

THE LONGUE DURÉE AND CLOSE READING

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



Charms from Archival Sources (18th Century – First Third of the 20th Century), Moscow: Indrik. Vol. 1, compiled by Tatiana A. Agapkina, 2023; Vol. 2, compiled by Alexandra B. Ippolitova and Andrey L. Toporkov, 2024.

This two-volume publication contains approximately 860 texts preserved in the archives of the Russian Geographical Society and the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology at the Russian Academy of Sciences. Most manuscripts date to the second half of the 19th century, although earlier and later sources are also represented. The scholarly apparatus includes introductory articles to both sections, contextual notes for individual manuscripts, commentaries, a functional index of charms, an index of names (including place names), and a bibliography. The second volume of the edition contains more than 500 texts from 30 sources preserved in five archives located in Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Saratov: the Manuscript Department at the Russian State Library; the Russian State Archive of Literature and Art; the Folklore Archive and Manuscript Department at the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House), the Russian Academy of Sciences; the St. Petersburg branch of the Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences; and the Department of Rare Books and Manuscripts at the V. A. Artisevich Zonal Scientific Library at N. G. Chernyshevsky Saratov National Research State University.

The volumes continue a series of publications devoted to the magical folklore of East Slavic peoples, initiated more than twenty years ago

by Indrik Publishers within the framework of the Traditional Spiritual Culture of the Slavs series, Text Publications sub-series. Previous volumes include:

Forbidden Reading in Russia of the 17th–18th Centuries (eds. A. L. Toporkov, A. A. Turilov. Moscow, 2002);

Polesian Charms (Recorded in the 1970s–1990s) (comp., text preparation and notes by T. A. Agapkina, E. E. Levkievskaya, A. L. Toporkov. Moscow, 2003);

Russian Charms from Manuscript Sources of the 17th – First Half of the 19th Century (comp., text preparation, articles and commentary by A. L. Toporkov. Moscow, 2010).

In the first volume we found slightly fewer than 400 Ukrainian charms. Although only five Ukrainian manuscripts are represented, two of them are extensive. Geographically, the published material includes Russian charms from the different provinces in the European part of Russia, from the multi-ethnic areas, and from the Don Cossack Region. Chronologically, the collection spans from the late 18th century to 1915, with the majority of manuscripts dating from the mid- to late nineteenth century.

From a genre perspective, the material in this volume comprises charms in the traditional sense, non-canonical prayers, fragments of canonical prayers and psalms, as well as a certain number of incantations and magical formulas. The book includes both handwritten collections of charms and prayers and compilations assembled by individual collectors. Since the primary aim of the edition was to publish charms – that is, texts of verbal magic – many manuscripts appear only in part, as fragments.

The introductory sections provide an overview of expeditions conducted in the early 20th century and during the socially and politically complex 1930s, as well as the origins, professions, and other relevant biographical details about individual collectors.

Particular emphasis is placed on the commentaries, which characterise the collections and summarise the motifs found in the charms and their structural sequence. They identify, for example, the presence of a closing formula where applicable, indicate prior publications of the text, reference biblical motifs, and specify editions in which a given motif has been discussed in detail. The references are linked to the scholarly tradition associated with the study of charms and mythology, including works by researchers emerging from the Nikita Tolstoy school

(S. Tolstaya, E. Levkievskaya, L. Vinogradova, T. Agapkina among others).

I present here two examples of commentary added to the texts, illustrating the depth of work undertaken on each individual text to highlight all its distinctive details, and draw attention to the similarities in other publications. I also highlight the textological changes introduced by earlier editors of the texts.

Charm against bleeding in cases of cuts and lacerations (Agapkina 2023: 28)

1. By the sea, beneath an oak, there is a tomb; upon it a maiden sews and charms the wound (VZMFU¹: 27–28, B1);
2. It is not [name] who charms, but Christ with the Mother of God and the apostles (legitimizing formula) (VLZ: 235 ff.);
3. Formula of negation of illness: The duck has no milk (therefore, the wound has no blood) (VLZ: 190–192);
4. Closing formula (a lock in the sea, a key in the mouth) (VLZ: 242–244);
5. Let the wound be strengthened and the blood cease to flow (VZMFU: 24, A1). Published in: Maikov, No. 142. Possibly, Maikov replaced *men'*, *mnya* with *kamen'*, *kamnya*.
Seventy apostles – followers of Jesus Christ, chosen in addition to the twelve apostles and preaching His teaching (Luke 10:1–2).

