

## Chapter 6

### Medical Texts

Medical texts comprise the Old English genre which attests most often to *ælf*. As I indicated in my introduction, the presence of *ælf* in these texts has been commented on extensively, and even been the focus of a book (Jolly 1996)—but a complete reassessment is required (§1:1). The present chapter marshals the wide range of evidence provided by the medical texts: lexical, textual, codicological and cultural. Presenting the outcomes of these disparate approaches coherently is a serious challenge. A remedy may be linked to one other lexically, to another by the history of its transmission, and another again by its manuscript context; and each of these may be under study in its own right. Compromising between these approaches, I have grouped together the most important cluster of texts lexically—those containing the word *ælfside*—along with textual relatives and a text containing the cognate word *sidsa*, as the final section of the chapter. The other remedies are less entangled, and generally attest to *ælf* in unique compound words. These I discuss in an order based on their manuscript attestations. I have accorded *Wið færstice* a chapter of its own (ch. 8): because of the complexity and importance of this text, it demands separate treatment, the other, more prosaic, remedies providing it with one of several reading contexts.

I only touch, for lack of space, on the association with illness of *ælf*'s cognates and reflexes. Most of the known high medieval English evidence is referred to here, but by no means fully discussed; medieval German evidence appears only occasionally; and post-medieval evidence less again. However, it is important to appreciate that the associations of *ælf*e with illness seem to be part of a wider and presumably older tradition. The evidence is mainly West Germanic: medieval Scandinavian counterparts—despite the wealth of Icelandic saga-evidence—are rare and may have German origins, the extensive attestations in later folklore (on which see for example Lid 1921; cf. Honko 1959) reflecting the spread of German culture through the Hanseatic league.<sup>141</sup>

<sup>141</sup> For German see Schulz's recent analyses of the *Corpus der deutschen Segen und Beschwörungsformeln* (2000); also Höfler 1899, s.vv. *Alp, Elbe*, cf. s.v. *Mar*; Holzmann 2003, 27–30; cf. Edwards 1994. The two certain Scandinavian references which I know are to *álfavolkun* ('illness inflicted by *alfar*'; *DONP*, s.v. *alfa-volkun*) in an Icelandic text and the last remedy in a sixteenth-century Swedish medical text 'For elffwer' (ed. Klemming 1883–86, 394–95). See also, however, ch. 7. Boyer claimed, without giving a reference, that 'une ... croix de plomb porte une conjuration sans équivoque: *contra elphos hec in plumbo scribe* [sic]' ('one ... lead cross bears an unequivocal charm: *inscribe this in lead against "elphi"*'; 1986, 113–14; cf. Lecouteux 1997, 125). But he seems to have meant a lead plate from Odense, bearing a text which has a German manuscript version. Of these, only the manuscript says 'contra elphos hec in plumbo scribe' (*Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder*, s.v. *Blykors*); whether this was the intended

Excluding the Royal Prayerbook, considered above (§5:1), two Anglo-Saxon medical manuscripts attest to *ælf*. I have discussed BL Harley 585 above regarding *Wið færstice*; *ælf* occurs there once otherwise. BL Royal 12 D. xvii contains the collections known as *Bald's Leechbook* (in two books) and *Leechbook III*. The manuscript is handsome if plain, written by the scribe who (amongst other things) wrote the batch of annals for 925–55 in the Parker Chronicle.<sup>142</sup> This suggests that the manuscript was produced at Winchester in the mid-tenth century, the political bias of the Chronicle entries consolidating the obvious assumption of affiliations to King Edmund's court (cf. Downham 2003, 31). Some of the contents of Bald's Leechbook, however, show associations with the court of Alfred the Great, and Meaney argued that 'almost certainly, too, the original fair copy ... would have been produced in a Winchester scriptorium, during Alfred's reign' (1984, 236; cf. 1978; Wright 1955, 17–18; Pratt 2001, 69–71). Bald's Leechbook is impressively well-organised, much of its content translated from Latin, putting it at the cutting edge of early medieval Western medicine (see Cameron 1993, 42–45, 77–99). The other text, Leechbook III, exhibits less Latin influence, and so may reflect traditional Anglo-Saxon medicine better, though this does not mean—as Cameron thought—that it is an earlier collection (Cameron 1993, 35–42). There is no modern published edition of Royal 12 D.xvii, and since facsimiles are as accessible as Cockayne's edition (1864–66), where folio references are easily found, I cite from Wright's facsimile of Royal 12 D.xvii (1955; cf. Doane 1994b, no. 298). I have taken the usual editorial liberties of expanding abbreviations and normalising word-separation. All of these medical collections drew on earlier material, and all share material to a certain extent;<sup>143</sup> some of this is attested in manuscript as early as the second half of the ninth century (Meaney 1984, 243–45; Cameron 1993, 31), and much may in origin be older.

### 1. The elf-shot conspiracy: Bald's Leechbook II, f. 106r., *Gif hors ofscoten sie*

*Ælf* occurs in Bald's Leechbook in three remedies. One, from Book I, uses *ælfside* and is accordingly considered below (§6:3.4). The others both occur in section 65, occurring towards the end of the text on folios 106a–108a. One of these is our unique attestation of *sidsa* and is, again, considered with *ælfside* (§6:3.6). Section 65 is marginal to Bald's

function of the Odense inscription is not clear.

<sup>142</sup> See Wright 1955, 12–27; cf. Ker 1957, 332–33 [no. 264]; Meaney 1984, 250–51; Cameron 1993, 30–31.

<sup>143</sup> See especially Meaney 1984, though, understandably for a pioneering study, she missed several textual interrelationships which are identified here.

Leechbook, and I think was probably added after Bald's original compilation: at least one of the remedies seems to be oral in origin, the oft-noted 'læcedom dun tæhte' ('remedy which Dun taught'; f. 106v), while the first remedy of the section, *Gif hors ofscoten sie*, seems to be for the same ailment as *Gif hors sie ofscoten opppe oper neat* in the last section of Book I of Bald's Leechbook, section 89 (f. 58rv)—but it was characteristic of the compiler of Bald's Leechbook to include such related remedies together (cf. Meaney 1984, esp. 250–51; Cameron 1993, 82–83). Two more sections follow before the end of the book, but these are not remedies: 66 lists the properties of agate, and 67 information about measurements. The remedies of section 65 are listed in the contents list to Book II on folio 64v:

Læcedom gif hors sie ofscoten ⁊ wip utwærce . ⁊ gif utgang forseten sie . ⁊ wip lenctenadle . eft wip utwærce ⁊ wip unlybbum ⁊ wip þære geolwan adle ⁊ gif men sie færlice yfele ⁊ to gehealdanne lichoman hælo ⁊ wip gicþan ⁊ ælue ⁊ wip londadle ⁊ gongelwæfran bite . ⁊ wið utsihtre ⁊ heafodsealfa .

Remedy for if a horse is *ofscoten*; and one for ?dysentery; and one if excrement is obstructed; and one for *lenctenadl*; another for ?dysentery; and one for *unlybban*; and one for the yellow ailment; and one if the sudden evil be upon a person; and one to keep the body healthy; and one for scabs [perhaps an ailment such as psoriasis]; and [against an] *ælf*; and one for *londadl*; and one [for] spider's bite; and for ?dysentery [at any rate, some bowel disorder]; and head-salves.<sup>144</sup>

Jolly considered these ailments an 'odd collection' (1996, 151–54 at 154), though, as so often with other cultures' miscellaneous-looking categorisations, the ailments in this one may be more coherent than at first they seem.<sup>145</sup>

It is the first remedy in section 65, *Gif hors ofscoten sie*, on folio 106r, that concerns us here:

Gif hors ofscoten sie. Nim þonne þæt seax þe þæt hæfte sie fealo hryþeres horn & sien .III. ærene næglas on. Writ þonne þam horse on þam heafde foran cristes mæl þæt hit blede . Writ þonne on þam hricge cristes mæl & on leoþa gehwilcum þe þu ætfeolan mæge. Nim þonne þæt winestre eare þurh sting swigende. Þis þu scealt don. genim ane girde sleah on þæt bæc þonne biþ þæt hors

<sup>144</sup> The fact that *wip* is absent before *ælf* might indicate that that remedy was viewed to be for a more specific form of *gicþa*, an interpretation also invited by the fact that the beginning of the remedy *wið gicþan* on folio 107v is set into the margin and the beginning of the following remedies are not. However, these might respectively result from stylistic variation and the fact that the remedy *wið gicþan* happened to start on a new line, whereupon the scribe of Royal 12 D. xvii set the first into the margin as a matter of course.

<sup>145</sup> *Ælf* may, indeed, be a connecting feature. Of the fifteen remedies listed, three concern bowel problems and one jaundice—itsself associated with internal pains (see §6:2.2)—while *gif hors ofscoten sie*, which mentions *ælf*, also concerns internal pains (§6:1). Another is against an *ælf* (see §6:3.6), while cutaneous ailments (cf. *gicþan*) are associated with *ælf* (§6:2.3). Remedies against a spider's bite closely follow a series on fevers, madness and demonic and magical afflictions including *ælfsiden* in Book I of Bald's Leechbook (ff. 50v–54r, nos 57–68; see further below, §6:3.4). Although *lungenadl* is not elsewhere associated with *ælf*, it is incorrectly listed in the contents as *lenctenadl*, which is (§6:3.4, cf. §5:5). These latter issues relate fairly closely to the beneficial properties of jet as described in the following section, while, as Kitson pointed out, the only remedy in the Old English medical texts to prescribe jet occurs in section 65, in the remedy *Wið ælfe* (1989, 60–61).

hal. & awrit on þæs seaxes horne þas word. Benedicite omnia opera domini dominum. Sy þæt ylfa þe him sie þis him mæg to bote.

If a horse is badly pained [*ofscoten*]. Take then a dagger whose haft is of fallow-ox's horn and in which there are three brass nails. Write/inscribe on the horse, on the forehead, Christ's mark, so it bleeds. Write/inscribe then Christ's mark on the spine and on each of the limbs which you can grasp.<sup>146</sup> Then take the left ear, pierce it in silence. This shall you do: take a staff; strike on the back; then the horse will be well. And write/inscribe on the dagger's handle these words: *bless all the works of the Lord of lords*. Should it be *ælfes*, which is on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it [the horse].

