VERBAL CHARMS FROM A SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY RUSSIAN MANUSCRIPT

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The article publishes nine Russian magical texts translated into English. All of them are taken from the Olonets Codex, a collection of charms dating back to approximately the second quarter of the 17th century. The collection of charms found in the Olonets Codex is unparalleled both in its scope and in its thematic diversity – not only for the seventeenth century, but perhaps within the whole corpus of Russian charm manuscripts.

Key words: Russian charms, manuscripts, 17th century, Karelian-Vepsian language.

This article publishes nine Russian magical texts translated into English. All of them are taken from the Olonets Codex, a collection of charms dating back to approximately the second quarter of the 17th century. We have called it 'the Olonets Codex' (henceforth OC) because it apparently originated from the territory of the former Olonets province of North Russia, though the exact location where it was compiled cannot be traced. Today it belongs to the Manuscript Department of the Russian Academy of Sciences Library in St Petersburg (no. 21.9.10. Sev. 636). The collection of charms found in the OC is unparalleled both in its scope and in its thematic diversity – not only for the seventeenth century, but perhaps within the whole corpus of Russian charm manuscripts.

The manuscript was found in the mid-1870s and partly published in 1876 by L. L. Malinovskii, a teacher at the Petrozavodsk church school. In 1913, the famous codicologist V. I. Sreznevskii published a description of the manuscript alongside with a larger selection of texts, apparently unaware of the earlier publication by Malinovskii (Sreznevskii 1913: 196–202, 481–512). However, neither his edition nor the less accurate one by Malinovskii could give folklore scholars any idea of what the complete OC was actually like. It was only in 2010 that the complete critical edition of the OC, containing a preface and substantial apparatus, was published (Toporkov 2010: 37–310).

According to our estimation, the OC consists of 130 separate charms. As mentioned before, they were first described and indexed by V. I. Sreznevskii (Sreznevskii 1913: 196–202). In the current edition of the manuscript this indexing did not undergo significant changes (Toporkov 2010: 90–144). Sreznevskii's text numbers are used in this publication (No. 4, 18, 44, 45, 76, 90, 98, 116v, 122).

V. I. Sreznevskii gave each text a conventional name which included an indication of its function; except for one or two cases, these names are not changed in the current publication of the manuscript. In our publication they are written in italics before the text itself. It should be noted that some magical texts could be used in different situations, so in many cases the indication of their function is arbitrary. For example, Charm No. 7 (in manuscript, No. 98) is indicated as "Verbal charm against evil charms" in the Russian edition. Probably the same text could be used as a hunter's success charm and in some other situations. Charm No. 5 (in manuscript, No. 76) is called "Verbal charm against wounds and strokes" in the Russian edition. We can assume that it was used during forest work and military activities.

The OC includes 90 charms in the Russian language. As well as the charms, the OC has so-called *пригово́ры* (short magical texts which accompany some practical and ceremonial activities) and non-canonical prayers. Some entries include practical and superstitious procedures which were not supposed to be pronounced verbally.

Some charms of the OC include prayerful formulas, such as "God, Bless Me, Father", "In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit", "For ever and ever", "Amen!" and some others. In general, the OC it is typical of the Russian charm tradition of the 17–18th centuries, when charms were actively interacting with non-canonical prayers (Toporkov 2008b).

Functionally, the 90 Russian verbal charms fall into four general categories: 1) healing charms (33 entries); 2) protective charms (35 entries);[1] 3) regulative charms concerning social or personal relationship (15 entries); 4) charms related to economic activities such as farming (7 entries). In the current publication we have included 4 healing charms (No. 1, 3, 4, 6; in the manuscript No. 4, 44, 45, 90), 4 protective charms (No. 2, 5, 98, 116v; in the manuscript No. 18, 76, 98, 116v) and 1 love charm (No. 9, in the manuscript No. 122).

