

SECRECY AND RITUAL RESTRICTIONS ON VERBAL CHARMS TRANSMISSION IN GREEK TRADITIONAL CULTURE

Haralampos Passalis

The paper focuses on the ritual restrictions and taboos surrounding verbal charms transmission in Greek traditional culture. These restrictions and taboos which are closely connected with a strategy of secrecy based on the widespread belief that revealing the verbal part of charm renders the ritual ineffective, aim at protecting the transmission of verbal part which is considered as the main part of the ritual performance. Moreover, they can cast light on issues as the social status of performer, the owned status of magic, the problem of collecting charms in fieldwork, and even on the way of performance (the verbal part has to be recited in such a manner so that it is not heard). Special attention is given to how this strategy of secrecy affects the construction of the verbal part by way permitting transformations, innovations substitutions, omissions, even texts which lack logical coherence without disturbing the efficacy of the rituals themselves.

Key words: Greek traditional culture, performative context, restrictions, secrecy, taboos, transmission, verbal charms

Restrictions and taboos, secrecy and access conditions as well as the right to transmit hidden or so-called secret forms of knowledge are all deeply rooted in the history of numerous cultural, religious and political systems and are connected with notions of ownership, control, power, empowerment, status and prestige. It is not, of course, accidental that the restrictions imposed on the transmission of such knowledge remain crucial factors in the practice of magic; for magic has been traditionally steeped in secrecy, restrictions and taboos.¹ “Secret words supposedly open the doors to hidden treasures and remedy manifold ills; they are passed from magician to magician, like possessions, and competing practitioners contest the power of their hidden wares” (Luhmann 1989: 131). Rules and regulations on the transmission of the secret knowledge “elevates the value of the thing concealed. That which is hidden grows desirable and seems powerful, and magicians exploit this tendency to give their magic significance” (ibid. 161). Witchcraft and magic consist of knowledge, and knowl-

edge entails power. Those in possession of secret knowledge exercise power over others precisely because of this knowledge (Middleton 1987: 38). However, as Huson (1970: 27) argues “power shared is power lost”.

Usually, there is a form of ritual behavior, which is closely connected with specific rites of initiation and framed by restriction and taboos in order for the information and knowledge of magic to be transmitted from the current owner to the next. Moreover, the system of orally transmitted secret knowledge in traditional rural culture is extremely interesting. However, except for only a few cases (Kōiva 1996: 41–46), little attention has otherwise been paid to it by the majority of ethnographers,² whose research are mainly focused on examining the morphological types and form of verbal charms,³ without taking into account that secrecy and restrictions in their transmission are closely related, on the one hand, with the social status of the performer and the function of magic in a specific cultural context, and, on the other, with the multiform diversity of the secret text transcribed on fieldwork.

The present article, based on ethnographic data collected by Greek ethnographers, focuses on the dynamic of restrictions, secrecy and taboos mainly associated with the transmission, but also with the performance and practice of verbal charms in traditional, rural, Greek culture. In the first part of this paper we will examine the restrictions and taboos as regards the transmission of the verbal component of the charm, whereas in the second part we will be concerned with the performative context of its transmission. The last part will address the question of how the whole system of restricted transmission and performance – aiming mainly at preserving the secret character of the text – affects the text itself as it is closely connected with such issues as the transformation of the verbal part of the charm.

RESTRICTION AND TABOOS ON TRANSMISSION OF THE GREEK VERBAL CHARMS

If we examine closely the transmission system of verbal charms, we see that restrictions and taboos surrounding their transmission apply mainly to the verbal part of the charm. The whole ritual, the objects used as well as its accompanying movements and ritualistic gestures, are familiar to those attending it, still a crucial part of it remains undisclosed to the uninitiated. It is worth mentioning some characteristic ethnographic testimony: “I did know how the charmer did all that, but the words of the charm I didn’t know ... Without the words the cure was impossible” (Γιαννοπούλου 1951: 264). Thus,

lack of knowledge of the specific words of the charm, render the whole ritual ineffective. In traditional Greek society the verbal part of charms is called *arigmata* (“αρχήγματα”) which means words which cannot be told or which must not be told and cannot be disclosed (Στέλλας 2004: 17). The verbal part of the charm, which constitutes the basic ingredient of the magic recipe, needs to be kept secret.⁴ This insistence on the preservation of the apocryphal nature of the charm is explicit and categorical and it constitutes an integral part of the mythical system of the transmission and performance of the charms.

The difficulty of collecting and recording these texts is well known and it is due to the widespread belief that when a charm is openly disclosed it loses both its magic and therapeutic qualities.⁵ Charm collectors have repeatedly pointed out the hesitation, reticence and reluctance on the part of charm possessors to disclose what they know when they are asked to do so (Ταταράκης 1872: 332; Ημελλος 1962: 176; Αικατερινίδης 1957–58: 587; Κορρές 1966: 105–06), for it is believed that when the owner of the charm transmits the verbal part to someone else, he/she loses his/her power of healing. For this reason, verbal charms can only be transmitted shortly before the death of the previous owner (Νικολαΐδης 1979: 32). This fact is further corroborated by a number of ethnographic recordings: “She would never disclose the charm for it would not work then. When she felt death approaching or grew too old to use the charm effectively, she would teach it to her daughter or to whoever else she thought appropriate” (Σαράντη-Σταμούλη 1951: 233–34), “It was impossible to get her to tell the charm to me, no matter how I pleaded with her, but only on her deathbed, shortly before she breathed her last” (Γιαννοπούλου 1951: 264).

This part of the charm, its crucial kernel, is not easily accessible and in some cases its improper transmission can also be dangerous: “He/she who transmits it to someone else must be advanced in years and only after his own death can the charm be used for a good purpose. This charm should never be used when the person who has transmitted it is still alive, because he/she can be harmed” (Ασβεστή 1962: 206), “If they disclose it, they will die after a year has passed on the exact day and time when they disclosed it” (Κουκουλές 1908: 143–44). It is worth mentioning also the case of one female charmer who refused to share the secret text of a charm against ants because, as she believed, “the moment she breathes her last all the ants will gather around to feast on her body” (Παπαδάκη 1938: 524).

