', translates it as '*sorcier qui use de ligaments magiques*'. 'Ligamenta' are known from similar prohibitions, Blaise translates it as 'botte d'herbes (appliquée à une malade)'.  
 49. See VAN RUIJN, *Shepherds*, pp. 33-48.

that is women who give potions to some so that they get an abortion, and some who practice divinations so that their husbands love them more. All *malefici*, who blaspheme in whichever way, should be made to appear before us, so that their cases can be discussed before us.<sup>50</sup>

In this text we again encounter a number of people who forecast the future, but also some who ‘observe months and times’, and others who claim knowledge of some kind of medicine. All of these are, to Gerbald, *malefici*, ‘evildoers’, who practice blasphemy. This line of thinking is well-known from handbooks of penance, where such practices were considered to be sacrilegious, stupid, diabolical, and detestable. Still, Christians who had indulged in this kind of behaviour could always compensate for this by doing penance, which would reconcile them with God.<sup>51</sup> One interesting example comes from the eighth-century *Paenitentiale pseudo-Egberti*, and is quoted by the ninth-century penitential of pseudo-Theodore:

‘24. Who observes *divini* and *precantatores*, or diabolical amulets (*filacteria*) and dreams and herbs, or the fifth day in honour of Jove, or the first day of January in the way of the pagans (*more paganorum*), if he is a cleric, should do five years of penance, a layman three.’<sup>52</sup>

What we learn from all of this, I think, are two things: first, that good Christians could indulge in undesired behaviour, but that they were not considered any the less Christian for it by their bishops or priests. Instead, their cases should be discussed in front of the bishop (as Gerbald demanded), and their behaviour should be corrected by penance. The problem here was considered to be a lack of understanding and knowledge about the ins and outs of the Christian

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50. Gerbald of Liège, second episcopal statute, ed. BROMMER, *MGH Cap.ep.* I, p. 29, c.10: ‘*Ut inquirantur sortilegi et aruspices et qui menses et tempora observent et qui somnia observant, et ista filacteria circa collum portant, nescimus quibus verbis scriptis, et veneficas id est mulieres, quae potiones aliquas donant, ut partus excutiant, et aliquas divinationes faciunt per hoc, ut a maritis suis maiorem amorem habeant. Omnes maleficos, de qualibuscumque causis blasphemantur, ante nos adducere faciat, ut causae eorum ante nos discutiantur.*’

51. Rob MEENS, *Penance in medieval Europe, 600-1200* (Cambridge, 2014), esp. chapter 5.

52. *Paenitentiale pseudo-Theodori*, ed. Carine VAN RHIJN, *Corpus Christianorum Series Latina CLVIB* (Turnhout, 2007), pp. 63. This prescription is part of a extensive chapter, in which nearly the entire ‘catalogue’ of bad superstitions turns up: XXI. *De idolatria et sacrilegio et qui angelos colunt et de maleficis, veneficis, ariolis, sortilogis, divinis et vota reddentibus et qui kalendis ianuarii in cervulo et vitula vadit et mathematicis et emissoribus tempestatum.*

religion rather than bad, or un-Christian (let alone pagan) intentions – and who-ever repented from the bottom of his heart would surely be forgiven by God. Educated clerics should know better, so their lapses were punished heavier than those of laymen who did not.

The second point is this: if we strip off all the (biased) ‘language of superstition’ and see what these practices were actually about, we end up with three things: predicting the future, observing the moon and the stars, and medicine, so practices remarkably similar to what highly learned clerics did. In view of my earlier observations about medicine and *computus*, it seems that in the perception of early medieval authors, there were good ways and bad ways to practice these skills; good ways were per definition found with educated experts, whereas Gerbald’s and Isidore’s *maleficii* per definition indulged in superstitious and blasphemous practices that should be avoided by any Christian. Many practices described in the prescriptive texts, then, may be read as in principle acceptable. In the hands of the wrong, uneducated people, however, who would not be able to get them right, such practices could lead to offending God. I will come back to this point when I discuss the El Escorial manuscript below. First of all it is important to see what the manuscript evidence has on offer to substantiate this view.

