



# Re-examining Hrabanus Maurus' letter on incest and magic

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*This article offers a reanalysis of Hrabanus' mid-ninth-century text De magicis artibus. Often read and studied as a complete work, the De magicis artibus is in fact one portion of a longer text that also discusses incest and marriage practices. Furthermore, the single surviving copy of the text is deliberately attached to another work by Hrabanus, his Poenitentiale ad Otgarium. This article argues that by examining the text in its entirety, as well as its manuscript context and edition history, Hrabanus' whole work is better understood as one of pastoral care informed by the Old Testament.*

Sometime between 841 and 842, Hrabanus Maurus wrote a letter to his old friend and classmate Hatto. He described the topics of his letter as 'the marriage of kindred and the conjuring tricks and spurious divinations of magicians'.<sup>1</sup> In the text Hrabanus drew on both the Old

\* Thanks are due to several people for their advice and assistance while writing this article. First and foremost, to James Palmer, whose support, encouragement, and feedback have been crucial; I have benefitted from many discussions with him and particularly owe to him the phrase 'pastoral housekeeping'. I am grateful to P.G. Maxwell-Stuart for his advice and help with trickier parts of Latin, as well as countless discussions about magic in the Middle Ages which clarified my thinking on many points. Mark Thakkar also was never sparing in his assistance with Latin and palaeography. I would also like to thank the following for their help in various forms: Justin Arnwine, Cameron Houston, Áron Kecskés, Julia Rohn, Jared Wielfaert, Alex Woolf, and the staff at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana. Lastly, I am grateful for the two anonymous reviewers, who greatly improved this article by their feedback.

<sup>1</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Epistola* 32, ed. E. Dümmler, *MGH Epistolae* 5 (Berlin, 1899), pp. 462–5 at pp. 462–3: 'de consanguineorum nuptiis, et de magorum prestigijs falsisque divinationibus'. All translations are mine unless otherwise noted. For a helpful gateway to the literature on Hrabanus Maurus, see the essays in P. Depreux, S. Lebecq, M.J.-L. Perrin and O. Szerwiniack (eds), *Raban Maur et son temps* (Turnhout, 2010). Biblical quotations in the article are from the Douay-Rheims edition.

## *Early Medieval Europe*

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and New Testaments, various church canons, as well as several patristic authorities, attempting to draw and produce from these sources a harmonized response to the topics Hatto had proposed to him. Hrabanus sought to accomplish two ends: first, he attempted to prove to Hatto that the Old Testament was a valid authority for Christian practice, and second, he endeavoured to harmonize the often-discordant opinions of past writers, canons, and Scripture. These two aims undergird how he addressed the problems of consanguinity and illusory magic. The difference between the subjects, however, has frequently obscured how they complemented each other within Hrabanus' vision of pastoral care for a Christian society.

A crucial problem has been the way scholars have separated the two halves of Hrabanus' letter. This has been exacerbated by a disproportionate interest in the history of magic and the relationship between Christianity and lingering pagan magical practices.<sup>2</sup> In the process, the full logic of Hrabanus' ideas – and how consanguinity comes to be linked with illusory magic – has been lost. Meanwhile, there has been scholarly attention paid to the manuscript that contains the letter, which focuses mostly on the glosses throughout.<sup>3</sup> The seamless transition in the manuscript from one section to the next has been ignored. In fact, the beginning of *De magicis artibus* is only denoted by a rubricated 'D' (see Fig. 1). Additionally, in the later printed editions the title is altered from *De consanguineorum nuptiis, et de magorum praestigiis fasisque divinationibus* to *De magicis artibus*. This reduces the whole content into two separate and individual

<sup>2</sup> This approach finds its most complete form in V.I.J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1991). Though not exhaustive, the *De magicis artibus* appears or is mentioned on its own in: H.P. Broedel, *The Malleus Maleficarum and the Construction of Witchcraft* (Manchester, 2003), pp. 75, 87 and 191; L.L. Coon, 'Historical Fact and Exegetical Fiction in the Carolingian Vita S. Sualonis', *Church History* 72 (2003), pp. 1–24, at p. 22; S.C. McCluskey, *Astronomies and Cultures in Early Medieval Europe* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 145–7; A.L. Meaney, 'Ælfric's Use of his Sources in his Homily on Auguries', *English Studies* 66 (1985), pp. 477–95, at pp. 478, 479, 491; A. Pairet, 'Shades of Circe: Wisdom and Knowledge in Christine de Pizan's Exempla', *French Forum* 42.3 (2017), pp. 393–405, at p. 402 n. 1; J. Palmer, 'Defining Paganism in the Carolingian World', *EME* 15 (2007), pp. 402–25, at p. 420; M. Rampton, *Trafficking with Demons: Magic, Ritual, and Gender From Late Antiquity to 1000* (Ithaca, 2021), pp. 74, 297–8; K. Schlabach, 'De Divinatione daemonum', in K. Pollmann and W. Otten (eds), *Oxford Guide to the Historical Reception of Augustine, Vol. 1* (Oxford, 2013), pp. 132–4; Hrabanus Maurus, *De Universo* VII.5, trans. P. Throop, *De Universo: The Peculiar Properties of Words and Their Mystical Significance: Volume One, Books I – XI* (Charlotte, 2009), p. xii; P. Zambelli, *White Magic, Black Magic in the European Renaissance* (Leiden, 2007), p. 36, n. 3.

<sup>3</sup> See R. Bergman and S. Stricker, *Katalog der althochdeutschen und altsächsischen Glossenhandschriften* (Berlin, 2005), pp. 1524–5; R. Kottje, *Die Bussbücher Halitgars von Cambrai und des Hrabanus Maurus: Ihre Überlieferung und ihre Quellen* (Berlin, 1980); and H. Mayer, *Die althochdeutschen Griffelglossen der Handschrift Ottob. Lat. 3295 (Biblioteca Vaticana): Edition und Untersuchung* (Bern, 1982).

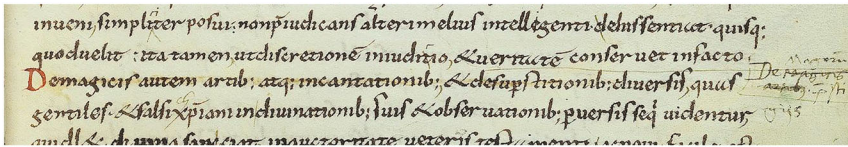


Fig. 1 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Otto. Lat. 3295, fol. 62r. The *De magicis artibus* begins in the middle sentence: ‘De magicis autem artib[us] atq[ue] incantationib[us] . . .’ [Colour figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

portions, and significantly widens the subject of the latter portion, from ‘conjuring tricks and spurious divinations’ (two species of magic) to ‘the magic arts’ (the genus of magic).

Neither scholarly approach treats the text in a holistic and satisfactory way. The emphasis on reading the *De magicis artibus* vis-à-vis long-term changes in magical practices from Antiquity through the early Middle Ages accounts neither for the political circumstances surrounding its composition, nor the intellectual and epistolary climate in which Hrabanus operated. Analysis of the manuscript itself and Hrabanus’ role in its organization will make apparent that its contents are better understood as pertaining to Hrabanus’ pastoral concerns for spiritual and moral *correctio*.<sup>4</sup> Setting the text within the Carolingian vision for a Christian community bound to, and informed by, Old Testament law helps to contextualize the background to, and importance of, Hrabanus’ initial argument to Hatto – that the Old Testament must needs be seen and treated as properly authoritative within a Christian society.<sup>5</sup> Next, reading the letter in the political context of the civil war between the sons of Louis the Pious will ground our understanding of it in the busy textual and epistolary community where writers were addressing many different pastoral problems facing the tumultuous empire left to Louis’s sons. Widening our perspective on Hrabanus’ letter will reveal a text that displays a unity of thought, purpose, and theme, which is only visible if we resist the urge to vivisect it for the portion on magic.