So restrictions are imposed on its proper transmission. These restrictions are mainly connected with the following basic factors: kinship and age, gender and time of transmission.

Authority of the elderly and kinship

In folk Greek society ownership of verbal charms is closely linked with the authority of the elderly. Charms are transmitted through a network of relations of kinship following a strictly hierarchical system of initiation. Thus, the relation between master and disciple is analogous to the relation between a senior member of the family – who usually retains control of secret knowledge – and a junior one. In that frame, the incantation is seen as a commodity that could be possessed and transmitted by dint of hereditary rights only: “The following incantation is transmitted only through the family line” (Ασβεστή 1962: 206), and “many inherit the art of exorcism from their own parents” (Μαντζουράνης 1924: 131), “those, moreover, who use such means and methods are usually elderly men, particularly elderly women who have learned them from their ancestors” (Αθανασόπουλος 1929–32: 578).

Transmission occurring exclusively between family members is not of course restrictive and inviolable. There is frequent reference concerning transmission to non-relatives: when the charmer felt her death approaching or when she realized that she was too old to use the charm effectively, she would pass it on either to her daughter or to anyone else she thought appropriate (Σαράντη-Σταμούλη 1951: 233–34). In those cases, the candidates were to be sought within the owner’s immediate circle of friends. The following ethnographic testimony from Zakynthos is a characteristic instance of a female charmer’s anxiety with no offspring to transmit the know-how to a friend: “Oh my dearest friend, I have been so anxious to see you this year and I couldn’t wait to see you coming ... I have been bound by oath not to disclose these to anyone else as long as I live, except when I feel my end approaching. Then, I shall let my faithful, dear friend to know. Oh how I wish I had a daughter to leave her behind in my mother’s place and mine!” (Γιαννοπούλου 1951: 263).

Gender

Widespread in many and different region of the rural Greek culture is the well-known restriction which concerns the gender of the next legitimate charm performer. Usually, men should transmit the verbal part of the charm to women and vice versa (Ρήγας 1968: 153; Κυριαζής 1926: 65; Παπαδόπουλος 1964: 238; Κορρές 1966: 105; Παπαθανάση-Μουσιοπούλου 1982: 40; Χρυσάνθης 1988: 117). Characteristic are the following ethnographic testimonies: “...the mother told her son just before she died that this particular charm can only be passed on from a female to a male or from a male to a female” (Ασβεστή 1962: 206), «My

charm ... can heal the evil eye, because my late aunt picked it up in secret from my late godfather” (Κοσμάτος 1910–11: 187), “The charm works only when it is passed on from a male to a female person and vice versa, for otherwise it won’t cure those ill and ailing” (Πάγκαλος 1983: 359), “It is not to be deemed valid when it is transmitted by a man to another man or by a woman to another woman” (Πάγκαλος 1983: 373).

It is also worth noting another ethnographer’s testimony according to which in transmitting the charm to the ethnographer himself, the male charmer points out that its transmission is not to be effective because the prescribed set of rules regarding its transference from a male to female and vice-versa are transgressed. He records: “while the charmer dictating the charm to me so I could write it down, he went like ‘look, it would be much better if I were to dictate it to a woman rather than to you. Then you could have learned it from her yourself’, he said; and he had just transmitted it to me that very moment! But he seemed to simply disregard or ignore that” (Στέλλας 2004: 16).

In certain cases, the ethnographic transference of charms via the male-to-female or female-to-male line of transmission additionally defines some characteristic qualities of the next charm owner: “Their secret charms were passed on from women to unmarried young boys or to mothers’ first-born sons and subsequently from them to females of every age. Under no circumstances would they transgress the rules” (Στέλλας 2004: 15).

There are, of course, cases in which the transmission of the charm occurs between people of the same sex, but these cases concern mainly a charm transmission from mother to daughter (Σαράντη-Σταμούλη 1951: 233–34; Φραγκάκι 1978: 111, note 111) or from one woman to another, her bride (Παπαθανάση-Μουσιοπούλου 1982: 40, 47), or a friend of hers (Γιαννοπούλου 1951: 263).

As far as the male to male transmission line is concerned we have to say that we have come across only few cases where the transmission occurs between father and son (Κυπριανός 1968: 200–201), – an issue which needs further investigation and which can cast light on the relation between gender and performers of rituals in Greek traditional society – and one testimony in which the charm has been passed on from the grandfather to the grandson (Παρχαρίδης 1979: 404).

Temporal parameters

A number of temporal parameters should be taken into consideration in the transmission of charms if the latter are to remain effective. The most appropriate days for the effective transmission of charms are days which are con-

nected with the folk religious system (Μεριανού-Βοσαγάρη 1989: 321–22; Ρήγας 1968: 153). The sacred knowledge is transmitted by the current owner to next heir practitioner in a church with and during the time of holy mysteries or even on Christmas night (Μεριανού-Βοσαγάρη 1989: 321–22). Traditionally sacred days such as Good Friday and Maundy Thursday, namely “the days of Easter” (Λουκατος 1992: 102) are thought to secure the effective transmission of mystical texts. Charms “are transmitted ... while the twelve Gospels are being read in church, because in accordance with folk belief it was while Jesus Christ was on the cross of his martyrdom that he delivered the charm which would be used to cure the sick” (Παπαθανάση-Μουσιπούλου 1982: 47).

THE PERFORMATIVE CONTEXT OF TRANSMISSION

In traditional Greek society verbal charms constitute, in effect, a system of traditional ‘archive’ or a body of knowledge based mainly on oral speech and exchange stored in human memory and transmitted mainly by word of mouth from one charmer to the next. This method of oral transmission of charms is further corroborated by numerous ethnographic accounts: “This charm is transmitted by word of mouth” (Πάγκαλος 1983: 373), “A man would learn the charm by hearing it from a woman and a woman from a man” (Φασατάκης 1991: 109). Equally characteristic, moreover, is certain information coming from the island of Limnos, according to which magic knowledge can be effectively transmitted only after the charmer has imparted it to its next owner and practitioner in repetitious fashion. He/he has to repeat it to the next owner many times, until the new owner has “digested” it. He/she will then have to open the new owner’s mouth and he will blow in the air or spit three times (Μέγας 1941–42: 78).

