

“THE MAGICAL TURN? ROOM FOR NORDIC DOCTORAL STUDENTS” SYMPOSIUM (UPPSALA, APRIL 11–12, 2024)

Interest in folk beliefs, narrative and ritual practices in relation to magic and the supranormal is greater today than it has been for a very long time. In academia, too, research on the subject seems to be enjoying a renaissance. In Sweden and the Nordic countries there are a number of doctoral projects dedicated to the topic of magic in which young researchers approach folkloric archive collections with new theoretical starting points, methodological approaches and questions. The aim of the symposium “The magical turn?”, held on 11-12 April 2024 in Uppsala (Sweden), was to bring together young researchers who, in their ongoing dissertations, approach the subject of magic from different perspectives and are activating the research field and the collections from new and different perspectives and to create space for the exchange of scientific knowledge.

The symposium was organized by the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy for Swedish Folk Culture and in collaboration with the Department of Ethnology at Stockholm University, the Nordic Museum and the Institute for Language and Folklore. It lasted two days and was held in the hospitable atmosphere of the Royal Gustavus Adolphus Academy for Swedish Folk Culture, in the historic city of Uppsala. The speakers were seven young researchers coming from different scholarly backgrounds such as folklore studies, human ecology, linguistics and philology, religion studies, ethnology, museum studies and history from universities from Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Italy who, in their ongoing dissertations, have activated the research field and archive collections from new and different perspectives. The following issues were discussed at the symposium: the relationship between magic and religion; magic and its social functions; the reception of museum objects

and the role of collectors in categorizing magic; magic as a political tool for rewriting histories; charms in oral and manuscript traditions; the contribution of the Church and clerics to the diffusion of charms in Scandinavia; the possibility of systematizing national charms corpora and of the charm-indexes elaboration.

The first day of the symposium was opened by the organizers Fredrik Skott (Institute for Language and Folklore, Gustavus Adolphus Royal Academy for Swedish Folk Culture), Lotten Gustafsson Reinius (Nordic Museum and Stockholm University) and Ebba Vikdahl (Stockholm University), and took the form of two sessions dedicated to two main topics. The first session was dedicated to the theme of magic in relation to its relationship with places, objects and artefacts believed to be connected to the supernatural. John Björkman, PhD student in Nordic Folklore Studies at Åbo Akademi University, presented a paper entitled “Folktröplatsers kulturella geografi i sydvästra Finland” (Cultural geography of folklore sites in south-west Finland). In his research on folklore sites linked to the supernatural in south-west Finland, he investigates whether certain natural landscapes, cited in folklore as terrifying and supernatural, conceal older forms of sacredness.

Ebba Vikdahl, PhD student in Ethnology at Stockholm University presented a paper entitled “Konstruktioner av ett magiskt förflutet i Nordiska museets folktrosamlingar” (Constructions of a magical past in the Nordic Museum’s folklore collections), focused on the Nordic Museum’s collection of and knowledge about magical objects and artifacts. In her research she investigates how these artefacts – by being incorporated into the museum – are reloaded into cultural heritage and what this in turn can tell us about the view of magic during the time in question.

The second session was dedicated to the relation between magic and religion in relation to books of magic and verbal charms in Scandinavia. The first paper presented by Mette Moesgaard Andersen, PhD student in Religious Studies at School of Culture and Society (Aarhus University) focused on Danish Black art books and their reception history. In her presentation entitled “Danske sortebøgers receptionshistorie og dennes påvirkning på empiri indsamling- og udvælgelse” (The reception history of Danish black books and its impact on empirical collection and selection”), she discussed how these writings have been received over time and how this affected the collection and categorization in Denmark.

Finally, Alessandra Mastrangelo, PhD student in Literary, Linguistic and Comparative Studies at University of Naples L’Orientale presented

her ongoing research on the manuscript and oral tradition of Swedish healing charms, with a paper entitled “Botformler och magiska läsnin-gar: Verbal magi i det förmoderna och tidigmoderna Sverige” (Healing charms and magical texts: Verbal magic in pre-modern and early mod-ern Sweden). Based on a selection of manuscripts dated to 1650–1850 and folklore material, she examines how Swedish verbal charms are presented and transmitted. Among the various issues discussed were how the authors adapted and modified healing texts that were com-mon throughout Europe, the collection results and the evidence of the database, and the importance of making this material accessible to an international audience for international comparison. Finally, she dis-cussed possible future research developments, such as the elaboration of a motif index for the Swedish charm corpus.

The day ended with a refreshments and recollection by the speakers and the audience followed by a dinner in Uppsala’s Old Town.

The second day of the symposium opened with a session dedicated to the relationship between folk beliefs, artefacts and narratives about the supernatural and how these influence each other. Kristian Aarup, Phd student at Copenhagen University presented his research on folk beliefs about everyday objects in 18th and 19th century Danish peas-ant culture with a paper entitled “Trosforestillinger forbundet til den præindustrielle danske bondes hverdagsgenstande” (Beliefs associated with the everyday objects of the pre-industrial Danish peasantry). In his project he explores the relationship between folklore and everyday life and its practices in the Danish pre-industrial commoner society in both a material and immaterial sense. His paper focused on the every-day folk beliefs of the Danish pre-industrial peasant society and how these beliefs have been expressed in practice.

Sanna Händén-Svensson, Phd student in Human Ecology at Lund University presented her research on the Swedish *Storsjöodjur* (the monster of Lake Storsjön), with a paper entitled “Väsen, djur, kryptid. Varför är Storsjöodjuret så svårt att ta på allvar?” (Creatures, ani-mals, cryptids. Why is the Storsjöodjur so hard to take seriously?) The *Storsjöodjur* is a phenomenon that originates in Jämtland folklore and was first mentioned in writing as early as 1635. The aim of her thesis is to examine the view of nature that underlies some of the conceptions of cryptids and asks the question whether stories of cryptid sightings can be seen as a (re-)enchanted force.

Finally, Adriana Aurelius, PhD in Museum studies at Umeå Uni-versity presented a paper entitled “Trolldom, avgudadyrkan eller folk-

tradition?" (Witchcraft, idolatry or folk tradition?). She presented her research on the Sámi artefacts *seitar* found in museums and the role that the sources used by museum collectors played on the perception of these artefacts. Critical questions were discussed about what the older sources say about *seitar*, what they do not say, and where that knowledge may have gone.

The symposium was closed with a brilliant and stimulating summarizing talk given by the commentators Egil Asprem (Religious Studies, Stockholm University) and Blanka Henriksson (Folklore Studies, Åbo University) on the main issues and themes that emerged during the two-day symposium, as well as on further research and on plans for future scholarly meetings.

The symposium provided an opportunity for young researchers to present their research, address various issues related to their research topics, as well as to establish new contacts and broaden their study horizons. Crucial was the comparison during the symposium with international scholars moving along similar lines of research. The importance of interdisciplinary approaches and collaborations in the study of magic has been emphasized.

As a speaker, I would like to thank all the organizers and organizations that made this symposium possible. It is hoped that this will be the beginning of further collaborations and meetings around the interest and study of magic and its many manifestations, forms and functions, both in Scandinavia and internationally.

Alessandra Mastrangelo,

*Dept. of Literary, Linguistic and Comparative Studies
University of Naples L'Orientale*