The sole surviving manuscript which contains Hrabanus’ letter to Hatto is Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Otto. Lat. 3295. It contains eighty-four leaves that can be dated to two sections.<sup>6</sup> Folios 1–13 were

<sup>4</sup> For recent criticism of the term *correctio*, see C. van Rhijn, *Leading the Way to Heaven: Pastoral Care and Salvation in the Carolingian Period* (London, 2022), pp. 25–51.

<sup>5</sup> On the Carolingians and Old Testament law see, G. Heydemann, ‘The People of God and the Law: Biblical Models in Carolingian Legislation’, *Speculum* 95.1 (2020), pp. 89–131.

<sup>6</sup> This history and description is based on Bergman and Stricker, *Katalog der althochdeutschen*, pp. 1524–5; Kottje, *Die Bussbücher*, pp. 69–70; and Mayer, *Die althochdeutschen Griffelglossen*, pp. 15–17; see also B. Bischoff, *Katalog der festländischen Handschriften des neunten Jahrhunderts (mit Ausnahme der wisigotischen) Teil III: Padua-Zwickau* (Wiesbaden, 2014), nos. 6444 and 6445, p. 405.

written in the same hand around the first quarter of the ninth century, probably in Mainz. Folios 14r–84v were written in several hands around the third quarter of the ninth century, probably in the Rhine-Main region.<sup>7</sup> The archbishop of Cologne, Herman I (d. 924), gave the manuscript to the Cologne cathedral library in c.900, and in the latter half of the twelfth century it appeared at the monastery of St Pantaleon in Cologne. Next it entered the library catalogue of the Ottoboni family in Rome, before being transferred to the Vatican in 1748. The contents are as follows:

Fols 1r–13v: Canons of the Council of Nicaea (*Collectio Dionysia-Hadriana*)

Fols 14r–21v: *Canones conciliorum Dionysia-Hadriana*

Fols 22r–46v: *Poenitentiale* of Halitgar of Cambrai

Fols 47r–58v: *Poenitentiale ad Otgarium* of Hrabanus Maurus

Fol. 58v: *Capitula ex canonum*

Fols 59r–68v: *de consanguineorum nuptiis, et de magorum prestigiis falsisque divinationibus* by Hrabanus Maurus

Fol. 68v: Writer's note: 'Hucusque scripsimus secundum quod Hrabanus excerpsit de canonum auctoritate'

Fols 69r–75v: *Capitulare ad presbyteros* of Theodulf of Orléans

Fol. 75v: Hrabanus Maurus' Epitaph

Fol. 76r–v: Excerpts from the *Epitome Hispana*

Fols 77r–84r: Pseudo-Isidore, Commentary on *Canticum Canticorum*

Fol. 84v: Hymn Fragments

Although the manuscript has before been characterized as *canones*, I would suggest that this is not an accurate description as it generalizes the contents of the whole manuscript under this single label, despite the fact that canons make up less than half of the total contents.<sup>8</sup> Immediately noteworthy from the diverse material of the manuscript is the authoritative and pastoral nature of what has been selected. Up to the commentary on Canticle of Canticles (that is, from folios 1r–77r inclusive), all of the manuscript's contents relate in some way to pastoral care and diocesan governance (roughly 90% of the manuscript). The manuscript appears to be a reference work for a cathedral library (i.e. Cologne), rather than a handbook for a diocesan

<sup>7</sup> Bischoff placed the origins of fols 1–13 in Mainz, while he was less sure about the rest of the manuscript and suggested the Rhine-Main or Alsace regions, see Bischoff, *Katalog Teil III*, nos. 6444 and 6445, p. 405. I think closer to Mainz is probable, as do Bergmann and Stricker, Kéry, Kottje, Mayer, and Meens. See Bergmann and Stricker, *Katalog*, pp. 1524–5; Kéry, *Canon Collections of the Early Middle Ages (ca.400–1140): A Bibliographic Guide to the Manuscripts and Literature* (Washington, DC, 2000), p. 59; Kottje, *Die Bussbücher*, pp. 139–40 and Kottje, *Verzeichnis*, p. 199; Mayer, *Die althochdeutschen*, pp. 15–17; Meens, *Penance*, p. 133.

<sup>8</sup> Bischoff, *Katalog Teil III*, p. 405.

priest.<sup>9</sup> At first glance, Hrabanus' letter to Hatto may seem out of place among the canons and penitentials, but as will be shown below, the content of the letter fits well within the context of correct practice and diocesan governance – the manuscript is one manifestation, on the diocesan level, of the broader concerns of *correctio* and *renovatio*. In addition to the content of the letter to Hatto, BAV, Otto. Lat. 3295's inclusion of Hrabanus' *Poenitentiale ad Otgarium* also sheds light on this manuscript's focus on works of pastoral care.

The context for the *Poenitentiale ad Otgarium* is similar to the origins of the letter addressed to Hatto. In or shortly after 841, Archbishop Otgar of Mainz had asked Hrabanus to write a penitential, and Hrabanus replied with the first of two he would eventually produce.<sup>10</sup> Both penitentials originated as letters and were requested of Hrabanus by bishops.<sup>11</sup> As Rob Meens has commented, the *Poenitentiale ad Otgarium* was 'written solely on the basis of texts with impeccable authority', drawing on the Bible, patristic works, and important councils.<sup>12</sup> One of these was the *Collectio Dionysia-Hadriana*, parts of which were included too in folios 14r–22v of our manuscript – in fact, just before the *Poenitentiale ad Otgarium*. A high priority for those working for reform in the latter parts of the ninth century was the importance of authority and uniformity; to help ensure that unity the *Collectio Dionysia-Hadriana* was meant to be the sole collection for consultation, superseding all previous ones.<sup>13</sup> As in the case with our manuscript, other canon collections like this were often produced along with penitentials. Hrabanus himself was responsible for the inclusion of his letter to Hatto alongside the *Poenitentiale ad Otgarium*. Writing to Otgar in the preface to the *Poenitentiale*, Hrabanus says:

And lest by chance it become necessary for you to search for it in different books, moreover because it is already clear that you have searched briefly, I have attached to this book another [*alterum*], which I had recently finished on the marriage of kindred and the conjuring tricks and spurious divinations of magicians, so that you would have them together, because the arrangement of topics makes them congruous. Therefore, read this little work [*opusculum*] which has been sent straight to you, and if anything set down in it seems

<sup>9</sup> On handbooks for priests, see van Rhijn, *Leading the Way to Heaven*, especially pp. 52–83.

<sup>10</sup> Kottje, *Die Bussbücher*, pp. 5–6. On Hrabanus' penitentials, see P.J. Payer, *Sex and the Penitentials: The Development of a Sexual Code 550–1150* (Toronto, 1984), pp. 67–71.

<sup>11</sup> Kottje, *Die Bussbücher*, pp. 5–6.

<sup>12</sup> R. Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe 600–1200* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 133.

<sup>13</sup> Meens, *Penance in Medieval Europe*, p. 114.

not altogether right, let it be corrected by your devoted study for the benefit of those who read it.<sup>14</sup>

I suggest that it is the pastoral nature of the *Poenitentiale* which Hrabanus sees as congruous (*concordes*) with the letter to Hatto, precisely because the letter is instructive for pastoral care. Penance, appropriate marriage practices, and illusory magic all have a direct bearing on the laity, and this makes the letter to Hatto a suitable addition to the *Poenitentiale*.