According to the mythical system of verbal charm transmission, secret and sacred knowledge is passed down by word of mouth through the Virgin Mary, the saints or the angels: “This charm was said by the Holy Virgin when she was being stalked by the wicked king Herod, because our Lady dreaded the evil eye, for it could affect our lord Christ” (Κοσμάτος 1910–11: 187), “Charms are said to have also been transmitted by word of mouth by Angels and they have cured all ailments” (Σαράντη-Σταμούλη 1951: 223). Moreover, in that type of narrative charm with a “historiola”, where a mythical event of encounter is described, the sacred person (Christ) is described as transmitting the verbal part orally to the saints (Κυριακίδης 1917: 611; Φραγκάκι 1978: 191; Πάγκαλος 1983: 372).

The oral transmission and actual practice of charms constitutes a differentiating factor between those belonging to the oral folk tradition and to those of the so-called learned tradition of magic, which is inherited in written form mainly found in ancient books of witchcraft, and which comprises archaistic elements, specific words of power and apocryphal magic symbols.⁶ Charms of the learned tradition, to be sure, continue to exist and to be practiced alongside their orally transmitted counterparts within the framework of the traditional Greek culture, but they are to be placed outside the body of folk literature, since they do not meet the criteria of orality. Those charms belonging to the learned tradition are transmitted in written form and their practice is based mainly on reading or writing the secret part rather than on a memorized reproduction of it (Πασσαλής 2000: 39–41). Things, however, can be somewhat complicated when it comes to investigating societies which employ both systems of communicative technology (oral and written), for it often happens that we see an interacting feedback at work between the two traditions. Furthermore, in some cases, the next charm owner needs to write down the verbal part in order to memorize it or the charmer transmits the verbal charm in written form (Παπαδόπουλος 1975: 170) when the restrictions of sacred days are not transgressed even in written form (*ibid.* 40, 47). Also, it is often the case that oral charms are recorded in magician's books, which are specially kept for that purpose and which contain both scholarly and oral charms. According to Roper (1998: 64), and, I think we have to agree with him, "In recent times much transmission has involved such methods and a term such oral-and-written transmission is a more accurate description of this process than an abstract use of oral transmission".

Transmission, however, in the Greek region occurs mainly in the form of a specific ritual process in private context of performance predicated upon the interception of the charm, a strategy which secures its further successful practice by the next charmer without annulling its effectiveness when it is also performed by the current owner. According to ethnographic data, "If the charm is to be of any value, if it is to be powerful and effective, it has to be transmitted ... not through the process of teaching it to one another, but rather through stealing it" (Κοσμάτος 1910–11: 187) and the healing properties of the ritual can be preserved "only when it is intercepted by a person of the opposite sex" (Κορρές 1966: 105–06).

What does stealing the verbal part of the charm mean in this context? We might say that this is essentially the only case where a charm performer transgresses the law of secrecy as well as the restrictions on the charm's performance in whispering fashion by spelling out the charm aloud, so as to facilitate the process of transmission and reception of its secret text (Στέλλος 2004: 17).

The practitioner of the charm spells it out loud enough and in such a way, so as for the next owner to hear it clearly and retain it in memory (Σαράντη-Σταμούλη 1937: 353). Characteristic, and illuminating testimonies illustrate this exact manner of transmission: “As she was spelling out the charm loud and clear the very moment she was performing it, the other woman, who was standing nearby listening, would pick it up and could subsequently perform it herself successfully and from then on both charmers were successful in the task when they performed it” (Σαράντη-Σταμούλη 1951: 233–34)

RESTRICTIONS ON TRANSMISSION AND PERFORMANCE AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE TEXT

From what has been said so far it becomes obvious that knowledge of the verbal component of a charm is considered to be the most fundamental parameter for the effective and successful performance of the entire ritual process. One would expect, then, that its verbal component constitutes an invariable formula which is transmitted whole and unchangeable from one generation to the next and whose deviation from its traditional form would consequently result in annulling its effectiveness⁷. It's worth noting that Sebeok & Ingemann in their essay in *Cheremis verbal charms* point out that “The effectiveness of a charm depends on its literal citation, since any departure from its precisely set mechanism may render the magic wholly ineffective” (Sebeok & Ingemann 1956: 280). Webster in his study on *La Magie dans les sociétés primitives* reaches a similar conclusion claiming that “L'incantation doit être retenue ad verbum; toute altération, abréviation interdite ou forme induite de récitation passe pour diminuer ou paralyser son pouvoir” (Webster 1952 : 101). It's worth mentioning also the case of Malinowsky (1954: 68) who from anthropological point of view claims that the verbal magic in the civilisation of Trobriand consists of unchangeable formulas which are transmitted from one generation to another without any kind of alteration since even the slightest deviation from its original form results in annulling its effectiveness

If, however, we examine the transcribed Greek verbal charms closely, what we actually find out is that no written text is totally similar to another and that there are as numerous versions of its text as there are charmers who use it (Στέλλας 2004: 456). It is well known and it has been repeatedly pointed out by various ethnographers and collectors of charms that such variability is not to be encountered only when the same charms are used for similar purposes in the same region by different practitioners (Roper 1998), but also in cases of the performance of the same charm by the same practitioner in a different time

(Foley-Kerewsky 1978: 908). According to Roper (1998: 51) “this phenomenon, observed especially in longer charms, arises because non-literate charmers, even when they were particularly concerned with producing a verbatim repetition of longish charms, possessed no failsafe way of telling if they had produced a verbatim repetition or not”.

