

The *Lorscher Bienensegen* is an Amulet: Using Manuscript Margins to Make Amulets

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Abstract: The Old High German *Lorscher Bienensegen* or Lorsch bee incantation is one of the best-known examples of a text that uses the power of words to influence the behaviour of bees. During the tenth century, this text was written upside down in the margins of the ninth-century manuscript Vatican, Cod. Pal. Lat. 220. It has long been assumed that the text is a written version of an oral tradition that was recited by beekeepers in and around the abbey of Lorsch. However, this raises the question of why someone would write such a text upside down in the margins of an older manuscript. Contrary to previous scholarship, I propose that the Lorsch bee incantation was intended to be used as an amulet which was to be placed in an apiary. To make this argument, I will first discuss other *Bienensegen*, several of which explicitly instruct their readers to write down the text to prevent bees from fleeing. Second, I will demonstrate that in the manuscript that contains the incantation numerous parts of the margins were cut out. Thereby, I will suggest that the resulting strips of parchment could have been used to produce amulets. In short, I will argue that the *Lorscher Bienensegen* is an amulet.

Keywords: Early Middle Ages, Old High German, bees, amulets, incantations, Lorsch

Introduction

*Kirst imbi ist hucze nu fliuc du uihu minaz hera fridu frono in munt godes gisunt heim
zi comonne sizi sizi bina inbot dir sancte maria hurolob ni habe du zi holce ni fluc du.
noh du mir nindrinnes noh du mir nintuinnest sizi uilu stillo uuirki godes uuillon.*

Christ, the swarm is out! Now, fly and come here, my cattle. In the Lord's peace; in the protection of God; come home in good health. Sit, sit, bees, Saint Mary impels you. You have no furlough. Do not fly into the woods. Neither will you escape me, nor will you elude me. Sit completely still; work God's will.¹

This is the tenth-century Old High German *Lorscher Bienensegen* or Lorsch bee incantation. The incantation is not only regarded as one of the oldest German works of poetry, but is also a clear example of how early medieval people would use the power of words to affect reality—in this case, to resettle a swarming bee colony (see [Stricker 2013](#) for an overview of the scholarship on this).

In fact, the *Lorscher Bienensegen* was not the only text used to that effect. It is part of a wider tradition of bee incantations, most of which were, like this one, intended to control swarming.² This is the process through which a bee colony, if their hive is overpopulated, can reproduce and redivide. Within the nest, worker bees construct so-called swarm cells where new queen bees can develop. The old queen and a significant portion of the colony fly away to find a new place to settle. When conditions are favourable, usually in spring, the colony prepares to swarm. Initially, a cluster of bees forms, which surrounds the queen, moving outside the hive and temporarily settling in the vicinity of the original hive. Scout bees search for a suitable location, and when this is found, the swarm relocates to build a new nest. The beekeeper must act swiftly before this happens, observing the swarm, to identify their temporary location. Catching and relocating the swarm is incredibly important, as the bees will quickly find a new home if left unattended ([Garner, Miller, et al. 2011: 365–6](#); [Goosmann 2023](#)). If the beekeepers succeeds in resettling the swarm, they now have two productive bee colonies instead of one. However, swarming is also a highly insecure time for beekeepers. If they fail to offer the swarming bees a new home, they risk losing a significant part of their colony. For some beekeepers, this risk involved in a swarming colony may outweigh the potential benefit of doubling the stock. Thus, it is not surprising

¹ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Pal. Lat. 220, fol. 58r. For images of the entire manuscript, see https://digi.vatlib.it/view/bav_pal_lat_220 (accessed 11 July 2024). Translation and transcription: [Fraaije \(2020: 337–38\)](#). I follow Fraaije here because of his close transcription of the text in the manuscript. I translate *nintuinnest* with 'elude' instead of Fraaije's 'elope' to stay closer to standard English. Numerous other editions exist, see for instance [von Steinmeyer \(1916: 396–97\)](#).