This passage also has implications for the question of dating. Ernst Dümmler dated the letter to Hatto c.842, but Raymund Kottje dated the *Poenitentiale* to c.841. The letter was written prior to the *Poenitentiale*, as Hrabanus said in the preface that he 'had recently finished' it (*nuper . . . confeceram*). This may, therefore, push the letter's dating slightly earlier than Dümmler suggested. Kottje thought that this manuscript is a copy of the original one that Hrabanus had sent to Archbishop Otgar (which would also strengthen the likelihood it was copied in Mainz).<sup>15</sup> This is also the only manuscript of the *Poenitentiale ad Otgarium* that includes the letter to Hatto as Hrabanus intended.<sup>16</sup>

One reason that the letter to Hatto is dated to the period of Hatto's abbacy of the Fulda monastery (842–56) may come from Hrabanus' student Rudolf. Listing Hrabanus' works in the *Miracula sanctorum in Fuldenses ecclesias translatorum*, Rudolf says: 'Indeed, [Hrabanus] wrote one book replying to abbot [Hatto]'s questions about how the uniting of kindred [in marriage] ought to be avoided and the practice of magic shunned. He also wrote one book for Archbishop Otgar.'<sup>17</sup> Rudolf called Hatto 'abbot', which gives the impression that the questions Hatto addressed to Hrabanus were put during his tenure as abbot. However, Rudolf was writing in Fulda during Hatto's abbacy, and this could reasonably account for him using the title anachronistically. The *Poenitentiale* and letter to Hatto follow sequentially in Rudolf's

<sup>14</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 32, ed. E. Dümmler, pp. 462–7, at pp. 462–3: 'Et ne forte necessarium vobis foret in diversis voluminibus id quaerere, quod vos iam constat in brevi exquisitum habere, huic quoque libello subiunxi alterum, quem nuper de consanguineorum nuptiis, et de magorum prestigiis falsisque divinationibus confeceram, ut haberetis eos simul, quos ordo rationis concordēs fecit. Legite ergo opusculum quod vobis directum est, et si quid in eo minus recte positum videatur, vestro sacro studio ad utilitatem legentium corrigatur.' This passage can be found on BAV, Otto. Lat. 3295, fol. 47r, bottom of the left column and top of the right. The letter to Hatto is completely removed from the *Poenitentiale ad Otgarium* in both the *MGH* and *PL* editions.

<sup>15</sup> Kottje, *Die Bussbücher*, p. 140.

<sup>16</sup> For the other manuscripts of the *Poenitentiale ad Otgarium*, see R. Kottje, *Verzeichnis der Handschriften mit den Werken des Hrabanus Maurus* (Hanover, 2012), pp. 46, 74, 173 and 224–5.

<sup>17</sup> Rudolf of Fulda, *Miracula sanctorum in Fuldenses ecclesias translatorum*, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH SS* 15 (Hanover, 1887), pp. 328–41, at p. 341: 'Ad interrogata quidem Bonosi abbassi respondendo, quomodo cognationis commixtio declinanda sit et magica ars devitanda, confecit librum unum. Scripsit quoque libellum 1 ad Otgarium archiepiscopum.'



catalogue, just as they do in BAV, Otto. Lat. 3295. Rudolf wrote the *Miracula* c.843–7, probably before Hrabanus was elevated to archbishop of Mainz (847).<sup>18</sup>

Hrabanus' text was handed on to posterity in this single manuscript and was transmitted (deliberately) within the context of canons, capitularies, and penitentials. The contents and organization of the manuscript itself strengthen its ties to the broader context of Carolingian interest in *correctio* and pastoral care in the ninth century. When scholars examine the letter to Hatto as *De magicis artibus*, a treatise on magic, they too often excise it from this broader penitential context and ambience of pastoral care.

It was with the *editio princeps* of George Colvener in 1627 that the word *tractatus* was first attached to Hrabanus' letter and the text was bifurcated. In this edition, the letter is entitled: 'Hrabani Mavri Mogvntinensis Archiepiscopi, de consanguineorum nuptijs. & De Magorum Praestigiis, Falsisque divinationibus, Tractatus'.<sup>19</sup> It was published as a single unit, but with the subheading *de magicis artibus* to divide the work into two sections. In 1864 the *Patrologia Latina* (PL) followed Colvener's example and divided the text as *De consanguineorum nuptiis* and *De magicis artibus*.<sup>20</sup> Further confusing the scholarly treatment of Hrabanus' reply to Hatto, in the *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* (MGH) edition of 1899, Ernst Dümmler included it as one of Hrabanus' *epistolae* rather than as a treatise and, in the process, omitted all long quotations. As will become apparent, none of these editions of the text satisfactorily conveys the letter's original intent.

Styling the letter a *tractatus* is misleading, suggesting a category and genre in which the text does not easily fit; it meets expectations of neither length, complexity nor originality.<sup>21</sup> Instead, what one finds is a menagerie of long quotations from past writers and church councils, stitched together to form what has been described as a 'highly

<sup>18</sup> J. Raaijmakers, *The Making of the Monastic Community of Fulda, c. 744–900* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 231.

<sup>19</sup> *Hrabani Mavri Abbatis Primus Fuldensis; Ordinis S. Benedicti, postea Archiepiscopi Mogvntini Operum Quotquot reperiri potuerunt; Tomus Sextus & Vltimus*, vol. 6, ed. G. Colvener (Cologne, 1627), pp. 163–73. MS BAV, Otto. Lat. 3295, fol. 59r. The manuscript contains the heading: DE CONSANGUINEORU[M] NUPTIIS, ET DE MAGORUM PRAESTIGIIS FALSISQ[UE] DIVINATIONIBUS.

<sup>20</sup> Full title in the PL: *Beati Rabani Mauri Fuldensis Abbatis et Mogvntini Archiepiscopi de Consanguineorum Nuptiis et de Magorum Praestigiis Falsisque Divinationibus Tractatus*.

<sup>21</sup> See M. Pollheimer, 'Hrabanus Maurus – the Compiler, the Preacher, and his Audience', in M. Diesenberger, Y. Hen and M. Pollheimer (eds), *Sermo Doctorum: Compilers, Preachers, and their Audiences in the Early Medieval West* (Turnhout, 2013), pp. 203–28, esp. at pp. 210–11.

derivative' source for medieval views about magic writ large.<sup>22</sup> Rather – and this needs to be stressed – the letter is a contingent response to a particular query. Hrabanus consistently valued harmonizing past opinions over formulating new ones.<sup>23</sup> He himself seems to be aware that he could be charged with a lack of originality: 'I dared not offer anything new from myself, but rather, following what I found I simply inserted the writings or words of the Fathers.'<sup>24</sup> Originality is at best irrelevant and at worst detrimental to Hrabanus' legal analysis – as indeed it is in many of his other works.<sup>25</sup>

When the *De magicis artibus* is set within the context of his broader corpus – when it is seen joined with the section on consanguinity, and later attached to the *Poenitentiale ad Otgarium* – approaching it as a kind of 'treatise on magic' fails to articulate accurately either its form or function. Instead, approaching it holistically, we are able (in Peter Brown's helpful description) 'to read over the shoulder of an ancient author as he reads texts that we ourselves have read'.<sup>26</sup> We may witness Hrabanus' thought process in addressing the pastoral difficulties of consanguinity and illusory magic.

Dümmler's omission of long quotations erodes the force of Hrabanus' work. First, this excision alters the text itself, presenting it in a way that is fundamentally different from the original. It creates the impression that the sections in Hrabanus' own words are the only substantial contributions he had to make on the matter. But this is to misread not only the epistolary origins of the text, but also the encyclopaedic thought-culture in which Hrabanus operated. His thoughts are bound within his sources and the 'writings or words of the Fathers'. Hrabanus' 'collecting' of patristic and scriptural authorities is not unique to this letter, but rather is indicative of his wider method.<sup>27</sup> Second, along with the quotations, some thoughts original to Hrabanus are removed as collateral

<sup>22</sup> Flint, *Rise of Magic*, p. 11; also called 'highly derivative' in Rampton, *Trafficking with Demons*, p. 298.

<sup>23</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, pp. 455–62, at p. 457.

