The ecclesiastical fight against storm-makers in the Latin west

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This paper studies the strategies used by the Church to fight against the storm-makers. These figures were said to cause the storms that ruined crops, and during Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages in the Visigothic and Frankish kingdoms were subject to punishment and constraints. The analysis begins with a review of the methods employed by ordinary people to nullify the actions of tempestarii. *Next, the canonical legislation enacted to punish these practitioners of magic is examined, followed by an analysis of how the Church was helped in this struggle by the civil authorities. Finally, the study explores how the Church countered belief in the* tempestarii *both through preaching and teaching, and through the appropriation and reinterpretation of these beliefs within its own doctrinal framework.*

This article examines the strategies employed by the Church to combat storm-makers in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, particularly – though not exclusively – between the sixth and ninth centuries in the Visigothic and Frankish kingdoms. The analysis begins with a review of the popular methods used by ordinary people to neutralize the actions of the *tempestarii*, including *defensores*, horns, bells, and amulets. It then turns to the canonical legislation enacted to punish these

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practitioners of magic.[1] Attention is then given to the ways in which ecclesiastical authorities enlisted civil power in this struggle, with a comparative consideration of conciliar regulations and corresponding civil legislation. Finally, we explore how the Church sought to counter belief in the *tempestarii* both through preaching and teaching, and through the appropriation and reinterpretation of these beliefs within its own doctrinal framework: the spirits believed to cause storms were redefined as Satan and his demons, while the deities who protected the fields were recast as angels and Christian saints. In this process, clerics themselves ultimately came to assume a role analogous to that of magicians, invoking rain or warding off storms.

In order to understand this topic in all its complexity, we need to keep in mind the transhistorical vulnerability of farmers to environmental conditions. In a pre-industrial society, however, inclement and extreme weather events could cause not just loss of livelihood, but also loss of life. The peasant lived looking at the sky: drought or floods could ruin the harvest and generate a crisis that led to hunger and disease. Something as episodic and fleeting as a hail storm could destroy in a few minutes the effort of many months of hard work. This concern about the effects of weather on agriculture led some individuals to attempt to predict meteorological phenomena, based primarily on empirical observation, philosophical theories, and cultural traditions.[2] However, there were limits to successful prediction, particularly when weather events occurred unexpectedly, revealing their most violent and destructive aspects. In fact, according to historical chronicles, the ninth century was especially prolific in episodes of thunderstorms and hailstorms.[3]

The popular imaginary created a figure on which to unleash anger and frustration when a crop was lost due to a storm: a magician named a *tempestarius* or *inmissor tempestatum*. This is the person Agobard, bishop of Lyon (814–40), spoke of in his *De grandine et tonitruis* (written around 816), and whom we can document in many

[1] In this article, the word 'magic' is used in the broadest sense of the term, although we remain aware of the degree of complexity involved in its use: in many cases, those accused of being magicians were simply people who practised a particular form of religiosity that differed from the 'official' one; it was mainly fear of the Other and the definition of individual identity that served to create the stereotypes of magicians and witches. Here, therefore, two categories of weather-related magicians will be discussed, which are different in principle but closely related.

[2] L. Taub, *Ancient Meteorology* (London and New York, 2003), pp. 15–124. On medieval meteorology, see A. Lawrence-Mathers, *Medieval Meteorology. Forecasting the Weather from Aristotle to the Almanac* (Cambridge, 2020).

[3] T. Wozniak, *Naturereignisse im frühen Mittelalter* (Berlin and Boston, 2020), pp. 363–71.

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other sources.[4] In fact, Agobard is the most prominent author on this subject, to the extent that most studies addressing magic and meteorological phenomena during the early Middle Ages have relied on him as their exclusive, or at least principal, source of research.[5] Nevertheless, it must be borne in mind that, despite his significance, Agobard was only one among several authors who engaged with the problem of storm-makers, and thus belonged to a much broader tradition framed within Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages. Consequently, by frequently studying him in isolation, scholars have often lost sight of the wider context of the issue. The present article seeks to situate Agobard within a broader tradition and social praxis. In this way, adopting a wider perspective on the topic of storm-makers in Hispania and Gaul between the sixth and ninth centuries allows us to analyse all the means employed, whether by the common people or by the ruling classes, to combat *tempestarii* (or, at the very least, to combat the belief in their existence).

The idea that some individuals could alter the weather by generating storms is deeply rooted in human thought. According to Clarence J. Glacken, human beings have always asked themselves three basic questions that have allowed them to understand their relationship with the world they inhabit: 1) Is this earth the creation of a demiurge? 2) To what extent has the environment influenced human culture? And 3), to what extent can humans modify the environment?[6] It is precisely

[4] The *tempestarius* (Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis* 1, ed. L. Van Acker, Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis [CCCM] 52 (Turnhout, 1981), p. 3) or *inmissor tempestatum* (*Liber Iudiciorum* VI.2.4, ed. K. Zeumer, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica* [*MGH*] *Leges nationum Germanicarum* [*Leg. nat. germ.*] 1 (Hanover and Leipzig, 1902), p. 259). This magician was also known as an *obligator*, because he forced demons to act on his behalf (*Admonitio generalis*, 65, ed. A. Boretius, *MGH Capitularia regum Francorum* [*Capit.*] 1 (Hanover, 1883), pp. 58–9); an *emissor tempestatum*, *maleficus* or *maledicus* (*Paenitentiale Burgundense*, 20, ed. R. Kottje, Corpus Christianorum Series Latina [CCSL] 156 (Turnhout, 1994), p. 64); or a *propulsor tempestatum* (Ratherius Veronensis, *Praeloquia* I.10, ed. P.L. D. Reid, CCCM 46A (Turnhout, 1984), p. 14). On this subject, see: C. Lecouteux, 'Les maîtres du temps: tempestaires, obligateurs, défenseurs et autres', in C. Thomasset and J. Ducos (eds), *Le temps qu'il fait au Moyen Âge. Phénomènes atmosphériques dans la littérature, la pensé scientifique et religieuse* (Paris, 1998), pp. 151–69. Regarding the relationship between witchcraft, corrupt air, and climatic catastrophes, see C. Cuadrada, 'Aire corrupto, mujeres diabólicas y *tempestariae*', *Acta historica et archaeologica mediaevalia* 32 (2014–15), pp. 619–58.

[5] The list of works devoted specifically to the study of Agobard's *De grandine et tonitruis*, or more generally to storm-makers, is too extensive to be recorded in this note. For a comprehensive list, see the bibliography compiled in: J.A. Jiménez, *Agobardo de Lyon. Sobre el granizo y los truenos. Introducción, traducción y comentarios* (Madrid, 2018), pp. 156–61; E. Ludueño *et al.*, *Agobardo de Lyon. Sobre el granizo y los truenos* (Buenos Aires, 2021), pp. 95–8. See also the recent and insightful study by J.-P. Devroey, *De la grêle et du tonnerre. Histoire médiévale des imaginaires paysans* (Paris, 2024), in which the author employs micro-historical methods to undertake a historical, anthropological, and environmental analysis that helps to reconstruct aspects of 'peasant imaginaries' related to meteorological phenomena that remain under-represented in the sources.

[6] C.J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore. Nature and Culture in Western Thought from Ancient Times to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1973), pp. VII–VIII.

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this third question that may have led to the belief that some people could go so far as to alter the weather. As an important context for this belief, we need to bear in mind that, according to preserved sources, during Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages there were two levels of belief in the field of meteorological phenomena. The first was that God was the only one with sufficient power to control weather and cause extreme episodes if He so desired, either by Himself or through evil angels. As a corollary, to believe otherwise, i.e. that adverse weather conditions could be caused by the devil or even by some humans, was a false and reprehensible belief. The counter position was that meteorological phenomena could indeed also be caused by the devil and by some humans (such as the *tempestarii*). This belief, which could be considered 'popular', was in fact present among all strata of society, including the ecclesiastical hierarchies. There were therefore representatives of both positions within the Church. We will have opportunity below to see examples of both of these religious sensibilities held by different Churchmen.

