

## BOOK REVIEWS

Eleonora Cianci, *The German Tradition of the Three Good Brothers Charm* (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 2013).

Packed with motifs and able to claim for parts of its constituent narratives a very long history of circulation, the *Tres Boni Fratres* (or *Three Good Brothers*) charm is among the more common touchpoints encountered by scholars working in a variety of national contexts. Aptly labeled a *Sammelsegen*, or collection blessing, by the German scholar Oskar Ebermann in his examination of the subject published in 1903, surviving examples of this charm for wounds feature a complex bipartite narrative and a wealth of biblical allusions. In its fullest manifestation, the charm deploys a narrative centered on the encounter of three brothers with Christ followed by a brief discursive (sometimes interrogatory) episode between them, and finally, instructions to the brothers to perform some application of oil and wool alongside the recitation of a charm laden with Longinus motifs. It thus contains a charm within a charm, with the initial encounter historiola of the *Three Good Brothers* charm—as Lea Olson reminds us in *Incantatio* 1 (2011)—attested in strikingly early texts, namely papyri of the fifth or sixth centuries A.D.

Eleonora Cianci has produced a close study of twenty-six instances of the *Three Good Brothers* charm that she has identified in German-language manuscripts spanning the thirteenth to seventeenth centuries. She approaches the charms systematically on a number of methodological levels, treating each instance as a text, a component of the manuscript that contains it (or the “mise en page,” as she memorably terms it), a cultural article within the medieval and early modern context in which the manuscript was produced, and as a signifier of a healing act of which we know very little outside of the clues created by the charm text. Because she reproduces images of the manuscript page, transcriptions of the charm text itself, and descriptive cataloguing material for each of the sources, her publication is also a reference guide to the extant German-language material, bringing together in one place everything subsequent scholars will need to conduct their own analysis on the surviving corpus.

Cianci begins by reviewing the state of the scholarship on German-language charms recorded in manuscripts, and it is telling that after an initial spate of studies in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, modern work touching on the charm within the Germanic linguistic family consist of only a handful of researchers: Olsan, Cianci, and Christa Haeseli. This leaves Cianci with an open scholarly field in which to set the terms for how to interpret the German-language corpus. She takes up this challenge by next addressing the problem of corpus definition—how to decide what exemplars should be included under

the label *Three Good Brothers* charm, and what to exclude? As it turns out, identifying core overlapping motifs provides the best answer, allowing Cianci to assert that “despite the high number of manuscripts transmitting the German *Three Good Brothers* charm over approximately five centuries and despite the various languages offering a different set of versions and motif clusters, my opinion is that we can still consider the *Three Good Brothers* charm as one text on a general semantic level” (34). Those central motifs include the meeting between the brothers and Jesus, the dialogue that ensues along with its focus on the use of a herbal remedy and Jesus’s instructions to seek Mount Olivet and the curative powers of oil and wool, and finally the incorporation of a Longinus charm. These motifs, and the numerous subvariants, Cianci excerpts from the manuscripts and organizes into separate charts for helpful reference (153–222).

Notably, Cianci is arguing (drawing from the work of Ruth Finnegan) for an approach that, while cognizant of the importance of analyzing performance, oral versus textual transmission, and linguistic features, contains at its heart a concern with the folk-narrative aspects of charms. The toolkit of the folklore-narrative discipline, and especially its hundred-plus years of developing motif catalogues and narrative identification, thus becomes the framework she argues for as the primary means of interpreting charms. This is an effective approach, and one that charm scholars can profitably adopt along the lines of Cianci’s example here. It allows the scholar to gather together charms sharing the same core motifs and to propose charm typologies without disregarding the clear variations appearing in the historical corpus. These variations are one of the interesting contradictions found in charms: While verbal performance and shared knowledge of the words to be uttered with charms were clearly important, as Cianci notes, unlike the performance of verbal magic, charm content did not depend exclusively on a stable spoken formula (32). As a result, the development of a motif index, and not just a charm typology, should be central to the field.

