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# A Charm Against Beeswarms

## Introduction

Charms are spoken formulae, often accompanied by nonverbal ritual. They rely on the supernatural, but scholars will point out that no natural/supernatural distinction applied in the early medieval world-view that speaks from our texts, or not in the same way as today. In fact, OE did have a word *gecyndelic* for “natural” in the sense “in the nature of a thing”; the difference with today’s concept of natural is where its speakers drew the line at what was considered natural, as this was typically defined with reference to God’s purpose in creating a thing (cf. the introduction to *Against gout*. It is accordingly hard to know which charms would have been condoned or rejected by which ecclesiastical authorities, but it is probably safe to assume that formulae that do not call on God or the Christian saints would have been condemned by someone like Ælfric of Eynsham.

The fact that these charms are in alliterative long lines would have aided memorization, but it is certainly plausible that their rhythm and sound also bore an association, however implicit, with the sorts of powers one sought to access.

For more on the charms, see *Karen Jolly, Popular Religion in Late Saxon England*.

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## Manuscript

Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 41, p. 182 (s. xi<sup>1</sup> or xi med.)

## Text

(1) Wið ymbe: nim eorþan, oferweorp mid þinre swiþran handa under þinum swiþran fet, and cwet:

“Fo ic under fot, funde ic hit.

Hwæt, eorðe mæg wið ealra wihta gehwilce

and wið andan and wið æminde

and wið þa micelan mannes tungan”

(2) And [siððan]<sup>1</sup> forweorp ofer great 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 gehwilc metes and eþeles.”

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<sup>1</sup>MS wið on.