



## Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages (Magic in History)

*Don C. Skemer*

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In the Middle Ages, textual amulets—short texts written on parchment or paper and worn on the body—were thought to protect the bearer against enemies, to heal afflictions caused by demonic invasions, and to bring the wearer good fortune. In *Binding Words*, Don C. Skemer provides the first book-length study of this once-common means of harnessing the magical power of words.

Textual amulets were a unique source of empowerment, promising the believer safe passage through a precarious world by means of an ever-changing mix of scriptural quotations, divine names, common prayers, and liturgical formulas. Although theologians and canon lawyers frequently derided textual amulets as ignorant superstition, many literate clergy played a central role in producing and disseminating them. The texts were, in turn, embraced by a broad cross-section of Western Europe. Saints and parish priests, physicians and village healers, landowners and peasants alike believed in their efficacy.

Skemer offers careful analysis of several dozen surviving textual amulets along with other contemporary medieval source materials. In the process, *Binding Words* enriches our understanding of popular religion and magic in everyday medieval life.



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