Cianci concludes with a call for a multidisciplinary approach to future work on the subject, noting that an “eclectic approach which draws on philology, linguistics (more specifically dialectology), folklore, and folk-narrative studies might provide more answers than a single discipline or single person can do” (223). No quibbles can be taken with this advice, but it is worthwhile to consider what might be missing from this list of disciplines. Two interrelated ones come to mind: the study of folklore practices and history. Both would ask us to investigate the persons who created and made use of these historical charm texts. To be sure, Cianci devotes some time to this question generally—i.e. that literacy was on the rise, and that clerical and non-clerical scribes alike were responsible for these texts. And of course, an investigation of cultural practices must necessarily go beyond the charm manuscript sources themselves, a challenging

task for distant historical times. But what more can we know about medieval and early modern European, including German, attitudes toward healing, that Cianci does not explore in this book? What contemporary attitudes about the time, place, and understanding of how healing took place? These essentially ethnographic questions are difficult, but not impossible to answer, and have been explored by folklorists and historians alike for a number of years.

Certainly, the intrepid multidisciplinary charm scholar seeking to add this to Cianci's list of disciplines will have an essential reference work in the form of her book to start from. Moreover, the clarity of layout, systematic collating of variations, and close attention to the context surrounding each manuscript offers a helpful model for charm scholars working in other national contexts, making this a major contribution to the field.

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Vilmos Keszeg, ed., *Rontók, gyógyítók, áldozatok - Történetek és élettörténetek* (Cursers, Healers, Victims – Tales and Life Stories), Kolozsvár: Erdélyi Múzeum-Egyesület, 2012, 399 pp., ISBN 978-606-8178-56-1.

Since 1990, the researchers from the Department of Hungarian Ethnography and Anthropology at the Babeş–Bolyai University in Kolozsvár/Cluj-Napoca have focused on studies of the pragmatic aspects of popular beliefs in Transylvania. Their attention is turned mainly in three directions: the concentration of belief knowledge into the hands of specialists, the role of popular beliefs in modifying the human careers and everyday life, and the modes and ways of speaking about beliefs. Using participant observation, interviewing and sociological methods, the researchers have been able to draw a detailed image of the individuals' belief habits and practices, of the incorporation of the beliefs into the local social contexts, and of the nature of the belief events, their unfolding, courses and effects.

The results of these energetic and important research activities have been continuously published in the series *People and Contexts* (Emberek és kontextusok). Started in 2008, the series already boasts a number of volumes, with the book reviewed here standing as number eight.

*Cursers, Healers, Victims – Tales and Life Stories* is a collected volume, in Hungarian language, and contains the following parts: short preface, four studies, extensive bibliography, index, two summaries (one in Romanian and one in English language), black-and-white pictures appendix, audio recordings list, and a DVD with these same recordings in audio format.

The preface is written by Dóra Czégényi, who also compiled the bibliography. The first study is by Attila Fodor, and deals with the life stories and the collective beliefs about a woman from the village of Aranyosrákos/ Vălenii de Arieş. The analysis focuses on the alleged quackery via supernatural means, practiced by the said woman. The second study is written by Éva Salánki-Fazekas and examines the beliefs in supernatural beings, held by a Romani woman from the village of Berettyószéplak/ Suplacu de Barcău. The study discusses a detailed categorization of the supernatural entities and their functions, as they are told by the informant. The third study's author is Szillárd Salló and it is focused on the typology of the human practitioners of magic – cursers, diviners and healers in the village of Gyimes/ Ghimeş. The analysis deals with their general characteristics and activities, illustrated with case studies. All the three studies provide transcripts of the interviews with the informants and glossaries of the local dialectic peculiarities.

The fourth study is by the editor Vilmos Keszeg and provides summarizing comments of the previous three studies. It also presents the main results

of the research of beliefs in Transylvania so far, and points out directions for further examination.

The bibliography is very rich. It provides a comprehensive overview of the secondary literature on Hungarian popular beliefs in Transylvania. The literature is mainly in the Hungarian language, with a few pieces in French, English and German.

The appendix contains 35 black-and-white photographs of the locations and the informants, discussed in the studies. Both the appendix and the DVD provide additional depth of the book's content, illustrating important contextual details and circumstances.

