

## CONFERENCE REPORT

### CANONICAL AND NON-CANONICAL IN CHARMING TEXTS AND PRACTICES

Following a two-year pause due to the Coronavirus pandemic, the eleventh international interdisciplinary conference organized by the International Society for Folk Narrative Research's Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming took place 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> September 2022, both in-person at the National Library of Latvia in Riga and online via Zoom. Although numbers were lower than the previous Charms conference, which took place in May 2019 in Pescara, Italy, the 2022 conference featured twenty-one papers, presented by twenty-six participants, roughly forty percent of them physically in Riga and the remainder online virtually.

The conference theme, 'Canonical and Non-Canonical in Charming Texts and Practices', allowed for a fascinating variety of presentations—especially in cases where officially sanctioned texts and customs (typically based on the canons of science and religion) coexisted and interacted with charms and charming practices that were widely practiced but decidedly non-canonical. The theme also allowed for an abundance of geographic diversity with papers focusing on texts and practices from (in alphabetical order) Belarus, Croatia, England, Estonia, Finland, India, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Russia, Sweden, Tuva, Ukraine, and the United States.

Looking thematically at the presentations, the topics of magic and/or healing figured prominently in ten papers—including Alessandra Mastrangelo's 'Verbal Charms in the Context of Healing

Practices in Nineteenth-Century Sweden: The Case of a Healing Book', Ilona Tuomi's 'License to Kill: An Investigation of Frog Coffins and the Social Logic of Magic', Nidhi Mathur's 'Sadhguru, Great Mystic from India, on Healing Sadhguru', Inna Veselova's 'Men and Magic in a Soviet Village', Danila Rygovskiy's 'Illness as Blessing, Illness as Penance: Discourse and Practices in Old Believer Monasteries', Mare Kõiva and Tatziana Valodzina's 'Transmission of Knowledge: A Comparison of Belarusian and Estonian Traditions', Lubov Golubeva and Sofia Kupriyanova's 'The Transmission of Magic Knowledge in the Healing of Baby Diseases', Julia Marinicheva and Angelina Potasheva's 'Magic Knowledge Transfer: A Knower and a Successor', Kira Sadoja's 'Healers' Codes of Behaviour in Rural Areas of the Carpathian Mountains in Ukraine', and James Deutsch's 'The Scientific, Religious, and Charming Practices of Hyomei During the Influenza Pandemic'.

Prayers, incantations, and vernacular religion/worship figured prominently in another eight of the presentations—including Andrey Toporkov's 'Russian Versions of "The Dream of the Virgin": Problems of the Social Functioning of a Non-canonical Text', Daiva Vaitkevičienė's 'Prayers and Verbal Charms in Lithuanian Oral Literature: One or Two Genres', Laura Jiga Iliescu's "'This Mother of God Prayer Comes like a Charm": Considerations on a Terminological Issue in the Frames of the Charm Genre', Tuukka Karlsson's 'Kalevala-metric Communicative Incantations: Discussing Canonical Terminology of Finno-Karelian Knowledge Objects', Frog's 'Para-Incantations and Para-Charms More Generally', Kira Kyrgys's 'Tuvan Charms and Their Relationship with the Worship of Nature', Aleksii Moine's 'Finno-Karelian Incantations and Networks of Non-human Agents: How to Talk About Vernacular Christianity', and Aigars Lielbārdis's 'The Formation of the Vernacular Religion in Latvia: Traces of the Jesuit Legacy'

A final thematic category—admittedly with some overlap from the first two categories—are three papers that focused on various collections of charms and their textual qualities—including Jonathan Roper's 'Chugg's Charms: Authenticity, Typicality and Sources', Davor Nikolić, Evelina Rudan, and Josipa Tomašić's 'The Status of

Charmers, Charming and Charms in the Ethnographic Discourse of Ethnographic Monographs at the Turn of the Twentieth Century', and Katherine Hindley's 'Vernacular Charms and the Vernacular Bible in Medieval England'.

Following two very full but enlightening days of scholarly activities, conference participants in Riga got to relax more socially with dinner in the Kolonāde restaurant serving Latvian specialties and an outdoor excursion the next day to the Latvian Open-Air Ethnographic Museum.

Special thanks go to the conference organisers, Archives of Latvian Folklore (Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art of the University of Latvia) and ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming, and especially to the staff of the Archives of Latvian Folklore, led by Aigars Lielbārdis.

**James I. Deutsch**

*Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage*

*Washington, D.C., USA*

ORCID: 0000-0002-8566-701X