### III. PROGNOSTIC TEXTS IN CAROLINGIAN MANUSCRIPTS

Prognostic texts often travelled in either medical or computistic manuscripts, as we have seen. Their first manuscript witnesses after the Late Roman period start to appear around the year 800, so clearly Carolingian scribes played an important role in their transmission. By going through the manuscripts discussed or used in the works of Beccaria, Matter, Chardonnes, Liuzza, Weißer and Svenberg, and by finding a few more myself, I have compiled a corpus of 40 Carolingian manuscripts that contain one or more prognostic texts.<sup>53</sup> This corpus is neither complete nor balanced, since it is not based on a thorough search of manuscript catalogues, and rests to a large extent on studies that favour one text or one category of

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53. BECCARIA, *I codici di medicina*; MATTER, ‘The “Revelatio Esdrae”’; CHARDONNES, *Anglo-Saxon prognostics*; LIUZZA, *Anglo-Saxon prognostics*; WEISSER, *Studien*; SVENBERG, *De Latinska lunaria*. It should be noted that none of these authors knows the El Escorial manuscript discussed here.

manuscripts. What is more, medical and computistic manuscripts have enjoyed more, and more systematic attention than other categories, in the same way that the single texts at the centre of attention for Matter, Weißer and Svenberg are only three examples of a much larger set of extant prognostic texts. All the same, it is a corpus large enough to get an impression of how exactly prognostic texts ‘work’ in their manuscript contexts, and they may give us some ideas about why they were copied and studied in the first place. One important clue is the titles these texts were given in these manuscripts, another is how they relate to the texts among which they were copied. I will discuss two examples, one medical manuscript and one computistical, before using the same method of interpretation for the El Escorial manuscript.

The first example is ms BERLIN, *Deutsche Staatsbibliothek*, Phill. 1790, a modest-sized volume of 111 folia, written in the first half of the ninth century by several hands, and filled with medical texts by Galenus and Hippocrates, collections of medical recipes, and a compilation of short medical excerpts.<sup>54</sup> Even though we have no clear provenance for this manuscript, its context must be that of a centre of learning with a substantial library where medicine was studied. Among the material of which this rather chaotic manuscript is made up, there are no less than six complete prognostic texts, and one fragment. The first two, a so-called birth lunary, directly followed by a short fragment of a combined health/dream lunary, can only be recognised as separate texts by a modern eye. In the manuscript, they have become one whole with a text that discusses the creation of Adam, and a brief exposition of the different components of his body. Without any break, the same hand has added the first birth lunary (without title), then the fragment of a second one, which breaks off after the first three days of the moon at the end of the page. The next prognostic text has a title: ‘*Incipit conpotus de egris ut scias utrum vivat an nos* [read: *non*]’, and it explains how to calculate the survival chances of a patient on the basis of the numerical value of the letters of his name. In fact, this is a short version

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54. See BECCARIA, *I codici di medicina*, no. 50, pp. 199–202. The manuscript can be consulted online: [http://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/resultRecherche/resultRecherche.php?COMPOSITION\\_ID=15877](http://bvmm.irht.cnrs.fr/resultRecherche/resultRecherche.php?COMPOSITION_ID=15877). A full description is given by Valentin ROSE, *Verzeichnis der Lateinischen Handschriften der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Berlin I: Die Meermann-Handschriften des Sir Thomas Philipps* (Berlin, 1893), no. 165, pp. 362–369.

of the instructions belonging to a so-called Sphere of Apuleius or Pythagoras, but the figure itself is missing.<sup>55</sup> The next text, another health lunary titled '*Incipit lunaris liber I*' gets its label at the end: '*Explicit dicta Galieni de lunae diebus pro infirmis*'. This is directly followed by another short health lunary, written in two columns and titled '*Incipit de infirmis per lunam liber II*'. A third health lunary follows directly after, titled '*Liber tertius de infirmis per signa*'. Here, the fate of the sick person is connected with the signs of the zodiac. Finally, a dream lunary is added directly after, without any visible break with the previous text, titled '*Incipit somnialis visalis*'.