<sup>24</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 458: 'Ego quoque, quia ex meo aliquid noviter non ausus sum proferre, maiorum scripta vel dicta secundum id quod inveni simpliciter posui.' See also, M. de Jong, 'The Empire as *ecclesia*: Hrabanus Maurus and Biblical *historia* for Rulers', in Y. Hen and M. Innes (eds), *The Uses of the Past in the Early Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 191–226, at pp. 201–3.

<sup>25</sup> M. de Jong, 'Old Law and New-Found Power: Hrabanus Maurus and the Old Testament', in J.W. Drijvers and A.A. MacDonald (eds), *Centres of Learning: Learning and Location in Pre-Modern Europe and the Near East* (Leiden, 1995), pp. 162–76, at pp. 170–4. See also K. Zechiel-Eckes, 'Ein Dummkopf und Plagiator? Hrabanus Maurus aus der Sicht des Diakons Florus von Lyon', in Depreux, Lebecq, Perrin and Szerwiniack (eds), *Raban Maur*, pp. 119–35.

<sup>26</sup> P. Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul: Afterlife and Wealth in Early Western Christianity* (Cambridge, MA, 2018), p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> For an analysis of this regarding Hrabanus' *Commentary on Matthew*, see O.M. Phelan, 'The Carolingian Renewal in Early Medieval Europe through Hrabanus Maurus's *Commentary on Matthew*', *Traditio* 75 (2020), pp. 143–75. Phelan notes that Hrabanus pre-emptively defends himself and his style against charges of unoriginality, p. 158.



damage. This vivisection mangles the text and has led to a fragmented scholarly view of it.<sup>28</sup> Rarely has the text been considered in its entirety.<sup>29</sup>

The central problem with the *MGH* omissions is that they obscure Hrabanus' argument defending and justifying the Old Testament as a proper source of authority for Christian thought and practice. This argument concerning the Old Testament is preliminary and more important to Hrabanus than either consanguinity or illusory magic: he wrote more about the Old Testament than any other subject.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, the Old Testament was a source for contemporary ethics, and it was also a historical source of identity for Carolingian writers, especially Hrabanus.<sup>31</sup> This adds another layer to Hrabanus' anxieties about undermining the authority of the Old Testament.

More than the Old Testament itself is at stake if its authority for Christians is on shaky ground. If Carolingian political identity as the new 'chosen people' is found in the community's adherence to God's commandments, then any threat to the validity of the Old Testament's authority to exert sway over Christian behaviour threatens to undermine that very identity.<sup>32</sup> As with Israel in the Old Testament, so with the Carolingians: failure to follow God's law threatens the stability of the community and their status as a 'chosen people'.<sup>33</sup> Hrabanus wrote to Hatto:

Consequently, I have been able to find only a difficult solution to the questions you proposed to me, because you were arguing against the evidence taken from the old Law in [my] letter written in reply to Bishop Humbert on how many generations it is allowed for kindred to join themselves in marriage, on the grounds that they are not appropriate for this age, that is, for the Christian religion.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Hrabanus' text is also fragmented into three different items (as *De consanguineorum nuptiis*, *Epistola ad Hattonem*, and *De magicis artibus*) in Kottje, *Verzeichnis*, pp. 247, 250 and 258, respectively.

<sup>29</sup> Martha Rampton, in 'Why the Carolingians Didn't Need Demons', in M. Gillis (ed.), *Carolingian Experiments* (Turnhout, 2022), pp. 245–98, recognizes that the *De magicis artibus* is a portion of the letter to Hatto, but her discussion of the letter is limited to the *De magicis artibus*. Although, at p. 260, she grants that 'magic seldom emerged as a central issue in and of itself in the Carolingian reform movement', the scholarly tradition nevertheless centralizes the *De magicis artibus* to the detriment of the whole letter. I am very grateful to Professor Rampton for generously sharing her essay with me ahead of publication.

<sup>30</sup> See de Jong, 'Old Law and New-Found Power', in Drijvers and MacDonald (eds), *Centres of Learning*, pp. 162–76.

<sup>31</sup> De Jong, 'The Empire as *ecclesia*', in Hen and Innes (eds), *Uses of the Past*, pp. 197–8.

<sup>32</sup> Heydemann, 'People of God', p. 94.

<sup>33</sup> Heydemann, 'People of God', p. 95, also p. 103.

<sup>34</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 455: 'Unde modo difficilem exitum in quaestionibus a te mihi propositis invenire potui, eo quod testimonia de veteri lege adsumpta, in epistola rescripta ad Humbertum episcopum, quota generatione liceret cognatis connubia iungere, redargebas, quasi non <convenientia /MS/> huic temporis, hoc est religioni christianiae.'

This shows that for Hrabanus the appropriateness and validity of the Old Testament is foundational, a *sine qua non* for what he will eventually say about consanguinity and illusory magic.

When Hatto read Hrabanus' reply he was reading an epistolary communication. When Otgar received it along with the *Poenitentiale* he was reading a 'little work' that Hrabanus wanted attached to the penitential. It stands to reason then, that we ought to return both editorially and literarily to the way in which the text would have been read in its immediate context. Furthermore, splitting the letter in two and studying only a portion of it hampers our appreciation for the sum of Hrabanus' literary style and method in addressing Hatto's questions. We also lose focus of the broader argument he makes throughout both sections that the Old Testament is a valid source of authority for Christian practice.

### Consanguinity

Hatto's questioning of Hrabanus' use of the Old Testament in establishing Christian norms for marriage came at a time when there was much disagreement on the matter. Canonical opinion on incest and consanguinity in the Carolingian age was complex and often contradictory. During this period, ecclesiastical authorities attempted to define marriage and impediments to it more clearly, but a cohesive conclusion had yet to be reached, not least as canonical authorities and local practices varied.<sup>35</sup> By the ninth century, the church was moving toward a more conservative approach to sexual ethics, including increasing the number of generations required to separate people in order to avoid consanguineous marriages.<sup>36</sup>

There were two potential sources for confusion concerning how closely related a married couple could be.<sup>37</sup> The first was how degrees of kinship were to be calculated; the second was how many degrees were then to be permitted. There was no definitive agreement on either of these in the early Middle Ages. Degrees of kinship could be established in two different ways: the 'Roman' method and the

<sup>35</sup> J.A. Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society in Medieval Europe* (Chicago, 1987), p. 140.

<sup>36</sup> M. Costambeys, M. Innes and S. MacLean, *The Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2014), p. 132. In addition to the pastoral and theological concerns which bear on proper marriage, it ought to be noted that the Church was not the only party that was interested in who could marry whom, e.g. King Childebert II made marrying one's stepmother a capital crime in 596: M. de Jong, 'An Unsolved Riddle: Early Medieval Incest Legislation', in I. Wood (ed.), *Franks and Alamanni in the Merovingian Period: An Ethnographic Perspective* (Woodbridge, 1998), pp. 107–40, at p. 108.

<sup>37</sup> The following is summarizing M.D. Elliot, 'Boniface, Incest, and the Earliest Extant Version of Pope Gregory I's *Libellus responsionum* (JE 1843)', *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Kanonistische Abteilung* 100 (2014), pp. 62–111, at pp. 82–9.