Rich in source materials and profound scholarly analysis, the book offers major contributions to the field of studies of verbal magic. Firstly, it places very specific verbal magical texts and rites within the broader framework of the local belief systems. This is particularly valid for the studies by Salánki-Fazekas and Salló. The book convincingly demonstrates that verbal charms and verbal magical rites, practices and practitioners are integral and often central part of the popular beliefs systems. This is a reminder that very often it is impossible (and actually unnecessary) to separate verbal magic from its broader spiritual and cultural context.

Secondly, the book consistently connects and inter-connects the verbal magic and the popular beliefs with the everyday human life and its wide array of crises, necessities, deficiencies, emotions and accidents. The functionality of the charms, charmers, and charming is well demonstrated. It is clear that verbal magic plays an important (if not central) role in the process of influencing and modifying the human world via supernatural means. Certainly, this is generally true for a number of a cases all through human history. provides one more very close look on verbal charms as main tools in the management of human problems and the resolution of everyday life deficiencies and crises. It also shows verbal magic and related beliefs as expressions of personal emotions, interests, tensions and conflicts between individuals and families.

Thirdly, the book places verbal magic and the related practices at the cross-point of three cultural contact zones: Hungarian, Romanian and Romani. The book emphasizes again the importance of the language and the text, oral and written. The analyzed verbal charms and belief systems have their own specific vocabulary, a field of constant interplay between the three languages and between the variations of verbal magical texts. This interplay is linked to the broader interactions between various Christian religious denominations, in terms of sacred texts, rituals, clergy and laity. Canonicity and non-canoncity of beliefs, views and opinions plays a significant role too.

In terms of methodology, the volume represents case-studies at their best. The researchers are familiar with and deeply immersed in the cultures they are researching. They have really broad access to the daily lives and the belief systems of the informants. The source materials reveal not only a bulk of data, but also an atmosphere of trust, accuracy and authenticity. The authors conducted lengthy interviews rich in detail, and the same is true for the analytical parts of the book. The interpretations of the source materials are comprehensive, the analysis of the interviews outlines the patterns and the features of the belief phenomena, but also the variations and peculiarities, as they fluctuate from individual to individual.

Surely, the volume also contributes with the fact that it provides an opportunity for young researchers to present their research results. It does not, however, stop here. The work of Fodor, Salánki-Fazekas and Salló is not only published, but also discussed and commented by an established and experienced scholar, Vilmos Keszeg. Thus, their approaches, methods, analyses and conclusions become part of the interactive and productive scholarly discourse.

Finally, I would like to say that it is indeed a pity that the majority of the non-Hungarian scholars are not familiar with the Hungarian language. With its excellent content and form, this book definitely deserves an excellent translation into English. The same is valid for the whole series *People and Contexts*. Alas, such a publishing enterprise can turn out to be a lengthy and expensive pursuit. Hopefully it will happen someday. Until then, I sincerely hope that all the colleagues, interested in this excellent volume will find ways to access its valuable content.

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*Sisnieva legenda v fol'klornyh i rukopisnyh tradizijah Blizhnego Vostoka, Balkan i Vostochnoj Evropy*. Moskva: Indrik, 2017. // *The Sissinius legend in the folklore and handwritten traditions of Near East, Balkans and Eastern Europe*. Moscow: Indrik, 2017. 856 pp.

This collective monograph on the Sissinius legend, published in Moscow in 2017, brings together the contributions of fourteen scholars from Russia, Armenia, Romania and Greece. In this volume, the manifestations of the legend in various cultures and ages are discussed with an attentive eye to a wealth of source materials: printed books and manuscripts, folklore and oral tradition, visual representations of the legend and archaeological evidence. While maintaining strong links and excellent awareness of the pre-existing scholarship, the contributors to this volume provide the readers with accounts of the most recent developments in the field and with a number of sources and theories that have previously been unpublished or overlooked.

The legend of St. Sissinius, together with the prayers, verbal charms and imagery connected to this legend, is widely spread among the cultures of Middle East, the Balkans and Eastern Europe. The roots of the story go back to the early centuries of the Christian era, and its popularity is attested in various forms up until modern times. The heart of the legend in its most generalized form is an encounter between a saint and a female demon; the demon usually threatens or harms pregnant women and infants, but the saint beats the demon, makes her acknowledge her many names and undo some of the harm she has already caused. The names of the female demon are the crucial part of the legend, for it is believed by many cultures that reciting the names or writing them down can protect humans from the demon's evil schemes.