A great part of these alterations is due to the fact that as a genre verbal charms belong to the oral folk tradition and are consequently liable to the changes and modifications dictated by their very mode of orality (Astakhova 1964: 266, 271; Roper 2003: 8–22).⁸ When these genres are examined under the prism of their oral composition, we are presented with texts which cannot, but present a certain degree of variation, since the main characteristic of oral folk production is that of multi-form diversity. Every single performance, then, of a text constitutes a unique, a different version, which means that the actual moment of its performance coincides with the moment of its creation (Lord 1964: 101).⁹

Charms are closely related to folksong, riddles and children’s rhymes as well as to tongue-twisters, folk verse narratives and myths and should thus be examined as part of the so-called folk literary creation¹⁰. There are, however, certain specific features which greatly differentiate charms from the above mentioned folk genres and which greatly affect the variety and the extent of their transformation. These special features, which are connected mainly with the communicative and performative context of their transmission and performance as well as with the restrictions accompanying it,¹¹ seem to be responsible not only for “smallest adaptation or replacement... in the text... in order to adjust it to another person or disease” (Kõiva 1995: 226) or for the process of “ecotypification” (“adaptation...to conform to local prejudices, ecology, to feature local heroes, use local dialect” Roper 1998: 53) but also for expansion, omission and replacement of larger parts and sections and finally for those cases in which the intelligibility of the text is affected because the flow of speech lacks meaningful sequence and logical coherence. It is worth noting that the latter forms in Greek verbal charms are far from rare.¹² The considerable number and variety of latter forms show, on the one hand, that the exact linguistic realization of the text is not to be considered an inviolable rule, and, on the other, that the recitation of such charms occurs in a mechanical fashion and its fragmentary and elliptical form does not affect its ritual efficacy.

Commenting on the communicative aspect of folkloric phenomena, Sebeok (1974: 37) emphasizes the existence of a narrator or singer who addresses himself/herself to an audience while reciting a text, which if it is to be effective, requires a set of contextual links commonly shared by both parties as it also requires a physical and psychological backdrop that facilitates their mu-

tual communication. This communicative context can be considered as part and parcel of the theoretical model of any communicative act which requires the presence of a sender/transmitter who undertakes the task of codification based on certain parameters such as a message, a common code for both the transmitter and the receiver and, finally, a proper channel of communication that will render their communication possible.

In examining the performative context of charms we come up with a basic differentiation in terms of their communicative context in relation to other forms of folklore creation. This differentiation has to do with a specific restriction, which concerns the recitation of the charm whose transmission is steeped in secrecy¹³. This kind of charms has to be performed in such a way so that it couldn't be heard. To this effect, the ethnographic data which describe the performance of the ritual are quite illuminating: "You must, then ... whisper it so as not to be heard"(Γιαννοπούλου 1951: 267), "you also say these words silently" (Δεληγιάννης 1938: 57), "whispering charms through his teeth so he couldn't be heard" (Πετράκη 1964: 46), "they were uttering secret words silently with only their lip slightly moving and you could tell they were actually saying something" (Παρχαρίδης 1979: 484), "they were whispering the words through their teeth, so the patient could not hear them" (Στέλλας 2004: 15–16).

Those who participate in the ritual performance hear a continuous flow of elliptic, unintelligible speech. The acoustic reception of these texts during the performance is characterized by such idiolect terms as "pattalala" and "ktsakefala" (i.e. elliptic incomplete and weird) (Στέλλας 2004: 16–17), since in accordance with ethnographic testimonies this particular manner of recitation kept the secret content/core of charms hidden from the others (Στέλλας 2004: 17).

Contrary to other forms of oral folk literature the effective performance of the charm does not, indeed, depend on its notional and meaningful reception by those participating in the performance of the ritual act. Beyond any communicative deviation and pathology that could be detected by an external observer of the ritualistic act – something which has been adequately dealt with by scholars (Tambiah 1968: 179) – the transmitter/sender functions simultaneously as a/an receiver/auditor of the charm (figure No1). Since charms are whispered or silently recited, in order for their text to remain inaudible, the performer/practitioner is virtually the only one who is in a position to confirm their precise linguistic realization when these are performed for the first time. This fact, which leaves no margin for external censorship, positions an external observer in a position from which he/she is unable to assess the verbatim reproduction and coherence of a given charm and it furthermore renders the magic speech vulnerable to all sorts of alterations and variations.

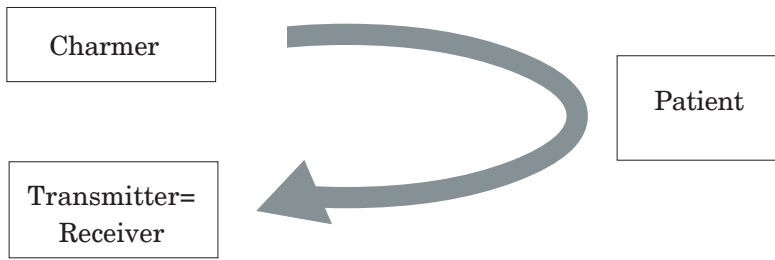


Figure 1. Performative context of ritual.

The only occasion of the charm being heard by the participants is when the receiver also happens to be the future heir-practitioner of it (figure No 2). However, even in this case, the receiver is unable to verify the faithful reproduction of the charm, since this is the first time she/he ever hears it being spelled out.

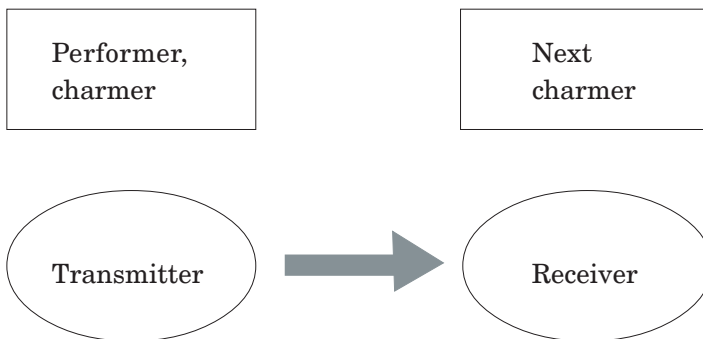


Figure 2. Performative context of transmission

In examining, also, the communicative framework and performative context of their transmission, we realize that the conditions under which charms are transmitted are far from ideal, and thus, not conducive to a faithful reproduction of their text. We have also seen the parameters and proper context for their legitimate transmission, in that the next practitioner should hear and pick them up while they are being whispered by the current user. The charm is recited only once, but should nonetheless be memorized by the next user:

charms should be intercepted, rather than openly transmitted and legitimately acquired. It is, thus, not unlikely that while the transmission is under way, parts of it are omitted, words become corrupt and meanings are inevitably altered with the final, transformed text ultimately becoming unintelligible. This is so not only because the performer's memory cannot possibly retain a rather extensive text, but also because of the incomplete and thus inaccurate audition of the text which passes from one user to the next modified, altered, inaccurate and incomplete. Also, the fact that we are dealing with a genre that delights in the use of unintelligible verbal expressions renders such a lack of intelligibility reasonable and by extension acceptable to any given observer of the ritual.