² The most complete overviews of medieval and modern bee incantations have been provided in [Fife \(1939: 305–59\)](#) and [Ebermann \(1917\)](#). See also [Fife \(1964\)](#), a relatively short article based on his dissertation.

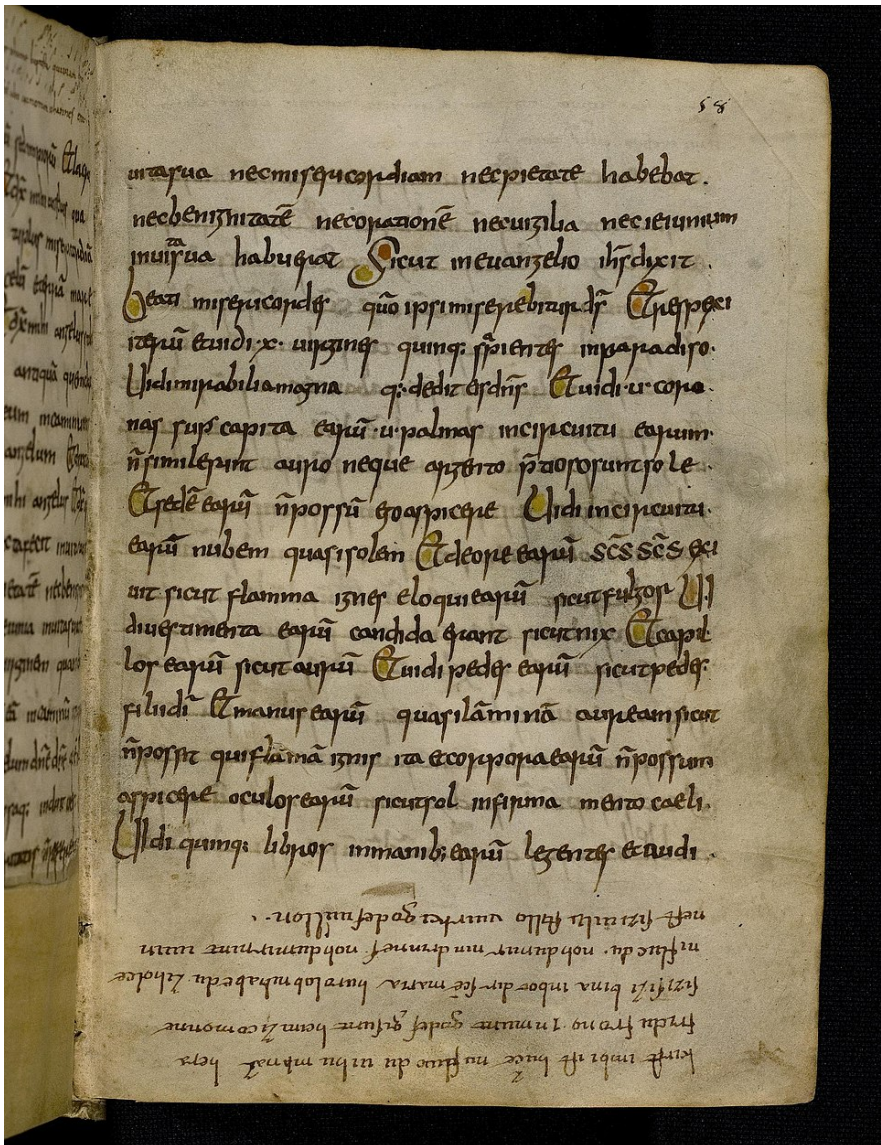


Fig. 1: Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Pal. Lat. 220, fol. 58r. Public domain image. Source: https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lorsch_Bienensegen#/media/Datei:Pal_lat_220_fol_58r_-_Lorsch_Bienensegen.jpg.

that an early-medieval beekeeper would want ways to control the process of swarming. By using a bee incantation, a beekeeper could attempt to calm, control or even entirely prevent their bees from swarming.

