Cross And Cruciform

IN THE ANGLO-SAXON WORLD

Studies to Honor the Memory of Timothy Reuter

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STUDIES TO HONOR THE MEMORY
OF TIMOTHY REUTER

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Signifying Christ in Anglo-Saxon England: Old English Terms for the Sign of the Cross

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AT THE END OF HIS HOMILY for the fifth Sunday in Lent, Ælfric summarizes the central properties of Christian worship of the cross. In a typological reading based on interpretations of the Fathers,[1] he contrasts the Old Testament Tree of Life, which brought death, with its New Testament counterpart, the "tree of redemption," which brought life and salvation. In a synopsis of Christian faith, he highlights the core elements of the Christian belief in salvation through Christ's sacrifice on the cross:

(1) Mine gebroðru uton behealdan þone ahangenan crist . . . Swa micel is betwux þære gehiwodan anlicnysse. and ðam soðan ðinge . . . Þurh treow us com deað. þa ða adam geæt þone forbodenan æppel. and ðurh treow us com eft lif. and alysednyss. ða ða crist hangode on rode for ure alysednysse; Ðære halgan rode tacn. is ure bletsung. and to ðære rode we us gebiddað. na swa þeah to ðam treowe. ac to ðam ælmihtigum drihtne. ðe on ðære halgan rode for us hangode.[2]

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1 This typological interpretation is, for instance, found in Hippolyt, Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine; see Godden I, p. 473.
2 Godden II, ii, 136, homily 13, lines 277–94 ("Fifth Sunday in Lent"). Most of

[My brothers, let us behold the crucified Christ . . . so great is the difference between the apparent likeness and the true thing. Through a tree death came to us when Adam ate the forbidden apple; and through a tree life came again to us and redemption when Christ hung on the rood for our redemption. The sign of the holy cross is our blessing and to the rood we pray, though not to the tree, but to the Almighty Lord who for us hung on the holy rood.]

At the beginning and the end of this passage, probably reflecting on practices in contemporary orthodox Christian worship, Ælfric stresses that the cross as a material object must not itself be an object of worship, and emphasizes that the cross is in its essence symbolic: one must not pray to a tree or a material object of any kind, but to "Christ who for us hung on the holy rood," that is, to Christ himself in the culmination of his redemptive mission. In essence, the cross signifies Christ.

The cross is thus intrinsically a sign. And though cross-forms, i.e., two lines intersecting in one of the most basic of geometrical patterns, go back to a very remote period of human civilization and were used as symbols, religious or otherwise, long before the Christian era,[3] the cross has unquestionably become the principal symbol and emblem of the Christian religion itself.[4]

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the translations in the present chapter basically follow the translations given in Thorpe, here p. 241; yet, some of the phrases have been changed to correspond to the findings of the present chapter.

3   See *Lexikon des Mittelalters*, 9 vols. (Stuttgart: Metzler, CD-ROM version, 2000), s.v. *Kreuz / Kruzifix* (various authors) and the detailed articles "The Archæology of the Cross and Crucifix," "The Cross and Crucifix in Liturgy," and "Sign of the Cross" in *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, *www.newadvent.org/cathen/c.htm*. Most important and also influential for Christian faith are the ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic symbol of life—the "ankh"—which was adopted and extensively used by Coptic Christians, and the "swastika," which was marked on many early Christian tombs as a veiled symbol of the cross. For TAU as a precursor of the Christian tradition, see Bremmer, "Old English 'Cross' Words" in this volume, p. 205, and below, pp. 258–260.

4   The cross and its interpretation attest to the radical transformation of the

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THE SIGN OF THE CROSS AS A PERFORMATIVE MANUAL GESTURE

The centrality of this symbol in Christianity is made explicit in the various manual acts and their specific performative functions in liturgy and daily devotional life which have developed in the course of Christianity—the different forms of the "sign of the cross." Basically, this term is "applied to various manual acts, liturgical or devotional in character, which have this at least in common: that by the gesture of tracing two lines intersecting at right angles they indicate symbolically the figure of Christ's cross."[5] It is an engagement of the body that affirms what the faithful professes, and it is also a sign to others of what one professes oneself. There are three variants of this gesture which I shall examine here.

Variant 1: Little Cross Traced on the Forehead
Of all the methods of employing this symbol as an emblem, the most ancient is a little cross, which is traced as a very personal gesture upon a part of the body, most often the forehead. From the second century onwards,[6] this practice is attested to by numerous allusions

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image in the history of Christianity: the cross as an instrument of torture was replaced by the cross as a symbol of triumph. Jesus's sacrifice on the cross has never been easy for believers expecting the triumphant Messiah, since crucifixion was reserved for slaves and common criminals in Roman law and was thus considered to be extremely degrading. Accordingly, Christians were at first very reticent about portraying the cross because too open a display of it might have exposed them to ridicule or even danger. The cross only became a popular symbol after Constantine converted to Christianity and abolished crucifixion as a death penalty. Pauline theology which interprets the crucifixion as "the paradox of the crucified Christ's victory in defeat" (1 Corinthians 1:23–28; see also 2 Cor. 10:7–10; and 2 Cor. 12:9), is central for its positive understanding of the cross's ambiguity. For Paul, the crucifixion is the perfect sign for a fundamentally paradoxical divinity—strong in its weakness, glorious in its ugliness. See also Robert Baldwin, "'I slaughter Barbarians:' Triumph as a Mode in Medieval Christian Art," *Konsthistorisk Tidskrift* 59/4 (1990): 225–42.

5   *Catholic Encyclopedia*, s. v. "Sign of the Cross."

6   For one of the earliest examples from the beginning of the third century,

in patristic literature. In idea, it is clearly associated with references in scripture, notably Ezechiel 9:4: "And the Lord said to him: Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem: and mark Thau upon the foreheads of the men that sigh, and mourn for all the abominations that are committed in the midst thereof."[7]

This little cross, the oldest variant of the manual gesture, is used as the fundamental ensign and symbol of Christianity and is thus traced on the forehead of the infant in baptism as a mark that the child is baptized in Christ:

(2) Mid þam haligan ele ge scylan þa hæþenan cild mearcian on þam breoste and betwux þæm <gesculdru> on middeweardan mid rode tacne [2a], ærþanþe ge hit fullian on þam fantwætere. And þonne hit of þæm wætere cymð, ge scylan wyrcan rode tacen [2b] upp on þæm heafde mid þam haligan crisman.[8]

[With the holy oil you shall mark the heathen child on the breast and in the middle between the shoulders with the sign of the cross before you baptize it in the baptismal water. And when it has come out of the water, you shall trace the sign of the cross on the head with the holy chrism.]

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see Tertullian (*De corona militis* 3: 4, *Tertullianus, Quintus, Septimius Florens: De corona*, ed. Jacques Fontaine [Paris: Presses Université de France, 1966]): "Ad omnem progressum atque promotum, ad omnem aditum et exitum, ad uestitum, ad calciatum, ad lauacra, ad mensas, ad lumina, ad cubilia, ad sedilia, quacumque nos conuersatio exercet, frontem signaculo terimus," (In all our travels and movements, in all our coming in and going out, in putting on our shoes, at the bath, at the table, in lighting our candles, in lying down, in sitting down, whatever employment occupies us, we mark our foreheads with the sign of the cross).

7 Translation from Douay-Rheims, *http://www.drbo.org/* (October 16, 2008).

8 *Die Hirtenbriefe Ælfrics*, ed. Bernhard Fehr, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 9 (Hamburg, 1914; repr. with supplement, ed. Peter Clemoes, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), p. 148, lines 5–6.

Variant 2: Large Cross Traced from Shoulder to Shoulder

From the fourth or fifth century, we also find another variant of the sign of the cross as a performative manual gesture, namely a large cross traced from forehead to breast and from shoulder to shoulder. It is made today, for instance, by Catholics upon themselves when they begin their prayers or by the priest at the foot of the altar when he commences mass with the words: "In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti." The *pectorale* (a large cross over the breast on the liturgical vestments) has become one of the emblems of bishops, derived from their wearing of a pectoral cross as a sign of their office, and the sign for the bishop in the Old English monastic sign list accordingly comprises this large sign of the cross: (3) "Bisceopes tacen is þæt þu strice mid þinre hande ofer æðere eaxle niþerweard ofer þine breost on rode tacne,"[9] (The sign for the bishop is that you stroke with your hand over each shoulder down over your chest in the sign of the cross).

Variant 3: Blessing

The sign of the cross, as many quotations from the Fathers in the fourth century show, also passed very early on into a gesture of benediction. Thus another important variant of the sign of the cross is made in the air, mainly by bishops or priests (but usually people of authority), in blessing persons or material objects. Although this act in a Christian context always comprises the sign of the cross, this connection is not openly expressed in English (cf. Old English *bletsian*, Present Day English "bless").[10] The Old English verb *bletsian* generally used for this act is—like Old English *rod*[11] "cross"—not

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9 *Monasteriales Indicia: The Anglo-Saxon Monastic Sign Language*, ed. and trans. Debby Banham (Pinner: Anglo-Saxon Books, 1991), p. 46, no. 120.

10 See the entries in the *OED*, s.v. "bless" and *DOE*, s.vv. *bletsian* and *gebletsian*, which establishes the central Old English meanings "to bless (1a. of God, Christ), (1b. of a bishop, priest, saint, etc.), (1c. of a parent)" and "to bless (ritually)" (2.); other much less frequent meanings are "to praise, extol" (3.), or "to be pleased" (4.).