CONCLUSIONS

Restrictions and taboos, secret transmission and performance of mystical knowledge exclude the possibility of any kind of censorship. Thus, the performer, having complete control over the authenticity and distribution of verbal part, may improvise and make his/her own decisions as of the order or the segment omission of the charms themselves or even add segments from other incantations he/she may know "without necessarily being aware of this" (Roper 1998: 61). Conviction that the older member has successfully performed the ritual process coupled with a belief in the efficacy of the charm in other situations ensure the continuity of the lineage in power and legitimize any innovation initiated in or omissions from in the text.

The way knowledge is acquired and performed affects not only the way one feels about it, but also its structure and mode of practice. The fact that one person knows the secret code while the other is excluded from it is significant, for secrecy is structured around this very relation between those who know and those who do not¹⁴. However, the power of the ritual is not so much determined by the concealed knowledge it entails, as by the power invested in it by a number of restrictions and taboos, since restrictions and taboos as well as the rule of limited or non-communication are all about control. Rules and regulations imposed on transmission and performance offer such control by securing the rights of those who have access to the secret knowledge as well as by confirming their authority and preventing uncontrolled distribution of knowledge. Moreover, they affect the construction of the verbal part by way permitting transformations, substitutions, omissions, even texts which lack logical coherence without disturbing the efficacy of the rituals themselves.

NOTES

¹ For the notion and function of secrecy, restrictions and taboos in terms of the dissemination of knowledge in aboriginal societies see Morphy 1991, Keen 1994 and Kaima 2000. For the connection of secrecy with certain social groupings, such as the so-called secret societies or with social processes like rites of initiation see Middleton 1987: 25–43. For the political function of concealment of information see Simmel 1950 and Tefft 1980.

² Cf Kōiva 1996: 2/18 (www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol2/docdoc.htm) “Folklorists prefer to collect their spells in the purest form possible, i.e. as concrete texts. Such texts of magical spells appear without any commentaries or annotations and thus seem out of context; quite often, there is no specific reference to the circumstances under which they were presented. Occasional descriptions of transmission, belonging to the general background of philosophy and world outlook, have never become subjects of inquiry or recording”. See also Herjulfsdotter 2009: 57–58.

³ For a detailed analysis of relevant studies see Πασσαλής 2000: 23–28, 123–145.

⁴ Open/free transmission or free distribution (see Kōiva 1996: 2/18) of verbal charms in traditional Greek society concerns mostly the cases where the patient has to perform the ritual himself/herself, or, the cases of collective rituals, where the performers are more than one. These occur either when the charm is transmitted to a specific patient in order to recite it himself, (as in the case of love spells) or when both the patient and the charmer have to perform it in the form of a discourse shared between them or when the charm has to be performed by more than one performers endowed with specific qualities (e.g. seven/nine virgins). All the above cases are not included in the present study since they are characterized by different modes of transmission and performance.

⁵ It should be mentioned, of course, that there are other reasons – besides the expected loss of the charm’s efficacy – which discourage the disclosure of the texts. Some of these have to do with the material gains and exchanges the performer receives (Πασσαλής 2000: 114), the fear of his/her becoming the “laughing stock of others” (Ημελλος 1962: 176) as well as with the fact that recourse to such acts is considered to be ethically reprehensible as well as contrary to the tenets of the Christian religion (Πασσαλής 2000: 120).

⁶ The learned tradition, which has come down to us through magic-medicinal manuscripts, includes those texts, which have their origin in the systematic astrological and demonic magic. In this category are also included certain texts containing a number of incomprehensible words or words of foreign origin, lists of both sacred and non-sacred names as well as meaningless strings of words or letters, numbers, magic symbols and geometrical patterns. The performance of these texts relies either on their being read aloud or on their recording (Goody 1983: xvi). In the latter case, the magic qualities of the texts are transmitted into the very object upon which they are inscribed. Texts of the ecclesiastical tradition and canon, such as the Gospels (the New and the Old Testament), prayers, blessings, exorcisms, hymns, psalms, extracts from liturgical books, saints’ lives etc. are also used as magic recordings (Gaster 1900: 139; Olsan 1992: 120). These texts possess the power to protect from harmful influences and for this reason they are often used in the making of amulets.

Their basic characteristic has to do with fragmentation and lack of coherent reasoning, since there is no rule requiring the existence of the whole written text, and, quite often their recording is restricted only to certain magic symbols, letters and patterns.

⁷ Evans-Pritchard (1967: 5), who conducted a comparative study of the magic speech of the Zande and that of the Trobriand, reached a number of different conclusions, though. According to Evans-Pritchard, the performers can change the words depending on the purpose these are intended to serve. Moreover, it is possible for different performers to add to the already existing body of words various details. The essential part in the case of Zande is not the verbal, but the non-verbal part/component, that is, the medicines to which the performers address their speech (Evans-Pritchard 1977: 449). Consequently, the power and value of magic acts relies primarily on the very objects themselves, for without them magic is unsuccessful (*ibid.* 451).

⁸ Cf. “It should be mentioned that all folk production in which the creative aspect is intrinsically connected with the performance component have one specific feature in common: they are generally performed not on the basis of written texts (manuscripts, printed material or notes), but by memory... Naturally, such performances entail unconscious or conscious alterations” (Bogatyrev 1969: 229).