In this block of seven texts, which all together cover folios 40r to 42v, there is nothing that indicates disapproval, censorship or uncertainty about the trustworthiness of these texts on the part of their users.<sup>56</sup> The first two texts have been integrated into a short tract of a theological nature about Adam. The second one has markers of authority in its title: its method is *computus*, and such calculation will produce medical knowledge of a rather fundamental nature (life and death). The first of the three health lunaries is ascribed to the famous medical scholar Galen; the two health lunaries that follow similarly combine predictions about health matters with the moon, or the signs of the zodiac, while the dream lunary at the end combines the day of the moon with the meaning of dreams. Even though the earliest lunaries probably pre-date Christian time-reckoning by a couple of millennia, I think we can safely assume that in this Carolingian context, lunaries were read and used within the intellectual framework of Christian time-reckoning. This means that the seven texts in the Berlin manuscript were presented as credible and trustworthy in several different ways. First of all, they share their main theme (health and disease) with the rest of the manuscript. Furthermore, two merged into a theological context, one was ascribed to a medical authority, the others borrowed the authority of Christian *computus*. Nothing indicates that they were considered to be funda-

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55. For examples of this figure, ascribed to both Pythagoras and Apuleius in different manuscripts, see E. WICKERSHEIMER, 'Figures médico-astrologiques des IX<sup>e</sup>, X<sup>e</sup> et XI<sup>e</sup> siècles', *Janus. Archives internationales pour l'histoire de la médecine et la géographie médicale* 19 (1914), pp. 157-177 esp. p. 169.

56. That Carolingian scribes, students and scholars had an elaborate system of signs to express their opinions on the texts they worked with, is demonstrated by Evina STEINOVA, '*Psalmos, notas, cantus*: on the meanings of *nota* in the Carolingian period', *Speculum* 90 (2015), pp. 1-34.

mentally different from the other texts in this manuscript, or less trustworthy.

My second example is a manuscript now in the Vatican Library, Pal. lat. 1449, which was compiled in the monastery of Lorsch in the first half of the ninth century as a high-quality study manuscript for *computus*.<sup>57</sup> The manuscript has 146 large folia (295x235 mm), filled with beautifully executed tables and texts. Its main focus are the computistical works of Bede. Other, related material has been added, such as a calendar, a short work about *computus* by Alcuin of York, and a few letters on the same subject. Among this material there are three prognostic texts, first of all a short ‘bloodletting lunare’ added under the (unfinished) title ‘*Ad sanguī*’ (*sic*) in a Carolingian hand on an originally empty folio (9v), where it sits between the calendar and a set of computistical tables and lists. It is a short list, organised by day of the moon, and in that sense it looks much like other short computistical lists that follow directly on the folia after it. The second prognostic text appears much later in the manuscript, on f. 119v, and is titled ‘*Revelatio quae facta est Esdrae et filiis Israhel de qualitatibus anni per introitum ianuarii*’. It predicts the weather, the harvest, and important events for an entire year depending on the day of the week on which January 1<sup>st</sup> falls – the opening reads, for instance,

‘If the first day of January falls on a Sunday, there will be a warm winter, a humid spring, a windy autumn, a good harvest, an abundance of sheep, more than enough honey [...], and something new is heard about kings or princes.’<sup>58</sup>

This text is grouped together with a short text that conveniently lists the five women called Anna in the Bible, which is followed by a short medical compilation attributed to Galen, after which a fourth text gives dietary advice per month – all of this fits onto less than

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57. See BORST, *Schriften zur Komputistik* I, p. 300; DiTommaso, ‘Greek, Latin and Hebrew manuscripts’, p. 25; MATTER, ‘The “Revelatio Esdrae”’, pp. 382–83. There is a full description of the manuscript at [http://bibliotheca-laureshamensis-digital.de/bav/bav\\_pal\\_lat\\_1449?ui\\_lang=eng](http://bibliotheca-laureshamensis-digital.de/bav/bav_pal_lat_1449?ui_lang=eng), the manuscript itself can be digitally consulted at [http://bibliotheca-laureshamensis-digital.de/bav/bav\\_pal\\_lat\\_1449/0001/scroll?sid=b114c7a37fc52a10e1703e642c9c7deb](http://bibliotheca-laureshamensis-digital.de/bav/bav_pal_lat_1449/0001/scroll?sid=b114c7a37fc52a10e1703e642c9c7deb) [both visited 28.7.15].