People against *tempestarii*

The belief in the existence of *tempestarii* was a widespread phenomenon that affected all social strata.[7] However, while ruling classes directed their measures (whether ecclesiastical or civil laws) to persecute such individuals, the general population preferred to focus on eliminating their effects – that is, storms and hail (although these meteorological phenomena were not always held to be caused by *tempestarii*). Peasants did this by every means at their disposal: by using other magicians to counteract the power of the *tempestarii*, by using the noise of bells and horns to drive away storm clouds, and by making amulets and hiding them in the fields.[8]

Agobard of Lyon commented that there was a type of magician (the *defensores*) who claimed not to know how to generate storms, but instead knew how to ward them off.[9] This was a prudent position,

[7] Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis*, 1, CCCM 52, p. 3: 'in his regionibus pene omnes homines, nobiles et ignobiles, urbani et rustici, senes et iuuenes, putant grandines et tonitrua hominum libitu posse fieri' ('in these regions, almost all people – noble and common, urban and rural, old and young – believe that hailstorms and thunder can be produced at the will of humans'). Though of course, not everyone, across all social classes, believed in their existence.

[8] L. Grig, *Popular Culture and the End of Antiquity in Southern Gaul, c. 400–550* (Cambridge, 2024), pp. 162–72, studies the various popular methods used to combat hail in Gaul during Late Antiquity, showing how a diverse rural society utilized a wide variety of strategies to neutralize climatic threats. Popular remedies used for this purpose (which included both objects and performative elements) were part of 'lived religion', which, in turn, is integrated into popular culture.

[9] Agobard named them this way, perhaps ironically, perhaps (and this is more likely) because peasants called them this (Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis*, 15, CCCM 52, p. 14).

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since claiming the capacity to provoke a storm meant risking the punishments of both civil and ecclesiastical laws. The peasants gave such *defensores* a part of their harvest (very possibly a tenth) in exchange for their services, and called this payment *canonicus*.[10]

The identity of these individuals is a mystery, and there have been various theories.[11] Some researchers believe that we are dealing with two different categories of magician, some who provoke storms (*tempestarii*) and others who avoid them (*defensores*), as Agobard suggested.[12] On the other hand, others consider the roles of the *tempestarii* and *defensores* were combined in the same individual – that is, a magician capable of both generating and keeping storms away, to whom people paid a part of their harvest to ensure he would not send damaging weather. In effect, this alternative is figured as a kind of concealed blackmail or protection racket.[13] For his part, Rob Meens expounds an interesting theory, although unfortunately it is hard to sustain. He argues that actually these *defensores* were clergymen who received a share of their parishioners' harvest in exchange for protecting their fields from weather disasters, something that would explain the use of the term 'canonical' to refer to such payment, a word full of ecclesiastical connotations.[14] However, if this was indeed the case, it is likely that Agobard would have been more explicit in his criticism.

On many occasions, people did not resort to any professional to keep the storms at bay, but acted directly. The key to success seemed to lie in noise, which served to ward off the evil spirits or demons who brought the storm clouds; the more noise they made, the greater the chance of saving the fields. For example, we know that horns were used to achieve this aim, a type of resource also employed to combat moon eclipses. A council held in Eauze in 551 condemned the custom of pronouncing magic formulas on the horns in order to enchant them, possibly for these purposes.[15] The *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*

[10] Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis*, 15, CCCM 52, p. 14. See Jiménez, *Agobardo*, pp. 135–43.

[11] Grig, *Popular Culture*, pp. 169–70.

[12] H. Platelle, 'Agobard, évêque de Lyon (†840). Les soucupes volantes, les convulsionnaires', in H. Platelle (ed.), *Présence de l'au-delà. Une vision medieval du monde* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2004), pp. 105–12, at p. 107; P. Caruso, *I trattati di Agobardo di Lione contro le superstizioni. Introduzione, testo latino, traduzione italiana e note* (Naples, 2018), p. 52 (although this author calls both categories of magicians *tempestarii*, she clearly differentiates them).

[13] P.E. Dutton, 'Thunder and Hail over the Carolingian Countryside', in D. Sweeney (ed.), *Agriculture in the Middle Ages. Technology, Practice, and Representation* (Philadelphia, 1995), pp. 111–37, at p. 118; O. Giordano, *Religiosidad popular en la alta Edad Media*, trans. P. García Moutón and V. García Yebra, 2nd edn (Madrid, 1995), p. 101; Lecouteux, 'Les maîtres', p. 153; M.A. Marcos, 'Ecos de arcaicas cosmogonías acuáticas en el ocaso del mundo medieval', *Ilu* 13 (2008), pp. 91–118, at p. 116.

[14] R. Meens, 'Thunder over Lyon: Agobard, the *Tempestarii* and Christianity', in C. Steel, J. Marenbon and W. Verbeke (eds), *Paganism in the Middle Ages. Threat and Fascination* (Leuven, 2012), pp. 157–66, at pp. 162–6.

[15] *Concilium Aspasii episcopi*, 3, ed. C. de Clercq, CCSL 148A (Turnhout, 1963), p. 163.

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(*c.*740) mentions horns and shells used to deflect storms.[16] Some anonymous Frankish sermons, also from the eighth century, mention horns as a popular remedy to avoid storms; for example, in the *Homilia de sacrilegiis* (which adds that they were enchanted horns)[17] and the *Instructio rusticorum* (which mentions both horns and conch shells).[18] For its part, the *Paenitentiale Vindobonense a* (end of the ninth century) threatened with excommunication anyone who made noise either with a shell or by hitting a board with the intention of keeping thunder away.[19]

Bells were also used. Their strong chimes were supposed to make the storms flee,[20] but to make them more effective, they were blessed by priests: in an edict published on 23 March 789, Charlemagne forbade the bells to be baptized to stop the hail.[21] This custom of using bells to ward off storms was perpetuated over the centuries, as can be seen from the many epigraphs of the *tempestates fugo* type inscribed inside them.[22]

The power of the word could also be an effective remedy, through spells that reproduced ancient formulas of pagan origin but incorporated Christian elements. Eventually, these incantations were transformed into prayers and blessings, which were sometimes even introduced into the liturgy to pray to God to bring rain or deflect storms. An example of such a prayer is the *Oratio ad depellendam tempestatem* from a tenth-century codex from the monastery of Schäftlarn (Bavaria). The author invokes the angels of Satan, in the name of the Lord, so that they do not damage his parish, 'neither by evil water, nor by ice, nor by storm, nor by the murmuring of the magicians'.[23] The formulas of this

[16] *Indiculus superstitionum et paganiarum*, 22, ed. A. Boretius, *MGH Capit*. 1, p. 223. See Dutton, 'Thunder', p. 115.

[17] *Homilia de sacrilegiis*, 16, ed. C.P. Caspari, *Eine Augustin Fälschlich Beilegte Homilia De Sacrilegiis* (Christiania, 1886), p. 10. See M. Blöcker, 'Wetterzauber: Zu einem Glaubenskomplex des frühen Mittelalters', *Francia* 9 (1981), pp. 117–31, at pp. 126–7.

[18] *Sermo seu Instructio rusticorum*, ed. A. Hamman, *Patrologiae Latinae Supplementum* [*PLS*] 4 (Paris, 1968), col. 968.

[19] *Paenitentiale Vindobonense a*, 99, ed. F.W.H. Wasserschleben, *Die Bussordnungen der abendländischen Kirche: nebst einer rechtsgeschichtlichen Einleitung* (Halle, 1851), p. 422. See Blöcker, 'Wetterzauber', p. 127.

[20] Lecouteux, 'Les maîtres', pp. 160–1.

[21] *Duplex legationis edictum*, 34, ed. A. Boretius, *MGH Capit*. 1, p. 64. See Blöcker, 'Wetterzauber', p. 127.

[22] Caruso, *I trattati*, p. 55; J. Louzao, 'El sonido de las campanas: una aproximación al paisaje sonoro católico en la España contemporánea', *Huarte de San Juan. Geografía e historia* 25 (2018), pp. 149–71, at p. 163.

[23] *Oratio ad depellendam tempestatem*, 1, ed. A. Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen im Mittelalter*, 2 vols (Freiburg, 1909), vol. 2, p. 75: 'neque per aquam malignam neque per glaciem neque per tempestatem neque per murmurationem incantatorum'. See: Franz, *Die kirchlichen Benediktionen*, vol. 2, pp. 74–7; K. Gamber, *Codices liturgici latini antiquiores*, 2 vols (Freiburg, 1968), vol. 2, p. 553; F. Cardini, *Magia, brujería y superstición en el Occidente medieval*, trans. A.-P. Moya (Barcelona, 1982), pp. 236–7. More examples in Lecouteux, 'Les maîtres', pp. 155–60.