If judged by structure and semantics, the OC can be divided into 5 groups of entries: 1) narrative charms, 2) charm-requests addressed to supernatural creatures, 3) charm-comparisons, 4) non-specific charms including formulas of different types, and 5) dialogue charms. The most numerous group of entries in the OC is narrative charms (68 entries). In this publication 8 narrative charms and 1 dialogue charm are included (No. 4, in the manuscript No. 45).

In the fullest version, the OC entries comprise 3 elements: 1) heading, 2) instruction and 3) the text of the charm or prayer. None of the elements is obligatory and can be absent. The heading usually indicates the function of the text and sometimes even its type and genre characteristics. In most cases the OC charms are called "words", sometimes "charms" and "prayers". The instruction lets the reader know when, where and how this or that charm should be pronounced, what should be done and which things should be used.

Besides the Russian texts, the OC contains eleven charms in Karelian or Vepsian (the difference is slight and can be described as dialectal). Of these, nine are full-text individual charms and two are short formulae incorporated into fundamentally Russian texts. The interpretation of the non-Russian OC texts is problematic, and the editorial solution in *Russkie zagovory* was to duplicate the Karelian charms in an appendix, with a Russian translation and linguistic apparatus (Toporkov 2010: 286–310). This was prepared by A. S. Myznikov, a recognized authority on the Baltic-Finnic languages.

At least partially, the OC charms were used in a mixed two-language environment. It is interesting that some texts were written in the Karelian-Vepsian language, but the instructions to them were in Russian. It seems to have been assumed that the reader was bilingual and could read the instructions in one language and pronounce the texts in another language.

The Russian charm tradition, evident in the OC, was strongly connected with the magical traditions of the Karelian and Vepsian peoples. The interaction and influence was reciprocal, i.e. Russian charms influenced Vepsian and Karelian charms, and vice versa, Karelian and Vepsian charms had an influence on the Russian charms.

Many striking details of Russian charms of the 17th century could have originated in Karelia or Vepsia. For example, the motif of the "divine character riding from the sea" (No. 7, 9; in the manuscript, No. 98, 122), the image of a golden beetle with a golden bow and arrows (No. 8; in the manuscript, No. 116v), the image of a golden squirrel on a golden pine (No. 7; in the manuscript, No. 98).[2]

While preparing Russian OC texts for publication, we faced a series of linguistic problems. The OC texts include unique lexical elements which have never been met in other sources; e.g. the word *вомра (vomra)* (No. 9; in the manuscript, No. 122). A series of words and phrases have dubious meaning; e.g. the formula: *и пойдет то доброе сало по всем суставам и по всем жилам и улусам человеческим* (*the fat shall move along all joints, veins and parts of the human body*) (No. 8; in the manuscript, 116v). Some words from the OC today have another meaning, which can lead to their incorrect understanding by the modern reader; e.g. the word *притча* (*parable*) (No. 2; in the manuscript, No. 18).

All such cases are discussed in detail in the notes to the Russian edition of the OC. In this paper we have briefly commented on the meaning of these words.

In many OC entries we encounter rhythmical or metrical organization, cases of syntactic parallelism and different types of vocal repetitions (including rhymes and alliterations). Let us take fragments of two Russian charms as an example. In our compilation they are translated into English:[3]

> "...и *отмыкают* тридевять замков, *отворяют* тридевять храмов и *пущают* меня, раба Божи(я) имярек, в тридевять храмов, и *одевают* меня, раба Божия, ризой своею Пречистыя Богородица... и *впущают* в тридевять храмов и *затворяют* тридевять храмов, и *замыкают* тридевять замков..." (Toporkov 2010:128–129)[4]

> "Есть море *окиян,*[5]
> едет из окияна моря | человек *медян;*
> и кон(ь) под ним *медян,*
> (и лук) *медян,*
> и стрел(ь)е *медное;*
> и тянет *крепок* лук | и ст(р)еляет *метко.*
> На мху стоит | сосна *золотая,*
> на сосны золотой | белка *золотая.*
> И пострелит *медной* человек | *белку* золотую
> и *вынимает* у ней | сердце *булатное,*
> росколет *на трое,*
> *наговаривает и заговаривает* | трои слова щепотные" (Toporkov 2010: 128–129)