11 On the etymology and history of rod, see Rolf H. Bremmer, Jr's "Old

found elsewhere in the Germanic languages: being—like *rod*—of a somewhat uncertain etymology, the *OED* relates *bletsian* to Old English *blōd* "blood," so that its etymological meaning would be "to mark . . . with blood; to consecrate."[12]

The other Germanic languages do not use a native Germanic word, but choose a loan formed on Latin *signare* "to mark" (cf. *signum* "sign"). Thus we find the forms Old High German *seganon*, Old Frisian *seininge*, Old Saxon *segnon*, Old Norse *signa:* "to mark with the sign of the cross."[13] Only in the earliest of extant Anglo-Saxon witnesses, mainly in manuscripts of the translations of King Alfred's circle, do we meet a loan Old English *(ge)segnian*.[14] See, for instance, (4) "Segna þe & sete þe on þæt tacen ðære halgan rode"[15] (Bless yourself and set on yourself the mark of the holy cross). *Segnian*, however, is eventually ousted by the native formation *bletsian* and is, for example, only rarely attested to in Ælfric's writings.[16]

English 'Cross' Words" in this volume, above pp. 215–221.
12 See *OED*, s.v. "bless." As an "equally satisfactory" suggestion, the *OED* mentions the derivation of *blētsian* from *blōt* "sacrifice." The derivation from *blōd* is favored by the OED because the form *blōedsian* occurs earlier and because the change of *ds* to *ts* is seen to be phonetically natural in Germanic languages, while the reverse is not.
13 See Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, ed. Elmar Seebold, 24th rev. ed. (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2002), s.v. *segnen*.
14 See BT, s.v. *segnian*. Old English is also special in that it not only borrows reflexes of Latin *signum/signare* in a Christian sense, but more often uses the noun to express the military meaning "sign; banner." See Alfred Wollmann, *Untersuchungen zu den frühen lateinischen Lehnwörtern im Altenglischen. Phonologie und Datierung*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Englischen Philologie 15 (Munich: Fink, 1990), pp. 297–323.
15 *Bischof Waerferths von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, ed. Hans Hecht, Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa 5 (Leipzig and Hamburg 1901–07: repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1965), p. 325.
16 See, for example, the tautological phrase *senian and bletsian* in "Mid þrym fingrum man sceall senian and bletsian for þære halgan þrynysse," (With three

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While Latin explicitly connects the act of blessing with tracing the sign of the cross by the expression *facere signum crucis*, "make the sign of the cross," Old English communicates this concept only implicitly. The different cognitive effects of these two ways of expression are clearly seen when we compare the Old English description for the sign of the sacramentary in the monastic sign list with its Latin counterpart: compare (5) "Gif þu mæsse boc habban wille þonne wege þu þine hand [and] do swilce þu bletsige,"[17] ([i]f you want a sacramentary, then you move your hand and make as if you were giving a blessing) with (6) "Pro signo libri missalis: generali signo premisso adde, ut facias signum crucis" ([f]or the sign of the sacramentary: the general sign being made, add as if you make the sign of the cross).[18]

In order to compensate for this loss of transparency, the actual act and meanings of *segnian* as well as *bletsian* are (as already seen in quotation [4]) made more explicit by a following prepositional phrase *mid tacne þære halgan rode* "with the sign of the holy cross."[19]

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fingers must a man make the sign and bless himself for the Holy Trinity), Skeat, II: 154, line 155 ("Exaltation of the Holy Cross"). Two further occurrences are attested to in Ælfric's homily on Palm Sunday: "Eft swa gelice gelæhte ænne calic. senode mid swiðran. and sealde his gingrum" (Afterwards in like manner he took a cup and blessed [Thorpe: signed] it with his right hand and gave it to his disciples) and "and he syððan senode husel," (and he then blessed [Thorpe: signed] the Eucharist), but they refer to Jesus's blessing of wine and bread on the occasion of the Last Supper and therefore obviously can *not* comprise the sign of the cross. See Godden II, p. 139, lines 50 and 66 ("Palm Sunday"; cf. Thorpe, p. 245).
17 Banham, *Monasteriales Indicia*, p. 24, no. 9.
18 "List of Signs from Cluny" (s. xi); see Walter Jarecki, *Signa Loquendi. Die cluniacensischen Signa-Listen eingeleitet und herausgegeben*, Saecula Spiritualia 4 (Baden-Baden: Koerner, 1981), p. 133, no. C 65.
19 BT, s.v. *segnian*, lists this as a separate meaning: "III. without reference to the sign of the cross." The twenty-six occurrences with such a prepositional phrase are, however, only a small fraction of the total of about 1350 occurrences of the forms *(ge)bletsian* and *(ge)bledsian* in Old English; see *DOE*, s.v. *bletsian*,

In the following quotation, it is used to specify the act in the first instance of *segnian* in 7a: (7) "genom hine ða bi his cinne & mid tacne ðære halgan rode hio gesegnade [7a]. Ða he ða hio gesegnad hæfde [7b], ða heht he . . ."[20] (He then took him by the chin and blessed him with the sign of the holy cross. Then, when he had blessed it, then he commanded . . .).

In these cases, the manual gesture of the sign of the cross involved in the act of blessing is spelled out verbally: (8) "þa com him to se costnere; Witodlice an blac þrostle; . . . ac he hine bletsode mid þære halgan rodetacne. and se fugol sona aweg gewat,"[21] (then the tempter came to him. . . indeed, a black throstle. . . but he blessed him with the sign of the holy cross; and the bird instantly went away). It is again Ælfric who most explicitly summarizes the decisive aspects of the holy cross in its relation to the act of blessing. In his homily on the feast-day of the Exaltation of the Holy Cross he states:

(9) Is swa-þeah to witenne þæt heo [= the holy cross] is wide todæled mid gelomlicum ofcyrfum to lande gehwilcum. ac seo gastlice getacnung is mid gode æfre a unbrosnigendlic. þeah þe se beam beo to-coruen. þæt heofonlice tacn þære halgan rode is ure guðfana wiþ þone gram-lican deofol. þonne we us bletsiað gebylde þurh god mid þære rode tacne. and mid rihtum geleafan. Þeah þe man wafige wundorlice mid handa ne bið hit bletsung

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(ge)bletsian.

20 *The Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, ed. Thomas Miller, 4 vols., EETS 95, 96, 110, 111 (London: Oxford University Press, 1890–1898, repr. 1959–63), I: 2 and 388, lines 25–26. Interestingly, Miller tries to resolve the loss of transparency in *segnian* and translates both instances of *segnian* by "make the sign of the cross:" "and then took him by the chin and made over it the sign of the holy cross. When he had thus made the sign of the cross over it . . . " (p. 389).

21 Godden II, ii, 93, homily 11, lines 45–49 ("The Feast of Saint Benedict the Abbot"); Thorpe renders *mid þære halgan rodetacne* as "with the holy sign of the cross," ii, 157.

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buta he wyrce tacn þære halgan rode. and se reða feond biþ sona afyrht for ðam sige-fæstan tacne. Mid þrym fingrum man sceall senian and bletsian for þære halgan þrynysse.[22]

[It is, however, to wit that it [the cross] is widely distributed, by means of frequent sections, to every land. But the spiritual token (signification) is always with God, ever incorruptible, though the tree be cut in pieces. That heavenly sign of the Holy Rood is our banner against the fierce devil, when we bless ourselves boldly through God with the sign of the cross and with right belief. Though a man may wave about wonderfully with his hand, nevertheless it is not a blessing except he make the sign of the holy cross; and forthwith the fierce fiend will be terrified on account of the victorious token. With three fingers must a man make the sign and bless himself for the Holy Trinity.]

As we saw in the homily for the Fifth Sunday in Lent, Ælfric again highlights the difference between the material object and the cross as a symbol: while the actual instrument of torture, as well as its relics, are basically a tree which has been cut into pieces and has been widely distributed to every land, its spiritual signification is always incorruptible. One of the main functions of this sign—protection against the fierce devil—can only be fulfilled when we bless ourselves with the sign of the cross in the right belief. And so it seems necessary to Ælfric to point out that the act of blessing has to encompass the manual gesture of the sign of the cross: "Þeah þe man wafige wundorlice mid handa ne bið hit bletsung buta he wyrce tacn þære halgan rode" (a man may wave about wonderfully with his hand, nevertheless it is not a blessing except he make the sign of the holy cross). Without the central symbol of Christianity—the sign of the cross—the act is no performative act, no blessing at all.

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22 Skeat, ii, 152 and 154, lines 143–155 ("Exaltation of the Holy Cross").

OLD ENGLISH TERMS FOR THE SIGN OF THE CROSS: *RODE TACEN,*
CRISTES MÆL, (CRUC)

These inherent properties of the cross as (a) a symbol representing
Christ and, consequently, the salvation of mankind through Christ's
sacrifice on the cross, and (b) a sign used in various concrete, manual
gestures in specific liturgical and devotional contexts, are nicely mir-
rored in the Old English lexicon. Two Old English terms denoting
the sign of the cross contain lexical elements designating "sign:"
tacen "token, sign" in *rodetacen* "sign of the cross," and *mæl* "sign"
in *cristes mæl* (and its variant *cristelmæl*) "sign of Christ."[23]

First of all, it is intriguing that Old English should have two dif-
ferent terms for the concept "sign of the cross," the central symbol of
Christ and Christianity. The point of reference of these two forms, as
can be seen at first glance, is entirely different: *rodetacen* "sign of the
cross" refers to the instrument of crucifixion (*rod* "cross") and requires
a transfer from the material object to its symbolic meaning, Christ
and salvation. The term *cristes mæl* "Christ's sign," on the other hand,
already refers to the central referent, Christ (and salvation), and thus
calls for a "step-down" transfer to the material object, the cross.

Both *rodetacen* and *cristes mæl*, however, also pose another
question. Modern German, a language typologically similar to Old
English, differentiates between the syntactic group *(das) Zeichen des
Kreuzes* ("sign of the cross") and the lexicalized compound *(das)
Kreuzzeichen* ("cross-sign"). While the first one generally refers to
the cross as a symbol for Christ and Christianity, the lexicalized

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23 For Old English expressions for "sign," see Jane Roberts and Christian Kay,
A Thesaurus of Old English in Two Volumes, (London: King's College, 1995; now also
http://libra.englang.arts.gla.ac.uk/oethesaurus), 09.04.01. *Beacen*, another central
Old English term meaning "sign," is used in the figurative *sigebeacen* "sign of
victory" (for *sigebeacen* denoting "cross"). OE *mearc* "mark, sign" is not employed
for compounds denoting the "sign of the cross"; for the use of its derived verb
mearcian, a frequent collocate with *rodetacen*, see below, pp. 252–255.

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compound more specifically denotes the concrete manual gestures
used in liturgical and devotional practice, i.e., the little or large
cross traced on parts of the body in its various functions.[24] The
present study, which is designed to complement Rolf H. Bremmer's
study on the words for "cross" proper elsewhere in this volume,
will therefore now take a closer look at the Old English formations
rodetacen and *cristes mæl*, in particular their morphological make-up
and, consequently, their meaning. Both *rodetacen* and *cristes mæl*
would certainly deserve separate entries in the dictionaries of Old
English if they could be established as lexicalized compounds,
similar to German *Kreuzzeichen*, and denoting not only the "cross
as a sign," but more specifically the concept of the sign of the
cross which serves specific functions in the Christian liturgy and
devotional practice.

Old English Words Designating "Cross as a Material Object"

The short summary of the inherent nature of the cross as a sign,
above, shows that first of all we have to differentiate between words
denoting the cross as a material object on the one hand, and those
referring to the sign of the cross on the other. The most general word
employed for both these concepts is Old English *rod* (Present Day
English "[holy] rood").[25] While other Germanic languages borrow

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24 Accordingly, German dictionaries and encyclopedias list *Kreuz* ("cross")
and the compound *Kreuzzeichen* ("cross-sign") in two separate entries. In the
Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche, 11 vols. (Freiburg: Herder, 1993–2001, 3rd ed.)
for example, the symbolic functions and art history of the cross are described in
the headword *Kreuz*, while the headword *Kreuzzeichen* ("cross-sign") is defined
more specifically as "Zugehörigkeitszeichen zu Christus und spezifisch christ-
liche Segensgebärde," ("sign of affiliation to Christ and specifically Christian
gesture of blessing), s. v. *Kreuzzeichen*.