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prayer are very similar to the magic spells of earlier times, documented even in *tabellae defixionum*.[24]

These incantations could be written on various materials and placed on the land to be protected, so that from their location – which might be an elevated position or sometimes from a place of burial in the ground – they could exercise their apotropaic function over the whole farm. The talisman had to remain permanently in the field it had to preserve, and three different types of amulets existed: amulets made of metal and fixed with nails in a visible place within the property; amulets made of stone and displayed in an elevated place from where they dominated the territory; and amulets intended to remain hidden underground on the boundaries of the property, generally three equal ones that delimited the surface area intended to be defended.[25] Thus, the *Homilia de sacrilegiis* mentioned lead sheets covered with writing as a remedy to keep hail away.[26] Likewise, Charlemagne's edict of 23 March 789 referred to papers or parchments, probably also covered with magic formulas, fixed on top of poles (although these, being made of perishable materials, were only for specific occasions).[27]

As mentioned, sometimes the spells were engraved on stones buried on the edges of the fields, allowing some of these amulets to be preserved to this day. Some of the most interesting ones come from Spain. These are two slates from the post-Visigothic period, but they

[24] A *tabella defixionum* consisted of a lead sheet on which a curse was inscribed. The malediction was written in vernacular language, either Latin or Greek, and frequently combined expressions from both languages along with words of a magical nature that are today unintelligible. Alongside the text, iconographic motifs were often included, depicting demons or infernal deities, as well as magical symbols. Clearly, use of *tabellae defixionum* fell within the sphere of black magic (*goetia*), since the practitioner invariably sought to harm a third party, whether out of revenge, in the context of a legal dispute; due to sports rivalry (*defixiones* connected with the world of the circus and the amphitheatre are particularly numerous); or because of unrequited love. Once the curse had been composed, the lead sheet was rolled up and pierced with a nail (hence the term *defixio*) and buried in the grave of someone who had died prematurely; the deceased's *daemon* was invoked in the magical formula with the intention that it should enter the service of the petitioner and carry out the desired vengeance. Ultimately, the aim was to compel infernal forces to accomplish what could not be achieved by human means. The chronology of these tablets spans from the sixth century BCE to the fifth century CE, and they were used in both the Greek and Roman worlds. See: J.G. Gager (ed.), *Curse Tablets and Binding Spells from the Ancient World* (New York and Oxford, 1992); A. López Jimeno, *Textos griegos de maleficio* (Madrid, 2001); C. Sánchez Natalías, 'Escribiendo una *defixio*: los textos de maldición a través de sus soportes', *Acta classica Universitatis Scientiarum Debreceniensis* 47 (2011), pp. 79–93 https://zaguan.unizar.es/record/153180 [accessed 20 December 2025].

[25] F.J. Fernández Nieto, 'A Visigothic Charm from Asturias and the Classical Tradition of Phylacteries against Hail', in R.L. Gordon and F. Marco Simón (eds), *Magical Practice in the Latin West. Papers from the International Conference held at the University of Zaragoza (30 Sept. – 1 Oct. 2005)* (Leiden and Boston, 2010), pp. 551–99, at p. 591.

[26] *Homilia de sacrilegiis*, 16, ed. Caspari, p. 10. See: A. Péricaud, *De la grêle et du tonnerre, par Saint Agobard* (Lyon, 1841), p. 52; Blöcker, 'Wetterzauber', p. 126; Lecouteux, 'Les maîtres', p. 161.

[27] *Duplex legationis edictum*, 34, ed. Boretius, *MGH Capit.* 1, p. 64. See Blöcker, 'Wetterzauber', p. 127.

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reflect a tradition that extends back in time a few centuries and are a good example of how *defensores* in charge of fighting the storms would work. The first slate was discovered in Carrio (Asturias) in 1926, and has been dated to the end of the ninth or beginning of the tenth century.[28] It consists of two pieces joined together and fixed with a nail in order to hide the magic formula inside; later the slate was buried, as was done with the *tabellae defixionum*.[29] The magic text invoked a series of angels (mistaken for patriarchs by the anonymous author), who were said to have held the clouds in their hands.[30] They were asked to protect the village where the neighbours lived, along with all their possessions, as well as the hill and the cemetery, so that the bad weather would go beyond these lands. Satan was also invoked to prevent him from causing damage, and here the author of the formula specified what had to be protected: the reapers, the trees, the vineyards, and the fruit trees. He also asked the hail to turn into rain and to fall beyond the cemetery hill (which marked the limit of the settlement). It is stated at the beginning of the text that the author received the *nonia* necessary for the spell to work. Probably, this was his payment, maybe a ninth of the harvest, a sum that is reminiscent of the *canonicus* that Agobard of Lyon spoke of. In order to reinforce the magic power of the formula, some passages from the passions of Christopher and Bartholomew were also included in it.

The second slate, dated to the tenth century, comes from Fuente Encalada (Zamora).[31] It is very fragmented, making the text of the inscription incomplete and difficult to read.[32] In spite of this, indications have allowed this piece to be interpreted as a phylactery against bad weather. Again, the power of the spell is reinforced by the quotation of a passage from Bartholomew's *passio*. As with the Carrio slate, this may be another example of the work of a *defensor* who produced it as a

[28] The bibliography on this piece is abundant; among the main titles, we can highlight: M. Gómez-Moreno, *Documentación goda en pizarra* (Madrid, 1966), pp. 95–101; M.C. Díaz y Díaz, *Asturias en el siglo VIII. La cultura literaria* (Oviedo, 2001), pp. 139–48; I. Velázquez, *Las pizarras visigodas (Entre el latín y su disgregación. La lengua hablada en Hispania, siglos VI–VIII)* (Madrid and Burgos, 2004), pp. 368–84; Fernández Nieto, 'A Visigothic Charm'; J. A. Jiménez, 'Los *inmissores tempestatum* en la Hispania tardoantigua', *Hispania* 77.257 (2017), pp. 617–41, at pp. 625–33.

[29] Fernández Nieto was the first to point out the nature of this amulet against hail, demonstrating, through a series of parallels with other similar documents of Greco-Latin origin (Fernández Nieto, 'A Visigothic Charm', pp. 561–9, for these *loci simili*), that the Carrio slate was part of a tradition of talismans against hailstorms that started in classical times.

[30] Velázquez, *Las pizarras visigodas*, pp. 369–71.

[31] The main study on this slate is Á. Esparza and R. Martín, 'La pizarra altomedieval de Fuente Encalada (Zamora): contribución al estudio de las inscripciones profilácticas', *Zephyrus* 51 (1998), pp. 237–62. See also Fernández Nieto, 'A Visigothic Charm', pp. 589–90; and Jiménez, 'Los *inmissores*', pp. 633–4. On its date, see Esparza and Martín, 'La pizarra altomedieval', pp. 247 and 249–57.

[32] Esparza and Martín, 'La pizarra altomedieval', p. 244.

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phylactery to ward off storms. The individual in question possessed a basic literacy level, and although he reproduced a passage from Bartholomew's *passio*, it is possible that he was simply repeating a spell against storms perpetuated over time and thought to be effective; it is possible, therefore, that he was unaware of the origin of the words he was copying (which might also be true of the Carrio slate).[33]

Canon law

The Church acted against this type of practice and belief through the mechanism of ecclesiastical councils and various types of writings, both homiletical and catechetical. It must be kept in mind that the Church has been an institution that on many occasions has exercised a regime of control over the community of believers and that, consequently, has decided what is or is not acceptable; to do this, Church hierarchies used a rhetoric and a particular narrative (expressed through conciliar canons and other works) that helped them preserve their dominance.[34]

Frankish and Visigothic bishops were interested in maintaining their authority over the entire diocesan territory, given that what delimited the diocese was the social body and not administrative borders, which were often not well defined. And this control could only be total and clearly recognized when the entire territory was completely Christianized.[35] To

[33] Jiménez, 'Los *inmissores*', p. 634. Against this opinion, Esparza and Martín, 'La pizarra altomedieval', p. 258, who consider it to be the work of a Mozarabic clergyman.

[34] About the Church as an institution and control regime, see H.C. White, *Identity and Control. How Social Formations Emerge*, 2nd edn (Princeton and Oxford, 2008), pp. 234–5. On institutions and their use of rhetoric to exercise control, see: J.W. Mohr and H.C. White, 'How to Model an Institution', *Theory and Society* 37.5 (2008), pp. 485–512; E. Eidinow, 'Networks and Narratives: A Model for Ancient Greek Religion', *Kernos* 24 (2011), pp. 9–38, at pp. 17–18.