⁹ Cf. “Composition in Performance” (Finnegan 1988: 88–89).

¹⁰ For the relation between charms with the genre(s) of oral folk production see Sébillot 1913: 66; Klagstand 1958: 142; Conrad 1989: 438 n. 15.

¹¹ The need to include a number of performative factors in the process of examining folk phenomena is emphasized by many contemporary researchers in the field. These factors, in combination with the study of the textual form, are useful in terms of understanding the genre of charms in its totality and contribute significantly in differentiating it from other folk genres. Abrahams (1976: 197–98) maintains that any given folk genre needs to be examined on the basis of three different structural levels: a) the structure of its materials b) its dramatic structure and c) the structure of its context. The structure of its content, in particular, refers to the types of relationships that emerge among those participating in the communicative process. Jansen’s (1957: 110–118) criteria of examination and classification of folk genres have to do with the factors of their performance. He thus makes a distinction between two poles in the process of communication, namely, performance and participation. These factors stand in reverse relation with each other in every folk genre. The degree of the ability to perform the charm is in any case affected by the intrinsic requirements of the very form itself, by the function of expression in any particular case and, eventually, by the social expectations of the speaker. The forms, which are characterized by a low rate of performative ability, are those requiring a higher rate of participation, such as group/chorus singing without an audience; and vice versa, that is, forms characterized by a high rate of performative ability require a low rate of participation. Charms are to be included in the latter category. See Ben-Amos 1976: xxxviii–xxxix.

¹² An important factor, which is responsible for corruptions and alterations and which should be taken into serious consideration, relates to the circumstances under which the material is selected and recorded. In the majority of cases, to be sure, the recordings are random and do not occur under the most favourable conditions. Conse-

quently, we are not in a position to know what the possible differences would be between the recording we possess and other recordings of the same charm by the same practitioner in different moments of time, since such external factors as the emotional and/or psychological state of the performer can bring about alterations in the rendition of the charms. One more factor that needs to be examined relates to where and how accurately the recording has been conducted by a given collector and this is because the time of data collection is particularly important in the analysis of folk themes which are no longer in use. It makes sense to suppose, then, that if the recording is a recent one and has occurred within a community where the functionality of the genre has started to wane, the alterations will be greater or more extensive. The lifting of the restrictions and cancellation of taboos in the transmission process are usually connected with “the failing prestige of traditional medicine” (Κόϊβα 1996: 6/18) in rural cultures and with the invasion of new alternative systems of healing. Typical are the cases described by ethnographers where the charms are transmitted to them by inheritors who are no longer interested in traditional healing practices and who do not put into practice the knowledge they have acquired (Ημελλος 1962: 176), because they have no faith in it and do not trust it any more (Παρχαρίδης 1979: 484).

¹³ We are excluding here those charms whose performance is based on a loud recitation. See also n. 4.

¹⁴ According to Simmel (1950: 331) and from a sociological point of view what is essential is not the secret itself but, rather, ownership of the secret. The differentiating factor is to be traced between those who have knowledge of and control over the secret and those who do not. Thus, secrecy becomes both the crucial factor and one of the main magic ingredients of the whole ritual.

REFERENCES

- Abrahams, R. D. 1976. The complex Relations of Simple Forms, in Dan Ben Amos (ed.) *Folklore Genres*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 193–214.
- Ασβεστή, Μ. Β. 1962. Μαγικά και δεισιδαίμονες συνήθειαι. *Λαογραφία* Κ', 204–212.
- Astakhova, A. M. 1969. The Poetic Image and Elements of Philosophy. *VII Congrès International des Sciences Anthropologiques et Ethnologiques* VI. Moscou, 266–272.
- Αθανασόπουλος, Θ. Ι. 1929–1932. Παρατηρήσεις εις Λαογραφίας Θ'. Είδη τινά καταδέσμων. *Λαογραφία* Ι', 578–579.
- Bateson, G. and Bateson, C. M. 1987. *Angels Fear: Towards an Epistemology of the Sacred*. New York: Macmillan.
- Ben Amos, D. 1976. *Folklore Genres*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bogatyrev, P. G. 1969. Tradition and improvisation in folk art. *VII Congrès International des Sciences Anthropologiques et Ethnologiques* VI. Moscou, 228–233.
- Χρυσάνθης, Κ. 1988. *Δημόδης Ιατρική της Κύπρου*. Λευκωσία.
- Conrad, J. L. 1989. Russian Ritual Incantation: Tradition, Diversity, and Continuity. *Slavic and East European Journal* 33, 429–444.