The Sissinius legend has interested many scholars in the past 150 years, including M. Gaster, R. Basset, H. Winkler and R. Greenfield. The new comprehensive study of the Sissinius legend summarizes the previous research and brings together a wealth of material to create a complete picture of the currently available primary sources and existing trends in the scholarship. The aim of the project was not to close the discussion, but to produce a state-of-art platform for further research and fruitful discussion – and the book is eminently suitable for fulfilling this aim. In addition to the well-structured presentations of different versions of the Sissinius legend, its forms and interpretations, the book provides insights into the possible ways the versions of the legend developed and influenced one another. Moreover, the volume contains a number of previously unknown and unpublished sources, the texts presented in the original languages with Russian translations and commentary. Annotated lists of the demons' names supplied for some of the chapters will be of great help to cur-

rent and future students of the Sissinius legend, and the colour plates give us access to the imagery connected to the legend, as well as to a number of rarely exhibited manuscripts and artifacts.

The Introduction by A. Ljavidanskij and A. Toporkov gives a broad overview of the pre-existing scholarship and the major variants of the legend – in particular, the so-called Michael-type and Sissinius/Meletine-type, previously suggested by R. Greenfield. The authors outline the goals of the research project: broadly, “to follow the history, geographical spread and transformations of the main ethno-linguistic versions and plot types of the Sissinius legend in different cultures of Eurasia and Africa throughout at least 1500 years (5–20 centuries A.D.)” (p. 25). To achieve this goal, the scholars propose to reconstruct the prehistory of the legend, its major elements and characters, describe the different types of the legend and trace the ways the texts and the versions preserved in them have been transmitted, to analyze the imagery connected to the legend and explore the names occurring in the various versions. The methodology of the research includes historio-geographical, comparative and structural approaches, with the source-critical, textological, linguistic, folkloristic methods and the methods of the study of religion applied to the relevant sources. Each chapter of the volume centers upon a particular culture or a group of sources, and a separate appendix dealing with the image of St. Sissinius. The parallel structure of most chapters makes the argument easy to follow and the connections between different traditions clearly visible. The final chapter by A. Toporkov brings together some common trends and conclusions.

In the first chapter, A. Ljavidanskij offers a comprehensive study of Aramaic versions of the Sissinius legend. Studying the evidence of clay cups and metal amulets from 4–8 centuries, he outlines three redactions of the legend: A (with A1 and A2 subversions), B and C. He traces the changing cast of characters and their shifting roles between the Palestinian and Babylonian sources, paying specific attention to the image of Smamit, the female victim gradually transforming into a demon in later redactions, and the angels fighting the evil spirit in these texts.

In the second chapter, the same author focuses on the episode describing the encounter with the female demon Obisuf in the Testament of Solomon, the earliest redaction of which may date from as early as 4 century. The description of the demon and the motif of fighting her by writing her name is possibly among the earliest attestation of this type of legend and has many parallels in the international versions of the Sissinius legend.

In the following chapter, M. Kaspina takes a broader look at the Jewish tradition and focuses on the verbal charms and amulets protecting pregnant women and infants against Lilith and their connections to the Sissinius leg-

end. Summarizing the evidence of the sources from the long history of Jewish belief and learning, up until 20 century, the scholar outlines the two types of encounters between angels or the prophet Elijah and Lilith and notes the links of the Jewish tradition to the Aramaic and Byzantine traditions about similar encounters. The chapter concludes with a list of names for the demon in different types of texts and amulets and an anthology of key selected texts.

In order to explore the transformations of the Sissinius legend in the poorly attested Coptic tradition, E. Smagina turns to Arabic and Ethiopic evidence, attesting some close similarities between Coptic and Ethiopic images of the saint and his demonic adversary. The author also addresses the visual representations of Sissinius as an armed warrior in the Coptic iconography.