[35] On the structure of the Hispanic and Frankish bishoprics during Late Antiquity and early Middle Ages, see: I. Wood, *The Merovingian Kingdoms, 450–751* (London and New York, 1994), pp. 71–2; C. Pietri, 'Chiesa e comunità locali nell'Occidente cristiano (IV–VI d.C.): l'esempio della Gallia', in A. Giardina (ed.), *Società romana e impero tardoantico. Le merci, gli insediamenti* 3 (Rome, 1997), pp. 761–95 and 923–34; M. Lauwers, 'Paroisse, paroissiens et territoire. Remarques sur parochia dans les textes latins du Moyen Âge', *Médiévales* 49 (2005), pp. 11–32, https://doi.org/10.4000/medievales.1260 [accessed 10 September 2025]; P.C. Díaz, C. Martínez Maza and F.J. Sanz, *Hispania tardoantigua y visigoda* (Madrid, 2007), pp. 173–6, 183–90 and 527–38; P.C. Díaz, 'Sedes episcopales y organización administrativa en la cuenca del Duero (siglos IV–VII)', in S. Castellanos and I. Martín Viso (eds), *De Roma a los bárbaros. Poder central y horizontes locales en la cuenca del Duero* (León, 2008), pp. 123–43; Y. Hen, 'The Church in Sixth-Century Gaul', in A.C. Murray (ed.), *A Companion to Gregory of Tours* (Leiden and Boston, 2015), pp. 232–55, at pp. 238–44; F. Mazel, *L'évêque et le territoire. L'invention médiévale de l'espace* (Paris, 2016); P. Poveda, 'La diócesis episcopal en la Hispania visigoda: concepción, construcción y disputas por su territorio', *Hispania Sacra* 71.143 (2019), pp. 9–24; P. Ubric, 'La organización de la Iglesia hispana en los siglos IV–V', in L. Brassous and S. Panzram (eds), *El espacio provincial en la península ibérica (Antigüedad tardía – Alta Edad Media)*, Dossier des Mélanges de la Casa de Velázquez, Nouvelle série 49.2 (2019), pp. 41–75.

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achieve this objective, the bishop had to rely on the loyalty and collaboration of the diocesan clergy, especially rural priests, who would help him to transmit the ecclesiastical discourse to all corners of the diocese.[36] In this way, a social network emerged in which bishops were the central nodes of a complex network of relationships: horizontal (between peers) and vertical. In the former, they interacted with other bishops as well as with rich, landowning aristocrats (sometimes representatives of secular power). In the latter, bishops interacted with the priests, who were part of the diocesan clergy; these priests acted as nodes of this social network and served as a nexus between bishops and the parishioners, as the link that united both ends of a chain.[37]

The increasingly close and complex interaction and contact between the ecclesiastical and secular spheres, together with the Church's dominant position within society, led clergymen to become increasingly involved in legislating on matters that went beyond the realm of religious life. The conciliar canons reflect the concerns of the bishops who met periodically to legislate on a wide range of issues (doctrinal, organizational, disciplinary) affecting both the ecclesiastical ranks and society in general: the aim was to regulate the life of the community in a wide variety of areas.[38] As a regulatory institution, therefore, the Church seldom wished to tolerate activities that escaped its control.[39] The belief in the *tempestarii* inevitably led to the existence of the *defensores*, who, under the excuse of the payment of the canonical fee for protecting fields from the threat of hail, took away the donations of many grateful farmers that in theory should have been the tithe for the Church. For this reason, bishops insisted on the pagan character of the practices described above (even though most of them had long been

[36] On religion in the rural Hispanic world during Late Antiquity, see especially the various studies compiled in J.C. López-Gómez and A. Alvar Nuño (eds), *Religion in Rural Late Antique Iberia* (London and New York, 2025). See also M. Sotomayor, 'Las relaciones iglesia urbana-iglesia rural en los concilios hispano-romanos y visigodos', *Antigüedad y cristianismo* 21 (2004), pp. 525–39.

[37] Regarding the importance of the bishop in the society of his time, his relations with other members of the clergy, and with the king and other important lay figures in public administration (especially in Hispania and Gaul during Late Antiquity), see: R. Lizzi, 'I vescovi e i *potentes* della terra: definizione e limite del ruolo episcopale nelle due *partes Imperii* fra IV e V secolo d.C.', in E. Rebillard and C. Sotinel (eds), *L'évêque dans la cité du IVe au Ve siècle. Image et autorité* (Rome, 1998), pp. 81–104; C. Martin, *La géographie du pouvoir dans l'Espagne visigothique* (Villeneuve d'Ascq, 2003), pp. 113–39 and 191–203; F.C. Ruchesi, 'El obispo y sus roles públicos en la Galia merovingia; designación, funciones y su alcance en los siglos VI y VII d.C.', *Revista Signum* 13.1 (2012), pp. 70–93; G.I. Halfond, *Bishops and the Politics of Patronage in Merovingian Gaul* (Ithaca and London, 2019).

[38] J. Gaudemet and B. Basdevant, *Les canons des conciles mérovingiens (VIe–VIIe siècles)*, Sources Chrétiennes 353 (Paris, 1989), pp. 44–59; R. Barcellona, *Una società allo specchio. La Gallia tardoantica nei suoi concili* (Soveria Mannelli, 2012).

[39] This is evident not only in conciliar canons, but also in the sermons that preachers addressed to the people.

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Christianized), branding them as superstitious and demonizing them. As a result of the horizontal relations between bishops, provisions were issued in Church councils to put an end to the *inmissores tempestatum* so that people would stop believing in them: the rules emanating from the episcopal meetings imposed severe punishments on storm-makers. Later, in a clear example of vertical relations, the content of these canons reached the people through the work of presbyters.

In this section, attention will be directed to the conciliar legislation concerning *tempestarii* promulgated in the Visigothic kingdom and in the Frankish realms. However, an important problem related to the documentation on this subject concerns the imbalance in the number of sources found in Hispania and Gaul: while in Hispania the sources referring to the *tempestarii* are scarce, in Gaul there are abundant testimonies. This disparity in evidence is perhaps indicative of the lesser impact of this issue on the Iberian Peninsula, although it is impossible to establish the reason for this (perhaps because of a lower rate of crop losses due to meteorological disasters?).

Only one mention of superstitious beliefs linked to meteorological phenomena can be documented in Hispania, and it comes from the First Council of Braga (561). The bishops gathered in this synod anathematized any individual who thought that the devil could provoke thunder, lightning, storms, and drought by his own authority. In other words, only the belief that the devil could cause extreme events was condemned: weather could only be created by God.[40]

In the Frankish kingdom, we have to wait until the end of the eighth century, during Charlemagne's reign, to read a firm condemnation of the *tempestarii* in an ecclesiastical council. In the year 799/800, Arno, bishop of Salzburg, convened a provincial council in Riesbach, a synod that later continued in Freising and ended in Salzburg.[41] One of the canons arising from this episcopal meeting concerned precisely the *tempestarii*, together with other categories of magicians, such as those who performed spells or foresaw the future. The council decreed that wherever any of these were discovered they were to be locked up if they confessed to having done any wrong, but this should be done in moderation, so that, though in prison, they should not lose their lives; there they should remain until, by the inspiration of God, they solemnly swore to amend their sins. The canon also forbade the transfer of prisoners to the counts in exchange

[40] *Concilium Bracarense I (Proposita contra Priscillianam haeresem capitula)*, 8, ed. C.W. Barlow, *Martini Episcopi Bracarensis opera omnia* (New Haven, 1950), p. 108. See V.I.J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Oxford, 1991), p. 111.

[41] K.J. Hefele, *Histoire des conciles d'après les documents originaux*, trans. H. Leclercq, 16 vols (Paris, 1910), vol. 3.2, p. 1101.

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for a reward; if this happened and the archbishop knew about it, he had to inform his bishops so that they could take charge of the matter.[42] There are two aspects of the present canon worth noting: firstly, no physical punishment is imposed on the *tempestarii*; they are only deprived of their freedom until they repent and make amends. The second point is that enquiries are exclusively in the hands of the ecclesiastical authorities, and not the civil; perhaps prelates feared excessive harshness on the part of the latter.