- Δελγιάννης, Β. Ν. 1937–38. Λαογραφικά Δογαν-κιόϊ Μαλγάρων (Αν. Θράκης). *Αρχαίον Θρακικού Λαογραφικού και Γλωσσικού Θησαυρού Δ΄*, 53–71.
- Gaster, M. 1900. Two thousand years of a charm against the child-stealing witch. *Folklore* 11, 129–162.
- Goody, J. 1983. *The Interface between the Written and Oral*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Φασατάκης, Ν. 1991. *Η λαογραφία των Μελαμπών Ρεθύμνης*, τόμ. Α΄. Αθήνα.
- Finnegan, R. 1988. *Literacy and Orality. Studies in the Technology of Communication*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Foley, M. J. and Kerewsky, Halpern B. 1978. The Power of the Word. Healing Charms as an Oral Genre. *Journal of American Folklore* 91, 903–924.
- Φραγκάκι, Ευαγγελία Κ. 1978. *Η δημόδης ιατρική της Κρήτης*. Αθήνα.
- Γιαννοπούλου, Ε. Μ. 1950–51. Ζακυθινά ξόρκια. *Λαογραφία*. ΙΓ΄, 263–276.
- Αικατερινίδης, Γ. Ν. 1957–58. Επωδαί εζ Ανατολικής Κρήτης. *Λαογραφία* ΙΖ΄, 577–588.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1967. The Morphology and Function of Magic: A Comparative Study of Trobriand and Zande Ritual and Spells, in John Middleton (ed.) *Magic, Witchcraft, and Curing*. New York: Natural History Press, 1–22.
- Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1977. *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magical among the Azande*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Ημελλος, Στ. Δ. 1962. Ναξιακαί Επωδαί. *Λαογραφία* Κ΄, 176–195.
- Jansen, W. 1957. Classifying Performance in the Study of Verbal Folklore, in W. Edson and W. Richmond (eds.) *Studies in Folklore*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 110–118.
- Herjulfsdotter, R. 2009. Swedish Snakebite Charms from a Gender Perspective, in Roper J. (ed.) *Charms, Charmers and Charming. International Research on Verbal Magic*. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan, 54–61.
- Huson, P. 1970. *Mastering Witchcraft*. New York: Perigree.
- Kaima, S.T. 2000. Takwan: Secret Knowledge, Storage and Transmission in Wantoat, Morobe Province, Papua New Guinea. *Melanesian Law Journal* 2, 27–37.
- Keen, I. 1994. *Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion: Yolngu of North-east Arnhem Land*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Klagstad, H. L. 1958. Great Russian Charm Structure. *Indiana Slavic Studies* 2, 135–144.
- Kõiva, M. 1995. *From Incantation to Rites*, in Kõiva, M. and Vassiljeva, K. (eds) *Folk Beliefs Today*. Tartu: Estonian Academy of Sciences Tartu, 215–236.
- Kõiva, M. 1996. The transmission of knowledge among Estonian Witch Doctor. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 2, 42–72. Online: <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol2/docdoc.htm>
- Κορρές, Γ. Ν. 1966. Λαογραφικά της Πάρου. Α. Ξόρκια. *Επετηρίς της Εταιρείας Κυκλαδικών Μελετών* Ε΄, 104–124.
- Κοσμάτος, Στ. 1910–11. Επωδαί Κεφαλληνιακαί. *Λαογραφία* Β΄, 186–191.
- Κουκουλές, Φ. Ι. 1908. *Οινουντιακά ή μελέτη περί της ιστορίας, των ηθών και εθίμων και του γλωσσικού ιδιώματος του δήμου Οινούντος της επαρχίας Ασακεδαίμονος*. Χανιά.
- Κυπριανός, Χρ. 1968. *Πο Παγκύπριον Γυμνάσιον και η Λαογραφία*, vol. Β΄. Λευκωσία-Κύπρος, 171–203.
- Κυριαζής, Ν. Γ. 1926. Δημόδης ιατρική εν Κύπρω. *Κυπριακά Χρονικά* Δ΄, 1–186.

- Κυριακίδης, Στ. Π. 1917. Κυπριακά επωδαί (ευκές). *Λαογραφία* ΣΤ', 602–615.
- Λουκατος, Δ. Σ. 1992. *Εισαγωγή στην ελληνική λαογραφία*. Αθήνα: Μορφωτικό Ίδρυμα Εθνικής Τραπέζης (4th ed.).
- Lord, A. B. 1964. *The Singer of Tales*. London: Harvard University Press.
- Luhrmann, T. M. 1989. The Magic of Secrecy. *Ethos* 17:2, 131–165.
- Μέγας, Γ. 1941–42. Ζητήματα ελληνικής λαογραφίας, *Επετηρίς Λαογραφικού Αρχείου* 3–4, 77–196.
- Μερτιανού-Βοσαγάρη, Α. 1989. *Λαογραφικά των Ελλήνων της Κάτω Ιταλίας*. Αθήνα.
- Malinowski, B. 1954. *Magic, Science and Religion and other essays*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books (2nd ed.).
- Μαντζουράνης, Κ. Ι. 1924. Η πνευματική ζωή των Βουρβούρων. Β'. Ξόρκια. *Επετηρίς των Βουρβούρων* Α', 130–131.
- Middleton, John 1987. The notion of secrecy in Lugbara religious thought, in Kees W. Bolle (ed.) *Secrecy in Religions*. Leiden: Brill, 25–43.
- Morphy, Howard 1991. *Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Νικολαΐδης, Α. 1979. Λαϊκή ιατρική των Ελλήνων του Πόντου. *Αρχείον Πόντου* 36, 8–82.
- Olsan, L. 1992. Latin Charms of Medieval England: Verbal Healing in a Christian Oral Tradition. *Oral Tradition* 7:1, 116–142.
- Πάγκαλος, Γ. Εμμ. 1983. Μαγεία-Επωδαί, in *Περί του γλωσσικού ιδιώματος της Κρήτης*, vol. 7. Αθήνα: Κέντρον Ερεύνης Ελληνικής Λαογραφίας Ακαδημίας Αθηνών, 349–395.
- Παπαδάκη, Ειρ. 1983. Λαογραφικά Σύμμεικτα Σητείας. Δ. Γητειές. *Επετηρίς της Εταιρείας Κρητικών Σπουδών*. 1, 513–529.
- Παπαδόπουλος, Α. Α. 1964. Σύμμεικτα Ροδοπόλεως (Ματσούκας). *Αρχείον Πόντου* 26, 234–249.
- Παπαδόπουλος, Θ. 1975. Κυπριακά επωδαί. *Κυπριακά Σπουδαί* ΑΗ-ΛΘ, 167–181.
- Παπαθανάση-Μουσιοπούλου, Καλ. 1982. *Λαϊκή φιλολογία*. Αθήνα.
- Παρχαρίδης, Γ. Σ. 1979. Ομματίαγμαν-γήτεμαν. *Ποντιακή Εστία* 30, 484.
- Πασσαλής, Χ. 2000. *Νεοελληνικές λαϊκές επωδές (γητειές, ξόρκια)*. Μορφολογικά χαρακτηριστικά και εθνογραφικές καταγραφές. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki: School of History and Archaeology, Greece. Online: <http://thesis.ekt.gr/13624>
- Πετράκη-Επιφανίου, Στ. 1964. *Λαογραφικά της Σμύρνης*. Αθήνα.
- Ρήγας, Γ. Α. 1968. *Σκιάθου λαϊκός πολιτισμός*, vol. Γ. Θεσσαλονίκη: Εταιρεία Μακεδονικών Σπουδών.
- Roper, J. 1998. Charms and Memory: Some principles Underlying Variation. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 9, 51–70. Online: <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol9/roper.htm>
- Roper, J. 2003. Towards a Poetics, Rhetorics and Proxemics of Verbal Charms. *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* 24, 7–49. Online: <http://www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol24/engcharm.pdf>
- Roper, J. 2009 (ed.). *Charms, Charmers and Charming. International Research on Verbal Magic*. Great Britain: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Σαράντη-Σταμούλη, Ε. 1937. Πώς γιάτρευαν στη Θράκη. Γιατρικά, γητειές και χαρές. *Θρακικά* 7, 351–383.