Historiographically, this remedy is crucial, as it had prompted most of the identifications of 'elf-shot' in our Old English corpus. Despite its obvious title, *Gif hors ofscoten sie*, given here and in the contents list, this remedy was entitled *Wið ylfa gescot* by Grendon (1909, 208–9) and *Wip ylfa gescotum* by Storms (1948, 248–49). Moreover, the first clause, for which I suggest the literal translation 'if a horse is badly pained', was translated by Grendon as 'if a horse is elf-struck', by Storms as 'if a horse is elf-shot', and, circumspectly but in accordance with this tradition, by Jolly as 'if a horse is [elf] shot [*ofscoten*]' (1996, 152). This translation has entered the dictionaries (Bosworth–Toller 1898; Clark Hall 1960, s.v. *ofsceotan*). As I have discussed elsewhere, however, these readings derive from a misunderstanding of Cockayne's translation 'if a horse is elf shot' (1864–66, II 291): Cockayne's glossary entry for *ofscoten* shows he meant this as an idiomatic rendering meaning 'dangerously distended by greedy devouring of green food' (1864–66, II 401, cf. 291 n. 1; Hall forthcoming [c], §2).

Thun, stating what other scholars imply, deduced that 'the mention of *ylfa* makes it seem likely that the elves were thought to be those who were shooting' (1969, 385). This inference is predicated on the idea that *ofsceotan* connotes the shooting of missiles, for which we must posit a source. However, although *sceotan* literally denotes thrusting or shooting, later in English it had specific medical meanings along the lines of 'to afflict, cause pain; have darting pains' (*MED*, s.v. *shēten* §6b; *OED*, s.v. *shoot*, v. §1.5, *shooting* §3; cf. Höfler 1899, s.v. *schieszen* on German parallels); the prefix *of-* would simply have an intensifying force. This putative meaning is not otherwise clearly paralleled in the Old English medical texts, though Leechbook III and Harley 585 share a remedy 'wið sceotendum wenne' ('against a *sceotend* growth'; ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 148; cf. Leechbook III, section 30; ed. Wright 1955, f. 117r), which seems likely to attest to *sceotan* in a similar sense, unless it is a very early attestation of the sense 'to sprout, to spring forth' (*MED*, s.v. *sheten* §2b; *DOST*, s.v. *schute* §1.6). As Cockayne realised, *Gif hors ofscoten sie* almost certainly concerns internal pains rather than a projectile wound, actual or metaphorical.

<sup>146</sup> On this translation see Hall forthcoming [c], n. 6 (*contra* *DOE*, s.v. *æt-fēolan* §3a, following instead §1).

It is the last sentence of the remedy, of course, which actually mentions *ælf*, providing the only support for reading ‘elf-shot’ into the text. ‘Sy þæt ylfa þe him sie þis him mæg to bote’ is a rather convoluted sentence, which has hitherto been mistranslated. Cockayne offered ‘Be the elf what it may, this is mighty for him to amends’ (1864–66, II 291). This implies that an *ælf*, which might be one of various sorts, is somehow assailing the horse. Subsequent commentators have basically followed Cockayne. Grendon translated ‘Be the elf who he may, this will suffice as a cure for him’ (1909, 209) and Singer ‘Be the elf who he may, this has power as a remedy’ (1919–20, 358). Storms went further, offering ‘Whatever elf has taken possession of it, this will cure him’ (1948, 249). Most recently, Jolly improved on Cockayne’s handling of ‘þe him sie’ with the more conservative translation ‘Whatever elf is on him, this can be a remedy for him’ (1996, 152). However, these translations mishandle the first part of the sentence. The main clause of the sentence (‘þis him mæg to bote’) is hard to render idiomatically in English because of the usage of *magan*, but its meaning is not in doubt: ‘this will do for it [the horse] as a remedy’. But the subordinate clause (‘Sic þæt ylfa þe him sie’) confused Cockayne, and a complete reanalysis is necessary.<sup>147</sup>

*Him* would naturally be taken to refer to the indirect object of the sentence, as it does in the main clause (as in ‘this is mighty *for him* to amends’), while clause-initial subjunctives like *sy* (the third person singular present subjunctive of *wesan* ‘to be’) were used in inverted conditional clauses to express uncertainty (cf. ‘be he alive or dead...’; Mitchell 1985, II §§3678–80). This suggests the reading ‘be þæt ylfa, which may be on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it [the horse]’. Similar constructions found by searching the electronic *Dictionary of Old English Corpus* are ‘gif hyt þonne sy þæt sio wamb sy aþundeno, sceafta ðonne þa wyrte 7 lege on þa wambe’ (‘If it should then be that the stomach is swollen, scrape those plants and lay [them] on the stomach’; ed. Vriend 1984, 38) and ‘sy þæt sar þær hit sy, smite mon ða sealfe ærest on þæt heafod’ (‘Be the pain where it may, one should smear the salve first on the head’; ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 112) from the medical texts, and from the laws V Æthelstan, ‘& gif hit sy ðegen ðe hit do, sy þæt ilce’ (‘and if it be a thegn who does it, be that [punishment] likewise’; ed. Liebermann 1903–16, I 168).

<sup>147</sup> Cockayne justified his reading with the rather obscure note, ‘the construction as in *Ic hit eom, I am he*; combined with the partitive, as *Hwilec hæleða, what hero*’ (1864–66, II 291 n. 2). This evidently aims to elucidate *Sic þæt ylfa*, but the biggest problem with Cockayne’s reading is his rendering of ‘þe him sie’ as ‘what it may’. It might be possible to take *him* in *Sy þæt ylfa þe him sie* reflexively to refer to the subject (see Mitchell 1985, I §§271–74), producing a literal rendering along the lines of ‘Be that [creature] of *ælf*, which he may in himself be’, but extracting such a sense is tortuous, and the parallels available dubious.

The subject of the conditional clause must be *þæt*.<sup>148</sup> Cockayne tried to explain *þæt ylfa* as a partitive genitive (a construction along the lines of ‘one of the *ælfes*’), but *ælf* is masculine and *þæt* is neuter (we would have expected *\*\*sie he ylfa*; 1864–66, II 291 n. 2). He therefore sought a parallel for reading the neuter pronoun to refer to the masculine *ylfa* in the construction ‘ic hit eom’. This example seems of dubious relevance, but Cockayne’s interpretation might be viable insofar as neuter demonstratives are occasionally used of grammatically masculine nouns with asexual denotees (Mitchell 1985, I §68), in which case *ælfes* were viewed as asexual in this text. But it is more plausible to take *þæt* to refer to the illness with which the horse is afflicted (as is unambiguously the case in *sy þæt sar þær hit sy*, where the antecedent *sar* is restated), with *ylfa* as a straightforward possessive genitive: ‘If that [ailment] be *ælfes*’s, which is on it [the horse], this will do as a remedy for it [the horse]’.

Therefore, the last sentence, that which mentions *ælfes*, opens with a conditional clause, showing that *ælfes* are not necessarily involved in the illness at all. The remedy implies only that the ailment might in some way belong to *ælfes*, and advocates an extra measure for use if this is the case. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that the final part of the remedy, ‘& awrit on þæs seaxes horne þas word. Benedicite omnia opera domini dominum. Sy þæt ylfa þe him sie þis him mæg to bote’ is not integral to it. The remedy is completed with the striking of the horse, after which we are told ‘þonne biþ þæt hors hal’ (‘Then the horse will be well’), a closing-formula in the texts (see Cameron 1993, 40). The following note, mentioning *ælfes*, is an addition. This is supported by the existence of three remedies for *gescoten* horses which do not mention *ælfes*.<sup>149</sup> Several previous commentators, however, drew the opposite conclusion, Thun again making his inferences explicit:<sup>150</sup> having concluded that the *ofscoten* horse had been shot by ‘elves’ in the text which mentions them, he deduced that

the term *gescoten* in *Lacnunga* is a synonym of *ofscoten* in *Læceboc*. If we accept elves as being the shooting spirits in the two passages in *Læceboc* ... it will seem highly probable that they were thought of as shooting also in *Lacnunga*.

<sup>148</sup> *Ylfa* can, if declining regularly, only be a genitive plural. Even if it shows the same transference to the feminine *ō*-stem declension as the form *dunælfa* (see above, §5.2.3), a plural could not be the subject of the singular verb, which is, in any case, intransitive, leaving no function for *þæt* if *ylfa* were to be taken as the subject. Transference to the weak declension, attested by the eleventh century, taking *þæt* to be in concord with *ylfa* cannot plausibly be supposed in literary early West Saxon.

<sup>149</sup> Bald’s Leechbook I no. 88 (ed. Wright 1955, f. 58), textually related to *Lacnunga* no. 118, f. 171r (ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 168); and *Lacnunga* no. 164, ff. 182v–183r (ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 184–86). See further Hall forthcoming [c], §2.

<sup>150</sup> 1969, 383; cf. Storms 1948, 250; Grendon 1909, 164; Grattan–Singer 1952, 185; Jolly 1996, 1, 143; cf. Hall forthcoming [c], §2.

Subsequently, various other texts including neither *ælf* nor *sceotan* have, at times, been identified as remedies for ‘elves’, helping the idea of ‘elf-shot’ and other malicious actions by ‘elves’ to spread through the corpus (e.g. Storms 1948, 254–55; Bonser 1963, 160–61, 63). But this reasoning is inverted: the absence of *ælf* in all these texts militates against *ælf*’s general presence, not for it.