25 See BT and BTS, s.vv. *rōd*; see also *MED*, s.v. *rōde* (n. 5) and *OED*, s.v.
"rood." For more detailed information on the etymology and use of *rod* and
its compounds and *gealga*, see Bremmer, "Old English 'Cross' Words" in this
volume, above, pp. 215–220 and pp. 224–228.

the Latin word together with the new concept very early (i.e., in the eighth century) and create loans based on a late Latin form of *crux, crucis* (see Old High German *kruzi, kriuze*, Old Saxon *kruci*, Old Frisian *krioze, kriose*),[26] Old English employs the native word *rod*, whose original meaning "yard," however, is basically only attested in the compound *segl-rod* "sail-yard," a hapax legomenon (see BT, s.v. *rōd* I.) or in contexts referring to "a measure of land" (see BT, s.v. *rōd* II).[27] Denoting a material object, *rod* principally refers to the instrument of crucifixion, the cross on which Jesus was tortured and eventually killed, and also its relics (see BT[S], s.v. *rōd* III). In order to separate the cross of Christ, which had by Anglo-Saxon times become the central symbol of Christianity, from the instrument of punishment on which criminals were tortured ("gibbet," "gallows") and which is thus only in very specific eschatological contexts an object of veneration, Old English uses the compound *wearg-rod* "the accursed tree, a gallows, gibbet"[28] or chooses—like Old High German—an entirely different lexeme, namely OE *g(e)alga* "gallows," "gibbet" or more specifically "traverse; cross-beam."[29]

In addition to referring to the original instrument of crucifixion and its relics, *rod* designates a replica of the original instrument,[30] i.e.,

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26 See Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.v. *Kreuz*. For the occasional occurrences of a loan *cruc* in Old English, see below, pp. 270–274 and Bremmer, "Old English 'Cross Words'," in this volume, above pp. 208–15.

27 See also Bremmer, "Old English 'Cross' Words," in this volume, above, pp. 215–218.

28 Cf. *wearg* "evil, vile, malignant, accursed." See BT, s.v. *wearg-rōd*, and the discussion in Bremmer, "Old English 'Cross' Words," above, p. 219.

29 See BT, s.v. *gealga*, MED, s.v. *galwe*; see also Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, s.vv. *Kreuz* and *Galgen*; and Bremmer, "Old English 'Cross' Words," above, pp. 224–228.

30 Among the oldest of these are processional crosses—commonly a staff surmounted by the figure of a cross (see OED, s.v. "cross" 6.)—whose use seems to have been general in early times, since the Roman *ordines* suggest that one belonged to each church. Altar-crosses, on the other hand, can hardly be traced farther back than the thirteenth century.

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a model or figure of Christ's cross as a religious emblem, employed for ritual use (nowadays often called "crucifix").[31] These models of Christ's cross may be found "in a church" (BTS, s.v. *rōd* IV a), and the lexeme *rod* is accordingly used for the signs for a large or small cross in the Old English monastic sign list: (10) "Ðonne þu micelan rode abban wylle þonne lege þu þinne finger ofer þinne swyðran finger and rær up þinne þuman. Litelere rode tacen is ealswa rær up þonne litlan finger,"[32] (When you want a large cross, then lay your finger over your right finger and hold up your thumb. The sign for a small cross is just the same; raise the little finger).

Rod may further denote a small-sized model of Christ's cross suspended from the neck (BTS, s.v. *rōd*, IV c),[33] but also a large-sized figure "out-of-doors" (BTS, s.v. *rōd* IV b), i.e., "a monument in the form of a cross, or having a cross upon it, erected in places of resort, at crossways etc., for devotional purposes, or as a devout or solemn memorial of some event" (OED, s.v. "cross," 7). The term *rod* is thus used for the large stone crosses which were one of the distinctive features of Christianity in pre-Norman England,[34] and is generally employed for all kinds of crosses set up as tokens and memorials—thus, for instance, in praise of God by King Oswald before his battle against Ceadwalla:

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31 The Present Day English term "crucifix" is ambiguous. In its technical sense, it is reserved for "an image or figure (formerly also a pictorial representation) of Christ upon the cross" (see OED, s.v. "crucifix," 2.), though this distinction is not always drawn; see OED, same entry: "The misuse of crucifix for 'cross, figure of the cross,' is frequent in writers of the 18–19th c."

32 Banham, *Monasteriales Indicia*, p. 28, nos. 35 and 36.

33 For these, we also find the compounds *sweor-rod* "neck-cross'"(cf. *swēora* "neck;" see BT, s.v. *swēor-rōd*) and the hapax *bisceop-rod* "bishop's pectoral cross or crosier" (see DOE, s.v. *bisceop-rōd*).

34 See, for instance, the self-denotation of the cross in *The Dream of the Rood*. For these crosses, see Richard N. Bailey, "Crosses, Stone," in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge et al., (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), pp. 129–130.

(11) Oswold þa arærde ane rode sona Gode to wurðmynte ær þan þe he to ðam gewinne come, and clypode to his geferum, Uton feallan to ðære rode, and þone ælmihtigan biddan þæt he us ahredde wið þone modigan feond þe us afyllan wile.[35]

[Then Oswald raised a cross quickly to the honour of God before he came to battle, and cried to his companions, "Let us fall down before the cross, and pray the Almighty that he will save us against the proud enemy who desires to kill us."]

Words for the Sign of the Cross: Old English rodetac(e)n

OLD ENGLISH *RODETACEN*: COMPOUND OR SYNTACTIC GROUP?
Similar to Old English *rod* for "cross," Old English *rodetacen*—a loan translation of Latin *signum crucis (Christi)*—is the most central, frequent, and versatile word signifying the different aspects and functions of the sign of the cross. In the Dictionary of Old English Corpus, the forms *rodetacen* and *rode tacen* are attested to 157 times.[36] Yet in BT, the most comprehensive dictionary of Old English covering the letter *r*, *rodetacen* is not given a separate entry but is listed as one of the meanings of *rod* "cross," though with the

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35 Skeat, ii, 126, lines 17–21 ("Oswald"). The *vita* later refers to the healing powers of the cross (lines 30–32) and its moss (lines 36–39) and to the fact that it *on wurðmynte stod* "stood there for worship" (line 31).
36 See DOEC: the spelling most frequently attested is *rodetac(e)n* (117 occurrences) followed by *rode tac(e)n* with separation of determinant and determinatum (34 occurrences). Other attested spellings are *rodetaken* (4 occurrences in manuscript H of the translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*), *rodentacen* (1 occurrence in the "Life of Saint Margaret" in Cambridge, Corpus Christi College MS 303) and *rodætacæn* (1 occurrence in a Charter (S 427)). Charter and wills are quoted from the database *Regesta Regum Anglorum* at *http://www.trin.cam.ac.uk/ chartwww* (S refers to the number in the *Electronic Sawyer*, an online version of the revised edition of Peter H. Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters: an Annotated List and Bibliography* [London: Royal Historical Society, 1968]).

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commentary: "*Rode tacen* seems hardly a compound to judge by the numerous phrases in which *rode* is qualified by an adjective or genitive, but may be such in instances like *He mearcode him on heafde halig rode-tacen*."[37]

The delimitation of syntactic groups (nominal head *tacen* preceded by a genitive modifier *rode*) and compounds (one single noun *rodetacen*) is notoriously difficult for Old English.[38] Generally, the distinction between syntactic groups and compounds is based on certain kinds of "isolation" in the compound—orthographical, phonological, morphological, and/or semantic isolation. As criteria for this isolation, word division (orthography), stress pattern (two major stresses = syntactic group, one major stress = compound), morphological reasons, and semantic specification involving loss of transparency are considered to be decisive. It has been convincingly shown, however, that the stress pattern of Old English elements cannot be established from our extant sources, not even in poetry.[39] The same is true for spelling, which was even more erratic in this respect than it is in Modern English. In the case of *rodetacen*, however, one might wonder whether the overwhelming preponderance of the single form *rodetacen* (123 occurrences)[40] in contrast to *rode tacen*—with division of determinant and determinatum (34 occurrences)—might not be an indicator that Anglo-Saxon scribes took the syntagm as a compound. But an analysis of spelling with respect to word division is, of course, much impeded by editorial practices which are often oriented on the forms found in dictionaries.[41]

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37 See BTS, s.v. *rōd*, III (3).
38 See Dieter Kastovsky, "Semantics and Vocabulary," in *The Cambridge History of the English Language, Volume 1: The Beginnings to 1066*, ed. Richard Hogg, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 356–63; and Hans Sauer, "Die Darstellung von Komposita in altenglischen Wörterbüchern," *Problems of Old English Lexicography. Studies in Memory of Angus Cameron*, ed. Alfred Bammesberger (Regensburg: Pustet, 1985), pp. 267–315.
39 Sauer, "Komposita," pp. 269–70.
40 Including the spellings *rodetaken*, *rodentacen* and *rodætacæn*.
41 See, for instance, the remarks on the editorial procedure in the editions of

Thus morphological isolation remains as the most valid criterion to distinguish the compound from the corresponding syntactic group. In the case of genitive compounds,[42] the whole noun phrase has to be inspected: if the article and/or adjective agree in morphological form with the determinatum (in our case the neuter *tacen*), we have a compound. If they refer to the determinant (in our case the feminine *rod*), we have a syntactic group. Thus the feminine article *þære* in the first quotation of the paper from Ælfric, above,—"*Ðære* halgan rode tacn is ure bletsung"—establishes the syntagm as a syntactic group, which is to be translated as "the sign of the holy cross is our blessing."[43] Other instances of this use we have met so far are "Segna þe & sete þe on þæt tacen *ðære* halgan rode" (quotation 4), "mid tacne *ðære* halgan rode hio gesegnade" (quotation 7a), "ac he hine bletsode mid *þære* halgan rodetacne" (quotation 8), and "ne bið hit bletsung buta he wyrce tacn *þære* halgan rode" (quotation 9).

By contrast, a neuter modifier is also attested throughout the Old English period. See, for instance, the second instance of *rodetacen* in the translation of Gregory's *Dialogues*:

Ælfric's Catholic Homilies: "Word-division has been standardized on the basis of normal practice in dictionaries and grammars, supplemented where necessary by the precedents set by Pope's edition of Ælfric and by evidence (such as syntactic usage) of Ælfric's own views" (Clemoes, p. 169). In the glossary to the two series of Ælfric's *Catholic Homilies* we then find "*rodetac(e)n* n. 'sign of the cross'; as two words II: 13. 290" (see Godden I, p. 756).

42 Both *rodetacen* and *cristes mæl* are genitive compounds. As concerns *rodetacen*, OE *rōd* is a feminine noun (ō-declension) and so the first component of a compound *rodetacen* – {rode} – can be seen as the genitive *rōde*; Kastovsky, however, points out that in "a number of cases, e.g. *hildecalla* . . . the internal vowel should not be regarded as a genitive ending, but as a linking element like the German Fugen-s," (Kastovsky, "Semantics and Vocabulary," p. 363); see also pp. 369–370 commenting on *restedæg* "rest-day, Sabbath," or *hellefyr* "hell-fire."

43 The weak adjective *halgan* is of no help here because weak adjectives are not inflected for gender in the oblique cases.