'canonical' or 'scriptural' method, 'which tends to count degrees by numbers of "generaciones" rather than by numbers of "gradus" as the Roman method does'.<sup>38</sup> Using the 'Roman' method one would add together the number of generations separating the two parties from the first common ancestor. The 'canonical' or 'scriptural' method counts only the generations separating the further removed party from the common ancestor.<sup>39</sup>

Regarding the second potential source of confusion, there were several competing opinions on how many degrees must separate the two parties. Isidore thought that prohibited consanguinity extended to the sixth degree by the 'Roman' method (*usque ad sextum generis gradum*).<sup>40</sup> In the *Libellus responsionum*, Augustine of Canterbury enquired 'within what degree may the faithful marry their kindred; and is it lawful to marry a stepmother or sister-in-law'. Gregory the Great responded that 'the faithful should only marry relations three or four times removed' (*tertia vel quarta generatio fidelium licenter sibi iungi debeat*).<sup>41</sup> It was this opinion that led Boniface to question its authenticity.<sup>42</sup> A concern of Gregory's was that if there were a marriage any closer in generation, then children produced from the union 'could not thrive' (*non posse succrescere*). Pope Gregory II prohibited marriage within the fourth degree; Gregory III to the seventh.<sup>43</sup> Boniface corresponded with three popes and a fellow bishop concerning degrees of relation within a marriage.<sup>44</sup> In one instance, he had allowed a man to marry the widowed mother of his (the man's) godchild, which some considered to be a grave sin and capital offence.<sup>45</sup> These texts were all known at Fulda, and their varied opinions and recommendations illustrate the extent to which papal and canonical opinion was conflicted in its

<sup>38</sup> Elliot, 'Boniface, Incest', pp. 84–5.

<sup>39</sup> The 'canonical' method has sometimes been called the 'Germanic' and 'Germanico-canonical' method. I follow Elliot in avoiding using these terms. See Elliot, 'Boniface, Incest', p. 84; also, on the label 'Germanic', see Palmer, 'Defining Paganism', p. 404.

<sup>40</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae* IX.vi.27, ed. M. Reydellet, *Etymologies* (Paris, 1984), pp. 217 and 225. Also cited by Elliot, 'Boniface, Incest', p. 83; and P.L. Reynolds, *Marriage in the Western Church: The Christianization of Marriage During the Patristic and Early Medieval Period* (Leiden and New York, 1994), p. 75.

<sup>41</sup> Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*, ed. B. Colgrave and R.A.B. Mynors (Oxford, 1969), pp. 84–5.

<sup>42</sup> The source of the confusion was that Boniface calculated degrees of kinship using the 'Roman' method, while Gregory used the 'canonical' or 'scriptural' method: Elliot, 'Boniface, Incest', pp. 87–9.

<sup>43</sup> See the letter of Pope Gregory II to Boniface in *Die Briefe des heiligen Bonifatius und Lullus*, ed. M. Tangl, *MGH Epistolae Selectae* 1 (Berlin, 1916), pp. 44–7, at p. 45. Gregory III's letter to Boniface, *Die Briefe*, ed. Tangl, pp. 49–52, at p. 51.

<sup>44</sup> See *Die Briefe*, ed. Tangl, nos. 26, 28, 33 and 50; pp. 44–7, 49–52, 56–8 and 80–6 respectively.

<sup>45</sup> Boniface, *Die Briefe*, ed. Tangl, no. 33, p. 57.

approach to consanguinity. It is into this tangled web of opinions that Hrabanus waded when he wrote to Hatto.

It appears that Hatto was dissatisfied with Hrabanus' position on the subject and was especially critical of his use of Old Testament Levitical law to inform current Christian practice.<sup>46</sup> Karl Ubl identified Hatto's concern thus: that by relying on the Old Testament Hrabanus had raised Judaism and Jewish law over the present age of Christianity.<sup>47</sup> Hatto himself was very well versed in Old Testament history and literature; Hatto had, Hrabanus tells us, 'examined more shrewdly and searched more carefully' concerning the problem of consanguinity and incest bans.<sup>48</sup> Since a large part of Hrabanus' opinion on incest prohibitions stemmed from the prohibitions given by Leviticus XVIII, in order to maintain the validity of Levitical law, Hrabanus would have to broaden his argument first to include a defence of the authority of the Old Testament.<sup>49</sup>

In the portion that focuses on consanguinity, Hrabanus used nineteen separate citations from Scripture and patristic authors. He demonstrated through his use of extra material a highly sophisticated and deliberate style that combined to serve his theological purpose of unravelling, understanding, and prescribing the safest course of action regarding Christian marriage.<sup>50</sup> Through his citations of Scripture, patristic authors, and canons, Hrabanus created 'a bulwark of authority against ignorance and doubt'.<sup>51</sup> In the *imperium Christianum*, social relationships had to be defined and informed by correct theological reflection and practice to preserve a Christian social order. These social relationships are agreed upon and blessed by God and the church through *sacramenta*.<sup>52</sup> This significantly raised the stakes of the question of consanguine and affine marriages; a flawed or confused *sacramentum* would lead to a flawed or confused *imperium* where the offenders have placed themselves outside of the common Christian community.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>46</sup> This anxiety over Hrabanus' relationship with Judaism was not unique to Hatto, for Hrabanus had previously been criticized for his reliance on 'Jewish' sources. See P. Hoogeveen, 'Jewish Double Portraits: Hrabanus Maurus and His Commentary on 1 & 2 Samuel', in Y. Hen and T.F.X. Noble (eds), *Barbarians and Jews: Jews and Judaism in the Early Medieval West* (Turnhout, 2018) pp. 257–77, at pp. 259–60. See also R. Meens, 'The Uses of the Old Testament in Early Medieval Canon Law: The *Collectio Vetus Gallica* and the *Collectio Hibernensis*', in Hen and Innes (eds), *Uses of the Past* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 67–77.

<sup>47</sup> K. Ubl, *Inzestverbot und Gesetzgebung: Die Konstruktion eines Verbrechens* (Berlin, 2008), pp. 312–13.

<sup>48</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 455: 'astutius inquirebas et diligentius investigabas'.

<sup>49</sup> R. McKitterick, *History and Memory in the Carolingian World* (Cambridge, 2004), p. 188.

<sup>50</sup> See Pollheimer, 'Hrabanus Maurus', pp. 211–14.

<sup>51</sup> McKitterick, *History and Memory*, pp. 242–3.

<sup>52</sup> O.W. Phelan, *The Formation of Christian Europe* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 33 and 46.

<sup>53</sup> Phelan, *Formation of Christian Europe*, p. 18.

As seen above, one of Gregory the Great's concerns about marrying too closely within a familial network was that children 'could not thrive'. Hrabanus was also concerned with this danger, writing that 'the longer the marriage is by separation, the more secure it will be from destruction'.<sup>54</sup> Isidore in the *Etymologiae* gave three reasons for marrying: first and foremost, for procreation (citing the 'be fruitful and multiply' command of Genesis I.28); second, so that man should have a helper (citing Genesis II.18); and lastly, because of lack of sexual self-restraint (citing St Paul, I Corinthians VII.9).<sup>55</sup> Hrabanus followed Isidore and quoted portions of the passage in his *De universo*.<sup>56</sup> Jonas of Orléans (c.780–843/4), a contemporary of Hrabanus, stated in Book II of his *De institutione laicali* that God ordained marriage for the procreation of children.<sup>57</sup> These views reflect the guiding principle that the primary good and purpose of marriage was progeny.<sup>58</sup> This would then add immediacy to the threat that incestuous marriages potentially posed to the *imperium Christianum*: if children cannot thrive, and procreation fails, so too, eventually, does the *imperium*.

This danger, however, must be balanced out and informed by pastoral concerns. Hrabanus demonstrated elsewhere his concern that taking too strict an approach to prohibitions on consanguine marriages could lead to unforeseen pastoral problems in the future.<sup>59</sup> Hrabanus saw the danger as two-fold. An overly strict standard could allow for a married person to, upon discovering any degree of consanguinity, have easier access to a divorce. They could even feign some degree of consanguinity to escape a regrettable marriage. This would lead to a breakdown of the *sacramentum* of marriage, and the accompanying virtues of chastity and monogamy. Some of the proposed regulations in the seventh and eighth centuries prohibited marriage to such a far degree that actual incest was likely no longer a realistic concern.<sup>60</sup> These lengthy degrees of separation in turn also led to another pastoral difficulty. If the standards of what constitute a permissible spouse are so strict as to make it inordinately difficult to find someone who meets them, there is a danger that the youthful will fornicate rather than go through the trouble of finding a suitable and appropriate spouse. It was therefore

<sup>54</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 458: 'quanto longior est a discrimine tanto, securior erit internecone'.