In 829, Louis the Pious ordered a council to be held in Paris, which, among other things, also dealt with the vestiges of paganism in Frankish territory. Specifically, it mentioned the existence of magicians who, with their spells, could disturb the air and send hail, in addition to other evils. The bishops decreed that all those who were discovered performing such acts, regardless of whether they were men or women, should be severely punished, as they were not afraid to serve the devil in a manifestly reckless manner. However, the prelates did not specify the type of punishment; perhaps it was again an indefinite deprivation of liberty until they promised to make amends for their sins.[43]

Herard of Tours (bishop there between 855 and 871) also tackled this problem in his *Capitula*, a document published in 858 that constituted the rules for the internal regulation of his diocese. The prelate stipulated that the *tempestarii* and other types of magicians (sorcerers, soothsayers, dream interpreters, etc.) were to be punished with a public penance.[44] Herard's testimony is very important, for it introduces the subject of public penance, although he does not specify how long it should last or what exactly it should consist of. We do not know whether in the diocese of Tours the *tempestarii* would also be deprived of their freedom until the remission of their sins. Since the documents we are analysing are all of a local character, we cannot know whether their provisions mirrored those applied in other parts of the kingdom, or whether they were exclusive to that particular territory. In other words, it is impossible to discern whether storm-makers lost their freedom and were obliged to perform public penance in all parts of the kingdom, or whether they were deprived of freedom only in the territory of Salzburg and had to perform penance only in the diocese of Tours.

[42] *Statuta Rhispacensia, Frisingensia, Salisburgensia*, 15, ed. A. Boretius, *MGH Capit*. 1, p. 228. See: Hefele, *Histoire des conciles*, vol. 3.2, p. 1105; Dutton, 'Thunder', p. 115.

[43] *Concilium Parisiense*, 69, ed. A. Werminghoff, *MGH Concilia* 2.2 (Hanover and Leipzig, 1908), p. 669. See Dutton, 'Thunder', p. 115.

[44] Herardus Turonensis, *Capitula*, 3, ed. R. Pokorny and M. Stratmann, *MGH Capitula episcoporum* 2 (Hanover, 1995), p. 128.

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The Frankish penitentials of the eighth and ninth centuries provide more information. These manuals for confessors contained detailed lists of sins together with penalties for atonement, which generally consisted of a fast for a certain period of time. This penitential system, which was private, replaced canonical penance, which was carried out in a public manner. Penitential books established a seven-year penance for *inmissores tempestatum*, three of which were to be spent on bread and water.[45] The fact that this was a private penance contrasts with Herard of Tours's stipulation that in his diocese, penance for storm-makers should be carried out publicly. Regarding those who believed in the power of these magicians (or requested their services), at the beginning of the eleventh century Burchard of Worms recommended to the priests who heard the confessions of their faithful that they should ask them if they believed or had taken part in the perfidy of the *inmissores tempestatum*. If the answer was affirmative, the sinner had to do penance for a year on the established days.[46]

In Hispanic territories, the penalties imposed on the *tempestarii* were much more severe. In fact, both the *Paenitentiale Vigilanum* (second half of the ninth century) and the *Paenitentiale Silense* (eleventh century) established a fifteen-year penance for the *emissores tempestatum*, twice as much as that set for Frankish lands.[47]

Civil legislation

The Church also leveraged the horizontal relationships offered by its social network, on this occasion with civil authorities, to achieve its objectives.[48] The strong influence that the ecclesiastical hierarchy exerted on the governance of the Visigothic (for example, through the Councils of Toledo) and the Frankish kingdoms is well known. In this instance, bishops undoubtedly took advantage of their position of

[45] *Paenitentiale Burgundense*, 20, CCSL 156, p. 64; *Paenitentiale Bobiense*, 18, ed. R. Kottje, CCSL 156, p. 69; *Paenitentiale pseudo-Theodori* XXI.21, ed. C. van Rhijn, CCSL 156B (Turnhout, 2009), p. 62. See: Dutton, 'Thunder', p. 116; Lecouteux, 'Les maîtres', p. 153.

[46] Burchardus Wormatiensis, *Decretum* XIX.5, ed. J. Foucher, *Patrologia Latina* [*PL*] 140 (Paris, 1853), col. 961.

[47] *Paenitentiale Vigilanum*, 104, ed. F. Bezler, CCSL 156A (Turnhout, 1998), p. 12; *Paenitentiale Silense*, 88, ed. F. Bezler, CCSL 156A, p. 25.

[48] In some Councils of Toledo, bishops and judges were frequently ordered to collaborate in order to eradicate idolatry from Hispanic territories: *Concilium Toletanum III*, 16, ed. F. Rodríguez, *La Colección Canónica Hispana* 5 (Madrid, 1992), pp. 122–3; *Concilium Toletanum XII*, 11, ed. F. Rodríguez, *La Colección Canónica Hispana* 6 (Madrid, 2002), pp. 181–4; *Concilium Toletanum XVI*, 2, ed. F.A. González, *PL* 84 (Paris, 1862), cols 537–8. An exception is found in the Council of Riesbach-Freising-Salzburg (799/800), where the bishops ordered that the investigation of *tempestarii* should be exclusively in their hands, and not in those of the counts (on this, see note 42).

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power to encourage the kings to dictate laws to persecute storm-makers. Since, in theory, *inmissores tempestatum* achieved their ends through evil magic (a clearly criminal activity), it should not have been difficult for civil authority to enact these measures. Laws focused on this topic can be documented in both the Visigothic and the Frankish realms. However, one must also take into account the asymmetry in the surviving source material, which is considerably more abundant for Gaul than for Hispania.

The first of these laws comes from the latter and was promulgated by King Chindasuinth (642–53). Its aim was to punish all people who, by means of magical procedures – be it spells or incantations – harmed men, animals, fields, vineyards, and any kind of tree. The law made no distinction between the culprits, either on the basis of their social category – free or slave – or on the basis of their gender. According to the text, the condemned should receive, in their bodies and in their possessions, the same harm as that caused to other people.[49] Another law of Chindasuinth made the storm-makers more directly responsible for the harm that they did. They were said to send hail against vineyards and crops by certain incantations, and, for this reason, the king ordered that they be publicly punished with two hundred lashes wherever they were found. Next, they were to be scalped and hauled through ten villages in the neighbourhood, with the aim of setting an example for everyone. In order to prevent these wizards from recidivism, the monarch ordered them to be provided with clothing and food to survive, but confined to an undetermined place; thus, they could no longer harm anyone. If the judge had any doubts, he could address the king, and the sovereign would impose the punishment on the guilty party. Finally, the law also provided a penalty for the magicians' clients: they, too, would be publicly flogged two hundred times.[50] At this point, it is worth noting the degree to which the opening words of this law were influenced by the *interpretatio* of *Codex Theodosianus*.[51] This *interpretatio*, in turn, was also included by Regino

[49] *Liber Iudiciorum* VI.2.5, *MGH Leg. nat. germ.* I, p. 260. See: S. McKenna, *Paganism and Pagan Survivals in Spain up to the Fall of the Visigothic Kingdom* (Washington, DC, 1938), p. 124; Jiménez, 'Los *inmissores*', p. 621.

[50] *Liber Iudiciorum* VI.2.4, *MGH Leg. nat. germ.* I, p. 259. See: McKenna, *Paganism*, pp. 123–4; Flint, *The Rise*, pp. 110–11; Lecouteux, 'Les maîtres', p. 153; P.C. Díaz and J.M. Torres, 'Pervivencias paganas en el cristianismo hispano (siglos IV–VII)', in J. Santos and R. Teja (eds), *El cristianismo. Aspectos históricos de su origen y difusión en Hispania* (Vitoria, 2000), pp. 235–61, at pp. 248–9; Jiménez, 'Los *inmissores*', pp. 621–2.

[51] *Codex Theodosianus* IX.16.3, ed. T. Mommsen, *Theodosiani libri XVI cum constitutionibus Sirmondianis et leges Nouellae ad Theodosianum pertinentes*, 3 vols (Berlin, 1905), vol. I.2, p. 460 (*Lex Romana Visigothorum, Codex Theodosianus* IX.13.1, ed. G. Haenel, *Lex Romana Visigothorum* (Leipzig, 1849), p. 187). See Grig, *Popular Culture*, p. 167.