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(12) Eac he me sæde, þæt he mihte þis wundor wyrcan, þæt in swa hwilcre stowe swa he gemette nædran . . . þæt he hi acwealde sona gif he hi gesegnode *mid Cristes rodetacne* [12a], swa þæt heo toborstenum þam innoðum swulte for þam mægne þære halgan rode, þonne se Godes wer *þæt rodetacen* awrat [12b] mid his fingre.[44]

[He also told me, that he was able to work this wonder, that in whichever place he met a serpent . . . that he killed it instantly if he blessed it with the sign of Christ's cross [12a], so that it died from burst insides because of the power of the holy cross then, when the man of God wrote the cross-sign [12b] with his finger.]

While in the first instance (12a) the genitive modifier *Cristes* seems to indicate that the syntagm should be taken as a syntactic group (Latin *signum crucis Christi*, "the sign of the cross of Christ"), the neuter article *þæt* (instead of feminine *þære*) in the second instance *þæt rodetacen* (12b) shows that it is used as a compound.[45]

In its analysis of *rodetacen*, BTS implicitly also refers to this decisive factor for the differentiation between a syntactic group (German *Zeichen des Kreuzes*) and a compound (German *Kreuzzeichen*): the strong neuter adjective *halig* instead of the feminine *haligu*[46] shows that the syntagm is considered to be a compound. So the passage should be taken as ". . . with the holy sign of the cross" and not "with the sign of the holy cross." The full text of this quotation from Ælfric

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44 Hecht, *Bischof Waerferths von Worcester Übersetzung der Dialoge Gregors des Grossen*, ch. 35, pp. 246–47. Manuscript O does not give the compound form, but the syntactic group *ðare haligan*.

45 For another of these occurrences of *þæt*, see "hi wæron gemetfæste on geleafan þæs lifigendan Godes suna, and his ðæt halige rode tacn on heora lichoman getreowlice bæron" (they were modest in their faith in the son of the living God, and carried that (his) cross-sign [literal translation, U.L.] steadfastly on their bodies), translation mine: *The Anonymous Old English Legend of the Seven Sleepers*, ed. Hugh Magennis, Durham Medieval Texts 7 (Durham: Durham Medieval Texts, 1994), line 106.

46 Alistair Campbell, *Old English Grammar* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), § 643.

runs as follows: (13) "and he awoc ða bliðe. for ðære gesihðe. and for ðan behatenan sige. and mearcode him on heafde halig rodetacn,"[47] (and he awoke in a happy mood because of this vision and because of the promised victory, and traced on his head the holy sign of the cross).

This morphological means of delimitation by the different forms of modifiers seems fairly straightforward at first glance. A closer look at all the Old English occurrences reveals, however, that it is in fact only applicable in a very small number of cases.

	rodetacen (123 occ.)[48]	*rode tacen* (34 occ.)
without modifier /determiner	40	9
Determiner	6	2
feminine (> syntactic group)	4	1
neuter (> compound)	2	1
Adjective	9	7
feminine (> syntactic group)	6	5
neuter (> compound)	3	2

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47 Godden II, ii, 174, homily 18, lines 16–17 ("Invention of the Holy Cross"). Manuscript T has the variant *þæt halige*, in which the neuter demonstrative *þæt* stresses the grammatical gender neuter. For another use of the compound, see the version "he awoc þa bliþelice for þære fægeran gesihðe and for þære mæran behatenan sige. and mearcode him on heafde halig rode tacen. and on his guðfanan gode to wurðmynte," (he then awoke blithely because of the fair sight and for the great promised victory; and he marked on his head and on his banner the holy cross-sign in honor to God), "Discovery of the Sacred Cross," *Legends of the Holy Rood*, ed. Richard Morris, EETS o. s. 46 (London: Trübner, 1871), pp. 4–5.
48 Including the isolated attested spellings *rodetaken*, *rodætacæn* etc. (see above, n. 36), all of which do not divide the determinant and the determinatum.

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	rodetacen (123 occ.)	*rode tacen* (34 occ.)
Cristes	61	16
drihtnes ~	1	
þæs hælendes ~	1	
his ~	1	
þære halgan Cristes ~	3	
~ *Cristes*	1	

This table shows that only about 15 percent of the attestations (24 occurrences) allow a precise morphological analysis with respect to grammatical gender. In about a third of all instances (49 occurrences), a morphological test is not applicable because the forms are used without any modifier.[49]

In about half of the cases (77 occurrences), *rodetacen* or *rode tacen* are modified by the genitive *Cristes*, yielding the form *Cristes rodetacen*,[50] a phrase which explicitly relates the cross with Christ and thus further stresses the fact that the sign of the cross signifies Christ. BT take the many occurrences of the collocation *Cristes rodetacen* as an indicator that the syntagm was considered a syntactic group and not a compound, because *Cristes* is seen as modifying *rod*, i.e., "the sign of Christ's cross." As a loan translation of Latin *signum crucis Christi*, it is, however, such a frequent collocation in Old English that it seems possible to regard the whole phrase as a fixed expression for the specific concept "sign of the cross" with a first element *Cristes*, similar to *cristes-boc* "book containing all or part of the gospels" or *cristes-mæsse* "Christmas Day,"[51] and in particular

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49 See quotations (2a), (2b) above and (16), (17) below.
50 See quotations (14), (15), (21) and (24) below.
51 See *DOE*, s.vv. *Cristes-bōc* and *cristes-mæsse*. For *cristes-mæl*, see below, pp. 261–270.

. to *cristes mæl* "sign of the cross." Both these terms highlight the intrinsic nature of the "sign of the cross" as a sign for Christ and salvation. This relation becomes most evident in the one instance of a post-posed instead of pre-posed genitive[52] in the F-Version of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (London, British Library MS Cotton Domitian A. viii; s. xi/xii) for the year 796. Here, *Cristes* modifies the whole compound *rodetacen* and not only its first constituent *rod*: (14) "& ic Aðelhard arcebiscop mid twelf biscopan & mid þrim & twentigan abbodan þis ylce mid rodetacne Cristes getrimmað & <gefæstnað>"[53] (and I, Archbishop Aðelhard, confirm and validate this here with Christ's sign of the cross, together with twelve bishops and twenty-three abbots).

The formal analysis also shows that instances of the compound marked by a neuter modifier are attested to during the whole Old English period in different authors, and not only those who are marginal or later (see the quotations from the Old English translation of Gregory's *Dialogues* [12b] and Ælfric [13]). Thus the syntagm was obviously regarded as a compound by certain Anglo-Saxon authors and scribes, especially in contexts which refer to the concrete marking or tracing (OE *writan* or *mearcian*) of a cross on a part of the body (often the forehead). These are also the contexts in which German employs the compound *Kreuzzeichen*. The forms which are grammatically explicitly feminine are, by contrast, in about half of the cases (seven instances) used in contexts of "blessing," an

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52 Genitival modifiers can be placed before or after the head they modify: while the numbers are almost even for early texts (52% pre-posed vs. 48% post-posed around 900), there is a strong tendency for pre-position in late Old English (77% pre-posed vs. 22% post-posed in the eleventh century); see Manfred Görlach, *Einführung in die englische Sprachgeschichte*, 5th ed. (Heidelberg: Winter, 2002), p. 79.

53 Peter S. Baker, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Collaborative Edition. Volume 8: MS. F* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2000), for the year 796, p. 56. The Latin text of this passage only says "Et subscripsit Aðelardus archiepiscopus . . ." (p. 57).

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act which, as shown above, has to be performed *mid þære (halgan) rode tacne*. Here again, the comparison with Modern German shows that the typologically similar language may use both forms, but would prefer the syntactic group when designating the act of blessing, probably for reasons of explicitness and intensity: "Ich segne Dich mit dem Zeichen des Kreuzes" (I bless you with the sign of the [holy] cross) is preferred to "Ich segne Dich mit dem (heiligen) Kreuzzeichen" (I bless you with the cross-sign). In more general contexts, however, Old English, like Modern German, uses *(Cristes) rodetacen* as a compound.

OLD ENGLISH *RODETACEN*: SEMANTICS

Since the morphological analysis suggests a diversified use of the syntactic group *(þære) rode tacen* and the compound *(þæt) rodetacen* or *Cristes rodetacen*, the semantics of *rodetacen* will now be analyzed with respect to the question of semantic isolation or lexicalization. This survey account of the different meanings of *rodetacen* will then also provide the background for the following analysis of *cristes mæl* and *cruc*, both of which show some overlap with *rodetacen* in the referents they denote, i.e., are also Old English expressions for the "sign of the cross."

When dealing with a historical period, it is not always easy to determine whether a given formation is lexicalized or not, in particular in a form like *rodetacen* which—in contrast to *cristes mæl*[54]—has never adopted meanings that are not predictable from the meaning of the constituents and the pattern underlying the compound.[55]

A survey of all the attestations to the forms *rodetacen* and *rode tacen* in Old English (here ordered by their relative frequency) establishes essentially four broad meanings:

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54 See below, p. 262.
55 For this criterion of lexicalization, see Kastovsky, "Semantics and Vocabulary," p. 356.

Meaning	Collocate verb(s)
A) the little sign of the cross as a manual gesture (89 occ.)	*wyrcean (ofer),*
A1) traced on something concrete ~ a person, a part of the body (37 occ.) ~ an animal (6 occ.) ~ a concrete object (door, loaf of bread; 11 occ.)	*(a)writan* *mearcian (mid),* *(wæpnian [mid]),* *(agrafan)*
A2) the sign of the cross written on a (legal) document to validate solemn declaration (25 occ. in formulaic use)	*trymman mid, fæstnian mid, strangian mid*
A3) traced in the air (10 occ.)	
B) the sign of the cross used in the act of blessing (26 occ.)	*segnian mid,* *bletsian mid*
C) a material object, a model or figure of a cross as a religious emblem; a crucifix (21 occ.)[56]	
~ for liturgical or devotional use (processional cross etc.) set up within a building or in the open air (an outdoor cross or crucifix) (17 occ.)	
~ as a vision or apparition of Christ's cross (3 occ.)	
D) used in general reference to Christ's suffering on the cross and salvation (6 occ.)	

This survey shows that in most of the occurrences, *rodetacen*, as in Modern German, indeed refers to the oldest variant of the sign of the cross (Variant 1), i.e., the little sign of the cross traced as a performative manual gesture in the air or, more typically, on something specific (a person, an animal, a concrete object or such), most often on parts of the human body (A1) or written—in formulaic use—on (legal) documents (A2). The character of this tracing of the sign of the cross as an emblem is highlighted in the frequent collocation with the verb *mearcian* "to mark," i.e., *mearcian rodetacen* or *mearcian mid rodetacen* "to mark (with) the sign of the cross." This collocation is typically but not exclusively used in the writings of Ælfric.[57]

At all times, the Church has attributed to this mark not only effects of grace, but also of power against physical and spiritual destruction and death:

(15) And we sceolon mearcian ure forewearde heafod. and urne lichaman mid cristes rodetacne. þæt we beon ahredde fram forwyrde. þonne we beoð gemearcode ægðer ge on foranheafde. ge on heortan mid blode þære drihtenlican ðrowunge.[58]

[And we should mark our foreheads and our bodies with the sign of Christ's rood, that we may be saved from destruction, when we are marked both on the forehead and on the heart with the blood of the divine Passion.]