What, then, can we infer from *Gif hors ofscoten sie* about the meanings of *ælf*? A redactor of the remedy thought that one possible cause of a horse being *ofscoten* might be *ælf*. How the *ælf* might have caused this is not attested. But *ælf* is associated with past participles with similar senses to those which I have argued for *ofscoten* later in English, in Older Scots and in Martin Luther’s German. Between them, Middle English and Older Scots have the compounds *elf-schot*, *elf-taken*, *elue-inome* and *elf-grippit*.<sup>151</sup> This type of compound was not very common in Old English but became common from the Middle English period onwards (Carr 1939, 205–7; Marchand 1969, §2.23.2). Of the attested possibilities, the force of the determiner *elf-* here is almost certainly the usual one, suggesting the subject of the verb from which the generic is formed: *an elf shot a man* → *an elf-shot man* (see Marchand 1969, §2.23; cf. Carr 1939, 340). The second elements all seem broadly to mean ‘seized with pain’, each compound thus meaning something like ‘afflicted with a seizure or internal pain caused by *elves*’.<sup>152</sup> The past participle *elf-schot* is first attested in English in two groups of Scottish witchcraft trials, from 1650 and 1716, once more concerning livestock. Here, projectiles of some description do seem to have been envisaged as the vector of the illness, but these may show a secondary development (Hall forthcoming [d]). Meanwhile, according to Luther’s *Tischreden* (ed. Kroker 1912–21, III 131 [no. 2982b]),

Multa saepe dixit Lutherus de fascinatione, *von herzgespan und elbe*, et quomodo mater sua vexata esset a vicina fascinatrice, ita ut coacta esset eam reverendissime tractare et conciliare, *den sie schoß ihre kinder, daß sich zu tode schrien*.

Luther spoke very often about witchcraft, *about pains in the diaphragm and ‘elbe’*, and how his mother had been troubled by a neighbouring witch, so that she had been forced to treat her very respectfully and to conciliate her, *because she ‘schoß’ her children, so that they screamed themselves half to death*.

In addition to its collocation with *schliessen* here, *alp* appears alongside another word denoting an ailment sensed in the torso and literally called ‘heart-strain’. Though this could be a common innovation or a loan, this text suggests that the collocation of *ælf* with *sceotan* and internal pain derives from the shared culture of West Germanic-

<sup>151</sup> *MED*, s.vv. *elf*, *tāken* §2b; *DOST*, s.v. *elf*; *elf-grippit* is ed. Pitcairn 1833, I 53; cf. Thomas 1973, 725 for *fairy-taken*.

<sup>152</sup> Hall forthcoming [d]; *MED*, s.v. *tāken* §2b; *OED*, s.v. *take*, v. §I.7; *DOST*, s.v. *Grip* §1b.

speakers. It also raises the prospect that although *ælf*e might make a horse *ofscoten*, they might themselves have been acting for another party.

Whatever the case, *Gif hors ofscoten sie* seems to be an early attestation of a linguistic tradition which was to have a long life in English, associating *ælf*e with causing internal pains. The association is also, as I discuss below regarding the compound *ælfsgoða* (§6:2.2), attested elsewhere in the Old English medical texts. But precisely how *ælf*e were involved in making a horse *ofscoten* is neither indicated by the remedy, nor, reliably, by its later analogues.

## 2. Other *ælf*-ailments: Leechbook III, ff. 123a–25v

Leechbook III is markedly more concerned with diabolical threats, ailments whose names contain *ælf*, and what Jolly termed ‘mind-altering afflictions’, than Bald’s Leechbook. These matters dominate sections 54–68 (ff. 122v–127r). *Ælf* also occurs in Leechbook III in the compound *ælf*siden in section 41, but I consider this separately below (§6:2.2). Within this sequence are three contiguous sections, 61–63, respectively concerning *ælf*cynn, *ælf*adl (apparently comprehending *ælf*sgoða) and *wæterælf*adl, as the contents list on folio 110v describes:

.LXI. Wiþ ælf cynne sealf & wiþ nihtgengan . 7 þam monnum þe deofol mid hæmð. LXII. Wiþ ælfadle læcedom & eft hu mon sceal on þa wyrte singan ær hi mon nime & eft hu mon sceal þa wyrta don under weofod & ofer singan . 7 eft tacnu be þam hwæþer hit sie ælfsgoþa 7 tacn hu þu ongitan meht hwæþer hine mon mæg gelacnian & drenca & gebedu wiþ ælcra feondes costunge. LXIII . Tacnu hu þu meht ongitan hwæþer mon sie on wæterælfadle . 7 læcedom wiþ þam & gealdor on to singanne & þæt ilce mon mæg singan on wunda.

61. A salve against *ælf*cynn and against a *nihtgenga*, and for people whom the devil has sex with.  
62. A remedy against *ælf*adl; and also how one must sing over the plants before one picks them; and also how one must put those plants under an altar and sing over them; and also signs whereby [one can tell] if it is (an) *ælf*sgoða; and signs by which you can tell whether one can remedy it, and drinks and prayers against every tribulation of the Enemy.<sup>153</sup> 63. Signs by which you can tell if a person is suffering *wæterælf*adl, and a remedy against it and a charm to sing over it; and one can sing the same over wounds.

The first remedy, *Wiþ ælf*cynne, does not mention *ælf*siden, but is textually related to remedies which do, so this too I consider below (§6:3.5). The contents list associates the

<sup>153</sup> The *Dictionary of Old English* gives ‘temptations of the Devil’ for *feondes costunga* in the medical texts (s.v. *feond* §3.a.iv; cf. s.v. *costung* §2.b.ii). Certainly ‘temptation’ fits the meaning of *feondes costung* in most of its occurrences, which are from homiletic and other primarily didactic literature, but, as Meaney has argued (1992, 17–18), this translation seems out of place in the medical texts, since there is no suggestion that the remedies seek to cure temptation to sin. It seems more appropriate in this context to adopt the translation ‘test, trial, tribulation’ which the *Dictionary of Old English* also offers for *costung* (§1). *Feondes costung*, then, is for our purposes the ‘tribulation of the Enemy/Fiend/Devil’. It occurs in three *ælf*-remedies, and in three besides where, however, its associations tend to be too general to be illuminating.



*ælf*-ailments here with diabolical harm, and specifically *feondes costunga*, but the distinctions drawn in the passage also imply that the two things were viewed as at least potentially different. The phenomena which seem to be associated particularly with *ælf* in these sections are nocturnal assaults by supernatural beings, internal pains and cutaneous ailments or wounds.

## 2.1 *Ælfadl*

From the remedy *Wip ælfcynne*, Leechbook III proceeds to describe three complex procedures ‘*Vvið ælfadle*’. As Jolly emphasised, these include liturgical elements, and their complexity attests to the potential seriousness of *ælfadl* (1996, 159–65); but they contain no further evidence for the nature of *ælf*. Cameron claimed that ‘*ælfadl* ... for reasons already given, appears to have designated cutaneous eruptions of various kinds’ (1993, 155), but I have not found those ‘reasons given’ in any of his works: rather, the remedies offer no hints as to what clinical conditions *ælfadl* might denote. Linguistic perspectives are more enlightening. *Adl* was a generic term for illness (*DOE*, s.v.; Roberts–Kay–Grundy 2000, 102.08.02); of the possible semantic relationships between the elements of *ælfadl* (see Marchand 1969, §§2.2.9–14, 2.3–15; Carr 1939, 321–39), much the likeliest is the common English pattern whereby the generic results from the determiner (see Marchand 1969, §2.2.14.3.1–2; Carr 1939, 323–24): thus *ælfadl* is probably simply a generic term, denoting any *adl* caused by an *ælf* or *ælf*. There is no evidence that the word was a bahuvrihi compound, its overall meaning divorced from that suggested by its constituent elements (as in *bodice-ripper* ‘a romantic historical novel’).

## 2.2 *Ælfsogoða*

Among the remedies for *ælfadl*, however, are ‘*tacnu be þam hwæper hit sie ælfsogoþa*’ (‘signs by which [to know] whether it is *ælfsogoða*’). This suggests that *ælfsogoða* was a type of *ælfadl*; it must also have been a type of *sogoða*. *Ælfsogoða* has puzzled lexicographers; the *Dictionary of Old English* (s.v. *ælfsogeða*) offers ‘disease thought to have been caused by supernatural agency, perhaps anaemia’, repeating an inference in Geldner’s *Untersuchungen zu ae. Krankheitsnamen* of 1908.<sup>154</sup> But, as I have discussed elsewhere, *sogoða* itself denoted internal pains.<sup>155</sup> Moreover, the unusually specific

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Thun 1969, 388 n. 1. Clark Hall 1960, s.v. *ælfsogoða*, did considerably better, giving ‘hiccough (thought to have been caused by elves)’.

<sup>155</sup> Hall forthcoming [c], §3; cf. Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *sogoþa*; *MED*, s.v.; Clark Hall 1960, s.v. *sogeða*.

description of symptoms by which an *ælfsgoða* can be identified almost certainly include jaundice, and since the causal association of jaundice with liver, pancreas and bile duct problems tends to associate it with internal pain and digestive distress (Schiff 1946, 219–21, cf. 124–27, 177), the symptoms of *ælfsgoða* are consistent with these semantics (Hall forthcoming [c], §3; cf. Meaney 1992, 20). *Ælfsgoða*, then, surely denoted internal pains (possibly of some specific sort) caused by *ælf*. As such, it compares eminently well with later English *elf*-compounds. I have mentioned *elf-schot*, *elf-taken*, *elue-inome* and *elf-grippit* above (§6:1); we may add the Middle English noun *elf-cake* and the Older Scots noun *elf-schot*. *Elf-cake*, a textual variant of *elf-taken*, seems to denote pains within the torso (*MED*, s.vv. *elf*, *cake* §3b; *OED*, s.v. *elf*, n.<sup>1</sup>). The noun *elf-schot*, first attested in the last quarter of the sixteenth century, has long been taken to imply supernatural projectiles, but I have shown elsewhere that it probably also meant ‘sudden sharp pain caused by *elvis*’, reflecting a widely-attested meaning of *schot*.<sup>156</sup>

That *ælfsgoða* did connote the involvement of *ælf*, as its literal meaning would suggest, is shown by a Latin charm in one of the remedies, which begins ‘Deus omnipotens pater domini nostri jesu cristi. per Inpositjonem huius scriptura expelle a famulo tuo . NOMEN . Omnem Impetuum castalidum’ (‘God almighty, father of our lord Jesus Christ, through the application of this writing expel from your servant, NAME, every attack of *castalides*’). As I have discussed above (§5:2.1), *castalides* here seems certainly to denote *ælf* through an adaptation of the use of *dunælfa* to gloss *castalidas nymphas*, and it is striking that the exorcism shows such care to specify *ælf* in Latin rather than simply demonising them with *daemones* or *diaboli*. This charm has also been taken as evidence that *ælf* might possess the afflicted person, the charm being seen as an exorcism (e.g. Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *ælf-sogoða*; Jolly 1996, 163–64). This reading is possible but not required: ‘Impetuum castalidum’ could here mean any sort of attack (including magical ones). It seems to have been inferred from a second charm, following shortly after (Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *ælf-sogoða*): ‘Deus omnipotens pater domini nostri jesu cristi per Inpositionem huius scriptura et per gustum huius expelle diabolium a famulo tuo .N.’ (‘God almighty, father of our lord Jesus Christ, through the application of this writing and through its tasting, expel the Devil from your servant, N[AME]’). This presupposes diabolical possession. But the *impetus castalidum* and diabolical possession could have been accorded separate charms precisely because they were distinct.

