

INTRODUCTION

This journal issue comprises several parts and presents various studies on the theme of activities in charming and related fields. It includes five research articles, an interview and reports on books and conferences. It is largely based on and thematically framed by the conference “The Canonical and Non-Canonical in Charming Texts and Practices”, held at the National Library of Latvia in Riga on 6–9 September 2022. The conference was organised by the Archives of Latvian Folklore (a structural unit of the Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art at the University of Latvia) and the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming; it aimed to reveal various canonical and non-canonical values in texts and practices through personal, social, political and even economic relationships and contexts. However, it also contains articles not presented at the conference as well as an interview with a researcher studying charming; such interviews are becoming a tradition for *Incantatio*.

Historically, the texts and performance of charms have been influenced by official religion, conventional medicine and the political position of the state at different times while being channelled through the individual interpretations of users and performers embedded in traditions, which have a regional and local linguistic and cultural character. Simultaneously, they have a transnational nature, evidenced by the migration of societies and knowledge in the past and present. The charming tradition stands equally on two pillars – religion and medicine – each with its own path of development that has shaped and enriched vernacular charming practices.

Previous centuries have been highly stratifying, dividing societies into high and low culture as well as divisions based on social status, language, and right and wrong practices, thus impacting popular culture and traditions. On the one hand, canons are framed in theoretical frameworks, which in turn are rooted in a particular time and cultural context, while folk traditions, which are not canonical but involve inevitable deviation from the canon or variation, take their cues from the

canon as a culturally superior form and tend to follow it. In folk traditions, the canon of religion or practices and remedies of conventional medicine adapted by the folk have been simplified and modified. In usage by the folk, past forms are preserved for a longer time, whereas changes and developments in conventional medicine and official religion are more rapid (Lielbārdis 2024: 255–256). This leads to a mutual imbalance between academic knowledge, science or canon and tradition, both in the past and the present day.

This clash has been based on the values of different cultures, religions, ethnic groups, and even economic considerations. At the same time, the antagonism between these values has enriched tradition, whether it manifests itself as the opposition between the official religion and the folk (Yoder 1974; Thomas 1971) or vernacular religion (Primiano 1995), permitted and forbidden medicine, folk medical systems (Santino 1985: 153), or proper and “wrong” texts and practices, among others, taking into account individual religious experience and interpretation (Bowman and Valk 2014: 4). Priests, monks and educated doctors have fought for the right to heal the people; church canons, prayers and the cult of saints have influenced folk religion; the development of conventional medicine has changed vernacular traditions; and local conditions have determined the regional peculiarities of the official religion and conventional medicine.

This issue of the journal does not fully reflect the diversity of the conference’s theme and presentations, but the published articles do provide insights into the subject. Among these are Laura Jiga Iliescu’s article “The Tale of the God as a Prayer, a Charm, a Fairytale: Considerations and Multiple Generic Appurtenances” and Daiva Vaitkevičienė’s article “Verbal Charm vs. Prayer: An Emic Approach to the Lithuanian Terminology”. Both authors focus on the use of the terms ‘charm’ and ‘prayer’ concerning the content, context and functionality of a text, using sources and analysing material from Romanian and Lithuanian folklore, respectively.

The third article to reflect on the conference is Jonathan Roper’s “Chugg’s Charms: Authenticity, Typicality and Sources”, in which the author addresses the question of the authenticity of charms collected in Devon, England in the early twentieth century. The article reflects the work of a detective to highlight questions related to the reliability of orally-collected data and text rendition in literature.

Although not presented at the conference, the historical and contemporary comparison of folk beliefs is touched on in Reet Hiimäe’s paper

“Verbal Magic in Contemporary Women’s Narratives about Nightmare Experiences in Estonia”, which analyses narratives about nightmares from a woman’s perspective. This publication fits Hiimäe’s research interests in contemporary spirituality and folk beliefs in modern Estonia (Hiimäe 2017; 2019).

