

INTRODUCTION

This special issue of *Incantatio* is dedicated to the theme of tradition and innovation and comprises a selection of papers presented at the 9th conference of the Charms, Charmers and Charming International Committee of the ISFNR held at University College Cork on Friday 6th and Saturday 7th May, 2016. The papers presented here engage with the theme from a range of perspectives; historical change and the impact of modernity (Dillinger, Radchenko); theoretical and methodological innovation driven by the digital and virtual worlds (Ilyefalvi, Sawden) and the evolving ways in which charms and charmers have been viewed and represented in different societies over time (Milne, Tausiet, Leitão) are explored and reflected on from different disciplinary perspectives.

This issue opens with Johannes Dillinger's keynote lecture from the conference: "Charms and the Divining Rod: Tradition and Innovation in Magic and Pseudo-Science, 15th to 21st Centuries". Addressing the question of historical change in the use of charms, and magical thinking more generally, in relation to the practice of divining with a rod, Dillinger's paper demonstrates how charm texts associated with dowsing came in and out of vogue over the course of history. The function of charm texts in relation to dowsing, according to Dillinger, offer us an important insight into the relationship between magical and scientific thinking, and personal, moral and supernatural power from the medieval and early modern periods onwards.

The contribution from Daria Radchenko, "Dealing with Danger: The Practices of Keeping and Discarding Magical Letters", offers a historical analysis of the means by which various forms of magical letters, especially the genre of "Heavenly Letters", were handled by recipients of these sometimes unwanted and unsolicited chain letters. The study explores historical and contemporary Russian examples of this understudied folklore genre. Emese Ilyefalvi's article joins the ongoing discussion on the ambition (and merits of) creating an international charms index and database. Advances in digital database technology and the emergence of "computational folkloristics" offer new possibilities and lead Ilyefalvi to question the merit of traditionally conceived type and motif indexes and catalogues.

Louise Milne’s article “The Terrors of the Night: Charms Against the Nightmare and the Mythology of Dream takes a semiotic and structuralist approach to understanding the characteristic nightmare package of imagery, or image-constellation, which appears also in charms, curses and lullabies to do with disturbed sleep. Elements of the nightmare package – its mythos – is examined in its relationship to a spectrum of charms and related belief-narratives.

Kari Sawden’s paper, “A Shared Inheritance: The Interrelationship between Divination and Charming in 21st Century Canada”, explores the relationship between divination and charming in modern-day Canadian context by drawing on ethnographic research with Canadian divination practitioners to investigate the ways in which connections are created between charming and divinatory practices and how the two are utilised together in new contexts.

María Tausiet’s contribution, “Threefold Stories, Threefold Charms: Bécquer’s Poetic Ethnography of Witchcraft” looks at the work of 19th century Spanish writer Gustavo Adolfo Bécquer, focusing on his collection titled *Letters from my Cell* from the 19th century, and examines the charm-related material it contains, in the context of local folk traditions of the village of Trasmoz in Aragon, Spain. Traditional material such as legends and verbal charms are viewed through the lens of a ‘poetic ethnography’.

José Vieira Leitão’s article examines traditional Portuguese verbal divination procedures and processes of agency and causality as well as by referencing comparable methods of divination in contexts connected to Western esotericism.

In the following pages, we are delighted to present the work of scholars who are researching important questions in charms scholarship and enhancing our knowledge of diverse aspects and contexts of this subject area. With the publication of this volume, we hope that these scholarly essays will inform a wider audience about traditions, and innovations in those traditions, across different time periods and cross-culturally.

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