Charm against bleeding (Agapkina 2023:28)

1. Someone walked across the Jordan;
2. Let the blood not drip (cf. references to the Jordan in charms against bleeding: VZMFU: 26, A7); on this motif see: VLZ: 339–344; Agapkina, Toporkov 2007.

Textological aspects and the editorial approach are clearly defined: the aim was to make the texts accessible to a wider readership, using contemporary standard orthography while preserving distinctive features. We did not set ourselves specific paleographic or linguistic tasks and sought to make the book accessible to the non-specialist reader. Orthography and punctuation have been partially adapted to modern norms. Capital letters are used largely according to contemporary rules,

etc. Language has been corrected as sparingly as possible, in accordance with the conventions of many philological academic traditions.

The commentaries already indicate that earlier collections have undergone textological analysis. It is important to note the role played by several organisations and individuals over the centuries. The Department Ethnography at the Imperial Russian Geographical Society (after 1917 the Russian Geographical Society), founded in 1845, initiated a program of collecting ethnographic information from the four corners of the Russian empire (1848). In the 1860s this program focused on southern Russia. Invaluable information on the religion, customs, and folklore of Siberian indigenous peoples was provided by Russian travellers and geographers, as well as political opponents, many of whom later became prominent scholars, such as W. Bogoraz, a leading researcher of Chukchi culture and language.

The Russian Geographical Society did more than collect and publish some of the submitted manuscripts. Since the Society regularly organised expeditions and was associated with the most prominent scholars of its time, the material it received required bibliographic and annotated review. Several compilers worked on this, among whom Dmitry Zelenin's detailed descriptions – organised thematically and by ethnic group (see, for example, 1913) – are considered outstanding. A thorough knowledge of the archive was invaluable for the preparation of research and text collection. Dmitry Konstantinovich Zelenin (1878–1956), a linguist and ethnographer, was born in an Udmurt village near Sarapul, where his father was a parish clerk. He attended the Vyatka seminary and Dorpat (Tartu) University. Zelenin focused on the individual side of folk belief. He was particularly familiar with, and interested in, family and calendar rites, apotropaic rituals, and mythological ideas about trees, birds, nature, ecology, and living space.

Charms are also found in chronicles, including Finnic thunder charms recorded in runes. In addition, charms appear in birch bark books, which were widespread in the Novgorod region. Despite most of these books serving primarily as everyday business records and contracts they demonstrate how people communicated in the earliest Russian writing in the city of Great Novgorod in north-western Russia.

European societies – where writing and history have occupied a prominent position for centuries – desperately need the help of historians to investigate that period of the past beyond the immediate memory of the people whom ethnographers and folklorists can question. The *longue durée* then offers the possibility to make some hypotheses on the past of some contemporary cultural practices.

The consolidation of sources has made it possible to systematise archival material and present the genre-diverse texts it contains. This provides an excellent basis for studying individual charm types, their symbolism, language, and other features for example using close reading techniques. Through the consolidation, analysis, and publication of material, Toporkov and Agapkina have established a foundation that enables the resolution of complex problems and creates new perspectives for examining charms both as texts and as performances.

NOTES

¹ VZMFU – ВЗМФУ – Восточнославянские заговоры: Материалы к функциональному указателю сюжетов и мотивов. Аннотированная библиография / авторы-составители Т.А. Агапкина, А.Л. Топорков (*East Slavic Charms: Materials for a Functional Index of Plots and Motifs. Annotated Bibliography*, compiled by T. A. Agapkina and A. L. Toporkov). Moscow, 2014. <https://www.academia.edu/9334877/1>;

VLZ – ВЛЗ – Агапкина Т.А. Восточнославянские лечебные заговоры в сравнительном освещении: Сюжетика и образ мира (Agapkina, T. A. *East Slavic Healing Charms in Comparative Perspective: Plot Structure and Worldview*). Moscow, 2010. <https://www.academia.edu/27006701/>

Zelenin, Dmitry 1913. Bibliographic index of Russian ethnographic literature on the external life of the peoples of Russia: 1700–1910 : (Dwelling, Clothing, Music, Art., Economic life). S. Petersburg: A. V. Orlov. <https://www.prilib.ru/en/node/333551>

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