58. Vatican, Pal. lat. 1449 f. 119v: ‘*Kalendae ianuarii si die dominico uenerit, facit hiemem calidum, uerem humidum, autunnum uentosum, annonas bonas, habundantiam peccorum, hortilares, iuuenes moriaentur, pugne erunt, et latrocinia magna, aliquid noui audietur de regibus uel principibus*.’ See MATTER, ‘The “Revelatio Esdrae”’ for an overview of the long history and transmission of this text and all its variations.



two folia. This cluster of short texts underlines what Faith Wallis observed in the medical manuscripts she studied: material that was copied into a manuscript by thematic association (see above). The '*Revelatio Esdrae*', in other words, was considered to fit well into a manuscript that taught *computus*. What is even more interesting here, is the connection of the prognostic text to the priest Ezra, which anchored it into the Old Testament.<sup>59</sup> What one could learn from this text, in other words, was safely rooted in traditions of Christian knowledge via the Bible and computistic science.

On the last folio of the manuscript, f. 146v, finally, we find a Sphere of Pythagoras, including a short explanation of how to use it, as well as the alphabet and its numerical values, which makes it complete and useable. The explanation refers to Pythagoras, and mentions how the age of the moon should be used in the calculation needed to find out whether a sick person will live or die. This text is clearly a later (albeit Carolingian) addition to the manuscript, but all the same it has been added for good reasons: its theme is *computus* and health, its authority is, again, anchored in Christian time-reckoning and a highly respected scientific authority.

As in the first example, the prognostic texts in this high-level computistic handbook can, I think, only be told apart from their surrounding material by modern eyes. In both style, theme and function they blend in very well, and add knowledge considered relevant by the compilers. Via both Christian time-reckoning, biblical or theological framing and/or respected medical traditions, moreover, they present 'good', trustworthy knowledge – as in the first example, there is nothing at all in this manuscript that suggests disapproval about these texts on the part of its scribes and students. All this material, in other words, makes perfect sense in this manuscript, and was clearly part and parcel of the Christian scholarly traditions of which this manuscript as a whole is an expression. On the crossroads between time-reckoning and medicine, these prognostic texts were unproblematic, useful sources of knowledge with reliable pedigrees – but how did this work in the El Escorial manuscript, which was intended for an altogether different purpose?

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59. There is a long and fascinating tradition of attributions to Esdra in prophetic and apocalyptic texts, of which this '*revelatio*' is but one instance. See MATTER, 'The "*Revelatio Esdrae*"', p. 377 and note 3. The texts attributed to Esdra have been edited by O. WAHL, *Apocalypsis Esdrae, Apocalypsis Sedrach, Visio Beati Esdra* (Leiden, 1977).

## IV. THE CASE OF EL ESCORIAL L III 8

We now leave the world of (monastic) learning and study of advanced sciences that produced computistic sophistication and medical scholarship. The El Escorial manuscript, after all, does not belong to this world, but is concerned with pastoral care in all its many facets. This takes us to communities of laymen, who were dependent on their priest or bishop for their spiritual well-being, and for religious education. Since the manuscript is sizeable with its 189 folia, and since the material copied into it presupposes a library of some size, it is probably best understood in the context of an episcopal court.<sup>60</sup> There, it may have been used by either a bishop, a priest, or by clerics studying to be priests, or by all of the above. It is clearly a book that presupposes knowledge of other texts and manuscripts (the Bible, liturgy, *computus*), and its purpose was practical in the sense that it taught those who studied it much detailed knowledge connected to pastoral care. Apart from all the liturgical and para-liturgical material mentioned above, it also contains texts that underline its use in a lay community. As lay as a text will ever get is a sample marriage contract, for instance; additionally there are texts that help the priest explain the Creed and the Lord's Prayer to the uninitiated, and several homilies have themes well suited for a lay audience. Among the nearly 70 texts that the manuscript contains, there are also some medical recipes and other short texts with snippets of useful knowledge.

It is important to note here that the way in which this manuscript 'works' is fundamentally different from the two examples described above. The structuring elements of the medical and computistical manuscripts were blocks of long texts, around which some shorter

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60. Distinguishing between manuscripts for bishops and those for priests is often rather difficult, probably because there was an area of overlap. See N.K. RASMUSSEN, 'Célébration épiscopale et célébration presbytérale: un essai de typologie', *Segni e riti nella chiesa altomedievale occidentale*, Settimane di Studi sull'alto medioevo 33 (Spoleto 1987), 581-603. Rasmussen's typology is further elaborated by Yitzhak HEN, 'Liturgical handbook for the use of a rural priest (Brussels, BR 10127-10144)' in: Marco MOSTERT ed., *Organising the written word: scripts, manuscripts and texts*, Utrecht Studies in Medieval Literacy 2 (forthcoming, Turnhout 2017). I would like to thank Yitzhak Hen for giving me access to his article prior to publication. See also Carine VAN RHIJN, 'Manuscripts for local priests and the Carolingian reforms', in: Steffen PATZOLD and C. VAN RHIJN eds., *Men in the middle. Local priests in early medieval Europe* (Berlin/New York, 2016), pp. 177-98.