Ever since Franz Pfeiffer published the first transcription and discussion of the *Lorscher Bienensegen* in a short article of 1866, it has been assumed that the incantation is a written version of an oral practice that was recited by beekeepers in and around the abbey of Lorsch (Pfeiffer 1866: 3–19). This assumption has been worded more explicitly by scholars such as Austin Fife, who suggested that bee incantations would be recited daily by beekeepers in monasteries, and Marianne Elsackers who classified the *Lorscher Bienensegen* as an example of oral poetry (Fife 1964: 158; Elsackers 1987: 447–61). However, if the incantation is only a reflection of an oral practice, this raises the question of why, sometime during the tenth century, someone decided to write the text upside down in the lower margin of fol. 58r of the ninth-century manuscript Vatican, Cod. Pal. Lat. 220.³

Some scholars have proposed that the *Lorscher Bienensegen* was written upside down for magical purposes (Haeseli 2011: 140). However, mostly, its place in the manuscript has only been mentioned as a curiosity, with scholars assuming that it could have been a convenient place to record an oral practice (see e.g. Franz 1909: II 135–7; Jongeboer 1984; Fraaije 2020: 335–65). For our purposes, it is most important to note that the numerous scholars who discussed the *Lorscher Bienensegen* have always assumed that it was a written version of a text that was intended to be recited.

Contrary to previous scholarship, in this article, I aim to show that the *Lorscher Bienensegen* was originally written down to be cut out of the margin and used as an amulet. To make this argument, first, I will briefly discuss scholarship on medieval incantations and amulets. Second, I will contextualise the *Lorscher Bienensegen* in the broader corpus of bee incantations, showing that several of them were intended to be used as amulets. Third, I will study the place of the incantation in the context of its manuscript, from which several strips of parchment are missing, perhaps for the purposes of amulet production. In conclusion, I will argue that the *Lorscher Bienensegen* was recorded in the margins of an older manuscript, not merely to remember a longstanding oral tradition but to create a new amulet.

³ For a short discussion and overview of the available literature on the manuscript see Bergmann and Stricker (2005: 1590–92, no. 836b).

Incantations as spoken practices and written amulets

A study of the *Lorscher Bienensegen* can contribute to a broader understanding of the ways in which early medieval incantations were used. Here, I will use Theodore de Bruyn's (2017: 2) wide definition for incantations as 'texts that appeal to or adjure supernatural powers to heal, protect, constrain, or avenge'.⁴ By this definition, the term 'incantation' refers both to texts that are intended to be read aloud as well as to texts that are intended to be written down on an amulet. That is to say, the text can 'work' by being said out loud, by being written down or by a combination of the two. This is important because it is hard to assess how an incantation was intended to be used if it was written down in a manuscript without further explicit instructions.

Numerous early medieval incantations have been identified as additions to the empty spaces of older manuscripts (see e.g. Stuart and Walla 1987: 53–79). The margins, flyleaves and places that were otherwise left blank during the initial production of a manuscript were apparently attractive spaces to write down incantations. This has raised the question of how we can determine if and how these incantations in the margins were intended to be used. Generally, three possible answers have been proposed. The first and often implicitly assumed answer is that incantations were oral practices that were written down as quick practical solutions.⁵ The second possible explanation was suggested by Heather Stuart and Fred Walla (1987), who questioned the usefulness of writing down an incantation in a margin halfway through a manuscript, proposing instead that incantations were written down to preserve certain local practices for later generations. The third and most recent interpretation was offered by Christa Haeseli (2011), who argued that incantations were written down in the margins of manuscripts to create a tension with the main text, through which a certain 'magical performativity' would be achieved. Some of these interpretations are certainly valuable. However, they all assume that these texts were intended to be read out aloud. Therefore, they miss an additional possible reason for why incantations would be written down in manuscript margins.

Previous scholars have often overlooked the possibility that incantations without explicit instructions on how to use them could also be written down to be used as textual amulets.