Many OC charms start with the formula: "There is a holy sea-ocean, in the sea ocean there is a white stone"; this formula is used about 30 times in the OC and it has a lot of variants (Toporkov 2002: 354–357). In this compilation the formula is used in 7 entries (No. 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9; in the manuscript No. 4, 18, 76, 90, 98, 116v, 122).

The so-called transparent sympathetic epithet is typical of the charms. In the text it can be found several times. It unites with different nouns; e.g. in Charm No. 7 (in the manuscript No. 98) the adjective *медный* (copper) is met with 3 times and the adjective *золотой* (gold) – 3 times. In the love charms the adjective *gold* is found 14 times (No. 9; in the manuscript No. 122). Similarly, the numeral *тридевять* (three-by-nine) is used several times in 2 charms (No. 2, 9; in the manuscript No. 18, 122).

From the paleographic and linguistic data, together with particular points in the manuscript's contents, one may reasonably conclude that the OC was compiled in the second quarter of the seventeenth century, somewhere near Lake Onega or in south Karelia – that is, in the area of the more intensive contact between Russians and Karelo-Vepsians.

It seems probable that, rather than being copied from a single original, the OC was compiled gradually, through the occasional addition of new texts from multiple sources (recovered memories of older texts, new texts based on conventional formulae, acquiring new texts from other people or manuscripts sources etc.).

The OC is designed to help a person in almost any difficult situation in one's private or public life: disease (wounds, bleeding, toothache, hernia, fever, dislocation of joints, babies' crying or insomnia), childbirth, alcohol addiction, hunting and grazing, timber felling, trial, contact with authorities, wedding, fist fights etc.

From what the charms were intended to achieve, one can deduce that the compilers of the OC made their living in economic activities typical of North Russia, such as breeding livestock (mostly horses and cattle), and hunting or other forest-related activities. A deep insight into the everyday life of the OC compilers can be obtained from the sequences of charms relating to stockbreeding, hunting or forestry. A particular trait of the OC is its detailed descriptions of the rites accompanying many of the texts. They specify where, when, and exactly how a charm should be performed, and what accompanying actions and/or objects are necessary to give it full efficacy.

The ultimate task of the present publication is to acquaint English-speaking scholars with a corpus of authentic seventeenth-century Russian charms, since very few texts of this kind have hitherto appeared in English translation.[6]

1. *No. 4, Folio 3v–4r. Against bleeding.*

In the sea, in the ocean lies a blue sea, in that sea of ocean there is an *otlater* stone,[7] on the stone there sits a fair maiden with two heads, she is sewing up and charming up[8] the wounds of [*the name of the person*] the servant of God, arrow wounds, spear wounds, scimitar wounds,[9] axe wounds, knife wounds, charming up the 74 veins and sewing up all with red silk thread. And her needle has no eye. And she has dropped her needle into the blue sea into the ocean. A raven comes, catches the needle by its thread[10] and brings it away to the Mount of Sinai. This needle cannot be found in the mountains, this servant of God's wounds are not bleeding any more.

Say this prayer at new, full and old moon – on any day and any hour.

2. *No. 18, Folio 9r–9v. Against wizards, evil people and evil charms.*

Say this on St John's Friday,[11] in the morning, upon a padlock.

O Lord, bless me, O Father. In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Here I am, servant of God [*the name of the person*], I will get up with a blessing, I will go out with a sign of the cross, I will put on the bright sun, I will girdle it with the light dawn, I will pin it with many stars, I will take the young light moon in my hand, and I will go out to the open field, and I will meet my guardian angel and the Most Blessed Mother of God, and pray and weep: 'Protect me with thy protection and with thy wings[12] and shield me with thy robe from the wizard and the witch, from the sorcerer and the sorceress, and from any mischievous people, and from any mischief[13] on water and on earth'.