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of Prüm (a Benedictine abbot who died in 915) in his compendium of canon law.[52]

In the Frankish kingdom, the main measures against storms were taken by Charlemagne. He was still a young king when he received a *littera exhortatoria* from Cathwulf (*c*.775), in which the latter praised him and exhorted him to rule correctly. Cathwulf urged Charlemagne to severely punish people who acted against the law, including among them the practitioners of magic, such as sorcerers, poisoners, witches, soothsayers, and *tempestarii*.[53] Some years later, in 789, Charlemagne published his famous capitulary *Admonitio generalis*, in which, among other things, he ordered the prosecution and punishment of various types of magician, including storm-makers.[54] The same text was reproduced again, almost without variations, in a new capitulary issued at the beginning of the ninth century (*c*.802):[55] here Charlemagne said that these individuals should be corrected and punished, although he did not specify the type of penalty that should be applied to them.

A comparison of the civil laws (regardless of their Visigothic or Frankish origin) with the conciliar norms analysed in the previous section reveals interesting differences. Bishops, while demanding exemplary sentences, insisted on moderation: they rejected physical punishments and only imposed penalties of deprivation of liberty or, more commonly, public penances. In the case of the civil authorities, however, penalties were much more severe. In the various laws enacted on the subject, we read allusions to financial penalties, physical punishments (very harsh, including flogging and decalvation), public humiliation, and deprivation of liberty in very cruel conditions. The reason for these differences is obvious: for the ecclesiastical hierarchies, the salvation of the soul was paramount – hence, for example, the authorities were asked to lock up the storm-maker until he swore to make amends for his sins or to impose harsh penances on him. Civil authorities, on the other hand, dealt with the *tempestarii* on several occasions because they were believed to have carried out a punishable action by destroying the crops of the peasants, and they did so by means of evil magic, an activity that the rulers of the west had already considered criminal since the time of the Roman Empire. It was,

[52] Regino Prumiensis, *De ecclesiasticis disciplinis et religione Christiana* II.353, ed. E. Baluze, *PL* 132 (Paris, 1880), col. 350.

[53] *Epistolae uariorum Carolo Magno regnante scriptae*, 7, ed. E. Duemmler, *MGH Epistolae* 4 (Berlin, 1895), p. 504. See: Flint, *The Rise*, p. 62; Dutton, 'Thunder', p. 115.

[54] *Admonitio generalis*, 65, *MGH Capit*. 1, pp. 58–9. The same text was reproduced almost unchanged in the collection of capitularies compiled by Abbot Ansegisus at the beginning of the ninth century (827); Ansegisus, *Capitularium collectio*, 62, ed. A. Boretius, *MGH Capit*. 1, p. 402. See Dutton, 'Thunder', p. 115.

[55] *Capitulare missorum item speciale*, 40, *MGH Capit*. 1, p. 104.

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therefore, the practical effects that were here held to be more important than the state of the culprit's soul.

Recourse to teaching and preaching

As has been seen, some in the ecclesiastical hierarchy believed in the existence of the *tempestarii* and in their power to alter the climate, and for this reason they issued canons against them. However, other church authorities (those who disbelieved) felt it was more effective to combat the conviction that storm-makers were effective, a belief they considered to be a superstition that should be eradicated. And they did so in a didactic way, trying to demonstrate that meteorological phenomena had natural causes and that, behind these natural causes, was God.

In the Visigothic kingdom, between 615 and 620 Isidore of Seville wrote *De natura rerum* in order to explain the nature of the world and to combat superstitions regarding the origin of natural phenomena;[56] at the same time, he made a symbolic Christian reading of some of these weather events. Thus, for example, he maintained that thunder was the roar produced by clouds colliding, but metaphorically it symbolized the Divine Voice of God's reproach, or the preaching of the saints that resounds in the ears of the faithful all over the world.[57] Lightning was also produced by this violent collision of the clouds, in a manner similar to the spark that appears when two stones are struck, but it also symbolized the miracles of the saints, resplendent with the clarity of their wonders.[58] As for the snow, it originated in water accumulated in the clouds frozen by the harshness of the winds, as was the case with hail, but with its ice broken into small pieces by those winds and the heat of the sun. Partially melted, fragments fell on the earth in a rounded shape because of the friction of the air. Metaphorically, however, hail represented the hardness of perfidy, while snow designated the incredulous men, very cold and indolent.[59]

Isidore's *De natura rerum* was an erudite treatise, and not intended for the general population. By contrast, other ecclesiastics preferred to address the faithful directly through their preaching, urging disbelief in storm-makers. For example, Pirmin, in his *Scarapsus* (a sermon-like

[56] Surprisingly, Isidore took a different stance in his *Etymologiae*, there asserting that there were magicians capable of disturbing the elements; see Isidorus, *Etymologiae* VIII.9.9, ed. W.M. Lindsay, 2 vols (Oxford, 1911), vol. 1, n.p.

[57] Isidorus, *De natura rerum*, 29, ed. J. Fontaine, *Isidore de Seville. Traité de la nature* (Bordeaux, 1960), pp. 279–81.

[58] Isidorus, *De natura rerum*, 30, ed. Fontaine, pp. 281–3.

[59] Isidorus, *De natura rerum*, 34 (snow) and 35 (hail), ed. Fontaine, pp. 291–3. See Lawrence-Mathers, *Medieval Meteorology*, pp. 20–1.

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treatise written around 725/750), asked his parishioners not to believe in the *tempestarii* and not to deliver anything to people who claimed that the *maones* took the fruit felled by storms.[60] According to Agobard, a century later, the Magonians (whom Pirmin referred to as *maones*) were the fabulous inhabitants of Magonia, who arrived in ships that flew over the clouds in order to collect this storm-felled harvest.[61] Likewise, an anonymous Frankish preacher of the eighth century asked his listeners to harshly rebuke those individuals who claimed to be *tempestarii*, and demanded the faithful relinquish any belief in the existence of *mauones* (= *maones*) capable of stealing crops, as this was an unbelievable fallacy that had survived as a custom of the pagans.[62]

Without doubt, the best-known example of the Church countering belief in storm-makers is that of Agobard, who dedicated his famous, although unsuccessful,[63] first treatise exclusively to combating belief in them. This work is written in the form of a sermon, in which the prelate addresses his faithful directly, as if speaking to them in church. In his attempt to put an end to this superstition, Agobard first turned to the Bible as the only source worthy of faith: anything that did not appear in its pages did not deserve to be believed and therefore did not exist. If the *tempestarii* had been a reality, they would have been

[60] Pirminius, *Scarapsus*, 22, ed. E. Hauswald, *MGH Quellen zur Geistesgeschichte des Mittelalters* [*QGM*] 25 (Hanover, 2010), pp. 76–7.

[61] Agobardus (*De grandine et tonitruis*, 2, CCCM 52, p. 4). Pirmin referred to them as *maones*, a term also used by Florus to designate the sailors arriving from Magonia (see note 63). Several modern authors have also related this word to Magonia: Blöcker 'Wetterzauber', pp. 122–4; K. Heidecker, 'Agobard en de onweermakers. Magie en rationaliteit in de vroege Middeleeuwen', in M. Mostert and A. Demyttenaere (eds), *De betovering van het middeleeuwse christendom. Studies over ritueel en magie in de Middeleeuwen* (Hilversum, 1995), pp. 171–94, at p. 179; Meens, 'Thunder', pp. 164–5; J.A. Jiménez, 'Magonia o Maonia? Sobre los orígenes del nombre de una tierra mítica', *Veleia* 38 (2021), pp. 239–49.

[62] *Sermo seu Instructio rusticorum*, *PLS* 4, cols 968–9. A similar term is also used here to refer to the Magonians (*mauones*).

[63] *De grandine et tonitruis* was not successful in its time, as can be seen from the fact that it has only been preserved in a single manuscript (Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Ms. lat. 2853), discovered by Papire Masson in 1605. Moreover, there are very few citations by later authors that refer, even indirectly, to this work by Agobard. Florus' scholium to a passage from Augustine of Hippo's anti-Manichaean treatise *Contra Faustum* (preserved in the manuscript of the Bibliothèque municipale de Lyon, Ms. 610, fol. 12v), stands out. By means of an erroneous etymology, Florus connected the doctrine of Manes with the fabulous country of Magonia and its inhabitants (although, in his case, both names have lost the 'g' and have become *Maonia* and *Maones*); on this subject, see P. Chambert-Protat, 'Florus de Lyon et les extra-terrestres', in *Florus de Lyon. Une bibliothèque et un auteur au milieu du neuvième siècle*, 2014, https://doi.org/10.58079/orxm [accessed 29 March 2024]. Similarly, it is also worth remembering Rather of Verona (*c*.887–974), who in one of his sermons made use of Agobard's treatise (although without quoting it) when criticizing those who believed that men could provoke or drive away storms thanks to their powers (Ratherius Veronensis, *Sermo de ascensione I*, 4, ed. P.L.D. Reid, CCCM 46 (Turnhout, 1976), p. 52). Between 1430 and 1436, Bernardino of Siena mentioned storm clouds called *mago* by the sailors, against which the seamen waved their swords to threaten them (Bernardinus Senensis, *De idolatriae cultu*, 3.2, ed. Patres Collegii S. Bonauenturae, *S. Bernardini Senensis Ordinis Fratrum Minorum Opera Omnia* I (Quaracchi (Florence), 1950), pp. 113–14).

