



Figure 2: Rudolph Tschudi (1855-1923) was a versatile Swiss-born artist in Cincinnati
(Photo courtesy of Cincinnati Historical Society)

ANTHONY SHOMO'S INCANTATIONS

The following charms were written, or possibly dictated, in Virginia toward the end of the eighteenth century by Anthony Shomo. Mary Clawsey, a Shomo descendant and former student of mine, wrote me that "Anthony Shomo was born in Berks County, Pennsylvania, in 1756, the son of a Savoyard father (Joseph Chaumont) and a German-Swiss mother (Anna Maria Fricker), both Catholics. His mother was literate; his father was not. They immigrated on the same ship, but, since her family (father, brothers, and sister) were also on the ship, it is not clear whether Joseph and Anna were married before the voyage or were simply fellow passengers on the Atlantic crossing. Anthony served as an ensign in the Revolution. He married Elisabeth Rebecca Obhold, also Catholic, about 1786, and moved to New Market, Virginia, where they became Lutherans in 1797. He died there in 1812."

Peggy Shomo Joyner, another Shomo descendant, says that the charms are "catalogued under 'Medicine, Home Remedies, & Occult Science' [in the Henkel Papers at the Handley Library in Winchester, Virginia] as item 20—'Anthony Shomo's incantations for various ailments.'"

Apparently Shomo grew up in an area where the common speech was Pennsylvania German, a hybrid language composed of the southern German dialects brought to Pennsylvania in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. While the handwriting is good, it is very obscure in places.¹ Nevertheless, the general mosaic can be recognized despite the many lacunae. Both the spelling and grammar are far from standard

German. It is being published in its present condition in the hope that readers may solve some of the remaining problems [editor's note: anyone wishing to make a contribution may contact Dr. Jones through the *Report* at the address listed].

These charms follow an ancient German tradition going back to pagan days, beginning as *Zaubersprüche*, or magic charms, by which the sorcerer cured ailments in men and beasts. Such charms generally began with a brief narrative telling how some god or gods cured such an ailment through an incantation. The sorcerer then charmed the ailment with his own power. Among the oldest and best examples of such charms are the *Merseburger Zaubersprüche*, which were written down in the tenth century by Christian monks despite their pagan nature.²

The Church fought against the heathen charms and gradually changed most of them into Segen, or blessings, in which the power of the charm does not derive from the incanter but from God or his saints. This is the case in all of Anthony Shomo's charms. His first charm retains the narrative introduction as in the pagan *Zaubersprüche*, but the actual cure is effected by the saint who is invoked, not by the incanter. Thus this charm belongs to the category of Saint's Legend.³ The fact that divine help is being invoked is indicated by the "X. X. X.," representing the Trinity. It should be noted that both of Shomo's parents were Roman Catholic, for Luther all but eliminated the non-scriptural saints, who play a lesser role in Protestant charms.

Schomo's Incantations

The older Zauberspruch was, however, not entirely forgotten in America. A small fragment of one can be found in the Paul Henkel Family Papers, #17, of the Handley Library Archives in Winchester, Virginia, in which Shomo's *Segen* are also preserved. In this fragment the ailment (Schwind) is told to go out of the marrow into the bone, out of the bone into the flesh, and out of the flesh. The fragment ends here, but proto-types from the tenth century make it clear that the ailment should go out of the flesh into the skin and out of the skin into an arrow, which the incanter then shoots into the forest.⁴ Since this is but a fragment, it is possible that the complete

charm attributed the power to the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.

Today our interest in charms is antiquarian, but in Shomo's day they were taken seriously for medicinal purposes. When John George Hohman published his volume of charms in 1820,⁵ he did so to help humanity, as well as to earn some money. Its popularity is suggested by two English translations in 1846 and 1863.⁶

In America such charms are called "usings," an infelicitous translation of the German word *Brauch*, meaning custom or usage. They are also called "receipts" and are often recorded along with gastronomic recipes.