<sup>55</sup> Isidore, *Etymologiae* IX.vii.27, ed. Reydellet, pp. 233–7.

<sup>56</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *De universo*, VII.5, *PL* III, cols 9A–614B, at cols 192D–193A.

<sup>57</sup> Jonas of Orléans, *Instruction des laïcs*, ed. O. Dubreucq (Paris, 2012), p. 314.

<sup>58</sup> See F. Veronese, 'Contextualizing Marriage: Conjugal and Christian Life in Jonas of Orléans' *De institutione laicali*, *EME* 23.4 (2015), pp. 436–56.

<sup>59</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 29, ed. Dümmler, pp. 444–8, at p. 447. Also discussed by Ubl, *Inzestverbot*, pp. 311–12.

<sup>60</sup> Brundage, *Law, Sex, and Christian Society*, p. 140.

for reasons both theological and pastoral that it behooved Hrabanus to find a consistent and cohesive answer that could guide the faithful and their pastors.

In attempting to address the confusion and complexity of the problem posed by consanguinity, Hrabanus drew on and quoted from many of the authoritative voices that had hitherto contributed to the confusion. He sought to harmonize the opinions of the past to address the pastoral concerns of the present. Not only did he draw on these authorities, but he also skilfully navigated their complexity and stitched them together to construct his theological argument that marriage is permissible after the fourth degree (*generationem*), though more separation is always safer if possible.<sup>61</sup> He used past authorities to further his pastoral purpose concerning proper marriage boundaries, and he defended the legitimacy of the incest portion of the *Libellus responsionum* of Gregory the Great by stitching it into his whole collage of scriptural and patristic opinions. To use a martial image, Hrabanus created a coordinated artillery barrage of authority to bear on the pastoral problem of consanguinity.

As demonstrated above, one of Hatto's charges was against the authority Hrabanus believed the Old Testament had in relation to Christian discipline and practice. The need to respond to this led Hrabanus first to argue that both Testaments were authoritative sources because God was the source and author of both. To support this claim, he cited Luke IV.16–22, where Christ rose in the synagogue, read from the prophet Isaiah, and declared that this Old Testament prophecy has been fulfilled in him. The next passage Hrabanus quoted is from Luke XXIV.25–7, where Christ revealed to Cleopas and an unnamed disciple that past prophets spoke of the Christ and his suffering, 'and beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded to them in all the scriptures the things that were concerning him'. Hrabanus selected passages which illustrated examples of Christian revelation (e.g., the Passion and Resurrection of Christ) that have their residence and foreshadowing in the Old Testament. He finished this thread of his argument by citing the Transfiguration, where (in the presence of the apostles Peter, James, and John) the prophets Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Christ. Hrabanus emphasized by this episode that witness to Christ is to be found in the Old Testament law and prophets, symbolized by Moses and Elijah respectively.

Beginning with a quotation from St Paul's epistle to the Romans, where the old law is called good and holy, Hrabanus' citations shift to

<sup>61</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 458.



focus on the legitimacy of the Levitical law specifically. Next is a quotation from Ambrosiaster describing the law as three-fold, emphasizing that the natural law forbids sin, and therefore guides Christian behaviour. He then listed various Old Testament stories and says that a mystical meaning can be sought beyond their immediate historical value. Supporting this he quoted two passages from I Corinthians X.1–4 (how the Israelites were baptized in Moses and drank from the rock, which was Christ) and Galatians IV.22–7 (where St Paul allegorically interpreted the two sons of Abraham as the two testaments that give either bondage or freedom). He then made the argument that if Christ and St Paul use the Old Testament to support the teachings of Christianity, then it is an acceptable practice to imitate.

Next – and here hinges Hrabanus' entire argument in support of the Old Testament – he quoted Christ's words in John V.46: 'For if you did believe Moses, you would perhaps believe me also. For he wrote of me: But if, however, you did not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?' Belief in Moses and his writings, i.e., the law, is a prerequisite and necessary for belief in Christ. Dismissal of the Old Testament is an implicit dismissal of Christ and therefore of immense pastoral concern to Hrabanus. Discrediting or attacking the authority of the Old Testament was tantamount to sawing off the branch you are sitting on; without the Old Testament you lose the New. To cement the validity of this claim he quoted from Luke XVI.29–31, the story of Lazarus and Dives. The crux of this story is Lazarus' words to Dives: 'If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither would they believe if one should rise from the dead.' Up to this point, all the quotations Hrabanus selected serve as a preliminary to the question of consanguinity. He accentuates again and again through quotations that to believe in Christ implicitly implies a belief and acceptance of the Old Testament. Only after this does he move to Old Testament law and begin to address the specific question Hatto had asked concerning consanguinity.

Hrabanus next cited the portion of Leviticus XVIII that outlines who can marry whom. After quoting the Law he moved into extra biblical sources. Instead of analysing the passage from Leviticus, he preferred to insert a lengthy passage from St Augustine of Hippo's *Questions on the Old Testament*. He did this so that patristic opinion (and not his own) would guide how the passage should be understood, because his *modus operandi* was to harmonize the Old Testament (in this case the Levitical prohibitions) with patristic opinion. He then pulled another quotation from the same work of St Augustine to address specifically what is meant in Leviticus XX.20, 'If any man lies with the wife of his uncle by the father, or of his uncle by the mother, and uncovers the shame of his near akin, both shall bear their sin; *they shall die without children*'

(emphasis added). Hrabanus again relied upon St Augustine to unpack this further:

But what does *they shall die without children* mean, since children may have been born earlier from relations of this type and may also be born today? Should this be understood as having been established by God's law, that whoever may be born from them would not be regarded as children, that is, they would not rightfully succeed their parents?<sup>62</sup>

After this Hrabanus incorporated material from the *Libellus responsonium*, arguing that even though the *Libellus* is of dubious origin, nevertheless it ought to be consulted because it too harmonized and agreed with both Scripture and patristic opinions. Hrabanus claimed that one could easily tell if Gregory the Great had invented a new rule or prohibition or was simply following the authoritative sources that preceded him: if they harmonized with those sources, Gregory had not invented something new.<sup>63</sup> So far, Hrabanus' argument had established the authoritative veracity of the Old Testament, quoted the Old Testament on consanguinity, and shown how patristic sources for the Christian age confirm and agree with Levitical law.

To end his argument and harmonization project, Hrabanus added canons from church councils that had addressed marriage and incest. The canons from the Councils of Agde (506) – which in turn were cited at the Council of Epaon (517) – and Orléans (511) outlined that siblings, the widows of siblings, in-laws, stepmothers, first cousins, and an uncle's widow are all prohibited.<sup>64</sup> The second Synod of Braga outlined the pastoral response to any who have married two sisters or brothers: they are to refrain from communion until death, when they are permitted communion for mercy's sake, but if they survive, they must do penance.<sup>65</sup> And finally, Hrabanus listed several anathemata from the Synod of Rome in 721, convened by Gregory II.<sup>66</sup> It prohibited marrying a spiritual mother, a brother's wife, a granddaughter, a stepmother, a daughter-in-law, and first cousins.

<sup>62</sup> Augustine of Hippo, *Writings on the Old Testament*, trans. J.T. Lienhard, S. Doyle and J.T. Kelley (Hyde Park, 2016), p. 255; Augustine of Hippo, *Sancti Aurelii Avgvstini Quaestionum in Heptateuchum Libri VII; de octo Quaestionibus ex Veteri Testamento*, ed. J. Fraipont (Turnhout, 1958), p. 224.

<sup>63</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, pp. 457–8.