<sup>156</sup> Hall forthcoming [d]; *DOST*, s.v. *schot* §2; cf. *MED*, s.v., §4e, cf. §4d; *OED*, s.v. *shot*, n.<sup>1</sup> §I.1.b; Lexer 1869–76, s.vv. *geschôz*, *schuz*; Höfler 1899, s.v. *Schoss*; Söderwall 1884–1918, s.v. *skut* §3; cf. Schulz 2000, 72–82.

### 2.3 *Wæterælfadl*

The last in Leechbook III's sequence of *ælf*-remedies, section 63, declares itself to be 'Gif mon biþ on wæterælfadl' ('if a person is suffering from *wæterælfadl* (literally fluid-*ælf*-ailment)'; f. 125rv). No semantic information is afforded for *wæterælfadl* by way of synonyms. It, like *ælsogoda*, was probably a hyponym of *ælfadl*, being accorded a separate section simply because the section on *ælfadl* had grown so long. But we do have some idea about what ailment(s) *wæterælfadl* denoted. As Cameron emphasised, *wæterælfadl* might be understood in two ways: as *wæterælf-adl* or as *wæter-ælfadl* (1993, 155). The first interpretation would imply an ailment caused by a particular species of *ælf* ('water-*ælf*'); the second a specific variety of *ælfadl* (presumably involving symptoms associated with fluids). Both interpretations can be supported by reference to other compounds: *wæterælfen* occurs in the *ælfen* glosses (§5:3.1); *ælfadl* has just been discussed, while the use of *wæter-* as a modifier in Old English words for illnesses is well-attested (cf. Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.vv. *wæteradl*, *wæterbolla*, *wætergeblæd*, *wæterseocnes*). Most commentators have read *wæterælf-adl*.<sup>157</sup> But the available evidence suggests that *wæter-ælfadl*, supported by Bonser (1963, 162–63) and apparently Cameron (1993, 41), is much the more plausible alternative.

I have shown that the various compounds combining *ælfen* with topographical terms are almost certainly *ad hoc* formations, and that this is probably the case for *ælfen* itself (§5:3.2). Admittedly, the mention of *castalides* in the Latin charm against *ælsogoda* emphasises the potential for glosses to influence Anglo-Saxon physicians, but supposing that the gloss *wæterælfen* influenced the word *wæterælfadl* is rather far-fetched in view of other compounds of *wæter-* with words denoting ailments. There is also some rather tangential early Middle English evidence for associating *ælf* with bodies of water (see Edwards 2002), but *wæter-ælfadl* remains much better paralleled, and it is most unlikely that we should envisage an Anglo-Saxon tradition of *wæterælf*. *Wæterælfadl* must be considered another hyponym of *ælfadl*.

The remedy seems to cater for some cutaneous disorder, since it seems to prescribe a poultice for application to what in a charm it calls *benne*, *dolh* and *wund* ('wounds', 'cut, wound, tumour' and 'a wound, sore, ulcer'); it may be possible to associate these specifically with chicken-pox or measles (Cameron 1993, 154–55). If so, this could provide a basis for arguing that *wæterælfadl* is a bahuvrihi compound, any associations with *ælf* being forgotten; but, as with *ælsogoda*, certain symptoms may simply have

<sup>157</sup> e.g. Bosworth–Toller 1898, s.v. *wæterælf-adl*, amended in Campbell 1972 to *wæterælfadl*, s.v.; Dobbie 1942, cxxxvi; Jente 1921, 168; Jolly 1996, 134, 157; Schneider 1969, 295, 300–1; Storms 1948, 160–61.

been taken as diagnostic of ailments caused by *ælf*. Moreover, there is later and comparative evidence which associates *ælf*e with cutaneous ailments—albeit less than there is for internal pains. The *Life of Adame and Eve*, attested uniquely in Bodleian Library MS Eng. poet.a.1 (the Vernon Manuscript), compiled around the 1390s, describing the fallen angels, comments that ‘If eny mon is elve-inome othur elve-iblowe, he hit hath of the angelus that fellen out of hevene’ (‘If anyone is *elue-inome* or *elue-iblowe*, he has it from the angels that fell from heaven’; ed. Blake 1972, 106–7). There is too little context here to be certain what *elue i-nome* and *elue i-blowe* meant, but *elue i-nome* is presumably to be understood in the same way as *elf-taken* ‘seized with pain by an *elf/elves*’ (see §6:1), while the *Middle English Dictionary* links *elue i-blowe* with the sense ‘to blow (infectious breath, poison) upon (sb.)’ (s.v. *blouen* (v. (1)) §2c). If so, it may also have had a sense like *blisted*, as in the citation ‘3ef a man be blowyn with a foul spiritus or a false blast þat he loke lyk a mesel in his face’ (‘if a man be *blowyn* by a foul wind/breath or an evil so that his face looks like a leper’s’).<sup>158</sup> A similar collocation occurs in the Middle High German *Münchener Nachtsegen* (lines 33–36; ed. Grienberger 1897, 337–38), the hand dating from the second quarter of the fourteenth century (Edwards 2004, 120):

Alb mit diner crummen nasen  
Ich vorbithe dir aneblasen  
Ich vorbite dir alb ruche  
cruchen vñ anehuccen

*Alb* with your crooked nose,  
I forbid you to blow on [people],  
I forbid you, *alb*, to give off smoke,  
to creep and to cough on [people].

The compound *alvskot(t)* could in continental Scandinavia in the nineteenth century denote cutaneous ailments as well as internal ones (Thun 1969, 387; Lid 1921, 38–46 *passim*), *elveblest* remaining the Norwegian term for hay fever rashes, while German traditions also associate *alpe* with cutaneous ailments (Höfler 1899, s.v. *Alp, Elbe*). This material suggests that *wæterælfadl* may have been part of a reasonably well-defined association of *ælf*e with cutaneous ailments.

### 3. *Ælfsiden*

*Ælfsiden* occurs in three different remedies, each in different collections, though of these two must be textually related: one of the two remedies in *Lacnunga* which contain *ælf* (section 29, ff. 137r–138r); section 41 of Leechbook III (ff. 120v–121r); and a related a remedy in Book I of Bald’s Leechbook (section 64, ff. 52v–53r). Unfortunately, the

<sup>158</sup> Cf. the collocation of the remedy ‘For a man or womman that is blisted {blown upon malevolently} with wikkede spiritis to do away the ache and abate the swellyng’, immediately preceding a remedy for *elf-cake* in a fourteenth-century manuscript (ed. Henslow 1899, 89).

textual contexts of *ælf siden* provide little unequivocal evidence for its meaning. I begin, then, with a consideration of comparative linguistic evidence. Next I analyse the attesting texts, in ascending order of complexity, and then the textually related remedy *Wið ælfcynne*. Finally, I consider the remedy which attests to the cognate noun *sidsa*.

### 3.1 Comparative linguistic evidence

*Siden* occurs in Old English only in *ælf siden*. There is a consensus that *siden* is cognate with the Old Norse strong verb *síða* (to give a broad and advised translation, ‘work magic’), and its derivatives *seiðr* (the magic worked) and *síði* (the magic-worker). *Siden* would derive from the infinitive stem of *síða*’s Germanic ancestor, with deverbative *-en* (on whose etymology see Kluge 1926, §150; Voyles 1992, §7.2.26). The range of potential connotations of deverbative *-en* (on which see Kastovsky 1985, 237–38) is too wide for the suffix itself to be informative. *Sidsa*, also attested in an *ælf*-remedy (in Bald’s Leechbook II, section 65, f. 106r), seems to be another cognate, with the deverbative suffix *-sa* (on which see Kluge 1926, §146), and is accordingly considered here too. As I discuss below, a meaning for *ælf siden* along the lines of ‘magic’ is eminently appropriate in its synchronic contexts, so we may accept reasonably confidently the implication of the Norse cognate that this was roughly its meaning. As with *ælfadl* (see §6:2.1), the determiner *ælf-* probably denotes the source of the *siden*; if so, *ælf siden* probably meant something like ‘the magic of *ælf*’.

This association of *ælf* with magic has Middle English correlates. The best is a Latin narrative from a fifteenth-century treatise on the Ten Commandments, opening with *Non habebis deos alienos*, which tells of the ‘filius cuiusdam viri qui infirmabatur, quem pater duxit ad quemdam clericum in patria, qui habeant librum qui vocabatur *an heluenbok*, ut per eius benedictionem recuperat sanitatem’ (‘son of a certain man who became infirm, whom the father led to a certain cleric in that country, who had a book which was called *an heluenbok* (‘an *elven*-book’), so that he [the son] might regain his health through through his [the cleric’s] blessing’; ed. Wenzel 1992, 472, n. 29). The story explains that although the son was cured, the father went mad. As Wenzel suggested, the *heluenbok* seems surely to be a grimoire (1992, 473), and the implication is that *elven-* seemed an appropriate way of denoting the magical aspect of this book. We might add Chaucer’s reference to an *elf* in the *Man of Law’s Tale*. In an effort to convince her son King Alla that his wife and their new-born son should be abandoned, Donegild claims in lines 750–56 (ed. Benson 1987, 98) that

... the queene delivered was  
Of so horrible a feendly creature

That in the castel noon so hardy was  
 That any while dorste {dared} ther endure {remain}.  
 The mooder was an elf, by aventure {strange event}  
 Ycomen, by charmes or by sorcerie,  
 And every wight {person} hateth hir compaignye.

