

BOOK REVIEWS

James Kapaló, Éva Pócs and William Ryan (ed.), *The Power of Words: Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe*, Budapest & New York: Central European University Press, 2013, 325 pp. ISBN 978-615-5225-10-9

In a recent conversation with colleagues, a discussion arose how the studies of verbal magic are “nowadays coming back to fashion”. If the development of a research discipline can be regarded in terms of such ups and downs, then the volume *The Power of Words: Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe* most definitely represents a step upwards. Beautifully presented with a stylish layout and cover, the focused, fresh and well-ordered content from prominent authors forms an important and excellent contribution to the field.

The volume consists of an introduction, followed by thirteen chapters, an index, and information regarding the editors and the authors. The chapters of the book are grouped in three parts, aptly and precisely entitled.

The first part of the volume is called *Genre, Classification, Terminology*. It contains five chapters, dealing with these methodological issues from a variety of perspectives. Here, a number of national research traditions can be seen. Arne Bugge Amundsen discusses the study of charms in Norway, Domhnall Uilleam Stiùbhart presents a prominent collector of Gaelic charms, and Vilmos Voigt writes about the historical development of the charms terminology in Hungary. Also, Tatiana Agapkina and Andrei Toporkov demonstrate the importance and the complexities of the charm indexes, while Edina Bozóky takes a serious look at the medieval narrative charms and their characteristic features.

The second part of the book is called *Historical and Comparative Studies*. It contains four chapters, dealing with different levels of comparison, and again covering large geographical scope and chronological span. In one of the chapters, Lea Olsan explores medieval English charms’ marginality and centrality in a variety of contexts. Two other chapters present strong Hungarian traditions: Éva Pócs analyses the relations between Hungarian popular charms and church benedictions, while Dániel Bárh compares benediction and exorcism in early modern Hungary. These are followed by Daiva Vaitkevičienė’s examination of the parallels between Baltic (Lithuanian and Latvian) and East Slavic charms.

The third part of the volume is called *Content and Function of Charms*. It contains four chapters, dealing with different aspects of usage and constructive elements of the charms. Here Emanuela Timotin explores the textual motives the Romanian charms against the *năjit* and their manuscript tradition, while Francisco Vaz Da Silva interprets the Portuguese moon charms for sick children in relation to water. The geographical and temporal scope is broadened

again, as Maarit Viljakainen discusses the role of Virgin Mary in Finnish and Karelian birth incantations, while Gábor Klaniczay analyses the power of words in medieval and early modern Hungarian miracles, visions, incantations and bewitchments.

As a final and very useful part to this excellent volume, there is the detailed index, compiled by the young and promising researcher Emese Ilyefalvy.

In a sum, this book gives a fresh and valuable update on the most recent study of charms and charming. The authors come from different generations and different national traditions. Brought together in this volume, they all provide richness of perspectives, approaches, methods and opinions. Each chapter is a well-focused and serious examination of a particular aspect of verbal magic. Taken all together, these research pieces lead to a fascinating journey into the multi-leveled and multi-faceted world of charms and charming. In this book, the key notions are variety and potential. The variety comes as a multitude of national traditions, historical periods and angles of analysis. The potential is guaranteed by the chapters, which not only contribute to the field, but also give reference and inspiration for further research.

The volume *The Power of Words: Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe* comes from a long, vivid and fruitful tradition of research of verbal magic, and represents the next successful step in this line. This book makes it very clear that the studies of charms, charming and charmers is progressing well and at a steady pace. Not surprisingly, it is published by Central European University Press, well-known for its focus on high-quality interdisciplinary scholarly production.

Svetlana Tsonkova

ISNFR Committee on Charms, Charmers and
Charming

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