



Popular Religion in Late Saxon England: Elf Charms in Context

By Karen Louise Jolly

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In tenth- and eleventh-century England, Anglo-Saxon Christians retained an old folk belief in elves as extremely dangerous creatures capable of harming unwary humans. To ward off the afflictions caused by these invisible beings, Christian priests modified traditional elf charms by adding liturgical chants to herbal remedies. In *Popular Religion in Late Saxon England*, Karen Jolly traces this cultural intermingling of Christian liturgy and indigenous Germanic customs and argues that elf charms and similar practices represent the successful Christianization of native folklore. Jolly describes a dual process of conversion in which Anglo-Saxon culture became Christianized but at the same time left its own distinct imprint on Christianity. Illuminating the creative aspects of this dynamic relationship, she identifies liturgical folk medicine as a middle ground between popular and elite, pagan and Christian, magic and miracle. Her analysis, drawing on the model of popular religion to redefine folklore and magic, reveals the richness and diversity of late Saxon Christianity.

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Editorial Review

Review

Provides unique and valuable insights into popular culture in late Saxon England.

"Speculum"

Review

Karen Jolly has written a book that succeeds in being both focused and wide-ranging. With the Anglo-Saxon 'elf charms' as her chief point of reference, she manages to integrate with confidence and ease a diversity of materials, including not only the literary sources in Old English and Latin, but also the archaeological evidence and the ecclesiastical and political records. She shows a firm command of the time and place that she writes about and demonstrates the rootedness of religion magic within a particular culture. The result is a broad and fascinating panorama of Anglo-Saxon religious culture. While Jolly speaks of 'popular' religion, she makes no facile distinction between this and clerical Christianity; the book marks a noteworthy advance in our study of this culture in all its complexities.--Richard Kieckhefer, Northwestern University

Jolly's erudite and lively explication of the charms of elves provides unique and valuable insights into popular culture in late Saxon England.--*Speculum*

This interesting work convincingly challenges previous treatments of the subject.--*Times Literary Supplement*

From the Back Cover

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