⁴ For further discussions of terminology see Zellmann-Rohrer (2016: 1–6) and Bozoky (2003: 34–49). The lines between terms like prayer, blessing, incantation and charm are blurry. The word *Segen* in German is often used in scholarship and can be translated both as 'blessing' and as 'charm' or 'incantation'; see Holzmann (2001: 28–30). The applicability of such terms to an early medieval context has been questioned by Arthur (2018).

⁵ One particularly remarkable example of this assumption is Fuller (1980), who argues that the cleric who wrote down the Merseburg charms reverted to 'pagan charms' because he felt threatened by the Magyar invasions. See also, for a less controversial discussion of this perspective, Hellgardt (1995, especially 54).

Medieval amulets could be produced out of a wide range of materials but Don Skemer (2006: 1) has more specifically defined textual amulets as ‘generally brief apotropaic texts, hand-written or mechanically printed on separate sheets, rolls, and scraps of parchment, paper, or other flexible writing supports of varying dimensions’.⁶ These objects were often worn on the body but could also be placed in a wide variety of places like houses, doorsteps, and, importantly, beehives, to ward off evil or attract certain benefits. As Skemer (2006: 129–30) has suggested, it is possible that medieval amulets were sometimes produced out of scraps of parchment that were cut out from the margins of manuscripts.

Could Skemer’s suggestion be used to understand why medieval incantations were written down in manuscript margins? Certainly, numerous medieval manuscripts lack several strips of parchment that could have been used to produce a variety of practical short texts.⁷ However, if some of these margins were indeed used for the production of amulets, it is reasonable to assume that most of those amulets were cut out and can therefore no longer be found in the same context. The exception would be amulets that, for whatever reason, were never used and are thus still found in medieval manuscripts. This is where bee incantations and more specifically the *Lorscher Bienensegen* can provide a new perspective.

Bee amulets

Bee incantations can be found throughout medieval and modern sources from the ninth century onwards.⁸ While it is often assumed that these texts were intended to be read out aloud, most bee incantations do not convey explicit instructions on how they are to be used; the texts merely inform the bees what to do and where to go, without telling the beekeeper how they should use the incantation. This also applies to the *Lorscher Bienensegen*.

The silence of the text of the *Lorscher Bienensegen* about the manner of its use has undoubtedly contributed to the assumption that the text was supposed to be recited. However, some other bee incantations provide more elaborate instructions on how to use them. Although these texts are separated by time and space, they provide a glimpse into the variety of ways in which bee incantations could be utilised. They suggest that

⁶ The standard work on medieval amulets is Skemer (2006). The term ‘textual amulet’ is more specific than ‘amulet’ because an amulet does not necessarily have to contain text. De Bruyn (2017: 2) defines amulets in general as ‘objects that are worn, affixed, or deposited for healing, protective, or propitious purposes.’ An incantation is one of several types of texts that could be written on an amulet. For an excellent article tracing the development of one of the incantatory formulas that is found on amulets as well as in manuscripts see Ehmig and Urbanová (2022).

⁷ For manuscripts that lack strips of parchment and also contain incantations see, for instance Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare, XXI (19) and München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm, 6342. For one possible application of such strips of parchment in relic collections see Smith (2020).

⁸ The oldest known bee incantation from the ninth century can be found in Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek, Cod. Sang. 190, p. 1.

we cannot simply assume that bee incantations were intended to be recited. Before studying the *Lorscher Bienensegen* in more detail, it is therefore important to analyse the user instructions that accompany the broader body of medieval bee incantations.

There is no doubt that several bee incantations were intended to be recited. Take the eleventh-century Old English bee charm, the second part of which instructs its reader:

[...] *And wiððon forweorp ofer grot, þonne hi swirman, and cweð: Sitte ge, sigewif, sigað to eorþan! Næfre ge wilde to wuda fleogan. Beo ge swa gemindige mines godes, swa bið manna gehwiltc metes and eþeles.*

[...] When they swarm, cast grit over them and say: Sit yourselves down, victory women, descend to earth. May you never fly, wild, to the woods. May you be as mindful of my good fortune, as each man is of food and property.⁹

Similarly, a bee incantation in the late eleventh- or early twelfth-century Mülinen Rotulus contains the advice to make the sign of the cross and say aloud some of the first words from Psalm 8.¹⁰ However, these are two relatively rare examples; most bee incantations do not clarify whether they should be recited. This thus leaves the question of how the other bee incantations could have been used unanswered.