In the following chapter E. Gusarova undertakes the task of outlining the various manifestations of the Sissinius legend in the Ethiopian culture. The author emphasizes the complex nature of the legend's transmission, from its translation from Arabic into Ge'ez around 14 century through its centuries-long coexistence with other religious and magical beliefs on the Horn of Africa. The three variants of the first legend-type and one version of the second legend-type are analyzed, with a selection of original texts provided in the anthology. However, the scholar admits that the Ethiopian cultural context and the numerous manifestations of the legend still current in the Ethiopian society obstruct any clear view of the legend's development, so that any hypotheses about its roots and chronological forms are bound to be inconclusive.

In a brief chapter dealing with Arabic versions of the Sissinius legend, A. Ljavidanskij reviews a number of Arabic charms against child-stealing female demons, known from 19–20 centuries, but plausibly originating in a much earlier period. Although the Arabic sources do not contain the Sissinius legend as such, they manifest certain clear parallels to it: the charms and prayers are directed at the saint for protection of small children, and the demon takes on the shape of a woman. The author traces the origins of the demons' names and the variety of functions attached to them.

In the following chapter, A. Ljavidanskij and A. Nurullina address the Syrian tradition connected to the Sissinius legend. Discussing several verbal charms, mostly known from 18–20 centuries' collections, the authors note that these charms bear the traits of the Michael-type legend. However, the other type of the Sissinius legend seems largely unattested in the Syrian sources, which might make the earlier postulated close connection to the earlier Aramaic tradition doubtful. The characteristics of the Syrian charms, and especially the names of the female demons may suggest that apart from certain Aramaic influences, Arabic, Persian and Greek (Byzantine) influences can be traced.

Turning to the Byzantine tradition in the next chapter, O. Tchoekha analyzes a wide range of texts, the two structural types of the Sissinius legend found in them and the names of the main characters. The Byzantine versions of the Sissinius legend are attested as early as 8 century, and the two types of legend can even be found in the same manuscripts from 15 century onwards. The author revisits the preexisting scholarship, for which Byzantine tradition played a crucial role, and argues for Semitic origins of the Sissinius legend. While the structure of the Byzantine narratives and charms is similar to Arameic and Jewish version, the names of the demon and her female victim are changed, the most stable pair being Gilou and Meletine, respectively. A list of names, many of which are descriptive and refer to the harmfulness and Otherness of the demon, are a crucial part of the Byzantine texts.

In a short excursus, A. Rychkov offers a discussion of an important source that has not been included into the discussion of the Sissinius legend by previous scholars. A phylactery from a late 18-century Greek euchologion, reproduced in this excursus and supplied with a full translation, contains an intriguing example of two traditions: those of charms against child-stealing demons and against migraine (also personified as a demon).

In the following chapter, H. Passalis brings the discussion of the Greek material up to date with an exploration of the modern oral tradition. The modern Greek verbal charms connected to the Sissinius legend acquire a poetic form. They manifest two kinds of influences: on the one hand, the book tradition and, on the other, the oral verbal charms against different kinds of demons and sicknesses. The lists of names, crucial for the book culture, are largely absent from the oral charms.

The next tradition, discussed by T. Tadevosjan and Sh. Kozinjan, is the Armenian tradition of verbal charms. The earlier scholarship regarding the Sissinius legend has not included a discussion of Armenian folklore. This is unsurprising, given that St. Sissinius is not well-known to the Armenians; however, some references to him and some traces of the Sissinius legend, most likely derived from contact with other cultures (probably Greek), can be found in the Armenian verbal charms and amulets from 17–18 centuries. The scholars provide a selection of texts with translations and commentary to showcase the presence of the Sissinius legend in this culture.

The following chapter is dedicated to the Sissinius legend in the Southern Slavonic traditions. T. Agapkina gives an overview of the vast manuscript tradition, supplies editions and translations of selected texts, discusses the two types of prayer found in the Southern Slavonic texts and explores the variety of mythological characters found in these texts, with a particular attention to their names. A list of mythological names and terms is also supplied. Notably,

in the Southern Slavonic tradition one type of prayer is linked to the health and safety of pregnant women and infants, like in other traditions, while the other type (Michael-type) becomes connected to a broader range of illnesses. In the Russian tradition, addressed later in this volume, this latter type becomes attached to fever. Agapkina puts both types of prayer in the Southern Slavonic tradition into a wider context, discussing their place both in the book culture and in the folklore tradition.