<sup>64</sup> For the Council of Agde, see *Concilia Galliae: A.314–A.506*, ed. C. Munier, CCSL 148 (Turnhout, 1963), p. 227; for the Councils of Orléans and Epaon, *Concilia Galliae: A.511–A.695*, ed. C. de Clercq, CCSL 148A (Turnhout, 1966), pp. 9–10 and pp. 31–2 respectively.

<sup>65</sup> *Martini Episcopi Bracarenensis Opera Omnia*, ed. C. Barlow (New Haven, 1950), p. 142.

<sup>66</sup> *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, ed. G.D. Mansi, vol. 12 (Florence, 1766), c. 263.

Hrabanus sought to harmonize these various sources of authority on the question of consanguinity, recommending the standard that then emerges, rather than following one's own judgement on the matter. He therefore recommended a prohibition up to and including the fourth degree (*generationem*), which served as a middle ground between Gregory the Great and Gregory III.<sup>67</sup>

### Illusory magic

Hrabanus' overarching concern in his discussion of illusory magic is primarily pastoral. The way he framed and constructed his discussion was not predominantly inventive, but again reflects his *modus operandi* – he compiled and pieced together the thoughts and opinions of Scripture and patristic authors. He applied to illusory magic the same method he used to address consanguinity. His approach to these pastoral problems displays a unified exegetical method, one that fundamentally relies on the validity of the Old Testament. This harmonizing method is missed if one only approaches the *De magicis artibus* on its own. Furthermore, the authority of the Old Testament was not safe from Hatto's suspicion without Hrabanus' preliminary treatment and defence of it.

Rather than offering a new or original position on a topic, Hrabanus adapted classical authorities whenever he could. He used these sources to emphasize his overarching pastoral message, namely, that healing (*salus*) of body or soul can only be sought from Christ and his church, and to look anywhere else leads to destruction. Such destruction, wrought by demons and magicians, is a direct threat to the *imperium Christianum* and the vision of a unified Christian society. Relying on authoritative voices, Hrabanus used quotations as stepping stones to guide the reader through his discussion, where necessary even inserting his own thoughts into a quotation in order to defend the *imperium* and his flock against the dangers of illusory magic.

Illusory magic was a threat to the *imperium Christianum* because it was an offence against God, and because it would damage the whole of society and its citizens. The magic arts were made illegal as a method of keeping society and the Christian people safe from its destructive effects.<sup>68</sup> Charlemagne referred back to Moses's condemnation of sorcery in the Old Testament as justification for his legislation on

<sup>67</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 458. Also, see Ubl, *Inzestverbot*, p. 312. While Hrabanus does not explicitly mention Gregory III here, presumably he would have known Gregory's letter to Boniface; see, *Die Briefe*, ed. Tangl, pp. 49–52, at p. 51.

<sup>68</sup> P. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom: Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000*, 3rd edn (Maldon, 2013), p. 75.

magic.<sup>69</sup> Here too we have proscription predicated on the valid authority of the Old Testament. He included storm-making among a list of prohibited practices, and along with augury and incantations, ordered it to be punished harshly, because ‘it threatened to ruin and unhinge’ the *imperium Christianum*.<sup>70</sup> Charlemagne was concerned that local priests and people could eventually be induced to side with self-professed storm-makers and magicians against him and his *imperium*.<sup>71</sup>

Hrabanus, too, considered weather-magic a possible source of division in the *imperium* between the church and the laity. Here the pastoral and the political are bound closely together. Disobeying this legislation was not defined only in secular terms, as an offence against the king, but was also seen as an offence against one’s bishop and God.<sup>72</sup> Not only would a weather-making magician invoke magic and demons, but the magician also took advantage of the people by charging them money which could have been used for charity.<sup>73</sup> The various manifestations of magic and magicians threatened every level of the *imperium*.

The political climate during which Hrabanus wrote would have served to exacerbate the tension that had arisen between the political and the pastoral in the mid-ninth century. Not only was the civil war an ever-present concern to Hrabanus at this time, but the war itself created a tumultuous and fractured climate that was exploited in 841 by a group of Saxon peasants, whose revolt has since become known as the Stellinga Uprising.<sup>74</sup> One possible fear during this uprising was the danger that the Saxons would relapse into paganism. Indeed, Alcuin and others expressed concern about Saxon perfidy and relapse during Charlemagne’s conquests.<sup>75</sup> Ingrid Rembold has pointed out that while Carolingian writers insinuated that the Stellinga flirted with paganism, nevertheless they stopped short of outright describing them as pagan.<sup>76</sup> So, while they may not in fact, have been pagan or perceived

<sup>69</sup> R. Kieckhefer, *Magic in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 179.

<sup>70</sup> P.E. Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache and Other Cultural Clusters of a Dark Age* (New York, 2005), pp. 172–3.

<sup>71</sup> Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache*, pp. 174–5.

<sup>72</sup> C. van Rhijn, *Shepherds of the Lord: Priests and Episcopal Statutes in the Carolingian Period* (Turnhout, 2007), p. 91.

<sup>73</sup> Dutton, *Charlemagne’s Mustache*, pp. 185–6; see also R. Meens, ‘Thunder over Lyon: Agobard, The Tempestarii and Christianity’, in C. Steel, J. Marenbon and W. Verbeke (eds), *Paganism in the Middle Ages: Threat and Fascination* (Leuven, 2012), pp. 157–66.

<sup>74</sup> On the Stellinga Uprising see E.J. Goldberg, *Struggle for Empire: Kingship and Conflict Under Louis the German, 817–876* (Ithaca, 2006), pp. 109–12; *idem*, ‘Popular Revolt, Dynastic Politics, and Aristocratic Factionalism in the Early Middle Ages: The Saxon *Stellinga* Reconsidered’, *Speculum* 70.3 (1995), pp. 467–501; I. Rembold, *Conquest and Christianization: Saxony and the Carolingian World, 772–888* (Cambridge, 2018), especially pp. 85–140.

<sup>75</sup> Rembold, *Conquest and Christianization*, pp. 80–3, pp. 111–12.

<sup>76</sup> Rembold, *Conquest and Christianization*, pp. 110–16; and cited by Rembold, *Annales de Saint-Bertin, s.a. 841*, ed. F. Grat, J. Vielliard and S. Clémencet (Paris, 1964), p. 39.

themselves as pagans, nevertheless the very possibility of their relapsing into paganism remained a lingering anxiety among Carolingian writers. The pastoral climate in which Hrabanus operated, precisely at the time when he wrote his letter to Hatto, was one of military upheaval, political disunity, and the perceived (or invented) threat of a large-scale relapse of faith. All of these heighten the value of a unified and harmonious approach to pastoral care, not only in the largest archdiocese of the *imperium Christianum*, but in the diocese that some presented as largely responsible for the conversion of the Saxons.<sup>77</sup>

In 847 Hrabanus was elevated to the archbishopric of Mainz after the death of Archbishop Otgar, who had been a fierce opponent of Louis the German. The church in East Francia 'had suffered from negligence and abuses during the turmoil of the 830s and 840s', and Hrabanus became archbishop amidst this environment of anxiety about pastoral care.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, part of Hrabanus' role as archbishop was to heal the breach between Louis and the East Frankish clergy.<sup>79</sup>

We can see the origins of Hrabanus' concern for the pastoral state of the archdiocese of Mainz in his letter to Hatto; that concern would come to fruition in the late 840s and 850s. In the letter he cited several Old Testament prohibitions against sacrifices to other gods and the consulting of soothsayers and magicians. His use of the Old Testament here is justified by the argument he has already made in the first section on consanguinity. That justification is lost in any treatment of the letter which divorces the two sections. In a quotation from Deuteronomy XIV, God promised destruction to those who pursue magical 'abominations'. Hrabanus' concern as a pastor emphasized that everyone, clergy and laity alike, must beware the deceptions and illusions of the 'ancient enemy'.<sup>80</sup> This is why he wrote about illusory magic, not as a *tractatus*, but as one part of several pastoral problems that beset him or his associates who wrote to him for advice; his response functioned as a kind of 'pastoral housekeeping' or 'tidying up'.