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56 Including one—perhaps erroneous, because late—occurrence where *rodetacen* refers to Christ's cross itself, i.e., the instrument of crucifixion: "þa nolde se

mildheorta drihten geþafigen þe on hire self willes þrowode. and on þam rode tacne eall mancyn alysde . . ." (but the merciful Lord would not permit that the cross on which he himself had willingly suffered and redeemed all mankind . . .): Morris, "Discovery of the Sacred Cross," p. 17.

57 *Mearcian* is only rarely (ca. five times) used in the texts of the Alfred circle which commonly employ *(a)writan* "write" (see *DOE*, s.v. *awritan*, A.8.a.). For more general references, Old English authors use the verb *wyrcean* "make."

58 Godden II, ii, homily 15, p. 151, lines 55–60 ("On Easter Sunday").

This power of the sign of the cross manifests itself in particular when it is traced (by saints or priests) in the act of healing,[59] when it serves as a weapon against fierce might, a concept made explicit in the frequent collocation *wæpnian mid rodetacen* "arm with the sign of the cross:"

(16) Syððan se hæþengylda eac sealde þone attorbæran drenc þam apostole: & he mid rodetacne his muð & ealne his lichaman gewæpnode. & þane unlybban on godes naman halsode. & syððan mid gebyldum mode. hine ealne gedranc.[60]

[Then the idolater gave the venomous drink also to the apostle, and he armed his mouth and all his body with the sign of the cross, and exorcised poison in God's name and then he drank all of it with bold heart.]

From the earliest period, it has thus also been employed in exorcisms and conjurations as a weapon against all kinds of dark spirits.[61]

While the little sign of the cross employed in the performative acts depicted so far is mainly traced by priests, it can also extend its functional realm beyond the liturgy and rites of the Church. The most prolific use of the "sign of the cross" in a non-religious context is its employment as a written figure entered in a document to validate solemn declaration. It serves as a signature and kind of "seal in Christ" when charters, wills, or documents are signed and thus ratified "with the sign of the cross." Here it features as a material drawing on the parchment. The act of signature itself is accompanied by certain

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59   "Ne beo ge afyrhte þurh his gesihðe: ac mearciað rodetacen on eowerum foreheafdum. & ælc yfel gewit fram eow" (Be not afraid at the sight of him, but mark the sign of the cross on your forehead, and every evil shall depart from you): Clemoes, i, 445, homily 31, lines 184–86 ("Passion of St. Bartholomew").
60   Clemoes, i, 214, homily 4, line 222 ("Assumption of St. John the Apostle").
61   In the contexts of exorcism and popular medicine, we often find the term *cristes mæl* and also some instances of *cruc*; see below, pp. 261–270.

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performative formulae[62] employing the Latin terms *signaculum (sanctae) crucis* or *signum (sanctae) crucis,* or an Old English term for the "sign of the cross," such as *rodetacen.*[63] This practice is amply attested in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and particularly in the witness lists of charters and wills. As performative verbs used in the formulas, we most often find the verb *fæstnian* "to confirm, ratify," often in pair formulas such as *writan and fæstnian* or, even more frequent, with *getrymman* "to strengthen, confirm," *getrymman and fæstnian.*[64] See as illustrative examples for different formulas (i.e., "I, King X, confirm/ ratify Y with the sign of the holy cross"):[65]

(17) Ic Offa þurh Cristes gyfe Myrcena kining ðas mine geoue *mid rodetacne gefæstnige* (S 126)[66]

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62   The formulas are generally of the form "1st person personal pronoun (*ic/ we* + (name)) + performative verb in present tense + *mid rodetacen/crystesmæl.*" The 1st person personal pronoun and the verb in the present tense are indicators that these formulas are performative speech acts, i.e., utterances that explicitly denote the action to be carried out.
63   For an employment of this act in an age of widespread illiteracy, see ch. 58 of the *RSB* which commands: "Write he þa fæstnunge mid his agenre handa, gif he þonne writan ne cunne, bidde oþerne, þe writan cunne, þæt hine aspelige, and he sylf on þam gewrite rodetacn mearcige and hy swa fæstniende mid his agenum handum uppan þone altare alecge" (He shall write the confirmation in his own hand; if he is, however, not able to write, he shall ask some other person who can write that he should be a substitute for him; and he himself shall mark the sign of the cross on the document and confirm it, with his own hands placed upon the altar): Arnold Schröer, ed., *Die angelsächsischen Prosabearbeitungen der Benediktinerregel,* Bibliothek der angelsächsischen Prosa (Kassel, 1885– 1888; repr. with appendix by Helmut Gneuss [Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1964]), p. 101, lines 3–7.
64   See *DOE,* s.v. *fæstnian* B.2.
65   Note the different morphological forms of *rodetacen* in these three examples: (17) uncertain: no modifier, (18) syntactic group: feminine *þære* in the prepositional phrase *mid þære halgan rodetacne,* and (19) compound: masculine premodifier *ðam.*
66   786 or 589 for ? 779 or 789 x 790. Offa, king of Mercia, to the monks of St.

(18) Ic Æþelbreht cyning *mid þære halgan rodetacne* þis het swiþe geornlice *getrymman & gefæstnian* (S 333)[67]

(19) + Ic Ælfric se ercebiscop of Euerwic ðas ilces kinges godne wille *mid ðam halege rode tacne gefæstni* (S 959).[68]

In this formulaic use, the sign of the cross is not only a manual, transitory gesture, but is written in ink at the bottom of treaties and charters in a performative act of validating a document.

As is to be expected from Ælfric's exposition in quotation (1), the term *rodetacen* is also used in more general contexts to denote the cross figuratively as the ensign and symbol of Christianity and the central fact of the Christian religion, the atonement wrought on the cross (see meaning D in table):[69] (20) "He soðlice þone deað oferswiðde .

Mary's, Worcester (MS from s xi²).

67 864 (Dorchester, Dorset, 26 Dec.).Æthelberht, king of Wessex, to the church of Sherborne; grant of privileges, with note that Æthelberht placed the charter on the high altar at Sherborne (865, Good Friday). English (MS from s. xiimed).

68 1023. King Cnut to Christ Church, Canterbury; grant of the port of Sandwich (diverse MSS from s. xii¹ and later).

69 This context might also explain Ælfric's anachronistic use of the term *rodetacen* in an Old Testament context: "God sette on ðære ealdan. æ. and het niman anes geares lamb æt ælcum hiwisce. and sniðan on eastertide. and wyrcan mid þæs lambes blode rodetacn on heora gedyrum" (God appointed in the old law and commanded a lamb of one year to be taken of every family, and slain on Easter-tide, and to make with the blood of the lamb the sign of the cross on their door-posts), Godden II, ii, 21, homily 3, lines 81–82 ("On the Epiphany of Our Lord"); "Hi mearcodon mid ðæs lambes blode on heora gedyrum. and oferslegum. TAU. þæt is rodetacen" (They marked with the blood of the lamb, on their door-posts and lintels, the letter TAU, that is, the sign of the cross), Godden II, ii, 151, homily 15, lines 52–54 ("On Easter Day"); and "God bebead moyse on egypta lande. þæt he & eall israhela folc sceoldon offrian æt ælcum hiwisce gode an lamb. anes geares & mearcian mid þam blode rodetacen on heora gedyrum and oferslegum" (God commanded Moses in Egypt that he and all the people of Israel should offer, for every household, a lamb of one year to God, and mark with the blood the sign of the cross on their door-posts and lintels), Clemoes, i, 354, homily 22, lines 6–8 ("On the Day of Pentecost").

.. & on þam þriddan dæge sigefæst aras & sealde his rodetacen his apostolum"[70] (But he overcame death . . . and on the third day he rose victorious, and gave the sign of his cross to his apostles).

This use probably yields a more surprising, distinct meaning of the compound *rodetacen* in Old English. *Rodetacen*, which explicitly employs the constituent *tacen* "sign" as its determinatum, can also denote a model or figure of a cross, i.e., a material object (see meaning C). It thus serves as a synonym for its determiner *rod*, and not—as would be regular—its determinatum *tacen*. This use of *rodetacen* instead of the simple noun *rod* thus shows that the form *rodetacen* is indeed lexicalized and, in accordance with Ælfric's exposition in quotation (1), highlights that the cross is always a symbol. Christ's cross is never just a gibbet: (21) "Towurpað þis deofolgild and tocwysað. and aræra ð cristes rodetacn on ðære stowe"[71] (Cast down this idol, and crush it, and raise up the sign of Christ's rood on this place).

The same idea motivates the use of *rodetacen* (and, in the first place, *signum crucis* in the Latin exemplar) in the A-version of the *Gospel of Nicodemus*. *Rodetacen* here three times refers to a material object, which can be carried (cf. *berende*). This text, however, is somewhat idiosyncratic in that the feminine premodifiers *anre* (22a), *þysse* (22b), and *þysse* (22c) seem to indicate that *rodetacen* is not used as a neuter, but a feminine compound:

(22) Ac onmang þam ðe Enoh and Elias þus spræcon, heom þær to becom sum wer þe wæs earmlices hywes and wæs berende *anre*

While the identification of the letter TAU with the sign of the cross is common in allegorical patristic literature, Godden could not find any parallel for the detail that the Israelites marked their doors with the sign of the cross (see Godden I, p. 490). For Ælfric, it is obviously not absurd to use the inherently Christian *rodetacen* ("the salvation of Christ on the cross") in a description of the rites of the Jewish *pascha*.

70 Clemoes, i, 443, homily 31, lines 119–121 ("Passion of St. Bartholomew").

71 Godden II, ii, 169, homily 18, lines 14–16 ("The Apostles Philip and James").

rodetacen [22a] onuppan hys exlum ... He hym andswarode and cwæð: " ... And he me *þysse rodetacen* [22b] sealde and cwæð: ga on neorxnawang myd þysum tacne and gif se engel, þe ys hyrde to neorxnawanges geate, ðe inganges forwyrne, ætyw hym *þysse rodetacen* [22c] and sege to hym þæt se hælenda Cryst, Godes sunu, þe nu wæs anhangen þe þyder asende."[72]

[But while Enoch and Elias were saying these things, there came to them a certain man who was of a wretched appearance, and carrying a (sign of the) cross on his shoulders ... He answered them and said: " ... and He [the Savior] gave me the (sign of the) cross and said: "Go into paradise with this sign, and if the angel who is the keeper at the gate of Paradise does not allow you to enter, show him this (sign of the) cross, and say to him that Christ the Savior, the Son of God who has been crucified, sent you there."]