There is a holy sea ocean // (Folio 9v), on the ocean sea there is a black island, on the black island there is a white stone, on the white stone there are three-by-nine[14] temples, God's churches; on the three-by-nine churches there are three-by-nine locks, for the three-by-nine locks there are three-by-nine keys, and the three-by-nine keys are held by three-by-nine apostles; and from those three-by-nine churches a gold ladder going high up to the Heavens, and down the gold ladder, from heaven high and fair, come to me, servant of God [*the name of the person*], my guardian angel and Our Mother Lady, the Ever-Virgin, and they go to the three-by-nine apostles, and take from the three-by-nine apostles the three-by-nine keys, and unlock the three-by-nine locks, and open three-by-nine churches, and let me, servant of God [*the name of the person*], in the three-by-nine churches, and shield me, servant of God, with the robe of Our Lady the Ever-Virgin, from any foe and evil-doer, and from a wizard, and from a witch, and from a sorcerer, and from a sorceress, and from an evil charmer, and let me in the three-by-nine churches, and close the three-by-nine churches, and lock the three-by-nine locks; and Our Lady the Ever-Virgin takes the three-by-nine keys and hands them to the three-by-nine apostles, and commands my guardian angel to guard me from any foe and evil-doer, and from any mischief, from the one of the water, and from the one of the earth, and from the one of the underworld, and from the one of the woods, and from the one of the winds, and from the one that is sent; my guardian angel takes the three-by-nine keys and drops them down into the ocean sea. Here is the key and the lock for these words. Amen.

3. *No 44, Folio 20v Against toothache.*

On the same, on teeth.

There is a dry tree in the vale and a worm in my teeth. Ivan, Ivan, go and ask Lazarus who's been dead four days, if his teeth ache. As a dead man's teeth seek to ache, so may [the name of the person] the servant of God feel no toothache, now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Say this thrice.

4. *No. 45, Folio 20v Against toothache.*

If one's teeth ache: go into the wood, find a rowan tree growing over an anthill, and take out its heartwood, and ask it: Rowan, do thy roots or flesh ache? So may the teeth of [the name of the person] the servant of God, not ache forever.

5. *No. 76, Folio 27v – 28r Against wounds and strokes.*

I will get up with a blessing, I will go out with a sign of the cross, out of my house through the doors, out of my gate through the gate, with his father's mercy (forgiveness) from my father, with a blessing from my mother. And I, [the name of the person] the servant of God, will go to the open field, I will go to the shore of a blue ocean sea. And in the blue ocean sea, there is a blue stone, and on the blue stone there sits Our Lady the Ever-Virgin, with angels and archangels. Our Lady the Ever-Virgin, shield me, [the name of the person] the servant of God, //(Folio 28r) with thy holy and honoured robe from any wood: from cedar, from *pevga*,[15] from cypress, from juniper, from oak, from elm, from birch, from rowan, from pine, from bird-cherry, from honeysuckle, from fir, from alder, from hazel, from aspen, from dog rose, from buckthorn, from splintered wood and from slivered wood,[16] and from maple, and from linden, and from willow, and from poplar, and from elm, and from meadowsweet, and from any kind of wood, and from any fruit on earth, and from a stone, and from a sword, and from a spear, and from any iron, and from any bone of any beast or cattle, and from firearms. And quoth the Most Blessed Mother of God: 'Rise, rise, [the name of the person] the servant of God, do not weep, I will shield thee, [the name of the person] the servant of God, with my holy robe, from any wood and any fruit on earth, from stone and iron, and from any bone of any beast or cattle, and may thou, [the name of the person] the servant of God, be hurt by any wood and any earthly fruit, by stone and by a sword, and by a spear, and by any firearm, no sooner than they break through my holy and incorruptible robe; and I pray my Son, Our Lord, so that thou wert guarded by God's dexter arm forever. Amen.[17]