One particularly interesting case to consider in this regard is the following late eleventh- or early twelfth-century bee incantation:

Ut apes fugere non possum. In nomine domini. sede mater argonilia con tota tua familia. sanctificet dominus noster Ihesus Christus qui fecit celum et terram, mare et omnia qui in eis sunt. sanctificet te, sanctificet sancta Maria mater domini nostri Ihesu Christi, sanctificet uos sanctus Petrus et sanctus Paulus qui tenent clauas regni celorum. non possit ad siluam fugire nec ad patrium reintare. ego uobis abeo casas paratas de mel et lac lodatas ut uos sedeatis per annonn hilares casatas. scribe haec uerbum in stallea et apiario ponon et postea non fuiat.

So that bees cannot flee. In the name of the Lord, sit swift mother, with your entire family. May our Lord Jesus Christ who created heaven and earth, the sea and everything in them sanctify, sanctify you. May saint Mary, mother of our

⁹ Cambridge, Parker Library, Corpus Christi College 41, p. 182. Translation and transcription: Fraaije (2020: 336–37).

¹⁰ Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Cod. 803, Entry r139. 'Item. Quando apes se eleuant ut fugiant festina contra eas stricto pugillo, ita ut pollex in pugillo contineatur. Ita fac crucem et dic: Domine Deus noster, q.a.e.n.t.i.u.t., et hoc fac ter: lotet hec + tonis sic +. ('Likewise. When bees take flight to flee, quickly hold up a clenched fist against them, in such a way that your thumb is contained in the fist. Make the sign of the cross with it and say: Lord our Lord, how admirable is thy name in the whole earth! and do this three times, lotet hec + tonis sic +'). The most detailed discussion of the manuscript is found in Kössinger (2020: 86–182). Claire Burridge, Carine van Rhijn, and I are working on an edition and translation of the manuscript.

Lord Jesus Christ sanctify you. May saint Peter and saint Paul, who hold the keys to the kingdom of God, sanctify you, so that you cannot flee to the forest nor return to your homeland. Here, I have prepared for you praised hives of milk and honey so that you sit here for the year in cheerful dwellings. Write these words on a slab, place them in the apiary, and afterwards, may they not flee.¹¹

This incantation is similar to the *Lorscher Bienensegen*. Remarkably, both texts are the only known cases from before the later twelfth century where Mary, rather than the beekeeper, is commanding the bees. In both cases, the incantation stresses that Mary requests the bees to settle and not flee to the forest; in this instance she does so alongside Jesus, Peter and Paul. Unlike the *Lorscher Bienensegen*, however, this incantation explicitly instructs its reader to write the text down and place it in the apiary.

Similarly, during the eleventh century, likely in Winchester, the so-called Columcille's circle was written in the manuscript London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius E.xviii (see [Rust 1999](#); [Arthur 2018: 140–5](#) for discussions of the text). The circle is an elaborate diagram accompanied by the following instructions:

Bis is s(an)c(t)e columcille circul :- Writ þysne circul mid þinnes cnifes orde on anum mealan stan 7 sleah ænne stacan on middan þam ymbhagan 7 lete þane stan on uppan þam stacan þæt he beo eall under eorðan butan þam gewritenan.