The practicality of Hrabanus' anxiety about illusory magic focused on the potential for people to search for health and salvation from sources

<sup>77</sup> See especially, Eigil of Fulda, *Vita sancti Sturmi*, c. 23, ed. P. Engelbert, *Die Vita Sturmi des Eigil von Fulda: literarkritisch-historische Untersuchung und Edition* (Marburg, 1968), pp. 158–9: 'Tunc pars maxima beato Sturmi populi et terrae illius ad procurandum committitur. Suscepto igitur praedicationis officio, curam modis omnibus impendit, qualiter non parvum Domino populum acquireret.'

<sup>78</sup> Goldberg, *Struggle*, p. 160.

<sup>79</sup> Goldberg, *Struggle*, p. 162.

<sup>80</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 462.

other than God.<sup>81</sup> He quoted examples of healings and exorcisms from the Gospels as well as the commission of the apostles, where Christ granted them his own healing power. These quotations demonstrated that for a Christian, the only appropriate power from which to seek healing or knowledge is God and those to whom God has delegated it. He added that it is folly to look for wisdom anywhere else and supported the point with a quotation from Ecclesiasticus.<sup>82</sup> He flooded his discussion with examples from Scripture emphasizing that healing, miracles, and true wisdom come from God alone.<sup>83</sup> He complements St Paul's opinion in I Timothy IV.10 that God is 'the Saviour of all men, especially of the faithful', with St Peter's statement in Acts IV.12 that 'there is no other name under heaven given to men, whereby we must be saved (*salvos*)'.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps Hrabanus' most forceful and comprehensive admonition comes near the end of the letter:

One ought to consider it and make every effort to be wary of it, lest in our time (in which we see the Christian religion spread among the entire world) the few men who remain should – through the sloth of teachers and the laziness of scholars – throw the way of worshiping the true God into confusion and – corrupted by demonic illusions – perform false divinations among God's people, leading astray peasants and the unlearned. In such a way that, after deserting from the truth which is the Light of the world *and enlighteneth every man that cometh into this world* of shadows, they seek knowledge of the future and seek healing for their souls and even for their bodies from those who deceive men.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> More examples of Hrabanus' admonitions about looking for health, wisdom, or salvation from sources other than God can be found at Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 459: '*nec ab alio quam a se requiri veritatem aut sanitatem vult*, quia ipse cum Patre et Spiritu sancto unus, verus atque omnipotens est Deus, *faciens mirabilia magna solus*' (emphasis mine); also p. 459: 'Quid ergo necesse est salutem ab alio quam a medico competente quaerere?'; p. 460: 'Qui autem sine salvatore salutem vult habere, et sine vera sapientia aestimat se prudentem fieri posse, non salvus, sed aeger, non puidens, sed stultus in aegritudine assidua laboravit.'

<sup>82</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, pp. 459–60.

<sup>83</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 459.

<sup>84</sup> Although Hrabanus links this with Christ, it is worth noting that St Paul is referring to the 'living God', 'quia speravimus in Deum vivum, qui est salvator omnium hominum maxime fidelium'.

<sup>85</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ep.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 461: 'Attendum est ergo atque omni studio cavendum, ne nostris temporibus, in quibus videmus christianam religionem in toto orbe dilatam, propter desidiam magistrorum et inertiam doctorum pauci illi, qui adhuc supersunt, confundant ritum culturae veri Dei et, daemonicis illusionibus depravati, divinationes falsas in populo Dei agunt, rusticos et imperitos seducentes, ita ut deserta ipsa veritate, quae lux est mundi et "illuminat omnem hominem venientem in hunc mundum" tenebrarum harum, quaerant scientiam futurorum et a deceptoribus hominum quaerant salutem animarum sive etiam corporum suorum.'



Hrabanus then shifted the discussion with a quotation from Psalm XCV,5 'all the gods of the Gentiles are devils', and thereby moved into a discussion of the nature and powers possessed by demons. The danger of consulting magicians is that behind every magician there is a demon waiting to ensnare the unwary through some form of illusory magic. He framed his discussion with a passage from St Augustine's *De divinatione daemonum*, augmenting it with his own brief commentary which emphasized that demons predicted their own downfall to appear powerful, even in the final defeat they faced by the Incarnation and rise of Christianity.<sup>86</sup> Hrabanus' tutor Alcuin had set an example which Hrabanus followed by also augmenting parts of St Augustine to emphasize certain points important to the effort and work of establishing an *imperium Christianum* through correct thinking and teaching.<sup>87</sup> Hrabanus made the point that whatever healing a person appeared to gain from a magician ought not be believed. At best it is mere trickery, but at worst it is a demonic illusion. Yet, even if one were healed or struck by some sudden sickness, everything is done by the permission of divine providence and therefore categorically cannot come from an independent power possessed by demons or magicians themselves.

Near the end of the text Hrabanus issued a warning to secular and religious leaders against consulting magicians and demons, a warning he culled from the prophets Ezekiel and Jeremiah. Christian leaders have the capacity to lead astray the flock entrusted to their care. Leaders in the *imperium* must shepherd the flock well if it is to flourish. Hrabanus emphasized how inept leaders are 'displeasing to Almighty God'.<sup>88</sup> A Christian leader must head the *imperium*, and the church subsisting within it must be led by holy people who seek wisdom and *salutem* from God and encourage their flock to do so accordingly. He then referenced the story of Ahab who was ruined through believing false prophets, citing also the story of Ahab's son Ahaziah, who sought healing for his sickness from Beelzebub and consequently died for his disloyalty to God. After Ahaziah was deceived and perished, Hrabanus sardonically noted that 'the healing (*salutem*) which he was seeking he did not find'.<sup>89</sup> The desire to safeguard the Christian flock from a fate similar to Ahaziah's reflects the nature of

<sup>86</sup> While omitted from the *MGH*, Hrabanus' inserted lines can be found: Hrabanus Maurus, *De magicis artibus*, *PL* 110, cols 1095A–1110A, at col. 1104D. Additionally, BAV, Otto. Lat. 3295, fols 66v–67r.

<sup>87</sup> Phelan, *Formation of Christian Europe*, pp. 133–4.

<sup>88</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ép.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 461.

<sup>89</sup> Hrabanus Maurus, *Ép.* 31, ed. Dümmler, p. 461: 'salutem quam quaerebat non invenit'.

Hrabanus' treatment of illusory magic and his pastoral concern, namely, that Christians should only seek help from God. To do otherwise leads to death and destruction.

### Conclusion

Although Hrabanus' text *De consanguineorum nuptiis et de magorum praestigiiis falsisque divinationibus* has been read and studied as a treatise on magic, it is first and foremost a work of 'pastoral housekeeping' that addresses topics of concern relevant to an abbot and churchman of the mid-ninth century. Part of this housekeeping was definitively establishing the validity of the Old Testament as an authority for Christian practice. Another part was the harmonization of various past opinions on consanguinity and illusory magical practices. These were live issues in 841–2, as civil war and revolt threatened to separate Christian communities in Germania.

The theme that runs throughout the text is this pastoral housekeeping, furthering a vision of a Christian community bound in and informed by Old Testament law. It is precisely this pastoral concern that explains Hrabanus' linking of the work with his *Poenitentiale ad Otgarium*, as well as its survival in a collection of texts that are overwhelmingly of a pastoral nature. Consanguinity and illusory magic are the boughs, but Hrabanus' concern for pastoral care is the trunk of the tree. When the *De magicis artibus* is split and separated from the rest of Hrabanus' letter to Hatto or from his *Poenitentiale*, it is as if scholars and editors have lopped off one smaller branch and set it up as its own tree, only to be disappointed with how small and puny a specimen it makes. In this paper I hope to have restored that small bough to the large tree whence it first sprouted.

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