ones were arranged. The El Escorial manuscript, however, contains mostly short texts. The majority of these range from a few lines up to two pages (so one folio), while the longest is about seventy pages. This makes the El Escorial manuscript into a compendium of pastoral expertise, intended for specialists (be it bishops or priests or future priests) whose duties were with lay communities.

There are three prognostic texts in this manuscript, two of which we have encountered before. First, there is a variant version of the text ascribed to Ezra in the Vatican manuscript discussed above, here with the title '*Incipit subputatio quam subputavit Aesda propheta in templo Salomonis in Hierusalem*'. It sits between a short canonical extract about priests who revolt against their bishop, and another short text that explains what exactly God did, and in which order, during the six days of Creation.<sup>61</sup> A list of Egyptian Days, secondly, has been added later (but still in the Carolingian period) in an empty space at the bottom of a page, just before a series of homilies starts. It has no title, and the unlucky days are written out as numbers on either side of a versified version that may well have functioned as an *aide-mémoire*.<sup>62</sup> Throughout the manuscript, we find bits and pieces of computistical material, with one solid block of *computus* in its tail end. It is there that we find the third prognostic text, called '*Incipit computatio somnium Danihelis propheta*', quoted at the very beginning of this article. It is a 'general lunary', which combines predictions about activities one should/should not undertake, with the prospects for sick people, the meaning and relevance of dreams, and finally with predictions about the character of new-born children. Again, a combination of a computistic frame with a Biblical attribution connects this text to traditions of reliable knowledge and learned expertise.

This same manuscript, however, also contains an episcopal statute and a handbook of penance that voice clear prohibitions against fore-saying the future, and this apparent contradiction is worth exploring a bit further. In the *Capitula Silvanectensia*, a reworked, combined version of the second and third episcopal statutes by Gerbald

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61. This is a short excerpt of Hrabanus Maurus *De rerum naturae*, XVIII, c.11, which is itself derived from Isidore. In the manuscript, its title reads '*Incipit de opera que deus in sex dies fecit*' without any attribution.

62. Arno BORST, *Der Karolingische Reichskalender und seine Überlieferung bis ins 12. Jahrhundert* II, MGH Libri Memoriales, 2.2 (Hanover, 2001), knows this text from other manuscripts, but as far as I know it has not been edited.

of Liège, we find the prescription cited above in a slightly different version, forbidding *sortilegi* and *aruspices*, the observance of months, times and dreams, the use of *filacteria*, and the consultation of women who concoct potions.<sup>63</sup> Other than Gerbald, however, the anonymous bishop who wrote this text ordered that whoever participated in such practices, should be '*severiter*' corrected.<sup>64</sup> The double penitential ascribed to Beda-Egbert, also included in the manuscript, adds the following on this subject:

'Of auguries and divinations.

He who observes auguries (*auguria*) or oracles (*sortes*) which are falsely called 'of the saints', or divinations (*divinationes*), or utters things to come by looking at some sort of writings, or takes a vow on a tree or on anything, except at a church, if clerics or laymen do this they shall be excommunicated from the church, or else, a cleric shall do three years of penance, laymen two or one and a half. If a woman places her daughter upon a roof or in an oven in order to cure a fever, she shall do penance for five years. Do not employ [jugglers] or chanting diviners when the moon is eclipsed, since by sacrilegious custom they trust they can protect themselves by their outcries and magical arts, even by the attaching of diabolical amulets (*filacteria*) whether of grass or of amber to their people or to themselves; nor celebrate Thursday in honor of Jove or the first of January according to pagan tradition (*secundum paganam causam*). If a lower cleric, he will do five years of penance, if a layman, three years.'<sup>65</sup>

63. See the *Capitula Silvanectentia* I, ed. POKORNY, *MGH Cap.ep.* III, pp. 74-92, p. 82, c.11, which is in its essence the same as the Gerbald-quotation cited above. The El Escorial manuscript is the only place where these texts have been found, so it is not entirely clear why Pokorny has edited it as two separate ones.