This is Saint Columcille's Circle: Write this circle with your knife's edge on a malmstone, and thrust a stake in the middle of the beehive, and lay the stone above the stake so that it may be all under the earth except for the writing.¹²

As Martha Rust (1999) has argued, the diagram was likely intended to protect bees during the process of swarming. This demonstrates again how writing down certain words and symbols could be used to control a colony of bees.¹³

¹¹ London, British Library, Cod. Sloane 475, fol. 136v; see Zellmann-Rohrer (2016, entry 1.12.10). The Latin in the entire text is rather confused: Zellmann-Rohrer proposes that *possum* should be altered to *possint*, *stella* to *stela* and *fuiait* to *fugiant*. In addition, I would suggest that *argonilia* comes from Greek ἀργός, which can mean 'swift' or 'white' but also 'idle' or 'lazy', which may indicate a type of wordplay in which the bees are both praised for being swift and exhorted to settle down by calling them lazy. This may align with the numerous different names that the bees are given in other bee incantations, such as the *sigewif* in the Old English bee charm, which Fraaije (2020: 340–41) argues refers both to 'victory' as well as 'descent' [i.e. descended] women. On the dating: Gneuss (2001): no. 498.1 about fols 125–231: 's. xi ex. or xi/xii, English or Anglo-Norman scribe'; Beccaria (1956): 258: 'in minuscola della fine del secolo XI'.

¹² London, British Library, Cotton Vitellius E.xviii, fol. 15v. Translation and transcription: Arthur (2018: 142).

¹³ Similarly, the fourth-century *Herbarium* by pseudo-Apuleius contains instructions to hang the herb *veneria* on a beehive to prevent bees from flying away. See Kinney (2022: 251): *ne apes examinēt uel ne effugiant. Herbam ueneriam in uaso apium suspensam habeto, nunquam seducentur* ('So that bees will not swarm or fly away [from their hive]. Have the herb ueneria hanging on a beehive and the bees will never be led astray').

This information is significant as several later texts including similar instructions are known. Two fourteenth- and fifteenth-century German examples also order the reader to write the incantation down, one of which explicitly instructs the reader to place it in the apiary.¹⁴ Remarkably, the formulas that are to be written down in these texts show many similarities to early-medieval incantations that are more ambiguous about their methodology. Besides broader similarities in word-usage and appeals to authorities, one example instructs the reader to write down the following words:

Elion elion argutt consun consun erit. Nun abia abia abia, qui facis ceram punicam, adiuro te per Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum ut hominem non fugias.

*Elion elion argutt consun consun erit. Nun abia abia abia, you who make Punic wax, I adjure you by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit that you shall not flee from man.*¹⁵

This is particularly important as the previously-mentioned Mülinen Rotulus contains a bee incantation which does not instruct its reader how it should be used and merely reads:

Benedictio ad apes. Elyon, elyon, arguit nun, non erit nun, abia abia abia qui facis ceram punicam, adiuro uos per Patrem et Filium et Spiritum Sanctum ut hominem non effugias.

Benediction for bees. *Elyon, elyon, arguit nun, non erit nun, abia abia abia, you who make Punic wax, I adjure you by the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit that you shall not flee from man.*¹⁶

The clear parallels between these two bee incantations are significant. They suggest that a bee incantation without explicit instructions could come to be used as a text for an amulet. This is not to say that the same text could not also have been recited. However, the diversity in the explicit instructions that accompany bee incantations demonstrates how

¹⁴ München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cgm, 467, 142a–b *schreib auff ein pley* ('write on a piece of lead') and München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm, 7021, 165b *schreibe die namen an ain permit und lege es in ein peigurtel* ('write the names on piece of parchment and place it in an apiary'). See Schönbach (1893: 29–31).

¹⁵ München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm, 7021, 165b. Similarly München, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm, 7021, fol. 158vb adjures the bees *ut non habeatis licenciam fugere filium hominis* ('So that you may not have permission to flee from the Son of Man').

¹⁶ Bern, Burgerbibliothek, Cod. 803, entry r138. Although the word *benedictio* may seem to indicate oral performance here, that is called into question by an incantation only four entries later in the same manuscript. This text explicitly instructs the reader to write the *benedictio* on an amulet: r142. *Benedictio ad vermem an unoquoque animali necandum. Hoc scriptum ligatum super se portat: allubia zababantes tronsonatros iat, ad remedium tollenda* ('Benediction to kill a worm and whatever animal. [The patient] carries this writing bound on him: *allubia zababantes tronsonatros iat*, as a remedy to remove it').

the incantations that are found in medieval manuscripts without further instructions cannot simply be assumed to be intended to be read out loud. It suggests that at least some of the written bee incantations were intended to be used as (models for) amulets.