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mentioned in the scriptures, but as they were not, they constituted a fallacy and all those who defended their existence were lying.[64] At the same time, Agobard reviewed all the passages in the Bible that referred to meteorological phenomena in order to demonstrate that God was the only one with sufficient power to control storms and hail.[65] Agobard also used natural causes to explain the origin of hail: both hail and snow were produced when the clouds rose higher than usual in summer and winter.[66] It is not really as profound an explanation as Isidore's, but that is because Agobard was interested above all in demonstrating that God was the only one responsible for natural phenomena. Agobard also appealed to logic, speaking to those who believed in *tempestarii* and explaining to them why this belief was fallacious.[67] Moreover, Agobard recognized the folkloric nature of the reports of *tempestarii*: every time he heard of someone who claimed to have seen the wonders of the storm-makers, he went to question them. But when he found them and required them to tell the truth, even resorting to the threat of divine punishment, the person questioned confessed that they were not really present at the time of the events, although they insisted that what they were telling him was true, and even gave the name of the magician, as well as the place and time of the event.[68] Everyone knew someone who had witnessed the wonder, although no one could claim to have seen it in person, a type of story very similar to what today we call urban legends.

Saints and thaumaturges against storm-makers

The superstition concerning storm-makers continued, despite all the civil and ecclesiastical condemnations and the efforts of the preachers to fight it. Ultimately one of the strategies adopted by the Church, and the one that produced the best results, was to appropriate and adapt the belief system to its own ends. In this way, the evil spirits – considered, since Hellenistic times, to be responsible for storms and other natural disasters – were replaced by Satan and his demons, who brought hail, storms, and other misfortunes such as epidemics.[69] The *daemones* who

[64] Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis*, 1 and 3, CCCM 52, pp. 3–5.
[65] Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis*, 4–14, CCCM 52, pp. 5–14. See: Jiménez, *Agobardo*, pp. 110–35; Lawrence-Mathers, *Medieval Meteorology*, pp. 41–2; Wozniak, *Naturereignisse*, p. 356.
[66] Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis*, 8, CCCM 52, p. 9.
[67] Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis*, 2, CCCM 52, p. 4.
[68] Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis*, 7, CCCM 52, p. 8.
[69] According to Einhard, a demon named Wigo devastated the Frankish kingdom, destroying crops, wine, and fruit, as well as spreading epidemics among cattle and men; Einhardus, *Translatio et miracula sanctorum Marcellini et Petri*, 14, ed. G. Waitz, *MGH Scriptores* 15.1 (Hanover, 1887), p. 253. See Lecouteux, 'Les maîtres', p. 164.

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interceded between men and gods were replaced by angels and saints, which, in turn, led to a rise in the worship of both; relics became magical instruments full of apotropaic power. And the functions of the magicians who ward off bad weather were usurped by the holy men of Christianity, often charismatic bishops and abbots with an aura of sanctity. There are many examples in the west concerning the power of these individuals;[70] their holiness was so great that they could bring rain when the fields suffered from drought. For example, according to his biographer, whenever there was a shortage of water Bishop Innocent of Merida (seventh century) organized processions through the city's basilicas and the townsfolk made their corresponding prayers, after which the rain soon came.[71] Gregory of Tours mentions the example of Quintian (bishop of Rodez and later of Clermont-Ferrand), who, in a time of severe drought, was also able to attract rain with the strength of his prayers.[72]

The relics of the saints also had this 'magic' power. Gregory the Great explains that Eutychius, a monk from Norcia, had such a reputation for holiness that after his death, whenever the earth was parched from scarcity of rain, the citizens would walk in procession through the fields displaying the saint's cloak while chanting prayers; the longed-for rain would come.[73] This last example is reminiscent of the processions that peasants made through the fields with the aim of freeing them from bad weather, although in this case replacing the amulet or phylactery with a martyr's relic and praying for the rain to come instead of the hail to go.

In contrast, other Christian holy men had the power to deflect storms and hail in a way that evokes the *defensores* mentioned by Agobard. Gregory of Tours tells the story of an anonymous monk whose prayers kept the rain from falling on the grain that the other monks had collected; the heavens opened and the water fell around the grain but did not wet it.[74] Abbot Aredius performed a very similar miracle, when, while travelling and about to be hit by a storm, he prayed and the cloud divided, discharging the rain on both sides of the road without touching the abbot at any time.[75] Gregory of Tours explains

[70] Grig, *Popular Culture*, p. 165.
[71] *Vitas sanctorum patrum Emeretensium* V.14, ed. A. Maya Sánchez, CCSL 116 (Turnhout, 1992), p. 99.
[72] Gregorius Turonensis, *Vitae patrum*, 4.4, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum* [*SRM*] 1.2 (Hanover, 1885), pp. 676–7. See Flint, *The Rise*, pp. 185–6.
[73] Gregorius Magnus, *Dialogi* III.15, 18, ed. A. de Vogüé, *Sources Chrétiennes* [*SC*] 260 (Paris, 1979), p. 326.
[74] Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiae* IV.34, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* 1.1 (Hanover, 1937), p. 167. See Wozniak, *Naturereignisse*, p. 358.
[75] Gregorius Turonensis, *Historiae* X.29, *MGH SRM* 1.1, p. 524. See Wozniak, *Naturereignisse*, pp. 359–60.

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that he too experienced a similar episode himself in his youth, although on this occasion the catalyst for the miracle was some relics he had inherited from his parents and that were in his possession when he was caught in a storm while travelling.[76] Relics also played a key role in another of Gregory's stories: the anecdote of a *homo sanctus* who was able to overcome the weather with the power of prayers and the help of holy remains. The narrative is set in the context of the fight against the vestiges of paganism. In the territory of Gévaudan there was a mountain with a lake to which a multitude of peasants came every year; they made offerings and banquets for three days, and on the fourth, when they returned home, they were always surprised by a storm so violent that many feared they would perish in it. But despite such fears, Gregory continues, they persisted in their mistake. This situation continued until finally a clergyman came to the region and preached to the crowds in order to convert them to the faith of Christ, succeeding after he built a chapel on the shores of the lake in honour of the blessed Hilary of Poitiers and depositing his relics there. Once the peasants were converted and their pagan rituals were forgotten, the heavy storms that annually harassed them did not occur again, since from that moment on they counted on the remains of the saint for protection.[77]

The holy wax of the basilica of St Martin in Tours also had this virtue: it was enough to put some on a field (usually on a branch of the tallest tree) that the hailstorms would pass by and not ruin the crops.[78] Gregory of Tours himself explains that he owned a field that was so severely hit by hail every year that after the storm there was nothing of any use left. So the bishop put some of this sanctified wax on a branch of the tallest tree and the storms never again returned.[79] This wax worked in a similar way to phylacteries and to other popular remedies that go back to classical antiquity.

Some charismatic figures of the Church, therefore, acted as thaumaturges and assumed a role analogous to that of the magicians, turning white magic or theurgy into miracles, either through the power of their holiness or the saving grace of relics. It should not be forgotten that peasants were living in the grip of anxiety caused by seasonal

[76] Gregorius Turonensis, *In gloria martyrum*, 83, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* 1.2 (Hanover, 1885), p. 545.
[77] Gregorius Turonensis, *In gloria confessorum*, 2, ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* 1.2, pp. 749–50. See J.-C. Schmitt, *Historia de la superstición*, trans. T. Clavel (Barcelona, 1992), pp. 34–6; Lecouteux, 'Les maîtres', p. 161.
[78] Gregorius Turonensis, *De uirtutibus sancti Martini* I.2; ed. B. Krusch, *MGH SRM* 1.2, p. 588.
[79] Gregorius Turonensis, *De uirtutibus sancti Martini* I.34; II.2, *MGH SRM* 1.2, pp. 604–5 and 609. See Flint, *The Rise*, p. 188.