64. ID. : '... ubicumque tales reperti fuerint, severiter corrigantur, donec ad emendationem venient.'

65. EL ESCORIAL, L III 8, f. 90r-90v: 'De auguriis e diuinationibus. Auguria uel sortes que dicuntur falsa sanctorum uel diuinationes qui eas obseruauerit uel quarumcumque scripturarum inspectione promittunt uel uotum uouerint ad arborem uel a quamlibet rem excepto ad ecclesiam, si clerici uel laici hoc faciunt excommunicantur ab ecclesia uel clericus iii annos peniteat, laicus ii, uel i et dimidum. Mulier si filiam suam super lectum ponit uel in fornacem pro sanitate febris v annos peniteat. Nolite exercere quando luna obscuratur ut clamoribus suis ac malestitiis sacrilego usu se defensare posse confidunt cara uos et diuinos precantatores filacteria etiam diabolica uel erbas ac succino suis uel sibi inpendere, uel v feria in honore iouis seu kalendas ianuarias secundum paganam causam honorare ac colere uoluerit. Si clericus est non cum gradu v annos peniteat. Si laicus iii annos peniteat.' The translation is based on John McNEILL and Helena M. GAMER eds., *Medieval handbooks of penance. A translation of the principal Libri Poenitentiales* (New York, 1938/1990), pp. 228-229.

Here we again encounter some of the characters that peopled Isidore's catalogue of magicians, cast in a now familiar negative role. Again, the main things these people do involve forecasting the future, dabbling in medicine and observing the night sky. In the penitential, however, there is something else that catches the eye, for some of these practices come pretty close to what 'good' Christians would do. The author lists divination using saints, consultation of 'some sort of writings', taking a vow in the wrong place, or celebrating the wrong days. In principle, there was nothing inherently wrong with invoking saints, consulting writings, taking vows, or celebrating feast days, but the point was this: all this should be done in the right way, in the right place, at the right time, by the right people, and with the right texts.

#### CONCLUSION

This is, I think, where we find the key to understanding prognostic texts in this handbook of pastoral expertise. To the compilers, students and users of this manuscript, the *sortilegi*, *aruspices* and *precantatores* of the prescriptive texts were something entirely different from those (the users of the manuscript themselves!) who consulted the *Subputatio Esdrae* and the *Computatio somnium Danihelis propheta*. The former were found among the uneducated and the misguided, the *stulti* who should be submitted to *correctio* by an expert. These people did not lack good, Christian intentions, witness their use of saints, or their willingness to consult writings, but they lacked the expertise needed to handle such knowledge correctly. The El Escorial manuscript, our pastoral manual, was a handbook for such experts, who worked with reliable texts and had knowledge of 'correct' practice on offer for those who asked. This frame of interpretation casts the bishop or priest in the role of expert, and of consultant about good Christian behaviour. Such experts had knowledge about more or less everything relevant to communities of laymen. This clearly went beyond just what happened in and around the local church, but included matters of health and disease, of birth and death, of the weather, the harvest and of cattle.<sup>66</sup> Isabel Moreira has shown how, when it came to the interpretation of dreams, the ideal situation

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66. See Carine VAN RHIJN, 'Carolingian rural priests as local (religious) experts', in: Steffen PATZOLD and Florian BOCK eds., *Gott handhaben. Religi-*

envisaged was that laymen did not just consult any fellow-villager, but came to their priest or bishop instead for an expert explanation.<sup>67</sup> The same can be argued for all subjects covered in the El Escorial manuscript, including its prognostic texts. There was nothing suspect or dubious about any of the texts it contains, when used in an informed way by an educated expert, and in this sense the lunaries and other prognostics had important and relevant knowledge on offer for those practicing pastoral care.<sup>68</sup>

*Utrecht University*

Carine van RHIJN

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*öses Wissen im Konflikt um Mythisierung und Rationalisierung* (Berlin/New York 2016), pp. 131-46.

67. Isabel MOREIRA, 'Dreams and divination in early medieval canonical and narrative sources: the question of clerical control', *Catholic Historical Review* 89 (2003), pp. 621-42 at 634-35.

68. I am grateful to Renate Dürr, Irene van Renswoude, Monika Wenz and the participants of my 'Prognostics tutorial' in the academic year 2014/15 for their comments, questions and advice.