The investigation of the wider source material of bee incantations thus shows that they were not merely written down as copies of oral practices. On the contrary, the bee incantations that contain explicit instructions on how they were to be used strongly suggest that texts like this could also be written down and placed in the apiary to influence the swarming of a bee colony.

Stripping a manuscript for parts

Because bee incantations were used both orally and in written form, it is important to take a closer look at the manuscripts that contain these texts. By studying how and where the *Lorscher Bienensegen* was written down, it becomes clear that it was intended to be used as an amulet.¹⁷

Vatican, Cod. Pal. Lat. 220, the manuscript that contains the *Lorscher Bienensegen*, was produced during the early ninth century somewhere in the central or upper Rhine region.

It primarily contains Latin theological texts including Pseudo-Augustine's *Dicta ad predicandum*, Boniface's *Predicatio de die iudicii*, Venantius Fortunatus' *Expositio symboli apostolorum* and several anonymous sermons. After its production, the manuscript likely made its way to the monastery of Lorsch sometime before the year 900 (Bergmann and Stricker 2005: 1590–2, no. 836b; Bischoff 1971: 113). There, the margins of the manuscript were inscribed by several tenth-century hands with a wide variety of hymns, chants, pen trials and didactic exercises that do not appear to be related to the texts in the centre. They give the impression of a manuscript that did not gather dust in a library but was actively used, perhaps in the monastery of Lorsch. The *Lorscher Bienensegen* itself was written upside down in the lower margin of fol. 58r underneath an apocryphal New Testament text that is known as the *Visio St Pauli* (Bergmann and Stricker 2005: 1590–2, no. 836b).

However, for a full understanding of the *Lorscher Bienensegen*, the lost margins of the manuscript may reveal even more than the ones that were inscribed. Remarkably, numerous upper and lower margins of the manuscript are missing either in part or in their entirety. For instance, the entire lower margin of fol. 27 is missing, while the main text is left intact. On the following folio, a smaller strip appears to have been cut out deliberately from the lower margin, leaving more of the manuscript, including the entire main text, intact. This

¹⁷ Bergmann and Stricker (2005: 1590–92, no. 836b); Bischoff (1971: 113).

trend continues throughout the rest of the manuscript. Fols 28 and 30 are missing a tiny strip in the lower margin, fol. 41 is again missing the entire lower margin much like fol. 48, whereas fols 53 and 54 are missing strips of parchment from their upper margin. There is no obvious correlation between the main and marginal text on these pages, nor any apparent reason why these particular places were chosen: it may be entirely adventitious.

Thus, the gaps left by the removal of strips of different sizes can be found in numerous places throughout the manuscript. The lines along which these strips appear to have been removed are completely straight, never interfere with the main text and do not appear to show many other signs of wear. All of this indicates that the removal of these strips of parchment was not an accident or a way of reformatting the entire manuscript. Rather, the missing strips of parchment appear to have been cut out deliberately. The smoking gun in this respect is fol. 57, which directly precedes the *Lorschier Bienensegen* and thus faces it in the manuscript. This folio lacks the entire lower margin in the exact same spot in which the bee incantation was written on fol. 58. Perhaps, the *Lorschier Bienensegen* was copied for future use from a text on fol. 57 that was then cut out of the manuscript and used as an amulet.¹⁸ In any case, it appears that people wrote texts in the margins of Vatican, Cod. Pal. Lat. 220 to cut them out for use on smaller strips of parchment.¹⁹