The *elf*'s use of *charmes* and *sorcerie* here neatly parallel *ælfside*.

The translation of *siden* simply as ‘magic’, however, may miss important connotations. For this reason, and because it will be relevant later in the thesis, it is worth discussing the meanings of *seiðr* here in more detail. *Seiðr* was the subject of Strömbäck’s masterly dissertation of 1935 and has been discussed extensively in recent years,<sup>159</sup> but some points which are important in the present context have yet to be made. The main intentions behind conducting *seiðr* seem to have been divination and the manipulation of targets’ states of mind to cause them harm or to facilitate their seduction (Strömbäck 1935, 142–59; cf. DuBois 1996, 44–50). It has pejorative connotations throughout our evidence,<sup>160</sup> and it seems clear in our texts that for males to practise *seiðr* was for them to transgress gender boundaries, specifically in a way which was denoted by the adjective *argr*, a legally proscribed term of abuse suggesting gender transgression.<sup>161</sup> The clearest statement to this effect is in chapter 7 of *Ynglinga saga*, which says of *seiðr* that ‘þessi fjölkynngi, er framið er, fylgir svá mikil ergi, at eigi þótti karlmonnum skammlaust við at fara, ok var gyðjunum kennd sú íþrótt’ (‘this sorcery, when it is performed, brings with it such great *ergi* that engaging in that did not seem to men to be without shame, and that accomplishment was taught to priestesses’; ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 19). Snorri’s reliability here can be questioned (DuBois 1996, 45), but his statement is supported both by eddaic poetry (see §7:2) and the evidence of a post-conversion Danish runestone, Skern stone 2, dating from around 1000, which curses

<sup>159</sup> Strömbäck 1935 is supplemented by Almqvist 2000 and Mebius’s historiographical survey (2000), with a recent critique by Mitchell (2000a). See also Solli 2002 (but also Mundal’s comments, 2003). A more general account in English is also offered by Raudvere (2002, 109–50). *Seiðr* and variants have also been appropriated as technical terms among neo-pagans, also attracting scholarly attention (Blain 2002), but this is not my concern here.

<sup>160</sup> Strömbäck considered divination ‘såsom motsats till den förgörande “svarta” sejden, vit sejd’ (‘by contrast with destructive “black” *seiðr*, white *seiðr*’; 1935, 142; cf. Raudvere 2002, 110–12; Solli 2002, 129–30), but his later emphasis that divination by *seiðr* too surely has negative connotations in our evidence (1935, 192) is worth reiterating. Thus the prophecy of the *seiðkona* for Qrvar-Oddr in *Qrvar-Odds saga* (cited by Strömbäck 1935, 96–98) is a curse, prompted by opposition to the *seiðkona* which marks Qrvar-Oddr as a ‘noble heathen’ (cf. Mitchell 1991, 61–62). To conclude from the centrality of this episode to the saga’s plot that ‘witchcraft in Iceland was tolerated more than on the continent’ (Morris 1991, 18) is unwise. Likewise, in chapter 4 of *Eiriks saga rauða*, a key text for Strömbäck (1935, 49–60), Guðríðr initially refuses to help in divinatory *seiðr* ‘því at ek em kristin kona’ (‘because I am a Christian woman’; ed. Einar Ól. Sveinsson–Matthías Þórðarson 1935, 208; cf. DuBois 1996, 47–48). The fact that some texts suggest that pagans might have thought *seiðr* a good thing, when the texts themselves circumscribe and undercut this analysis, is not convincing evidence that *seiðr* once had positive connotations.

<sup>161</sup> See Meulengracht Sørensen 1983 [1980], 18–20 *et passim*; regarding the link with *seiðr*, Strömbäck 1935, esp. 194–96; Almqvist 2000, 264.

as a *síði* (‘*seiðr*-worker’) anyone who breaks the stone (ed. Jacobsen–Moltke 1941–42, cols 116–17 [no. 81]). Although *síði* is not attested earlier, the Danish curse is in a tradition of cursing *argskapr* upon desecrators going back at least to the eighth century, being attested already in Sweden on the probably sixth-century Björketorp and Stentoften stones.<sup>162</sup> Solli’s recent survey of likely reasons for *seiðr*’s associations with *ergi* (2002, 148–59) include a putative association of *seiðr* with sexual perversion and bodily transformation, the tendency for shamanic practices to involve systematic gender-transgression, and the likelihood that, to co-opt DuBois’s phrasing (1996, 52),

in a culture in which keeping control of one’s wits and dealing in a forthright manner were both counted as prime features of masculinity, a complex ritual that entails public trance and possible underhanded manipulation of another’s will could only be seen as compromising of the masculine ideal.

Several of these factors can be inferred in the Anglo-Saxon evidence connected with *ælf*, as I discuss below (§9:2).

Although we cannot simply assume that any given connotation of *seiðr*, or any given reason for those connotations, were represented in *siden*, this material is suggestive in the context of *ælf*. *Seiðr* is in the Norse material associated with seduction and prophecy; when performed by males, it is associated with gender transgression. I have argued above that *ælf* were associated with seduction by *ælfscyne*, and with causing prophetic speech by the word *ylfig*. That *ælf* exhibited traits associated with femininity is suggested both by *ælfscyne* and by *ælf*’s use in denoting otherworldly females, first in glosses and later in English generally. Moreover, the distinctive association of *ælf* with *siden* and *sidsa* fits with Snorri’s statement, again quoted more fully above (§2:1.2), that Freyja ‘kenndi fyrst með Ásum seið, sem Vǫnum var títt’ (‘first acquainted the *æsir* with *seiðr*, which was customary among the *vanir*’; ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson 1941–51, I 13). Snorri made *seiðr* a distinctive feature of the *vanir*, and I have argued above for taking *álfr* as a (partial) synonym of *vanr*. Finally, the process *at síða* seems, at least in some of the prose evidence, to have been envisaged to involve a dissociation of the soul from the body, either in flight or shape-changing, attested much more widely in Old Norse literature (Strömbäck 1935, 160–90; Almqvist 2000, 265–66). That this kind of concept circulated in Anglo-Saxon culture is suggested by King Alfred’s interpretation of Boethius’s comment that ‘in somno spiritum ducimus nescientes’ (‘in sleep, we draw breath unconsciously’, but potentially ‘in sleep, we lead our spirits unconsciously’, 3.11.30; ed. Moreschini 2000, 89). Alfred rendered this as ‘ure gast bið swiðe wide farende urum unwillum 7 ures ungewealdes for his gecynde, nalles for his willan; þæt

<sup>162</sup> Almqvist 2000, 252; Moltke 1985, 140–41, 232–37; Solli 2002, 212–16.

bið þonne we slapað' ('our spirit tends to be wandering widely without our intent and outside our power—from its innate nature, in no way from its intention; that is when we sleep'; ed. Sedgefield 1899, 93). As Godden argued (1985, 277),

Alfred seems to be reflecting the common folk-belief that in dreams and trances an inner spirit or soul ... leaves the body and wanders about in the world. The remark is prompted by a misunderstanding of Boethius's Latin text, but Alfred would hardly have interpreted the text in this way if he had not been thoroughly familiar with the idea and given it some credence.

My assumption here that *ælfside* shares important features with *seiðr* is made more significant by *seiðr*'s historiography. Because aspects of *seiðr* are similar to those found in the shamanic practices of the arctic regions, it has often been argued that its practice was borrowed into North Germanic-speaking cultures from the Sámi, whose shamanic traditions are attested for the Middle Ages and remained strong until recent times.<sup>163</sup> If *seiðr*-practices were a specifically North-Germanic cultural loan, this would compromise the value of the word *seiðr* as comparative evidence for Old English *ælfside*. The association of *seiðr* with male gender transgression is of especial interest regarding *ælf*, but this has sometimes been associated with the borrowing of Sámi magical practices, which associated shamanism with males, into Norse-speaking culture, which, in this hypothesis, traditionally associated magic-working with females.<sup>164</sup>

However, studies of the origins of *seiðr* have largely ignored etymology.<sup>165</sup> As a strong verb, *síða* is likely to have an Indo-European origin, and phonologically and semantically convincing cognates are Welsh *hud* ('magic'), *hudo* ('work magic, work by magic') and Lithuanian *saĩsti* ('interpret a sign, prophesy'; *Geiriadur Prifysgol Cymry*, s.vv. *hud*<sup>1</sup>, *hydaf*; Wüst 1954, 136). The word *síða* and probably its basic meaning originate, then, in a pre-Germanic ancestor found in other Western Indo-European languages. Wüst argued for a Finno-Ugric origin for *síða* and its cognates from words such as Finnish *soida* 'to ring, jingle, make a sound' (1954). Though phonologically viable, this is less convincing, principally for want of other examples of Finno-Ugric loans into both Germanic and Celtic, than a Indo-European root concerning binding

<sup>163</sup> See Solli 2002, 169–97; cf. Price 2000, 18–22; Mebius 2000, 280; Lindow 2003. It is worth noting that the early twentieth-century assumption was that the influence had gone the other way (Hultkrantz 2001; Rydving 1990, 364–65), and that if this view was largely determined by the politics of the time, this is no less the case for the development of its antithesis (cf. Solli 2002, 183).

<sup>164</sup> e.g. Grambo 1989, 107–9; cf. Strömbäck 1935, esp. 196–206.