- Σαράντη-Σταμούλη, Ε. 1951. Προλήψεις και δεισιδαιμονίες της Θράκης. *Λαογραφία* ΙΓ΄, 201–36.
- Sebeok, A. Th. 1974. *Structure and Texture. Selected Essays in Chremis Verbal Art*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Sebeok, A. T. & Ingemann, F. J. 1956. *Studies in Chremis: The Supernatural*. New York: Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology.
- Sébillot, P. 1913. *Le folk-lore. Litterature orale et ethnographie traditionnelle*. Encyclopédie Scientifique publiée sous la direction du Dr. Toulouse. Paris.
- Simmel, G. 1950. *The sociology of George Simmel*, K. Wolff (trans. and ed.). New York: Free Press.
- Στέλλας, Ζ. 2004. *Της Πάρου, ζουγραφιές ατσούμπαλες. Αηθειές και άλλα λαογραφικά και γλωσσικά*. Αθήνα.
- Ταταράκης, Αρ. Μ. 1872. Αι δι' επωδών θεραπείαι. *Νεοελληνικά Ανάλεκτα* Α΄, 330–332.
- Teft, S. K. 1980 (ed.). *Secrecy: A Cross-cultural Perspective*. New York: Human Sciences Press.
- Tambiah, S. 1968. The magical Power of Words. *Man*, vol. 3, 175–208.
- Webster, H. 1952. *La Magie dans les sociétés primitives, traduction de Jean Gouillard*. Paris: Payot.

About the Author

Haralampos Passalis is currently employed as a teacher of Ancient and Modern Greek Language and Literature at the Intercultural School of Evosmos–Thessaloniki (Greece) and has also been working as a Researcher at the Centre for the Greek Language-Department of Greek Medieval Lexicography (Thessaloniki) since 1998. He is a member of the compiling team for the Dictionary of Medieval Vulgar Greek Literature 1100-1669, vols 15 (2003) and 16 (2006), 17 (2011), 18 (in press) published by the Centre for the Greek Language, Thessaloniki. Personal research interests mainly focus on Vernacular Folk Literature and Tradition as well as on the magico-religious system of Greek Traditional Culture.

ISNFR Committee on Charms, Charmers and
Charming

Incantatio

An International Journal on
Charms, Charmers and Charming

Issue 1

General Editor: Mare Kõiva
Guest Editor For This Issue: Jonathan Roper

Tartu 2011

General Editor: Mare Kõiva
Guest Editor For This Issue: Jonathan Roper
Layout: Liisa Vesik

Editorial board:

Alaric Hall
Claude Lecouteux
Lea Olsan
Éva Pócs
Jonathan Roper
Emanuela Timotin
Andrey Toporkov
Daiva Vaitkevičienė
Will Ryan

Editorial contacts:

<http://www.folklore.ee/incantatio>
incantatio@folklore.ee
Vanemuise 42, Tartu 51003, Estonia

Supported by and affiliated to projects SF0030181s08, SF0180139s08 and EKKM09-159 of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, and the European Union through the European Regional Development Fund (Centre of Excellence in CECT).

All rights reserved.

Copyright 2011 the authors and the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming

ISSN 2228-1355

Contents

Introduction	6
Secrecy and Ritual Restrictions on Verbal Charms Transmission in Greek Traditional Culture Haralampos Passalis	7
Practical Texts in Difficult Situations: Bulgarian Medieval Charms as Apocrypha and <i>Fachliteratur</i> Svetlana Tsonkova	25
Immaterialia Medica: Charmers and their Communities in Newfoundland Martin Lovelace	36
The Three Good Brothers Charm: Some Historical Points Lea Olsan	48
Genre and Authority in the Scholarly Construction of Charm and Prayer: A View from the Margins James A. Kapaló	79
BOOK REVIEWS	
A Successful and Fruitful Model – a Lithuanian Charms Collection as a Contribution to the Research of Verbal Magic	102
A New Generation Study of Lithuanian Incantations	104
Snake Bite Charms from Sweden	106
CONFERENCE REPORT	
<i>Charms, Charmers and Charming</i> . International Conference at the Romanian Academy (Bucharest, June, 24–25, 2010)	108

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first issue of *Incantatio*. This peer-reviewed journal is the natural outcome of the recent upsurge in charms studies, as illustrated, for example, by the activities of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research's Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming (<http://www.isfnr.org>). It is intended that *Incantatio* will be a lively forum for charms studies from a wide variety of traditions and scholarly approaches rather in the manner that *Proverbium* fulfills this role in paremological studies. Some of the range we hope to cover will be indicated by the contents of this our first issue, where we have articles on both medieval and (near-)contemporary charms, both European and North American material, and both close readings and theoretical interventions. Alongside such articles, we intend to published reports of conferences (or conference sessions) and reviews of books which touch on charms, charmers and charming.

The general editor of *Incantatio* is Mare Kõiva (mare@folklore.ee), who is also editor of the *Electronic Journal of Folklore* (<http://www.folklore.ee/folklore>). In addition, each issue will have a guest editor. For this first issue this role is being played by Jonathan Roper. We look forward to informative and productive developments in charms studies appearing the pages of *Incantatio*.

Mare Kõiva and Jonathan Roper