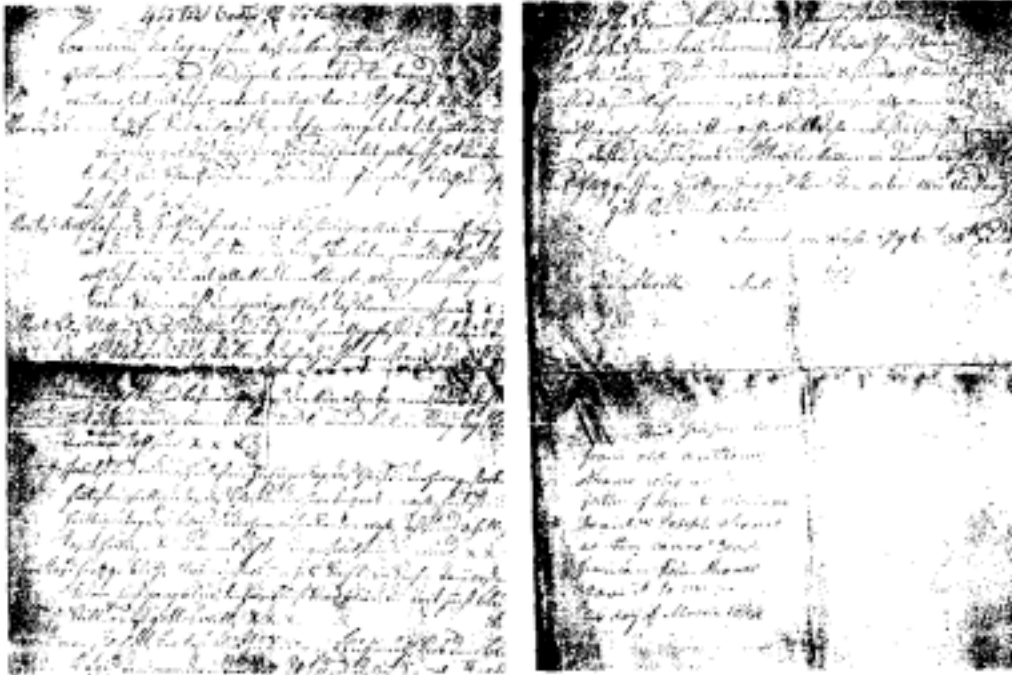


Figure 1: A sample page from the manuscript

Following here is the text as far as it can be deciphered:

1 VORDEN BRAND ZU DÄTEN
 2 Lorencius der lag auf dem Rost, da kam gott mit
 3 seinem Trost, da kam
 4 Gott mit seiner Hand, Und segnete Lorencius
 5 ten Brand, daB er sich nit
 6 weiter erhieb,⁷ nit difer erkrieb,⁸ nit weiter um
 7 sich trass, X.X.X.⁹
 8 Vor dass abnemen? Ich stel dich auf ten Dühren
 9 angel, der lib gott weis wass
 10 a dier mangel, dass du ich dier zur bus, der lib
 11 gott bestehet dir den fiber.
 12 te fuss, den Schwitz, und den Schweis, dein
 13 Zung frist bluth, dein Zung
 14 frist Fleisch. X.X.X.
 15 Vor tas Rothlahen } Rothlahe wu wil du hin ich
 16 will in den menschen gehn, wass
 17 wilt du in dem mensche tun, sein Fleisch
 18 verlaben sein Bluth verschlabe,
 19 rothlahe dass du nit, alle klecklein klingle,
 20 alle englein singen, alle
 21 Toden stehen aus dem grab. rothlafe lass von
 22 dem menschen ab, X.X.X.
 23 Vor te Schosblother } schos blother duk dich,
 24 der schmutzigste dekel druk dich
 25 schos blater duk dich, du komst daher, zu
 26 schleigen so muss du aus den
 27 neren weichen X.X.X.
 28 danen¹⁰ ich frisches brunenwasser derKune? du
 29 nim, damit deht ich die
 30 ? desser und die brein, die brei und Tie mund
 31 feil?? in drei tag soll sie
 32 terr und toth sein X.X.X.
 33 Vor geschwulst und wund, heit ist ein heilliger
 34 tag, das Christus der herr gestorben wahr
 35 heit ist ein heilliger tag, das Christus der herr
 36 begraben wahr, heit ist ein
 37 heilliger tag, das Christus der herr
 38 auferstanden wahr. das sein 3 heillige
 39 tag, 3 heillige stund dar mit deht ich die
 40 geschwulst und die wund, X.X.X.
 41 Vor tass hertzgeblieth, Unter unsers Herr gott
 42 Stuhl, da stehen drey rossen roth