6. *No. 90, Folio 32r Against babies' rupture.*[18]

There is a holy sea ocean, amid the sea ocean there is a white stone, on the white stone there are two rowan trees, two leafy ones, between the two leafy rowans there is a gold cot, in the gold cot there is a babe lying, ruptured by a rupture. And thou, rupture, don't rupture this babe, [*the name of the baby*] the servant of God, rupture, thou rupture, mare's bone and dog's bone, and go, rupture, away from this babe [*the name of the baby*] to the dark woods, beyond moors and marshes impassable. Our merciful Lord Saviour and His Mother the Ever-Virgin, and St. Nicolas, and all saints, cling, our lords, to these good words and relieve the babe from the evil, from the rupture.

Say this thrice upon seed oil or tar.

7. *No 98, Folio 33r – 33v Against evil charms(?).*

The ailment words, against harm.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. There is a sea ocean, and from the ocean sea rides out //(Folio 33v) a copper man, on a copper horse, with a copper bow, with copper arrows; and he pulls the strong bow and shoots well. There is a gold pine-tree growing on the moss, on the gold pine tree there is a gold squirrel. And the copper man shoots the gold squirrel, and takes out its steel heart, and splits it in three, and says three ailment words. For ever and ever. Amen.[19]

8. *No 116v, Folio 39r Against sickness and evil charms.*

There is a gold sea, in the gold sea there is a gold stone, in the gold stone there sits a gold man, the gold man has a gold bow in his hands, and the gold bow has a gold arrow, and by this gold arrow he has shot a gold aurochs bull,[20] and in the gold aurochs there is good fat. This fat is good against any evil, the one that is dead and the one that is live, that of water and that of woods, and this fat is good spread around every joint [or: body part], and every sinew [or: home], and every parish;[21] to servant of God [*the name of the person*], for health; to the sea, for glory; to me, for memory.

9. *No. 122 A love charm.*

There is a blue cloud, and under the blue cloud there is a blue sea, and in the blue sea there is a gold island, and on the gold island there is a gold stone. And

the gold stone will be moved, and out from under the stone the three-by-nine brothers will come, who wear a single pair of shoes, who are girt with a single girdle, capped with a single cap; they will carry three-by-nine axes and three-by-nine hatchets; they will go walking around the island, and they will find three-by-nine gold oak trees, of which the roots are gold, and the stems are gold, and the boughs are gold, and the whole of those oaks is gold; and the three-by-nine brothers will begin to strike the three-by-nine oaks with the three-by-nine axes, with the three-by-nine hatchets, on the three-by-nine sides. And out of the sea will come a man of a ripe old age, and he will ask the three-by-nine brothers: 'Why are you felling the oaks?' – And the three-by-nine brothers will answer: 'It's time to build a gold smithy, it's time to make a gold furnace, and it's time to burn oak charcoal in the gold furnace, so that copper and iron stick and blend together; so the hearts of the *vomra*[22] [*the name of the woman*] the servant of God, and [*the name of the man*] the servant of God, stick and blend together, her youth, and temper, and lust, // (Folio 43v) of her arms and of her legs, in lechery;[23] it's time to forge gold keys and locks in this furnace, to lock up the heart of the *vomra* [*the name of the woman*] the servant of God, together with the heart of the *vomr*[24] [*the name of the man*] the servant of God, her youth, and temper, and lust, of her arms and of her legs, bones and joints, and blood, in lechery'. As hot as the oak charcoal burns in this gold furnace, so may the heart of the *vomra* [*the name of the woman*] the servant of God, smoulder at me, [*the name of the man*] the servant of God, her youth, and temper, and lust, of her arms and of her legs, bones and joints, and blood. And the three-by-nine brothers locked up her heart with the three-by-nine locks, with the three-by-nine keys, the heart of the *vomra* [*the name of the woman*] the servant of God, together with those of [*the name of the man*] the servant of God, their youth, and temper, and lust, of their arms and of their legs, bones and joints, and blood, for [the time] when the moon is new, and when old, and when gibbous, and at every hour, and they locked up the heart of the *vomra* [*the name of the woman*] the servant of God, together with those of [*the name of the man*] the servant of God. And the three-by-nine brothers went up in the air, and they flew beyond three-by-nine hills, and no one can find those three-by-nine brothers, neither an old elder nor a young youth,[25] for ever and ever. Amen.[26]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