In the next chapter, M. Mazilu and E. Timotin focus on the Romanian tradition of legends and charms about a female demon who harms pregnant women and infants. Providing examples of both Michael-type and Sissinius/Meletine type of the legend from 16 century onwards, the scholars discuss the subtypes of the texts, the names of the demons and saints involved and the possible influences from other cultures: Greek, Southern Slavonic, and later Eastern Slavonic. Interestingly, the Romanian legends and charms connected to the Sissinius legend involve a number of Biblical motifs (the beheading of John the Baptist; references to the Satan) and close similarities to prayers, and the texts currently available to us seem to have been mostly written down by priests and monks.

The last cultural tradition discussed in the volume is the Eastern Slavonic tradition of charms against fever and the connections it has to the Sissinius legend. A. Toporkov notes that while the Sissinius/Meletine-type of the legend is unattested in Russian, Ukrainian and Belarus texts, the Michael-type undergoes an interesting transformation among Eastern Slavs. The name of Sissinius is still connected to the structure of an encounter-charm, and the names of the female demons encountered and beaten by the saint are listed within the charms (often including 12 or 7 names with careful explanation of their functions). However, the function shifts from the protection of pregnant women and infants to the protection against sickness (fever). This type of charm must have originated from a radical reinvention of the Southern Slavonic Michael-type charms; although the tradition attributes the origins of the legend to a Bulgarian source, the particular version of the encounter-charm is found only in the Eastern Slavonic tradition. Toporkov also notes the close relationship between this charm and other charms and prayers approved by the Orthodox Church; the context of both textual and visual evidence connected to the Sissinius legend in the Eastern Slavonic tradition suggest that the Church either accepted, or at least did not disapprove of these charms. On the other hand, the influence of oral tradition and folk beliefs is evident in the written charms. Another notable feature of the Eastern Slavonic tradition is the image of St. Sissinius himself: he is often depicted as an old monk, while a new character, (arch-)angel Sikhael, overtakes the role of the mounted warrior physically at-

tacking the demon. The author traces the possible timeline of development of the Sissinius tradition among the Eastern Slavonic people. This spans from the non-canonical prayers and amulets against shivering fever in the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries, through the appearance of Sikhael in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, to the shorter version of the encounter of Sissinius and Sikhael with the demonic daughters of Herod (14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries), and finally to the long redactions that included 12 names (17<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries). A selection of texts and annotated lists of the demonic names are supplied in this chapter.

In the following chapter, A. Rychkov focuses on yet another kind of evidence usually overlooked by earlier researchers: the *Historiolo* of Gregory the Theologian. This text is found together with a prayer to St. Sissinius in some of the Greek sources and describes a meeting between Gregory and the Archangel Michael. The dialogue between them provides the believers with the names and functions of protective angels – including angel Sichael. This *historiola* possibly originated in 10–12 centuries and became the vehicle through which the Cappadocian cult of Sichael passed into the Greek and Eastern Slavonic traditions of verbal charming.

In the special appendix, A. Rychkov traces the origins and development of the name and image of St. Sissinius in an attempt to explain the role of this figure in the tradition and fill in the blanks in the history of the Sissinius legend. Finally, in the Conclusion to the volume, written by A. Toporkov, the vast material discussed in the separate chapter is brought together to show some trends in the development of the two types of the Sissinius legend and the image of Sissinius and his adversaries. The scholar traces links between different traditions and briefly discusses not only the ways in which the legend developed, but also the possible reasons of its popularity throughout many cultures and many centuries. Through the present volume, many problems connected to the Sissinius legend are clarified, new sources are uncovered and placed into the context of previous and ongoing scholarship, trends of historical development and intercultural influences are discussed, and the foundation for further productive discussion is established. The scholars of the Sissinius legend from across Europe would greatly benefit from an acquaintance with this book, its wealth of material and the sound analyzes provided throughout the volume.

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