43 tie ein heist gang blud, tie zweit heist stand
 44 Blud, tie dritt heist Bluth steh
 45 still, es ist gottes will, X.X.X.
 46 Wan man sich fast? vor dass blut zu stillen,
 bluth
 47 muth, stob dein bluth
 48 Vergiss dein man, der in dem roth sitzt und
 49 dass und recht ordeil spricht,
 50 und das recht wohl weiss, X.X.X.
 51 Vor das bos ding; da hebt man einen sant stein
 52 auf, gegen ter sonnen aufgan
 53 Sandstein wie ich dich fass, so must du
 54 verlassen dein geschwulst und dein ka.?
 55 da streigt mans mit dem sandstein 3 mahl
 56 und legt den stein witter auf
 57 seinen blatz wie er gelegen hat.
 58 Hat dich beschrauen knecht oder magt, streich
 59 ichs mid meiner hand a weg,¹¹
 60 Hat dich beschraun frau oder man, so komt
 61 tas witter selber an.
 62 Vor die wurm Es seind der werma nein, 3 seind
 63 roth, und 3 seind bloh
 64 und 3 seind kroh, in einer halbe stund seind
 65 sie alle nein dot,...
 66 Vor muther weh Ach mutter guth ich bitte dihr
 in
 67 Jesus Christus name, in
 68 Jesus Christus grab du solt witer kommen in
 69 deinen rechte blatz...
 70 Vor hertzgesper, hertz gesper geh von den ribe
 71 wie unser herr gott von den Kribbe
 72 Amen im Jahre 1796. 30th Day of
 73 Abrill Anth Sh
 74
 75 This paper came
 76 from old Anthony
 77 Shomo who is the
 78 father of John & William
 79 Daniel & Joseph Shomo
 80 as they cannot read
 81 German John Shomo
 82 gave it to me on
 83 26 day of March 1844

Schomo's Incantations

"Corrected" Copy:

- 1 UM¹² DEN BRAND ZU TOTEN¹³
- 2 Laurentius der lag auf dem Rost, da kam Gott
mit
- 3 seinem Trost, da kam
- 4Gott mit seiner Hand, und segnete Laurentius
den
- 5 Brand, dass er sich nicht
- 6 weiter erheben moge, nicht tiefer ausgraben
- 7 moge, nicht weiter um sich frass, X.X.X.
- 8 Vor das Abnehmen Ich stelle dich auf die
- 9 Turenangel, der liebe Gott weiss was
- 10 dir mangelt, das tu ich dir zur Buss, der liebe
- 11 Gott besteht dir das Fiber
- 12 den Fuss (Blut?), den Schwitz, und den
- 13 Schweiss. Deine Zunge frisst Blut, deine
- 14 Zunge
- 15 frisst Fleisch. X.X.X.
- 16 Vor das Rotlauf) Rotlauf wo willst du hin? Ich
- 17 will in den Menschen gehen. Was
- 18 willst du in dem Menschen tun? Sein Fleisch
- 19 verlaben, sein Blut verschlaben.¹⁴
- 20 Rotlauf, tue das nicht, alle Klocklein
- 21 klingeln, alle Englein singen, alle
- 22 Toten stehen aus dem Grab. Rotlauf lass von
- 23 dem Menschen ab. X.X.X.
- 24 Vor Schossblotter Schossblatter, duck? dich der
- 25 Schmutzigste Deckel druck? Dich
- 26 Schossblater dücke? dich, du komst daher,
- 27 zu schleichen so muss du aus den
- 28 Nieren weichen. X.X.X.
- 29 Danen ich frisches brunnenwasser derKune (?)
- 30 damit tote ich die
- 31 desser? und die Breien, die ... und fiel, in
- 32 drey tag soll sie
- 33 durr und tot sein. X.X.X.
- 34 Vor Geschwulst und Wunden. Heute ist
- 35 ein heiliger Tag, dass Christus der Herr
- 36 gestorben war.
- 37 Heute ist ein heiliger Tag, dass Christus der
- 38 Herr begraben war. Heute ist ein
- 39 heiliger Tag, dass Christus der Herr
- 40 auferstanden war, dass sind 3 heilige
- 41 Tage, drei heilige Stunden, damit tote ich die
- 42 Geschwulst und die Wunden. X.X.X.
- 43 Gegen das Herzbluten. Unter unsres Herrn
- 44 Gottes Stuhl, da stehen drei Rosen rot.
- 45 Die eine heisst geh Blut, die zweite heisst
- 46 stehe Blut, die dritte heisst Blut steh
- 47 still, es ist Gottes Wille. X.X.X.
- 48 Wann man sich fast, vor das Blut zu stillen, Blut
- 49 Mut, stob dein Blut.
- 50 Vergiss dein Mann, der in dem Rat sitzt und
- 51 das richtige Urteil spricht,
- 52 und das Recht wohl weiss. X.X.X.
- 53 Vor das bose Ding. Da hebt man einen
Sandstein
- 54 auf gegen der Sonnenaufgang.
- 55 Sandstein, wie ich dich fasse, so musst du
- 56 verlassen dein Geschwulst und dein ka???
- 57 Da streicht man es mit dem Sandstein
- 58 dreimal und legt den Stein wieder auf
- 59 seinen Platz wie er gelegen hat.
- 60 Hat dich beschrauen Knecht oder Magd, streich
- 61 ich es mit meiner Hand weg.
- 62 Hat dich beschrauen Frau oder Mann, so
- 63 kommt das zuruck selber an.
- 64 Vor die Wurme. Es sind der Wurme neun, drei
- 65 sind rot, und drei sind blau
- 66 und drei sind grau, in einer halben Stunde
- 67 sind sie alle neun tot.
- 68 Vor Mutterweh. Ach Mutter gut, ich bitte dir in
- 69 Jesus Christus Namen, in
- 70 Jesus Christus grab sollst du zuruck kommen
- 71 in deinen rechten Platz ...
- 72 Amen im Jahre 1796. 30th Day of
- 73 Abrill Anth Sh
- 74
- 75 This paper came
- 76 from old Anthony
- 77 Shomo who is the
- 78 father of John & William
- 79 Daniel & Joseph Shomo
- 80 as they cannot read
- 81 German John Shomo
- 82 gave it to me on
- 83 26 day of March 1844