Instances of a lexicalized compound *rodetacen* designating a "material object" are also attested to in the Vercelli Homilies. In quotation (23), *rodetacna*[73] are listed together with *oðre halige reliquias* "other holy relics" which have to be venerated with appropriate humility on Rogation Days: (23) "ær he mæssan hæbbe gehyred, & barefotum Cristesbec & his rodetacna & oðre halige reliquias eadmodlice gegret hæbbe"[74] (before he has heard the mass, and has greeted the gospels, his crosses and other holy relics in a humble way with bare feet). In the second occurrence from the Vercelli Homilies, *Cristes rodetacen* refers to a material object, a procession cross, which is carried over the land on the Rogation Days: (24) "& we sculon beran usse reliquias ymb ure land, þa medeman Cristes

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72 "*Euangelium Nichodemi*: Text and Translation," *Two Old English Apocrypha and Their Manuscript Source: "The Gospel of Nichodemus" and "The Avenging of the Saviour*," ed. James E. Cross et al, CSASE 19 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 234–36, ch. 26, lines 1–13.

73 Note the plural form *rodetacna* which only makes sense if *rodetacen* refers to a concrete object, and not the cross as a general symbol for the salvation.

74 *The Vercelli Homilies*, ed. Donald Scragg, EETS o. s. 300 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), [homily] XIX, p. 320, lines 93–94.

rodetacen þe we Cristes mæl nemnað, on þam he sylfa þrowode for mancynnes alysnesse"[75] (and we shall carry our relics over our land, the precious Christ's crosses which we call *Cristes mæl* on which he himself suffered for the salvation of mankind). Since both of the occurrences in the Vercelli Homilies designate a material object, Scragg even gives "crucifix" as the single meaning for *rodetacen* in this text.[76]

The morphological and semantic analysis of *rodetacen* has thus shown that the term *rodetacen* and also the fossilized *Cristes rodetacen* should indeed be considered lexicalized compounds with concrete, distinct meanings in Old English. While the syntactic group *þære rode tacen* is mainly employed in general reference to Christ (and his salvation) or in contexts of blessing, the neuter compound *(þæt) rodetacen* distinctly refers to the oldest variant of the sign of the cross, the little cross traced on something concrete, most typically a part of the body or parchment, or to a crucifix.

Words for the Sign of the Cross: Old English Cristes mæl

In the passage from the Vercelli Homilies quoted above (24), we not only see that *rodetacen* is indeed a lexicalized compound with a specific meaning, but also that it is not the only Old English term used to denote the concept "sign of the cross." In this passage, the phrase "þa medeman Cristes rodetacen" (the precious Christ's crosses) is glossed by "þe we Cristes mæl nemnað" (which we call *Cristes mæl*). As mentioned above, *cristes mæl*, which here denotes a crucifix, is structurally similar to *rodetacen*, because it also incorporates a linguistic element meaning "sign"—OE *mæl*—as its determinatum.[77] Its status as a lexicalized compound, is—like that of *rodetacen*—disputed in the dictionaries of Old English.

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75 Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, [homily] XII, p. 228, lines 16–18.

76 Scragg, *Vercelli Homilies*, p. 455, s.v. *rodetacen*.

77 OE *mæl* is synonymous with *tacen* and generally refers to a kind of "sign" or "mark;" see BT, s.v. *mæl*.

OLD ENGLISH *CRISTES MÆL*: STATUS

Cristes mæl is attested to forty-four times in Anglo-Saxon sources.[78] In contrast to other Old English dictionaries,[79] it is not given a separate headword in the *DOE*, but is discussed in the head entry *Crist* in the section "in particular genitival constructions," together with *Cristes geleafa, Cristes lagu, Cristes bebod, Cristes godspel,* and also *Cristes rod* and *Cristes rodetacn* (1.b.ii.).

In view of the discussion on Old English compounds above,[80] this lemmatization does not seem to grasp fully the word formation of *cristes mæl* as a lexicalized genitive compound. Expressions like *Cristes bebod, Cristes godspel* and the like are fully transparent genitive constructions in which the genitive *Cristes* functions as a modifier of the head, i.e., naming the originator in *bebod* or *lagu* ("Christ's law;" "genetivus subjectivus") or the object in *Cristes geleafa* ("belief in Christ;" "genetivus objectivus"). *Cristes mæl*, by contrast, should be regarded as a lexicalized compound similar to *cristes-boc* "gospels" or *cristes-mæsse* "Christmas Day."[81] It clearly exhibits an advanced stage of lexicalization, because, in contrast to *rodetacen*, it has adopted meanings that are not predictable from the meaning of the constituents, i.e., it has undergone a restriction of meaning.[82] The

78 In the DOEC, we find 31 occurrences of *cristes mæl*, 11 matches for *cristes mel* and 2 for *criste mæl*.

79 J. R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, 4th ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), for instance, has a cross-reference from *cristelmæl* to *Cristes-mæl* "Christ's mark," "the cross;" the latter is thus given priority. BTS only has entries for *cristel-mæl* (with a variant *crystel-*) "I. a cross" and "II. the sign of the cross" and *cristelmæl-bēam* "a tree on which a cross is fixed." Holthausen, on the other hand, sees *cristelmæl* as a derived form of *cristes mæl*; see Friedrich Holthausen, *Altenglisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (Heidelberg: Winter, 1934): "*cristel-mæl* mn. "Kreuz" < *Cristes mæl*," p. 60.

80 See pp. 246–253.

81 See *DOE*, s.vv. *cristes-bōc* and *cristes-mæsse*.

82 Morphologically, determiners, adjectival modifiers as well as cataphoric and anaphoric references to *cristes mæl* agree in all instances with the neuter noun *mæl*.

form does not generally refer to a sign for/of Christ, but to the most important emblem of Christianity, the cross. An understanding of the full symbolic meaning and interpretation of *cristes mæl* as the "cross" requires the ideas stressed by Ælfric in the first quotation above, i.e., that the holy rood is a sign for Christ. Without this interpretative support in a theological background, *cristes mæl* could, for instance, also denote baptism (cf. German *Christusmal* "baptism" in theological discourse) or be taken to refer to the stigmata of Christ (cf. German *Wundmal*).

This advanced stage of lexicalization is also documented in occurrences which show phonological attrition. In addition to two instances of *criste mæl* with loss of the genitival *-s* in the first element of the compound,[83] we find nine occurrences of a form *cristelmæl* or *crystelmæl*.[84] Clearly this term also refers to the "sign of the cross," as the description of the sign for the *pistolboc* in the Old English monastic sign list shows:

(25) "Ðære pistol boce tacn ys þæt mon wecge his hand and wyrce crystelmæl on his heafde foran mid his þuman forþon þe mon ræt god spel þær on and eal swa on þære cristes bec"[85]

83 Some of these cases of phonological attrition are not easy to find because of (undocumented) emendations by the respective editors. The most recent editor of the *Lacnunga*, for example, provides a new occurrence by giving the text of line 804 as "Weorc Criste[s]mæl of cassuce fifo." In his critical apparatus, he explains the square brackets by "MS. *cristemæl* with the first part of the *-m-* resembling the top part of a low s;" see Edward Pettit, *Anglo-Saxon Remedies, Charms, and Prayers from British Library MS Harley 585: The Lacnunga*, 2 vols. (Lewiston: Mellen, 2001), p. 96 (804).

84 See also the structurally similar attrition and assimilation to nasal [n] in the attested spelling *cristenmælbeam* (s. xii) for *cristelmælbeam*. See *DOE*, s.v. *cristelmæl-bēam*.

85 Banham, *Monasteriales Indicia*, p. 24, no. 10. For an identification of the *pistolboc* as a "full mass lectionary" and not an "epistle lectionary," see Helmut Gneuss, "Liturgical Books in Anglo-Saxon England and their Old English Terminology," *Learning and Literature in Anglo-Saxon England*, ed. Michael

[The sign for the *pistolboc* is that one moves one's hand and makes the sign of the cross on the front of one's head with one's thumb, because one reads the word of God in it, and likewise in the gospels.]

The use of the sign is justified by the causal clause "forþon þe mon ræt god spel þær on," and thus establishes a strong link between the sign of the cross and the gospels, i.e., the book documenting Christ's life, death, and resurrection. The bodily movements described resemble the ritual preparation of the *diacon* who, before reading the gospel of the day, kisses the book and crosses himself. He also traces another sign of the cross in the liturgical book at the verse where the lesson begins.[86] Accordingly, the sign for the deacon in *Monasterialia Indicia* is (26) "Ðonne þu diacon abban wille þonne stric þu ealgelice mid þinum scyte fingre and wyrc cristes mæl on þin heafod foran on þæs halgan godspelles getacnunge"[87] (When you want a deacon, then stroke with your index finger just the same, and make the sign of the cross on the front of your head in indication of the holy gospel). The description again explicitly stresses, in the prepositional phrase *for þæs halgan godspelles getacnunge* "in indication of the holy gospel," why this sign is chosen, but does not use *cristelmæl* but its full form *Cristes mæl*.[88]

Lapidge and Helmut Gneuss (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 110; see also Ursula Lenker, *Die westsächsische Evangelienversion und die Perikopenordnungen im angelsächsischen England*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Englischen Philologie 20 (Munich: Fink, 1997), pp. 128–132, and "The Gospel Lectionary in Anglo-Saxon England: Manuscript Evidence and Liturgical Practice," *ASE* 28 (1999): 158–159.

86 See Josef Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia. Eine genetische Erklärung der römischen Messe*, 2 vols., 5th ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1962), I: 566–567; and Karl Young, *The Drama of the Medieval Church*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1933; corr. repr. 1962), I: 27–28.

87 Banham, *Monasteriales Indicia*, p. 48, no. 124, and p. 59 (commentary).

88 Interestingly, the Anglo-Saxon monastic sign list also employs the synonymous

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In view of these occurrences, it is surprising that the *DOE* lists *cristelmæl*, but not *Cristes mæl* as a separate headword, and that merely a cross-reference "cristes mæl *s.v. crist*" is given at the end of the entry *cristel-mæl*. I would, by contrast, like to support the view of Holthausen and Clark Hall that *cristelmæl* is a (colloquial) variant of *cristes mæl*, showing phonological attrition and assimilation.[89] Accordingly, the form *cristelmæl* should not appear as a headword, but in the section "attested spellings" for the headword *cristes-mæl*. With respect to word formation, *cristelmæl* only at first glance shows similarities to Old English patterns of word formation ending in Old English *-el* or Present Day English *-le* in Germanic languages (such as are attested to in Present Day English *beetle* or *girdle*) or Frisian compounds with *–l*;[90] it is, however, not akin to these coinages because they are basically derived from verbs. *Cristelmæl* is thus not formed on a pattern of the kind {*Crist*}+ {*el* } + {*mæl*}; the element {el} must rather be considered an assimilation of the final genitival *s* to the following nasal. This process of phonological attrition, which is quite common in lexicalized compounds, leads to a loss of transparency of the original compound: the determiner

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term *rodetacen* in the description of another sign related to the gospels, namely for a homiliary containing the exposition of the gospels for the Night Office: "Gyf þu hwylce oþre boc habban wylle þe godspelles traht on sy þonne lege þu þine swyðran hand under þin hleor. and werc rode tacen on þin heafod foran" (If you want any other book in which there is a gospel text, then lay your right hand under your cheek and make the sign of the cross in front of your head), Banham, *Monasteriales Indicia*, p. 28, no. 31.