<sup>165</sup> Among published work, Strömbäck 1935, 120 n. 2 need be supplemented only by Wüst 1954; cf. Vries 1961, s.v. *seið*; Ásgeirr Blöndal Magnússon 1989, s.v. *seiður*. Glosecki emphasised the importance of an Indo-European etymology, but for unstated reasons assumed *seiðr* to be cognate with *sit*, which is phonologically unlikely (1989, 97); Solli cited an unpublished 1993 Oslo University dissertation *Sjamanistiske trekk i nordisk førkristen religion?* by Roger Kolstad proposing a cognate in an 'indo-europeisk (sanskrit) ord for "sang"' ('Indo-European (Sanskrit) word for "song"'); 2002, 135).



which has also been proposed.<sup>166</sup> From a linguistic point of view, then, we cannot usefully talk about a Sámi origin for *seiðr*. Moreover, there is evidence for a long history of shamanic-like practices among the Germanic-speaking peoples, so there is no *a priori* necessity to derive *seiðr*-practices from Sámi culture.<sup>167</sup> The senses of *seiðr* may still have been influenced by contact with Sámi culture later; but if we find correlations between the meanings of *seiðr* and *ælfside*n, there is no reason not to accept them as reflecting the words' shared etymology. We may turn now to the textual evidence.

### 3.2 Harley 585, f. 137r–38r

This remedy opens with ‘Þis is se halga drænc wið ælfside ne 7 wið eallum feondes costungum’ (‘This is the holy/blessed drink against *ælfside*n and against all the tribulations of the Enemy’; ed. Grattan–Singer 1952, 108). *Ælfside*n is associated here, like most of the *ælf*-ailments, with *feondes costunga*, but both may have been mentioned in the remedy because, although the remedy was applicable to both, they were potentially distinct threats. The remedy almost entirely comprises liturgical ritual (Jolly 1996, 140–42), which is consistent with other *ælf*-remedies, but there is no further indication of what *ælfside*n might denote. The organisation of *Lacnunga* is too irregular for any secure inferences to be made from the manuscript context.

### 3.3 Leechbook III, ff. 120v–21r and *lenctenadl*

Leechbook III's remedy mentioning *ælfside*n falls in section 41, which advertises itself in the contents list on folio 110r to be ‘Wiþ ealle feondes costunga drenc 7 sealf’ (‘A drink and salve against all the tribulations of the Devil’); likewise the section opens with ‘Vvrc godne drenc wiþ eallum feondes costungum’ (‘Make a good drink against all the tribulations of the Devil’). The second remedy of those included in this section is slightly more limited in its application:

Wyrç gode sealfē wiþ feondes costunga . biseop wyrç . elehtre . harasprecel . streawberian wise. sio clufihte wenwyrç eorðrima. brembel æppel . polleian . wermod . gecnua þa wyrta ealle awylle on godre buteran wring þurh clað sete under weofod singe .viii. mæssan ofer smire þone man mid on þa þunwonge. 7 bufan þam eagum 7 ufan þæt heafod . 7 þa breost 7 under þam earmum þa sidan . Þeos sealf is god wiþ ælcra feondes costunga 7 ælfside ne 7 lenctenadle.

Make a good salve against the tribulations of the Enemy: ?hibiscus, ?lupin, viper's bugloss, strawberry-stalk, the cloved lesser celendine, *eorðrima*, blackberry, pennyroyal, wormwood,

<sup>166</sup> Vries 1961, s.v. *seið*; on the medieval association of binding with magic in the Germanic-speaking world see Flint 1991, 226–31 *et passim*.

<sup>167</sup> For Anglo-Saxon culture see Glosecki 1989 and §9:2.1; more widely the summary in Mebius 2000, 298–99; and the provocative investigations of Ginzburg 1983 [1966]; 1992 [1989].

pound all those plants; boil in good butter; strain through a cloth; place under the altar; sing 9 masses over them; then smear the person with it generously on the temples, and above the eyes and on the top of the head and the breast and under the arms. This salve is good against each tribulation of the Enemy and *ælfside*n and lent-illness.

As I discuss below, this must be textually related to *Wið ælfcynne* which occurs later in Leechbook III, and more distantly to one remedy *Wiþ ælcra leodrunan* in Bald's Leechbook examined next. The final sentence is most illuminating, associating *ælfside*n not only with the familiar *feondes costung* (on which see §6:2.0 n. 153; 6:3.2) but with *lenctenadl* ('Lent-illness'). *Lenctenadl* seems certainly to denote fevers, inferred by Cameron, mainly from the association with spring, to be forms of tertian malaria (1993, 10–11). The collocation of *ælfside*n with fever is reminiscent of *ælfisc* and the arguable hallucinogenic uses of *ælþone* (§§5:4.4, 5:5). The association is bolstered by the preceding section, a short remedy 'Wiþ þon þe mon sie monaþseoc nim mereswines fel wyr to swipan swing mid þone man sona bið sel . amen' ('For when a person is epileptic/made mad by the moon [cf. §5:4.3]: take dolphin's skin, make it into a whip, beat the person with it; he will be well immediately, amen'; f. 120r), while the next remedy in section 41 is 'Gif þu wilt lacnian gewitseocne man' ('If you want to minister to a mentally ill person'). These contexts amplify *Wyr to gode sealf*'s implication that *ælfside*n might produce symptoms. However, *feondes costunga*, *ælfside*n and *lenctenadl* seem more probably to be complementary than synonymous, as 'ælcra feondes costunga' ('each of the tribulations of the devil') ought to include all properly diabolical threats, and *lenctenadl* occurs elsewhere without being associated with the Devil. Thus, *ælfside*n is associated both with diabolical malice and fevers, but is not necessarily identical with either.

### 3.4 Bald's Leechbook I, section 64, f. 52v: the semantics of *leodrone* and the association of *ælf*e with *maran*

Section 64 of Book I of Bald's Leechbook contains, in the words of the contents list on folio 5r, 'Læcedomas wiþ ælcra leodrunan & ælfsidenne þæt is fefercynnnes gealdor & dust & drencas & sealf & gif sio adl netnum sie. & gif sio adl wyrde mannan oððe mare ride & wyrde seofon ealles cræfta' ('Prescriptions against every *leodrone* and *ælfside*n, being a charm, powder, drinks and a salve, for fevers; and if the illness should be upon livestock; and if the illness should happen to a person or a *mære* should ride and happen; in all, seven remedies'). Amongst other things, this shows that *ælfside*n might afflict people and livestock. It also affords a relatively large and complex combination of themes, several of which require detailed consideration.

The remedies themselves begin on folio 52v with ‘Wip ælcra yfelre leodrunan 7 wið ælfsidenne þis gewrit’ (‘Against each evil *leodrone* and against *ælfsiden*, this writing’). The third remedy is, as Meaney pointed out (1984, 239), almost identical to a salve ‘wið nihtgengan’ which comprises section 54 of Leechbook III (f. 122v), and these are themselves reminiscent enough of *Wið ælfcynne* and *Wip feondes costunga* in Leechbook III to suggest further textual interrelationships (see §6:3.5). *Wip ælcra leodrunan* occurs in a sequence of remedies concerned with fever and mental illness: section 62 is ‘wip feferadle’ (‘against fever-illness’); 63 ‘wið feond seocum men’ (presumably ‘for a diabolically-possessed person’, though conceivably ‘against a diabolically-possessed person’); 65 ‘wið lenctenadl’ (‘against *lenctenadl*’); and 66 ‘ungemynde’ (‘for one out of his mind’). This provides a context of interrelated symptoms in which to understand *ælfsiden*, several of which we have already met in this connection.

*Leodrone* occurs in this form only here in Old English. Recently reassessing the evidence, Fell argued that it is a variant of the poetic Old English *leodurun* (‘sung mystery’; 1991, 206–8); her case has gaps, but these can be filled.<sup>168</sup> *Leodurun* denotes holy mysteries and the Middle English *leodrone* prophecies; the potency of an *yfel leodrone* perhaps lay in the cursing power of ill-boding prophecies in comparable cultures.<sup>169</sup> Taking *ælfsiden* to denote a broadly similar threat would be attractively consistent with the meanings suggested for *siden* by *seiðr*. As I have discussed above (§6:2.1), the generic in compounds of this sort is usually the result of the determiner—the *siden* would be caused by *ælfe*—though in theory the ultimate source could be human maleficence directed through *ælfe*.

Section 64 concludes with a remedy ‘Gif mon mare ride . genim elehtran 7 garleac . 7 betonican . 7 recels bind on næsce hæbbe him mon 7 he gange inon þas wyrte’ (‘If a *mære* should ride a person: take ?lupin and garlic and betony and incense; bind in fawn-skin; a person should have this on him and he should walk ?in among these plants’). As I have discussed elsewhere, the clearest evidence for the meanings of *mære* is afforded by the seventh-century gloss *incuba: mære*, whose lemma is almost unique and must originate in a gloss on a copy of Isidore’s *Etymologiae* related to the Anglo-Saxon epitome of Isidore’s *Etymologiae* edited by Lapidge: this epitome gives *incuba* for Isidore’s *incubus*, and contains Old English glosses also contained in the same

<sup>168</sup> The first element is, on phonological grounds, most obviously the intensifying prefix derived from *leod* (‘man’; see Kastovsky 1992, 356–57). But Fell’s reading, foreshadowed by Cockayne’s translations ‘rune lay’ and ‘pagan charm’ (1864–66, II 15, 139), is attractive because of *leodurun*. For the variable loss of unstressed high vowels in relevant positions see Hogg 1992, §§6.21; *-run~-rune* variation is common; cf. Campbell 1959, §§592e, 619.4. There is some evidence for \*/(VV)θr/ > /(VV)dr/ in West Saxon, accounting for the *d* of *leodrone* (Campbell 1959, §422; Hogg 1992, §7.11).