NOTES

[1] The charms are aimed against the potential possibility of malefic magic. However, the same charms can be used as healing charms in case the person has already fallen ill, and as protective charms if he is healthy but there is fear that in near future he might fall ill (for example, if caused by malefic magic). That's why it is possible to use some charms as healing charms (for example, No. 7, 8; in the manuscript No. 98, 116v).

[2] Ref. (Toporkov 2008a).

[3] Rhyming words are given in italics.

[4] In this edition No. 2; in the manuscript No. 18.

[5] The division between poems is conventional. In this edition No. 7; in the manuscript No. 98.

[6] Maria Eliferova is the translation consultant.

[7] *Otlater* (also *olater*, *alatyr'*, *latyr'*, *latar'*) is a mythical stone appearing mostly in charms.

[8] A possible solution for the original *zashivaiet i zagovarivaiet*.

[9] In the original text: прикос кривой сабли, literally: "a wound caused by the unexpected sabre stroke".

[10] In the original text: лечит ту иглу за нить, where лечит (heals) is probably mistakenly used instead of ловит (catches).

[11] 'St John's Friday' is the Friday of the week in which St John's (Midsummer) Day falls.

[12] In the original text: Покрой меня кровом своим и крылома своима (Protect me with thy protection and with thy wings); this text dates back to the Book of Psalms and liturgical poetry; compare "... в крове крилу твоею покрыеши мя ..." (in English version: "… I have set the LORD always before me: because [he is] at my right hand, I shall not be moved …" (Psalm 16:8), "... сохрани мя под кровом Твоим и в сени крилу Твоею" (protect me under thy roof and under thy wings) (Thanksgiving Prayer of the Divine Communion, the second prayer of Basil the Great).

[13] In the original text: от всякой злой притчи; literally: from any sudden illness caused by malefic magic.

[14] I.e. 27 (a common numerological formula in all kinds of Russian folklore, including fairy tales).

[15] The scribe uses a biblical Church Slavonic word borrowed from Greek πεύκο 'pine'.

[16] In the original text: от рощепа и от нащепа; literally: from split tree (twice).

[17] In the original text the *Amen* word is written in secret code.

[18] 'Rupture' (Russian *gryz'*) might be either hernia or any sharp pain. The original charm is based on word play between the noun *gryz'* and the verb *gryzti* ('to gnaw').

[19] In the original text the *Amen* word is written in secret code.

[20] In the original text: злата тура; literally: the gold aurochs.

[21] In the original text: и пойдет то доброе сало по всем суставам и по всем жилам и улусам человеческим... The original *zhilam* can be understood as dative plural for both *zhila* ('sinew', 'vein') and *zhilo* ('dwelling', today's Russian *zhil'ë*). Both words are in fact derived from the same *zhi-* root meaning 'life'. By this word play, the initial meaning ('the aurochs fat will be applied to all of [thy] joints and sinews') shifts to: 'the aurochs fat will be distributed around all homes and parishes'.

[22] A *hapax legomenon*; it could mean either 'so-and-so' or 'beloved' (Toporkov 2010: 276–277).

[23] In the original text non-translatable word construction: межручные и ножные в прелюбодейном деле.

[24] Apparently the masculine form for *vomra*.

[25] A pleonastic construction in the original: not for an aged aged man, not for young young man.

[26] In the original text the *Amen* word is written in secret code.

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