

# **CONCORD AND CO-OPERATION DESPITE CONFLICTS AND CATASTROPHES**

In early autumn 2023, the Finnish organising team of the 2024 Conference of the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming sat down and started to plan the upcoming conference. Our first task was to find an inspiring theme that would gather charm scholars in Helsinki. The global COVID-19 pandemic had not happened too long ago, wars and armed conflicts were affecting many people's lives around the world, and the AI revolution as well as alarming news concerning the global environment and climate change cast shadows on the future. Hence the name of our conference became Conflicts and Catastrophes, as an honest and straightforward way of expressing the issues that were on our minds.

The conference was held in June 2024 in Helsinki, Finland. We received many excellent and interesting submissions, and the conference ended up comprising of 21 papers. During the three days of the event scholars considered conflicts, catastrophes, and charms in multiple ways: charms in relation to technology, politics, the environment, disease and healing, malefic spirits, interpersonal relationships, and social conflict. Despite its ominous name, the conference was a success, and the scholarly input was high.

As organisers, we were extremely happy to be able to use the Finnish Literature Society's Great Hall as the conference venue. Many Finnish folklorists and other charms scholars have cooperated with the Society, especially to study the archive material held in that building. We were so lucky that the Society's representatives offered international conference participants a tour of this tremendous archive, which comprise, for instance, thousands of Kalevala-metric incantation poems, as well as narratives and recollections about sages, witches and cunning men in 19<sup>th</sup>-century Finland, Karelia, and Ingria.

We had the privilege of organising a reception at the beautiful Laterna Magica book gallery, whose atmosphere exhales history, mysteries and magic, not least because of the bedrock cellar floor that was formed during the last Ice Age, 11,000 years ago. In addition, we got the chance to enjoy a warm summer evening at the sea, as the conference dinner was held on a ferry cruise around the Helsinki archipelago. On the last day of the conference, PhD Karolina Kouvola hosted a walking tour seeking the restless spirits that have been said to inhabit various places in Helsinki city centre. The stories we heard during the tour made the warm summer evening feel chilly at times. Luckily (or unluckily?), no ghosts were seen during the walk.

We discussed the possibility of publishing a thematic issue of *Incantatio* focusing on the papers presented in Helsinki during the conference. If the name Conflicts and Catastrophes was not a bad omen for the event, let us say that its meanings have become clearer during the publication process, although we were fortunate enough to be spared actual conflicts ourselves. Therefore, this issue comprises not only articles based on papers presented in Helsinki, but also a few additional publications.

Haralampos Passalis' article "Production and Reproduction of Words of Power in Our Modern Digital Era: A Case Study on the Healing Prayer to Saint Jude Thaddeus" is based on a paper presented in Helsinki. Through an analysis of the often marginalised figure of Saint Jude Thaddeus in contemporary Greece, Passalis examines the significant question of dichotomies between prayer and charm, official and unofficial, thus laying the groundwork for potential comparative study scenarios.

Eleonora Cianci's article "Against Wind and Storm: A Medieval German Charm" was also presented in Helsinki. Cianci discusses the crucial question of vernacular practices in relation to institutional texts. By analysing a medieval German weather charm, she shows the negotiations between vernacular ritual speech and institutionalised Christian practice.

Stephen Miller's article "'6 or 7 Note Books Full of Charms': The Sophia Morrison Collection of Manx Folk Charms" is a great addition to this thematic issue. Miller presents a corpus of 70 charms recorded by folklorist Sophia Morrison (1859–1917) in both Manx and English at the turn of century. Also attached is an appendix including a letter by Morris discussing Manx charm types.

Nicholas M. Wolf writes about an Irish charm and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century folklore collections of J. J. Lyons. Lyons was a Philadelphia-based Irish speaker who recorded a charm against the evil eye from an Irish-born

woman before the turn of the century. Wolf connects Lyons' work with the Gaelic revival movement and shows how Lyons can be approached as a 'proto-folklorist' who recorded the names and background information of his informants

In his article, Frog introduces the concepts of 'linguaging' and 'irruption' and examines their relevance to charm studies. Building a case-study around an 11<sup>th</sup>-century Latin text on treating fever, he shows how concepts that have backgrounds in linguistics can be adapted to the study of genre and register in folklore studies.

In 2023 and 2024, academic publishing house Indrik released two collections of charms:

*Charms from Archival Sources (18<sup>th</sup> Century – First Third of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century)*, Vol. 1, compiled by Tatiana A. Agapkina (2023); Vol. 2, compiled by Alexandra B. Ippolitova and Andrey L. Toporkov (2024). A review of the two volumes is presented by Mare Kõiva.

Finally, the reader can enjoy Monica Bercovici-Ratoiu's conference report from the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming Conference, held under the title of Syncretic Elements in the Process of Charming, 24–26 September 2025, in Bucharest, Romania. Yet another interesting and successful event!

In the fourth of our series of interviews with charms scholars about their scholarly lives, Jonathan Roper present an interview with Daiva Vaitkevičienė, a long-standing member of the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming. The interview was conducted by email in the autumn of 2025.

The editors navigated between catastrophes more than conflicts and managed to cooperate to offer the readers of *Incantatio* a special issue. We wish you pleasant and inspiring moments with the articles presented here, and hope you will find charms against any conflict or catastrophe that might befall you.

**Tuukka Karlsson, Siria Kohonen, Aleksi Moine and Ilona Tuomi**