<sup>169</sup> For early Ireland see Sjöblom 2000, 111–44; for medieval Iceland Raudvere 2002, 90–97; cf. for Anglo-Saxon England Jolly 1996, 98–99; Niles 2003a, 1112–40.

manuscripts as *incuba: mære*.<sup>170</sup> Here, *incuba* denotes a supernatural being, implicitly female, which presses down on or rapes people. This is consistent with the cognate, later and etymological evidence for *mære* and presumably underlies the riding *mære* in Bald's Leechbook.<sup>171</sup>

Precisely why *mære* is mentioned in this section is not clear. I examine some illuminating Norse and Irish analogues in the next chapter (§7:1), which suggest that *maran* might be part of an attack through *ælf-siden*. Here, however, I wish to emphasise that West Germanic evidence associates cognates and reflexes of *mære* with *ælf-* widely, associations no doubt underlying the modern counterparts *nightmare* and *alpträum* ('nightmare', lit. 'alp-dream'). To quote further from the most impressive example, the fourteenth-century *Münchener Nachtsegen* (lines 23–38; ed. Grienberger 1897, 337–38),<sup>172</sup>

alb vnde ǀ elbelin  
 Ir sult nich beng' bliben hin  
 albes svestir vñ vatir  
 Ir sult uz varen obir dē gatir  
 albes mutir trute vñ mar  
 Ir sult uz zu dē virste varē  
 Noc mich dy mare druche  
 Noc mich dy trute zciche  
 Noc mich dy mare rite  
 Noc mich dy mare bescite  
 Alb mit diner crummen nasen  
 Ich vorbithe dir aneblasen...

*alb*, or also *elbelin* [little *alb*],  
 you shall remain no longer (reading *lenger*)  
*alb*'s sister and father,  
 you shall go out over the gate;  
*alb*'s mother, *trute* [female monster] and *mar*,  
 you shall not go to the roof-ridge!  
 Let the *mare* not oppress me,  
 let the *trute* not ?pinch me (reading *zücke*),  
 let the *mare* not ride me,  
 let the *mare* not mount me!  
*Alb* with your crooked nose,  
 I forbid you to blow on [people]...

What beliefs these collocations reflect is less clear, but they show that the collocation of *ælf-* with *mære* in Bald's Leechbook is part of a widespread tradition among West Germanic-speakers. This collocation of *ælf* with *mære* is also interesting insofar as *maran* seem to have been female, which recalls once more the associations of both *ælf* and *seiðr* with male gender transgression, but there is not much that can be made of such slight evidence. As in the *Münchener Nachtsegen*, the German material also associates

<sup>170</sup> Hall forthcoming [b], §3; Lapidge 1996 [1988–89], 200; cf. Lindsay 1911, I 8.11.103–4. The glosses are ed. Lindsay 1921a, 96 [I225]; Hessels 1906, 49 [XLVII.81]; Pfeifer 1974, 30 [no. 558]; Steinmeyer–Sievers 1879–1922, IV 187, 204; cf. Bischoff and others 1988, Épinal f. 99v, Erfurt f. 7v, Corpus f. 35r.

<sup>171</sup> Raudvere 1993, esp. 71–95; Pokorny 1959–69, s.v. 5. *mer-*; de Vries 1961, s.v. *mara, morn*; *MED*, s.v. *mære*, n.2, *night* §6b; *OED*, s.vv. *mare* n.2, *nightmare*; *DOST*, s.v. *mare*; §7:1.1.

<sup>172</sup> Otherwise, see for English the *Southern English Legendary* account of the fallen angels in its section on the Archangel Michael (lines 223–60; ed. d'Evelyn–Mill 1956–59, II 409–10 at 409; cf. Horstmann 1887, 306–7; §7:1.3:) and lines 65–69 of Rowll's *Cursing* as it appears in the Maitland Folio MS (ed. Craigie 1919–27, I 163); for the Continent see the citations in the *Middelnederlandsch Woordenboek* (Verwijs–Verdam–Stoett 1885–1941, s.vv. *ALF*, (III) *MARE*); Edwards 1994, 17–21. The words are associated in Norse only in the Swedish *Sjælinna thröst* (ed. Henning 1954, 23), which is from the Low German *Der Grossen Seelentrost* (ed. Schmitt 1959, 17).

*mare* with the verb *riten*, showing the traditionality of this collocation in *Gif mon mare ride*.<sup>173</sup>

While this section of Bald’s Leechbook, then, tells us little that is concrete, it consolidates and extends the associations of *ælfsiden* in ways which are well-contextualised, providing an important basis for comparison with fuller narratives from other medieval cultures below.

### 3.5 *Wið ælfcynne*

*Ælfcynn* occurs only in section 61 of Leechbook III, on folio 123, at the head of the (-) *ælfadl* remedies already analysed (§6:2):

Wyr̃c sealfe wið ælfcynne and nihtgengan and þam mannum þe deofol mid hæmð . genim eowohumelan . wermōd bisceopwyr̃t . elehtre . æscþrote . beolone . harewyr̃t . haransprecel . hæþbergean wisan . cropleac . garleac . hegerifan corn . gyþrife . finul . Do þas wyr̃ta on an fæt sete under weofod sing ofer .viii. mæssan awyl on buteran 7 on sceapes smerwe do haliges sealtes fela on aseoh þurh clað . weorp þa wyr̃ta on yrnende wæter . Gif men hwilc yfel costung weorþe oþþe ælf oþþe nihtgengan . smire his andwlitan mid þisse sealfe 7 on his eagan do and þær him se lichoma sar sie . 7 recelsa hine 7 sena gelome his þing biþ sona selre .

Make a salve against *ælfcynn* and a *nihtgenga* and for those people whom the/a devil has sex with/and against those people whom the/a devil has sex with: take ?hops, wormwood, ? hibiscus, ?lupin, vervain, henbane, *harewyr̃t*, viper’s bugloss, stalk of whortleberry, ?crow garlic, garlic, seed of goose-grass, cockle and fennel. Put these plants in a vessel, place under an altar, sing 9 masses over them; boil in butter and in sheep’s fat; put in plenty of holy salt; strain through a cloth. Throw the plants into running water. If any evil tribulation or an *ælf* or *nihtgengan* happen to a person, smear his face with this salve and put it on his eyes and where his body is sore/in pain, and burn incense about him and sign [with the cross] often; his problem will soon be better.

The unique compound *ælfcynn* offers no evidence in itself. Old English *-cynn* was productive and compounded with a wide range of words—words for people, peoples, monsters, animals, plants and diseases (*DOE*, s.v. *cynn*)—and the Norse *álfkunnr*, *álfkunnigr* and *álfakyn* (see §2:2 n. 42) could be independent formations. However, it is at least clear that *ælfcynn* implies *ælfe* themselves, since the end of the remedy mentions the prospect of an *ælf* specifically. Jolly, apparently inspired to some extent by Storms’s handling of the text, asserted that ‘the salve works with incense and the sign of the cross

<sup>173</sup> The only other Anglo-Saxon evidence for this sort of concept known to me is a charm in a remedy ‘Wið dweorg’, which comprises section 93 of the *Lacnunga* (f. 167; ed. Grattan-Singer 1952, 160–62). The difficulties of this charm are legion, and some, particularly ambiguities of its syntax and its heavy emendation in the manuscript, have been glossed over hitherto (but see esp. Cameron 1993, 151–53; Stuart 1977; Meaney 1981, 15–17). But the charm definitely conceives of the ailment(s) in terms of a being (*wiht*) treating the sufferer as its horse (*hæncgest*). How fully it develops this concept is open to question, but it certainly shows that a vivid conceptualisation of a supernatural being riding a sick person like a horse may underlie *gif mon mare ride*.

to drive or smoke the elf out' (1996, 159), but while this inference of possession is possible, it is not to be assumed.

*Ælf* and *ælfcynn* are here collocated with *nihtgenga*. Beyond its literal sense 'night-walker' the meanings of this word are largely unknown; it is not even clear whether the remedy implies one or more. I examine other attestations below. *Þa menn þe deofol mid hæmð* is also ambiguous: it could denote the victims of diabolical rapes (recalling the association of *ælf* with *maran*) or people who, by willingly having sex with devils or the Devil, gain magical powers to do harm.<sup>174</sup> If the latter, it is a singularly early attestation of a concept which became common only in the early modern period, but as I suggest below, it could reflect popular ideas to some degree and the possibility should not be ignored (ch. 7). The syntax would be the smoother if we take *wip* in the same sense, 'against', throughout the sentence, in which case 'wið ... þam monnum þe deofol mad hæmð' ('against ... those people whom the Devil/a devil beds') implies that it is the *menn* who are a threat. But if any function of the remedy from the list at the end corresponds to the function stated at the beginning, it would be the *yfel costung*, suggesting that the *deofol* in the first sentence is assaulting victims—in which case the remedy is for and not against the *menn*. Whatever *þa menn þe deofol mid hæmð* means, however, its collocation with *ælfcynne* recalls *ælf*'s association with seduction.

The value of *Wið ælfcynne* is increased, however, by its relationship with three other texts, already mentioned. I give each; words shared between *Wið ælfcynne* and *Wip feondes costunga* are **emboldened**, those shared between *Wið ælfcynne* and the other two underlined.

1. Leechbook III, section 61, f. 123r:

**Wyrc sealf** **wið ælfcynne** and *nihtgengan* and þam mannum þe deofol mid hæmð . genim eowohumelan . **wermud** **bisceopwyr** . **elehtre** . æscprote . beolone . harewyr . **haransprecel** . hæþbergean **wisan** . *cropleac* . garleac . *hegerifan* corn . gybrife . finul . Do þas wyrta on an fæt **sete under weofod sing ofer .viii. mæssan awyl on buteran** 7 on sceapes smerwe do haliges *sealtes* fela on aseoh **þurh clað** . weorp þa wyrta on yrnende wæter . Gif men hwile yfel **costung** weorþe oþþe **ælf** oþþe *nihtgengan* . *smire* his andwlitan mid þisse sealf 7 on his **eagan** do and þær him se lichoma sar sie . 7 recelsa hine 7 sena gelome his þing *biþ sona selre* .

2. Leechbook III, section 41, f. 120rv (§6:3.3):

**Wyrc gode sealf wip** feondes **costunga** . **bisceopwyr** . **elehtre** . **haransprecel** . streawberian **wise** . sio clufihte wenwyr eorðrima . brembelæppel . polleian . **wermud** . gecnua þa wyrta ealle **awylle on godre buteran** wring **þurh clað sete under weofod singe . viiii . mæssan ofer smire** þone man mid on þa þunwonge . 7 bufan þam **eagum** 7 ufan þæt heafod . 7 þa breost 7 under þam earmum þa sidan . þeos sealf is god wip ælcra feondes **costunga** 7 **ælf**sidenne 7 lenctenadle .