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changes and unstable weather, and that they needed someone to become a point of reference in the fight against these conditions. But despite the impression that hagiographic stories often try to give us, from the continuous allusion in the sources to storm-makers we can suspect that magicians were often closer and more accessible to the people than the charismatic, but often distant, churchmen.

Conclusions

There can be no doubt as to the extraordinary importance of the subject of storm-makers in history. Its study not only highlights the significance of certain social and religious practices during Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages, but also illuminates complex social interactions established both between elite and popular groups, but, more particularly, among the members of these elites, composed of both clerics and laymen. These interactions become even more evident when the various mechanisms employed to combat the *tempestarii* – or, at least, the belief in them – are examined. The study of the historical social networks related to this field yields novel and stimulating results by underscoring how contacts between members of the lay and ecclesiastical elites contributed in diverse ways to the struggle against such superstitious practices. What follows is an examination of the principal conclusions that may be inferred from this paper.

The belief in the existence of individuals capable of ruining crops with hail is very old, and in the Latin west there is jurisprudence dating back to the Laws of the Twelfth Tables (mid-fifth century BC).[80] After the triumph of Christianity, the fight against storm-makers continued, but with a new added component of Christian belief joined to the civil element. This led to a wide variety of motivations in the fight against storm-makers, a variety reflected in the diversity of strategies adopted against them. Each population group had its own particular reasons and skills for tackling the problem.

Peasants blamed the *tempestarii* for the ruin of their crops, so they felt hatred and resentment; Agobard mentioned a lynching attempt against four miserable people accused of having fallen from a Magonian ship.[81] He also reported that, when a storm was approaching, peasants cursed

[80] A law of the Twelve Tables punished the use of incantations intended to ruin other people's crops. Its text is remembered by ancient authors: Seneca, *Naturales quaestiones* IV.7.2, ed. H. M. Hine, *L. Annaei Senecae Naturalium quaestionum libros* (Stuttgart, 1996), p. 195; Plinius, *Naturalis historia* XXVIII.17, ed. L. Ian and K. Mayhoff, *C. Plini Secundi Naturalis Historiae libri XXXVII* 4 (Leipzig, 1897), p. 281; Apuleius, *Apologia*, 47.3, ed. R. Helm, *Apuleius. Apologia* (Stuttgart, 1963), p. 54.

[81] Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis*, 2, CCCM 52, p. 4.

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the *tempestarii*'s tongue and wished it to dry up,[82] and Florus, in a scholium to a passage from Augustine of Hippo's anti-Manichaean treatise *Contra Faustum*, states that people used to kill them.[83] However, as the farmers could not put an end to these magicians, they at least tried to nullify the effects of their powers through various means, such as paying other magicians to ward off the storms, or using amulets and phylacteries. In this sense, there was not much innovation in the Christian world. As an illustrative example, one can cite a law of Constantine I (of the year 321), by which the emperor ordered the severe punishment of evil magic, while also allowing beneficial varieties aimed at preventing crops from being storm damaged.[84] Peasants, therefore, continued with the traditional remedies and formulas, although Christianized them, as can be seen in the Carrio slate or in the *defensores* mentioned by Agobard.

With regard to the Church (our main concern here), as an institutional system it was at the centre of an extensive social network that served to control most aspects of the community more effectively. Bishops maintained frequent contacts with other bishops and with representatives of civil authority, in a type of peer-to-peer relationship that we can call 'horizontal' and that served to consolidate their authority over the whole kingdom. The bishop was also the central node on which depended an extensive network of clerics who helped him to exercise his control over the diocesan territory (in what can be considered 'vertical' relations). The Church's character as a regulatory institution led frequently to it deciding what was acceptable or unacceptable to the community of believers. Hence, it did not tolerate superstitions about *tempestarii* and *defensores*. Religious authorities judged above all the idolatrous aspect of the storm-makers' activity; using magic to achieve their goals constituted a sin. The canonical documentation informs us that, even among the Franks, storm-makers were therefore confined, although in this case the confinement was temporary, until the guilty party repented. In any case, since being a storm-maker was a sin, it was necessary to do penance, although here too there was no great unanimity in the various territories of the west. While on Frankish soil the penance lasted seven years (three of which were to be spent on bread and water), in the north of the Iberian Peninsula it lasted fifteen years.

In the fight against storm-makers, the Church used its influence and extensive social network to enlist the help of civil authorities. In this

[82] Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis*, 11, CCCM 52, p. 11.
[83] Regarding this scholium, see note 63.
[84] *Codex Theodosianus* IX.16.3, ed. Mommsen, p. 460. See Grig, *Popular Culture*, p. 166.

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sense, the decisions of the civil and ecclesiastical hierarchies complemented each other and went hand in hand. However, the sentences imposed by civil legislation were more severe, since civil authority considered that storm-makers used magic in order to ruin the possessions of others, which was a serious crime. Visigothic and Frankish kings also issued laws and capitularies on the subject in order to tackle what was considered a significant problem. The Visigothic legislation established that *inmissores tempestatum* were to be publicly punished with two hundred lashes, then scalped, hauled through the nearest villages, and, finally, confined (probably in perpetuity). For their part, the Frankish capitularies did not specify the type of punishment that ought to be applied, only that the guilty should be punished. However, the canonical documentation was somewhat more explicit in this regard.

But the Church did not limit itself to fighting storm-makers, it also fought the *defensores*, the magicians who were charged with averting the storms. These individuals competed with the Church hierarchy in controlling the supernatural element and in responding to human needs and anguish by looking after the welfare of the peasants. And this was not a trivial matter, since the prestige of churchmen, authority over the community, and the control of donations were at stake. These donations were essential to keep the small parishes and the poorest in the community. And yet, as Agobard bitterly denounced, there were many farmers who preferred to pay the *canonicus* to their *defensores* rather than give the tithe to the Church.[85]

Finally, the most effective means of breaking down this superstition was for the Church to appropriate this belief system and adapt it to its own ideology. Charismatic figures in the Church (holy men) took over the role of magicians and turned the old white magic into miracles enacted through their holiness or the salvific power of relics. In this way, bishops (protagonists of many of these miracles) were able to continue to maintain control over their community and preserve the social network of which they were the main node.

A strong proof of the existence of these (mostly horizontal) relationships in the diocesan and inter-diocesan social network are the abundant condemnations of the *tempestarii* and of those who believed in them, condemnations that were repeated over time, sometimes reproducing *ad litteram* formulas. We are not dealing here with mere

[85] Agobardus, *De grandine et tonitruis*, 15, CCCM 52, p. 14. See Dutton, 'Thunder', p. 127–9, who believes that this is an essential part of the problem: farmers would use the payment of the *canonicus* as an excuse not to give the tithe to the Church (they could not afford the tithe because they had previously given part of their harvest to the *defensores* for their protection).

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literary borrowings, but with real re-use of texts in the most literal sense: individuals (often bishops) made copies of collections of sermons, canonical collections, or legislative compilations (e.g. of capitularies) in order to lend them to other individuals, so that these texts could serve as models for preaching on certain topics or for regulating such matters in ecclesiastical councils.[86] In this way, episcopal social networks contributed to the elaboration and dissemination of literary topics.

As a final conclusion, the evidence suggests that, regardless of the specific strategies adopted by the Church, the figure of the storm-maker constituted an enduring presence that could not be eliminated. The reason for this is simple: this character was necessary for the collective imaginary, as he was the scapegoat on which to dump all the frustrations and blame when a harvest was lost due to an unexpected storm.[87] And in this sense, he was no different from any other individual who was part of the always-essential Otherness.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Dipòsit Digital de la Universitat de Barcelona at https://diposit.ub.edu/dspace/.

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[86] This is perfectly clear in the case of Caesarius of Arles, who, according to his biographers, sent, through the intermediary of other clergymen, collections of his sermons to all the lands of Gaul, Italy, and Hispania so that they could serve as a model for the preachers there; Cyprianus *et alii*, *Vita Caesarii* I.55, ed. M.-J. Delage, *SC* 536 (Paris, 2010), p. 226.

[87] As also expressed by Dutton, 'Thunder', p. 129, 'the belief in storm-makers persisted because it was traditional, because it was useful in explaining natural phenomena and in assigning blame'.

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