89 See n. 79.

90 For the Germanic pattern of word-formation by the suffix *-el/-il/-ol/-ul/-l* (> PDE *-le*), see Hans Sauer, "The Old English Suffix *-el/-il/-ol/-ul/-l* (> PDE le; cf. *beetle, girdle, thistle*) as Attested in the Épinal-Erfurt Glossary," *Innovation and Continuity in English Studies. A Critical Jubilee*, ed. Herbert Grabes, Bamberger Beiträge zur Englischen Sprachwissenschaft (Frankfurt: Lang, 2001), pp. 289–313. For *-l* as a *Fugenelement* (empty morph) in compounds in Frisian, see Volkert F. Faltings, "Die Kompositionsbildung mit L-Einschub im Friesischen," *NOWELE* 25 (1995): 3–23.

cristel is no longer fully motivated, i.e., no longer necessarily connected to the proper noun *Crist*, so that language users may even have lost the feeling for the original meaning of the compound ("Christ's mark").

Old English Cristes mæl: *Semantics and Register*

It is especially interesting that the terms *cristes mæl* and *cristelmæl* are—in contrast to *rodetacen*—never used in the context of blessing (cf. meaning B for *rodetacen*), one of the core fields of the "sign of the cross." Neither are they employed in general reference to Christ's suffering on the cross (cf. meaning D for *rodetacen*). *Cristes mæl* and its variants are only used for the (sign of the) cross that can be seen or touched, i.e., for a model or figure of a cross, a crucifix (cf. meaning C for *rodetacen*),[91] or for the sign of the cross as a manual gesture traced on something concrete (cf. meaning A for *rodetacen*). It is thus employed in exactly the contexts where we find the compound—and not the syntactic group—*rodetacen*.

Another prototypical example of *cristes mæl* designating a procession cross—in addition to the passage in the Vercelli Homilies quoted above in (24)—is attested to in the famous passage of the Anglo-Saxons' first encounter with the (sign of the) cross from Bede's *Ecclesiastical History*. Here *sylfrene Cristes mæl* (translating "[veniebant] crucem [pro vexillo] ferentes [argenteam]") denotes the silver cross carried in the impressive procession of Augustine and his companions, (27) "Ac hi nalæs mid deofulcræfte ac mid godcunde mægene gewelgade coman: bæron Cristes rode tacen, sylfrene Cristes mæl mid him & anlicnesse Drihtnes Hælendes on

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91 Including references to visions or apparitions of the cross, as in "and men gesegon read Cristes mel on heofenum æfter sunnan setlan gange" (and the people saw a red (sign of the) cross in the sky after sunset): Susan Irvine, ed., *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle. A Collaborative Edition. Volume 7: MS E* (Cambridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2004), for the year 774, p. 39 [MS F: read *Cristes mæl*; MS D: read *Cristes mel*].

brede afægde & awritene"[92] (But they came not endowed with devilcraft, but virtue from heaven: they bore the emblem of Christ's cross, and had a silver crucifix with them and a likeness of the Savior drawn and colored on a panel). As in quotation (24), *cristes mæl* is here again placed as a kind of gloss next to the expression *Cristes rode tacen* and explicitly refers to the actual material object made of silver, a procession cross with the "likeness of our Lord," i.e., a *crucifix* in the narrow sense of the word. The wording of both this passage and in particular the Vercelli Homilies' "þe we Cristes mæl nemnað" indicates that *rodetacen* and *cristes mæl* belong to different registers. The loan translation *rodetacen* seems to be the official term for something which is—as the authors/translators insinuate—in colloquial language also called *cristes mæl*.

This prototypical use of *cristes mæl* designating objects or concepts that can be seen and touched by everyone in colloquial language, is also found in the five occurrences of *cristes mæl* in Old English charter bounds, where it obviously refers to outdoor crosses serving as roadside or boundary crosses: (28) "And syððan . . . to þæm Criste mæle. And swa fram þam Cristes mæle of dun weard ondlang anre ealde dic"[93] (And then . . . to the sign of the cross. And then from the sign of the cross on downwards along an old trench). This setting of *cristes mæl* in colloquial or at least everyday language may also account for the assimilated form *cristelmæl*. This kind of "sloppy pronunciation" is related to spoken language and we accordingly find the *cristelmæl* form mainly in the kind of sources we might expect, in functional texts such as the Anglo-Saxon monastic sign list (quotation 25) and in particular in Old English charter bounds:

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92 Miller, *Old English Version of Bede's Ecclesiastical History*, Bk. I, ch. 1, p. 58, lines 23–25.

93 S 201: C.E. 851. Berhtwulf, king of Mercia, to St. Mary's, Worcester; grant of 3 hides (*cassati*) at Grimley, Worcester. Latin with English bounds. [lost original; MSS s. xi² and s. xvii (incomplete)]; see also the occurrences listed in the *DOE*, s.v. *cristelmæl*.

(29) Þis sint þa gemæru . . . þær þæt cristel mæl stod of þan up .
. . oþ þære ealdan byrig. [94] (There are the bounds . . . there where
the sign of the cross stands, from there up . . . to the old town)

(30) . . . þonne on þa ealdan dic on þæt cristelmæl. Of þam cris-
telmæle . . . [95] (. . . then on the old trench to the sign of the cross.
From the sign of the cross . . .)

This view is corroborated by the two occurrences of a term *cristelmæl-
beam* unfortunately only attested in late charter manuscripts (s. xii;
s. xiii) which probably refers to a "tree with a crucifix attached to
it."[96]

While about half of the occurrences of *cristes mæl* (twenty-one
instances) designate a material object, a kind of crucifix, the other
twenty-three attestations refer to the little sign of the cross traced
on something concrete, often a part of the human body: (31) "Wid
blodrine of nosu, wriht on his forheafod on cristes mel"[97] (Against
bleeding from the nose, write on his forehead a sign of the cross).
Analogous to *rodetacen*, *cristes mæl* is also used for the sign of the
cross written on parchment in the formulas of witness lists and thus
employed for the ratification of charters and similar documents:

(32) Ðet wæs first seo kyning Wulfere þe þet feostnode first mid
his worde & siððon mid his fingre gewrat on Cristes mel & þus
cwæð: Ic Wulfere kyning mid þas kyningas & mid eorles & mid

heorotogas & mid þægnas þas gewitnesse mines gifes, toforan þone
ærcebiscop Deusdedit ic hit festnia mid Cristes mel. And ic Oswi
Norþhimbre kyning þeos mynstres freond & þes abbotes Saxulf hit
loue mid Cristes mel. And ic Sighere kyning hit tyðe mid Cristes
mel. And ic Sibbi kyning hit write mid Cristes mel. And ic Sighere
kyning hit tyðe mid Cristes mel. And ic Sibbi kyning hit write mid
Cristes mel.[98]

[That was first the king, Wulfere, who confirmed it first with his
word, and afterwards wrote with his finger on the cross of Christ,
and said thus: "I, Wulfere, king, in the presence of kings, and of
earls, and of captains, and of thanes, the witnesses of my gift,
before the Archbishop Deusdedit, I confirm it with the cross of
Christ." "And I, Oswy, king of the Northumbrians, the friend of
this minster, and of this Abbot Saxulf, commend it with the cross
of Christ." "And I, Sighere, king, ratify it with the cross of Christ."
"And I, Sibbi, king, subscribe it with the cross of Christ."]

In sum, it is evident that *cristes mæl* (and its variant form *cristelmæl*) is
only used for a restricted range of the meanings found for *rodetacen*,
but precisely for those which could be established as the core mean-
ings of the compound *rodetacen*, i.e., (A) "little sign of the cross" and
(C) "crucifix." *Cristes mæl* is, however, only used in a certain group of
texts, those that are basically early and which mainly document "col-
loquial" language to a larger extent than others: "Charm 1" (2 occ.);
the Vercelli Homilies (1 occ.); the translation of Bede's *Ecclesiastical
History* (7 occ.); confessional and penitential texts (Conf 1.1, Conf
5; 3 occ.); "Rubrics and Directions for the Use of Forms of Service"
(Lit 5; 2 occ.); Charters (4 occ.); versions D (1 occ.), E (9 occ.) and
F (1 occ.) of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle; the Leechbook I and II (6
occ.); "Charm 15" (1 occ.); "Charm 16" (1 occ.)' "Charm 19" (3 occ.);
and the Old English monastic sign list (1 occ.).[99]

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94 S 738: 966. King Edgar to Ælfgifu, his kinswoman; grant of 10 hides (*cas-
satae*) at Newnham Murren, Oxon. Latin with English bounds. [MSS s. xi and
s. xvii].
95 S 684: 960. King Edgar to Eanulf, his faithful *minister*; grant of 9 hides (cas-
sati) at Tywarnhayle in Perranzabuloe and St Agnes, and 2 (*mansae*) at Bosowsa
in Ladock, Cornwall. Latin with English bounds. [MSS. s. x med, s. vii].
96 See BTS and *DOE*, s.v. *cristelmæl-bēam*.
97 Chapter heading in Oxford, St. John's College MS 17 + London, British
Library, MS Cotton Nero C. vii, folios 80–4: see Ker, p. 435.

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98 Irvine, *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: MS E*, for the year 656, pp. 28–29.
99 For the abbreviations and the editions of the texts, see *DOE* and DOEC.

By contrast, *cristes mæl* is very rarely found in texts of the theological or religious register, and thus, for instance, never attested to in the writings of Ælfric.[100] While *rodetacen* is, for instance, used in the Saints' Lives denoting the healing power of the sign of the cross, *cristes mæl* is employed in a similar function and meaning in texts related to medical practice, chiefly popular cures and liturgical healing formulas (commonly classified as "charms"). The charm "Against Elf-Sickness or Elf-Disease," for instance, uses *cristes mæl* to designate a cross-shaped object (the lichen is taken from a cross) and also the little sign of the cross traced on a body part:

(33) Nim bisceopwyrt, finul, elehtre, ælfþonan nioþowearde, and gehalgodes Cristes mæles ragu and stor, do ælcre handfulle . . . And writ him Cristes mæl on ælcum lime . . . Awæsc siþþan, do to drence, and bisceopwyrt and Cristes mæles ragu, awyl þriwa on meolcum.[101]

[Take bishop's wort, fennel, lupine, the lower part of enchanter's nightshade, and lichen from a hallowed cross/crucifix, and incense, take a handful each . . . And inscribe the sign of the cross on each limb . . . Wash it afterwards, make it a drink, together with bishop's wort and lichen from a crucifix, boil them three times in several kinds of milk.]

This distribution of occurrences as well as the wording of the attestations, above, suggests that *cristes mæl* was a very common term in Old English, but was probably more often used in everyday language than in written texts.[102]

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100 Neither does Ælfric use *mæl* as an expression for "sign; mark," a concept which he generally expresses by *tacen* (106 occurrences in the *Catholic Homilies*) or, occasionally, *beacn*, as in *fore-beacn* "portent" or *sigebeacn* "emblem of victory," s.v in Godden I.