Eva Toulouze’s article “Stability and Change in the Udmurt Kuris’kon Prayers” also addresses the terminology and use of prayer in the Udmurt religion in Bashkortostan. This article is a follow-up to a study published in the previous issue of *Incantatio* on the texts and ways in which the Udmurts address their gods (Toulouze 2023). Both articles reveal Toulouze’s deep interest in and knowledge of the Finno-Ugric peoples and their fates, languages and cultures in the modern Russian Federation, and also on the subject of Russia’s war in Ukraine.

The research articles are followed by an interview with Emanuela Timotin, the chair of the Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming. This interview, conducted by Jonathan Roper, follows other conversations in previous issues of *Incantatio* with key figures and researchers in charm studies, and Timotin is undoubtedly one such figure. The interview covers her personal experience, her interest in the charm genre, and research challenges.

Two book reviews follow the interview. The first is by charm researcher Lea Olsen on *The Language of Magic*, edited by Eleonora Cianci and Nicholas Wolf (Cianci, Wolf 2022). The second is provided by the researcher of Latvian charms and Soviet folklore Toms Kencis, on the study *Latvian Charms: Texts, Traditions, Contexts* (Lielbārdis 2024), which is in Latvian but has an extensive introduction and conclusion in English.

This issue of *Incantatio* concludes with a look at conferences. The first report is by Jonathan Roper on the Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming annual conference “The Materiality and Performance of Charms”, held from 29 August to 1 September 2023 in Singapore. Eleonora Cianci has an overview of the Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming 16th annual conference “Conflicts and Catastrophes”, which took place on 12–15 June 2024 in Helsinki, Finland. Swedish charm researcher Alessandra Mastrangelo reports on “The Magical Turn? Room for Nordic Doctoral Students” symposium, which was held on 11–12 April 2024 in Uppsala, Sweden, and is considered essential for charm research, which is a part of folklore studies.

In preparing this issue, I express my gratitude to Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming chair Emanuela Timotin and vice-

chair Jonathan Roper for their advice, and a special thanks to Estonian charms researcher Mare Kõiva for her support and management of *Incantatio*. I also thank the authors of all the articles and reviews for their qualitative research and kind communication during the compilation of the issue. And a heartfelt thank you to the reviewers, who play an essential role in maintaining the quality of research publications yet remain largely unknown, in the shadows of the authors. My work as editor of this issue was supported by the basic budgeted sub-programme 05.04.00, “The Krišjānis Barons Cabinet of Folksongs” of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Latvia.

REFERENCES

- Bowman, Marion & Valk, Ülo 2014. Introduction: Vernacular Religion, Generic Expressions and the Dynamics of Belief. *Vernacular Religion in Everyday Life: Expressions of Belief*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 1–19.
- Cianci, Eleonora & Wolf, Nicholas 2022. *The Language of Magic*. Milano: LED. <https://www.ledonline.it/Il-Segno-le-Lettere/996-language-of-magic.html>
- Hiiemäe, Reet 2019. Belief Narratives of Spirit-Animals: A Case Study on Estonian Contemporary Folklore. *Folklore*, 77, pp. 115–138.
- Hiiemäe, Reet 2017. Destiny, Miracle Healers and Magical Intervention: Vernacular Beliefs on Involuntary Childlessness in Estonia. *Journal of Ethnology and Folkloristics*, 11 (2), pp. 25–50.
- Lielbārdis, Aigars 2024. *Latviešu buramvārdi. Teksti, tradīcijas, konteksti* [Latvian charms: Texts, traditions, contexts]. Rīga: LFMI.
- Primiano, Leonard Norman 1995. Vernacular Religion and the Search for Method in Religious Folklife. *Western Folklore*, 54 (1), pp. 37–56.
- Santino, Jack 1985. On The Nature of Healing as a Folk Event. *Western Folklore*, 44 (3), pp. 153–167.
- Thomas, Keith 1971. *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Toulouze, Eva 2023. How Do Udmurts Address Their God(s)? *Incantatio*, 11, pp. 26–55.
- Yoder, Don 1974 Toward a Definition of Folk Religion. *Western Folklore*, 33 (1), pp. 2–15.

Aigars Lielbārdis

Leading researcher, Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia (ILFA), The Archives of Latvian Folklore

Email: aigars.lielbardis@gmail.com