<sup>174</sup> *Hæmð* must be singular (the expected plural being *hæmmaþ*), precluding Crawford's 'elves and evil spirits of the night and women who lie with the devil' (1963, 110).

3a. Leechbook III, section 54, f. 122v:

Wyr̥c sealf̥e wið nihtgengan . wyl on buteran elehtran . hegerifan . bisceopwyr̥t . reademagþan . cropleac . sealt smire mid him bið sona sel .

3b. Bald's Leechbook I, section 64, f. 52v (from *Wiþ ælcra leodrunan*, §6:3.4)

Sealf elehtre hegerife bisceopwyr̥t þa readan magoþan . armelu . cropleac . sealt wyl on buteran to sealf̥e smire on þæt heafod 7 þa breost

Although some of the correlations noted are more striking than others, there is little in 3a which is not represented in 1. 3b's greater divergence is consistent with its appearance in another collection; although it does not mention *nihtgengan*, it does parallel *Wið ælfcynne* insofar as all the remedies in the section from which it comes are 'wiþ ælcra leodrunan & ælfsidenne'. Both of these remedies are, then, for ailments associated with *ælf*. The comparison of 3b with the other texts is also strengthened by its description in the contents list, 'Læcedomas wiþ ælcra leodrunan 7 ælfsidenne þæt is fefercynn̥es gealdor 7 dust 7 drencas 7 sealf 7 gif sio adl netnum sie' ('remedies against every *leodrone* and *ælfsiden*, being a charm for fevers, and powder and drinks and a salve; and [one] if the ailment be on cattle'; ed. Wright 1955, f. 5). Although it is not certain, it is syntactically likely here that *fefercynn̥es* refers not only to the noun immediately following it, but to all four of *gealdor*, *dust*, *drencas* and *sealf*. If so, then 3b's function is also associated with 2's, which serves amongst other things against *lenctenadl*. Although the verbal similarities between texts 1 and 2 are less extensive, the two remedies also share content without verbal similarity, in being concerned both with the Devil/devils, and both recommending the application of the salve to the face (respectively referred to with *andwlita* and *þunwong*).

It is impossible to establish a traditional text-critical stemma for texts like these, because the variation between them is due to free recomposition rather than mechanical errors. This makes it hard to assign priority to one text. While it is possible to imagine two different redactors excerpting material from a text like 1, it is simpler to suppose that 1 is a conflation of 2 and 3a; but we cannot be confident as to whether one redactor replaced *ælfsiden* with *ælfcynn̥*, or *vice versa*, or whether there was some more complex process. But their association does suggest that one man's *ælfsiden* implied another man's *ælf*, consolidating my argument that *ælfsiden* was not a *bahuvrihi* compound, but did indeed denote magic effected by *ælf̥e*. Moreover, the texts afford a nexus of interrelationships associating not only *ælfsiden*, *feondes costunga* and *lenctenadl*, but also *ælfcynn̥*, *ælf*, *nihtgenga* and *þa menn þe deofol mid hæmþ*, and, by implication, *fefercynn̥*, *leodrone* and *mære* too. This list is itself consolidated by another remedy against *nihtgengan*/a *nihtgenga* from section 1 of Leechbook III (f. 111). Following a

remedy ‘Wip swiþe ealdum heafod ece’ (‘For a very old headache’) derived from the *De medicamentis* of Marcellus Empiricus (Grattan–Singer 1952, 37–38), the text adds that the amulets which the remedy involves ‘beoþ gode wip heafodece & wip eagwærce & wip feondes costunga & nihtgengan & lenctenadle & maran & wyrtforbore & malscra & yflum gealdorcraeftum’ (‘are good against headache and against eye-pain and against the tribulations of the Devil and *nihtgengan/a nihtgenga* and *lenctenadl* and *maran/a mære* and plant-restraint<sup>175</sup> and enchantments and evil incantational techniques’). Whatever *nihtgengan* are, they keep familiar company: magic, *feondes costunga*, *lenctenadl* and *maran*. Even the *eagwærce* has some noteworthy parallels.<sup>176</sup>

### 3.6 *Wið ælfe 7 wip uncuþum sidsan*

This remedy occurs in section 65 of Bald’s Leechbook II, a few remedies after *Gif hors ofscoten sie*: ‘Wið ælfe & wip uncuþum sidsan gnid myrran on win & hwites recelses emmicel & sceaf gagates dæl þæs stanes on þæt win, drince .iiii. morgenas neaht nestig opþe .viii. opþe .xii.’ (‘Against (an) *ælf* [or ‘against *ælf*’<sup>177</sup>] and against unknown/strange/unusual *sidsa*, crumble myrrh into wine and the same amount of white frankincense and shave a piece of the stone *jet* into that wine, drink [on] 3 mornings, fasting [at] night, or 9 or 12’; ff. 107v–108r). The main evidence here for the meanings of *ælf* is its collocation with *uncuþ sidsa*. We have no more information for the meanings of *sidsa* than we have for *siden*; presumably it meant something like ‘magic’. What is interesting is that the text includes *uncuþ sidsa* without referring to some more ordinary *sidsa*. While this may imply that a *cuþ sidsa* would require a different remedy, a more elegant explanation would be to assume that this was implicit in *ælf*, the text to be interpreted as ‘against an *ælf* (no doubt using *sidsa*) but also against *sidsa* of an unknown source’. If so, then *sidsa* was connoted by *ælf*, but this inference is not secure enough to be relied upon. Kitson suggested that ‘the wine, myrrh and frankincense surely bespeak ultimate foreign origin for all that the “elf” may imply assimilation to native tradition’

<sup>175</sup> Perhaps ‘binding through magical use of plants’; cf. Meaney 1992, 22–24; Jente 1921, 310.

<sup>176</sup> *Wið ælfcynne* has its salve applied to the eyes, and *elfae* seem to be associated with eye-pain in a fifteenth-century English medical manuscript, British Library Sloane 963. On folio 14v a remedy ‘ffor akyng of eyen’ concludes a short collection of remedies. On the next folio (still within the same gathering), a different hand presents a series of *orationes* entitled ‘Aliud carmen pro eodem’ (‘another charm against the same’), which, fragmentary, cover folios 15r–16v (cf. Kieckhefer 1989, 70). *Elfæ* are prominent, alongside *demonas*, throughout these prayers; it appears that the remedy ‘ffor akyng of eyen’ prompted someone to include these as remedies for that ailment, and the prospect that eye-pains were associated with attacks by *elves* would provide a neat explanation. They would perhaps relate to Lassen’s argument for the association of good sight with power and masculinity in medieval Scandinavian culture (2000; cf. Larrington 1992, 8–12).

<sup>177</sup> Although *uncuþum sidsan* is in the dative, the case taken by *wið* in Royal 12 D. xvii varies so much that *ælf* could still be an accusative plural.



(1989, 61): we have here cultural elements drawn from ecclesiastical contexts being deployed here to meet problems denoted by older, vernacular words (cf. Jolly 1996, esp. 153–54).

#### 4. Interpretations

Elliptical though our medical texts are, they provide some reasonably clear evidence for the meanings of *ælf* and *ælf*. Our best-attested compound is *ælf**siden*, which is consolidated by the collocation of *ælf* with *sidsa*. Although it is not possible to link it with one clinical condition, a range of associations are attested which allow us to reconstruct its likely meanings. *Ælf**siden* involved *ælf*; *-siden* was almost certainly magic of some description; and the prospect of *ælf* working magic called *siden* or *sidsa* is well-paralleled by Snorri's association of the *vanir* with *seiðr*. It might afflict people or livestock. Whether *ælf*'s use of *siden* carried with it the pejorative connotations of gender transgression which the use of *seiðr* would have in Norse is not clear, however. Previous assumptions that *ælf**siden* might involve possession by *ælf* or some physical assault by them are by no means ruled out, but should probably be imagined if they are to be imagined at all as consequences of *ælf**siden* rather than *ælf**siden* itself. Like other assaults on the health by *ælf*, *ælf**siden* is also associated with diabolical tribulations, attesting again to the uneasy alignment of *ælf* with demons in ninth- to tenth-century Anglo-Saxon culture, but also to the continuing distinctness of *ælf* from diabolical threats. The association, through the related text *Wið ælf**cynne*, of *ælf**siden* with devils or the Devil having sex with people is a rare and intriguing one, but too ambiguous to develop. *Ælf**siden* is also associated with *nihtgengan* and *maran*, the latter collocation being well-paralleled, and one which I examine more fully in the next chapter. The ailments with which *ælf**siden* is particularly associated are varieties of fever, particularly *lenctenadl*. This is consistent with the meanings of the word *ælfisc* in its Old English attestation.

Other texts attest to other associations for *ælf*, supported this time mainly by later medieval English and Scottish evidence. Even when spurious identifications are discarded, *ælf* were associated with causing internal pains, denoted in the texts studied here with *ofscoten* concerning horses and *ælf**sogoda* concerning people. The association is also apparent, as I discuss below, in *Wið færstice*. The old idea that these pains might be caused by *ælf* shooting arrows or other missiles at their victims is not attested here, and should not be assumed. There were other *ælf**alda* besides, including cutaneous disorders, denoted in the texts studied here by *wæter-ælf**adl*. The ambivalent relationship between *ælf* and demons pervades these texts as it pervades the texts concerning

*ælfside*n, the suggestion once more being that the two were associated but not identical. The ambivalence recalls the enthusiasm of Anglo-Saxon clerics to use prognostic texts to try to tell the future despite the objections of sermonisers (Liuzza 2001). It is also reflected in the placement of *ælf*e in manuscripts: in Leechbook III, the *ælf*-remedies occur towards the end, but within its main body. But in Bald's Leechbook, they tend to occur at the ends of books, recalling Sims-Williams's observation of the similar placement of the more magical prayers in the early English prayer-books (1990, 301–2).

In themselves, these conclusions leave many questions unanswered, not least about how *ælf*e's causing of ailments related to their other characteristics, discussed above. However, they afford a basis for using fuller accounts of otherworldly beings—both from other medieval cultures and *Wið færstice*—to try to arrive at a convincing interpretation of Anglo-Saxon *ælf*e.