101 Godefrid Storms, ed., *Anglo-Saxon Magic* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1948), p. 222, lines 1–2, 10 and 29–30.

102 This view is also corroborated by attestations from the early Middle

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Old English (?) cruc

Even more restricted in its meaning and textual distribution is Old English *cruc*—a loan based on Latin *crux, crucis*—which is specifically used to denote the "sign of the cross" in texts documenting popular and liturgical healing practices. *Cruc* can without doubt be established as a synonym of *cristes mæl* by an attestation in the second book of Bald's Leechbook, which singles out two of the "signs of the cross" called *cristes mæl* and refers to them as *cruc*.

(34) and he [se petraoleum] is god gif hwam seo spræc oþfylð, nime þonne & wyrce cristes mæl under his tungan & his an lytel swelge. Gif mon eac of his gewitte weorðe þonne nime he his dæl & wyrce cristes mæl on ælcre lime, butan cruc on þam heafde foran, se sceal on balzame beon & oþer on þam heafde ufan.[103]

[and it [petroleum] is good if the speech of someone fails, then he shall take it and make the sign of the cross under his tongue, and swallow a little of it. Also if a man loses his mind, then he shall take part of it and make the sign of the cross on every limb, except the sign of the cross on the forehead, that shall be in balsam, and [also] the other one on the top of his head.]

Loans coined on Latin *crux, crucis* were borrowed as the common term for "cross" in the other Germanic languages. In Old English, which commonly renders this term by *rod*, we only find seven instances of *cruc*. It has been rightly pointed out by Käsmann in his study on the Middle English religious vocabulary,[104] however, that it is

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English period: the *MED*, s.v. *mēl* (n. 2) lists the meaning "4. A written figure of the cross (entered in a document to validate a solemn declaration); on (mid) Cristes ~" (two occurrences from the Peterborough Chronicle for 1121) and is used as a place name element (5).

103 Oswald Cockayne, ed., *Leechdoms, Wortcunning and Starcraft of Early England*, Rolls Series 35, 3 vols. (London: Longman, 1864–1866), II: 88–89.

104 Hans Käsmann, *Studien zum kirchlichen Wortschatz im Mittelenglischen. Ein Beitrag zum Problem der Sprachmischung* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1961), p. 113.

remarkable that *cruc* has survived into Present Day English in *crouch* and *crouchmas*,[105] in particular since Middle English soon adopted another word modeled on Latin *crux*, the French term *crois*.[106] This indicates that the rarely attested form Old English *cruc* was much stronger than today's evidence seems to suggest.[107]

Two of the seven occurrences of *cruc*, which are analyzed in detail by Bremmer in this volume, are of an idiosyncratic and somewhat accidental character. Once *cruc* refers to the material object and is used as a synonym for *rod*,[108] the other from the translation of Bede—also unique in its meaning—is more difficult to interpret but most probably refers to the shape of the cross, in which the bishop prostrates himself, i.e., the sign of the cross made on the ground.[109]

The other five attestations are taken from texts relating chiefly

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105 Cf. *OED*, s.v. "crouch" and *MED*, s.v. *crouche*. The form *cros* appeared— probably at an earlier date—in the north and east of England from the Norse *kross* (adopted from Old Irish *cros* and ultimately Latin *crux*; see *OED*, s.v. "cross;" *MED*, s.v. *cros*). In Old English, this is only known in topological nomenclature, mainly northern place-names such as "Crosby," "Crosthwaite." The *OED* also mentions that Wace (ca. 1175) cites *Olicrosse* (apparently referring to the Holy Rood of Waltham) as the battle-cry of Harold at Hastings.

106 See *MED*, s.v. *crois*. The *OED* does not list the form in a separate entry, but generally states "English has had several types of this word, derived by different channels from L[atin] *cruc-em*" (s.v. *cross*).

107 For a fuller discussion of *cruc*, see Bremmer, "Old English 'Cross' Words" in this volume, above, pp. 208–215, and *DOE*, s.v. *cruc*. *DOE* only considers four occurrences as native, and regards the three attestations of the accusative form *crucem* in "Charm 19" (Storms's no. 17) as "Latin forms in Old English context."

108 "and stod þær an medmycel rod on ðære eorðan on ðam norðeasthyrnan . . . & se preost mæssode be cruce. Ða geseah he ofer þa rode ane hand swylce heo bletsode" (and there stood a moderate-sized cross on the ground in the north-east corner . . . And the priest was saying mass near the cross. And then he saw above the cross a hand as though it were blessing): Arthur S. Napier, ed., "An Old English Vision of Leofric, Earl of Mercia", *Transactions of the Philological Society* 1907–1910 (London, 1909), 184–86.

109 See *DOE*, s.v. *cruc* b. and Bremmer, "Old English 'Cross' Words," above, pp. 208–215.

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to popular medical practice, namely from the Charms and the Leechbook. Four of them are found in "Charm 17" preserved in the third part of the Leechbook ("Against Elf-Sickness or Elf-Disease").[110] These clearly refer to either the little sign of the cross employed as a performative act and written/traced in a certain way (cf. the verb *writan*) or—like (34) from the second book of Bald's Leechbook—to a little cross traced on body parts functioning as an exorcism:

> (35) Writ III crucem mid oleum infirmorum, and cweð: . . . Nim þonne þæt gewrit, *writ* crucem ofer þam drince, and sing þis . . . Wæt þæt gewrit on þam drence and writ crucem mid him on ælcum lime and cweð: Signum crucis Christi conserva te in vitam eternam. Amen.[111]

> [Write three signs of the cross with oil of the extreme unction and say . . . Then take the writing, trace the sign of the cross over the drink and sing over it . . . Wet the writing in the drink and write a sign of the cross with it on each limb and say: The sign of Christ's cross preserve thee in eternal life. Amen.]

These attestations of the loan *cruc* in specific performative contexts suggest that the reason why *cruc* (probably pronounced /kru:ʧ/)[112] was borrowed, probably lies in the fact that it commonly carried a very special force due to its foreign or even "learned" character as a loan. It may have been used on purpose, because it gave the charm or recipe a special power similar to other Latin or foreign formulas used in this text type.[113] This would also account for the fact that the

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110 See Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, pp. 17–232.

111 Storms, *Anglo-Saxon Magic*, p. 226, lines 80–81, 82–83, 88–91.

112 The Present Day English form *crouch*/krauʧ/ suggests a pronunciation /kru: ʧ/ in Old English. In the *OED*, the palatalization of the final *c* /ʧ/ is explained by the "probability . . . that it is a late learned adaptation of L. *cruci-*, as pronounced by Italians or other Romanic people, just like Italian *croce*" (see *OED*, s.v. "crouch").

113 See, for instance, the end of the exorcism in "Sing ðis gebed on ða blacan blegene IX <syðan>, ærest 'pater noster', Tigað tigað tigað calicet aclu cluel

word has proved to be rather strong in spite of the small number of Old English attestations. It may have carried a special force, as it was accompanied by manual and other gestures in special circumstances—usually highly emotional situations, such as cases of emergency, not necessarily documented in our extant written sources.

Quotation (35) also demonstrates that we have to take into account that the inflected forms of Latin *crux, crucis*—pronounced in its Romance way with a /tʃ/—were much more frequently heard in Anglo-Saxon times than our Old English sources document. It is a word used very frequently, not only in all kinds of Latin religious and liturgical texts but also in prayers and charms. In (35), the gesture of tracing the sign of the cross is accompanied by reciting the Latin formula "Signum crucis Christi conserva te in vitam eternam. Amen" (The sign of Christ's cross may safeguard you in the eternal life. Amen). A similar context showing how the Latin term may have entered the Old English language is seen in an Old English "Cross Charm:" (36) "And wyrc swyþe gelome Cristes rode tacen on ðinum heafde and cweð þis gelome: Ecce crucem domini, and cweþ ðis þonne: Hoc signaculo sancte crucis"[114] (And trace the sign of the cross over

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sedes adclocles acre earcre arnem nonabiuð ær ærnem niðren arcum cunað arcum arctua fligara uflen binchi cutern nicuparam raf afð egal uflen arta arta arta trauncula trauncula, querite et inuenietis, adiuro te per patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum non amplius crescas sed arescas, super aspidem et basilliscum ambulabis et conculcabis leonem et draconem, crux matheus, crux marcus, crux lucas, crux iohannes;" "Sing this prayer upon the black blains nine times; Firstly, Paternoster; "Tigað tigað tigað calicet aclu cluel sedes adclocles acre earcre arnem nonabiuð ær ærnem niðren arcum cunað arcum arctua fligara uflen binchi cutern nicuparam raf afð egal uflen arta arta arta trauncula trauncula [no meaning can be attached to most of these words; Fn. 1]. Seek and ye shall find. I adjure thee by Father, Son and Holy Ghost that thou grow no greater but that thou dry up. Upon the asp and basilisk shalt thou tread and upon the lion and the dragon shalt thou trample. Cross Matthew, cross Mark, cross Luke, cross John." *Anglo-Saxon Magic and Medicine*, ed. John Gratton and Charles Singer, Publications of the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum n.s. 3 (London: Oxford University Press, 1952), ch. 25, pp. 106–7.

114   Julius Zupitza, ed., "Kreuzzauber," *Archiv* 88 (1892): 364–365, line 26.

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and over again on your head and say this over and over again: Ecce crucem domini, and then say this: Hoc signaculo sancte crucis).

SIGNIFYING CHRIST—OLD ENGLISH TERMS FOR THE SIGN OF THE CROSS: CONCLUSIONS

For the most important emblem and ensign of Christianity—the sign of the cross, the sign of Christ—Old English employs three different terms, two of which are genitive compounds with a determinant meaning "sign." *Rodetacen* is the most general term and is used for all shades of meaning of this concept in all kinds of religious and secular texts. The syntactic group *(þære) (halgan) rode tacen* "sign of the holy cross" is mainly employed in general reference to Christ (and salvation) and, for reasons of explicitness, in the context of "blessing," i.e., in collocations with the verbs *segnian* and *bletsian* which do not make explicit—in a Christian context—that the act of blessing must encompass the sign of the cross. The lexicalized compound *þæt rodetacen* (and its variant *Cristes rodetacen*), on the other hand, explicitly designates a crucifix or the oldest variant of the sign of the cross, the little sign of the cross traced on a part of the body or on parchment or the like. *Cristes mæl* "Christ's mark > sign of the cross" (and its variant *crystelmæl* with phonological attrition) is exclusively used for these two core meanings of the compound *rodetacen*, and is further restricted to colloquial (and early) texts. While these terms are fully established in the Old English lexicon, the loan *cruc*, which was borrowed in the other Germanic languages as the central term for "cross," is mainly used in very specific medical contexts for the sign of the cross traced on parts of the body and has, at least in Old English, never lost its "foreign character."[115]