Translation:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 INORDERTO RELIEVE A BURN
 2 St. Lawrence lay on the gridiron, then came
 God with
 3 His comfort, then came
 4 God with His hand and blessed for St. Lawrence
 5 the burn so that it
 6 would not spread deeper,
 7 not devour further around itself. X.X.X. (Father,
 Son, and Holy Ghost)¹⁵
 8 Against the ??? I place you on the
 9 door hinge, our dear God knows what
 10 you are lacking, I do that for your benefit, our
 dear
 11 God ?? you the fever (?)
 12 the foot, the blood, the sweat. Your
 13 tongue eats blood, your tongue
 14 eats flesh. X.X.X.
 15 Against erysipelas. Erysipelas, where do you
 wish to go? I
 16 wish to go into a person. What
 17 will you do in the person? Verlaben (?) his
 flesh
 18 verschlaben, make his blood sluggish.
 19 Erysipelas, don't do that. All the little bells
 ring,
 20 all angels sing, all
 21 the dead rise out of their graves. Erysipelas,
 leave
 22 the people alone. X.X.X.
 23 Against smallpox. Smallpox ??? yourself.
 24 May the filthiest cover press? You
 25 Smallpox ??? yourself. You come here
 26 to creep around, therefore you must
 27 withdraw from the kidneys. X.X.X.
 28 Whence I ??? fresh well water, ???
 29 With that I kill the ???
 30 and the gruels? In
 31 three days they should
 32 be dry and dead. X.X.X.
 33 Against swellings and wounds. Today is a holy
 34 day on which Christ our Lord died.
 35 Today is a holy day on which Christ
 36 our Lord was buried. Today is a
 37 holy day on which Christ</p> | <p>38 our Lord was resurrected. Those are three holy
 39 days, three holy hours. With that I kill the
 40 swelling and the wound. X.X.X.
 41 Against Heart attack (heart bleeding?). Under our
 Lord
 42 God's throne, there stand three red roses.
 43 The one is called "Go blood!" The second is
 called
 44 "Stand blood," the third is called Blood,
 stand
 45 still," it is God's will. X.X.X.
 46 When one determines? to stop the blood. Blood
 47 muth (?), stop your blood.
 48 Forget your man, who sits in the council and
 49 speaks the right judgment,
 50 and well knows the law. X.X.X.
 51 Against the evil thing. One picks a sandstone
 52 up at sunrise.
 53 Sandstone, as I grasp you, you must
 54 leave your swelling and your ???
 55 Then one strokes it with the sandstone three
 times
 56 and lays the stone back
 57 to its place where it has lain.
 58 If a servant or maid has robbed you, I will stroke
 59 it away with my hand.
 60 If a woman or a man has robbed you,
 61 then it will come back by itself.¹⁶
 62 Against worms. There are nine worms. Three
 63 are red, and three are blue,
 64 and three are gray, in half an hour
 65 they are all nine dead.
 66 Against birth pains. Oh good Mother, I beg you
 67 in Jesus Christ's name, in
 68 Jesus Christ's grave. You should come back
 69 into thy rightful place.
 70 Against heart stoppage. Heart stoppage, go
 from the woman
 71 as our Lord God went from the crib.
 72 Amen in the year 1796, the 30th day of
 73 April. Anth Sh
 74</p> |
|---|--|

NOTES

- ¹I wish to **thank Herta** Krotkoff, Frederick Weiser, **and** Lambertus Okken for helping me with some of the more difficult words.
- ²*Althochdeutsches Lesebuch*, ed. Wilhelm Braune. 15th ed. (Tubingen 1969), XXXI, 1. See *Zeitschrift für Deutsche Philologie* 73 (1954) 353 ff; Gerhard Eis, *Altdeutsche Zaubersprüche* (Berlin 1964); Susan D. Fuller, "Pagan Charms in Tenth-Century Saxony? The Function of the Merseburg Charms" in *Monatshefte* 72 (1980), 162-170.
- ³See Don Yoder, "The Saint's Legend in the Pennsylvania German Folk-Culture" in *American Folk Legend, A Symposium*, ed. Wayland D. Hand (Berkeley: U. of CA Press, 1971), 157-185.
- ⁴See "Pro Nessia" and "Contra vermes" in Braune **XXXI, 4, 4a** (See note 2 above).
- ⁵*Der Lang Verborgene Freund oder Getreuer und Christlicher Unterricht für Jedermann, enthaltend Wunderbare und probmässige Mittel und Künste, sowohl für Menschen, als das Vieh* (Reading, PA: 1820).
- ⁶*The Long Lost Friend* (Harrisonburg: 1846); *The Long Hidden Friend* (Carlisle: 1863)
- ⁷MHG "erhüebe," from "erheben"
- ⁸MHG "ergrüebe," from "ergraben"
- ⁹Symbol for "Father, Son, and Holy Ghost."
- ¹⁰At this point in the left margin there is an illegible note.
- "Note the influence of English "away"
- ¹²The "Vor" in the text was probably induced by its appearance in the following charms.
- ¹³Compare the word "däten" with English "deaden" or to "kill" a pain.
- ¹⁴"Verlaben" and "verschlaben" cannot be identified. The latter is probably related to MHG "slêwe" meaning "sluggish."
- ¹⁵A similar charm is found in Yoder, p. 162 (See note 3).
- ¹⁶Hohman, pp. 161-162, also gives charms against male and female servants (Yoder, p. 162. See note 3).

