Instructions for the ordeal of cold water (from ninth-century Francia)

This is a translation of a Latin text copied in two pages of a manuscript from St-Remi of Reims. I have not been able to find the original manuscript – it may be hiding somewhere in the Bibliothèque Nationale de France[1] *– but Jean Mabillon, who saw it in the late seventeenth century and who first published the text, thought it was ninth-century. The Latin is serviceable but not without the occasional error: this was a practical text, not a polished literary work.*

Edition*: Formulae Merowingici et Karolini aevi*, ed. K. Zeumer (Hannover, 1886), *MGH Leges*, no. 17, pp. 618-9, available online here
English translation by Charles West, September 2016.

When you wish to put people to the test, you should do it like this. Take those whom you want to put into the water, and lead them to the church, and in front of everyone, let the priest sing the mass for them and make them take part in that mass. And when they come to take the communion, before they do so, let the priest question them, saying to them with an oath 'I adjure you, so-and-so, through the Father…'.

But if everyone is silent, and no one says it, let the priest go to the altar and give them communion. Afterwards let him say to those to whom he gives communion, 'May this body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ be a test for you today'.

Once the mass is finished, let the priest make holy water, and him let take that water, and go to that place where the people will be tested. And when they come to that place, let him give them that holy water to drink, saying to each one 'May this water be a test for you'. Afterwards let him conjure (*coniuret*) the water which he puts them in. After this conjuration of the water, let him remove their clothing, and make them one by one kiss the sacred gospel and cross of Christ. And afterwards let him sprinkle each of them with holy water, and throw them individually into the water. He should fast before he does all this, and those who throw them into the water should not eat beforehand either.

The conjuration of the person. I adjure you, N., through the invocation of our Lord Jesus Christ and through the ordeal (*iudicium*) of cold water. I adjure you through the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and through the inseparable Trinity, and through our Lord Jesus Christ, and through all the angels and archangels, and through the Day of shuddering Judgement, and through the four

[1] Zeumer's edition identifies the manuscript only as 'olim res. S. Germ. 95', in other words, part of the collection of the monastery of St-Germain-des-Prés which arrived in Paris in the eighteenth century, and which was integrated into the BnF's holdings in 1865. Patrick Wormald, *Papers Preparatory to the Making of English law*, thought the manuscript was Paris BnF lat. 12287, but this seems to be a mistake based on using the wrong concordance, and the text is not there. The St-Germain manuscripts in Paris have not yet been properly catalogued, so our pages are perhaps still waiting to be rediscovered. Thanks to Sébastian Barret for advice.

evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and through the principalities and powers, through the dominations and virtues, and through the thrones of the Cherubim and Seraphim, and through the three boys Sydrac, Misach and Abdenago, and through the 144 thousand who suffered for the name of Christ, and through that baptism by which the priest regenerated you – that if you know about this theft, or you saw it or assisted, or took it in your house, or you gave consent or consented, or if you have a hardened or a fattened heart, may your heart wither (*evanescat*), and the water not receive you. Nor may any witchcraft (*maleficium*) prevail against this, but let it be made manifest. Therefore we strenuously beseech You, Lord Jesus Christ: make a sign so that if this man is guilty, he will not be received by the water. Do this, Lord Jesus Christ, for honour and glory, through the invocation of Your name, so that everyone may recognise that You are our Lord, who lives and reigns with the Father and the Holy Spirit for ever and ever, Amen.

Prayer to bless the water. We beg You humbly Lord Jesus Christ to deign to make such a sign present that, if this person who is thrown into it is in any way guilty, the water will not receive him, but he may wither (*evanescat*), and in no way receive him within. Do this, Lord Jesus Christ, for honour and glory to the invocation of Your name, so that all will know that you are the True God, and there is none other beside You, who lives and reigns with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Spirit, for infinity and for ever, Amen.

Almighty God created this ordeal (*iudicium*), and it is true, and it was established through the apostolic lord [Pope] Eugenius that all bishops, abbots, counts and all Christians through the whole world should take care to observe it, since it has been tested by many and established to be good. Therefore it was established and instituted by these people, that is not permitted to anyone to put a hand on the altar, nor to swear on the relics or bodies of the saints.