This information can be combined with the exact position of the *Lorschier Bienensegen* in the manuscript. A beekeeper in need of control over their swarm could presumably find much more practical ways and spots to write down (and find again) an incantation intended for oral recitation than upside down halfway through a manuscript. However, the manuscript context of the *Lorschier Bienensegen* perfectly aligns with the needs of someone who would want an amulet. The bee incantation is found on the recto of this folio, whereas the verso of the lower margin was left blank, perhaps because information written on the back could get lost after cutting out the incantation. This interpretation may also provide an explanation for the fact that the text was written upside down. Imagine that you want to make an amulet using fol. 58. The lower margin clearly has more space than the upper margin (see Fig. 1), making it a more convenient place to write a text for an amulet. Since the amulet will be cut out, it is not necessary to consider how the text would look in the manuscript at large, which means you can turn the manuscript around and start writing from what is then the top of the page. Thereby, it is possible to leave as much room as possible after the last line of the incantation so as not to interfere with the main text.²⁰

¹⁸ I am most grateful to the anonymous reviewer of this article for this helpful suggestion.

¹⁹ It might be that the manuscript was chosen because it had fallen out of use somewhat. At the same time, the fact that these cuts do not interfere with the main text suggests that the parchment cutters wanted to make sure that no valuable knowledge was lost.

²⁰ This theory is strengthened by an incantation on fol. 50r in Verona, Biblioteca Capitolare, XXI (19), which was also written upside down in a manuscript that has been deprived of misses numerous margins.

Now let us return to the text of the *Lorscher Bienensegen*:

*Kirst imbi ist hucze nu fliuc du uihu minaz hera fridu frono in munt godes gisunt heim
zi comonne sizi sizi bina inbot dir sancte maria hurolob ni habe du zi holce ni fluc du.
noh du mir nindrinnes noh du mir nintuinnest sizi uilu stillo uuirki godes uuillon.*

Christ, the swarm is out! Now, fly and come here, my cattle. In the Lord's peace; in the protection of God; come home in good health. Sit, sit, bees, Saint Mary impels you. You have no furlough. Do not fly into the woods. Neither will you escape me, nor will you elude me. Sit completely still; work God's will.²¹

The incantation only conveys the information that would be needed on the amulet. It contains no title and no further instructions that would have been important to understand the text if it had been intended for any future use in the margins of the manuscript. It merely instructs the bees what they should do when they swarm. This suggests that the intended audience of the text was not a prospective user of the manuscript or a beekeeper: it was the bee colony that needed to obey the amulet.

In this light, the manuscript context of the *Lorscher Bienensegen* can be understood. The incantation was written upside down in the lower margin of a manuscript from which strips of parchment were routinely cut out, suggesting that this margin could have been intended to be used in a similar way. Because of this context and the incantation's similarities with other bee incantations that were explicitly intended to be written down, we may now safely assume that the user of the incantation was also supposed to 'place them in the apiary, and afterwards, may they not flee' (London, British Library, Cod. Sloane 475, fol. 136v).

Conclusion

During the tenth century, a beekeeper in or around the monastery of Lorsch needed a way to control the swarming of their colony. Whether or not the beekeeper in question had access to a manuscript or was helped by a monk, someone decided to make use of the margins of a ninth-century manuscript. This person wrote down the words which are known from similar texts explicitly intended for use on amulets and chose a manuscript that had already been plundered for strips of parchment to produce an amulet which could be placed in an apiary.

The holes in manuscript margins left by pieces that were cut out thus reveal an interesting history. The *Lorscher Bienensegen* shows how the margins of older manuscripts were used

²¹ Vatican City, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Cod. Pal. Lat. 220, fol. 58r. Translation and transcription: Fraaije (2020: 337–38).

to write down amulet-incantations for practical use. This offers a new way of interpreting the numerous incantations found in the margins of manuscripts. We should consider the possibility that some of these texts were intended to be used as amulets. Why the *Lorscher Bienensegen* never ended up being used as such will remain a mystery. Perhaps the bees had already flown away, perhaps someone decided enough margins had already been removed or perhaps the text was simply forgotten.

Nevertheless, the evidence suggests that the *Lorscher Bienensegen* was an amulet.

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