

CONFERENCE REPORT

'CHARMS, CHARMERS AND CHARMING. INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE (PÉCS, MAY 15-17, 2015)

The academic field of verbal charms is covered by the periodic 'Charms, Charmers and Charming' conferences, which bring together new topics and methods in the field. This year a three-day international conference was organised by the Pécs Committee of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences. The city gathered together and hosted almost 40 speakers from many European countries. The presentations covered verbal magic from the Late Antiquity to the present day. I cannot mention all of the presentations, but will list just some of the thematically rich and multifaceted papers. Promising theoretical tools were demonstrated by Davor Nikolić who suggested using rational argumentation techniques in the study of verbal charms and demonstrated some common argumentative traits in European Christian charms. Henni Ilomäki discussed the differences between oral and literal charms, while Aleksandra Ippolitova talked about plant-picking charms in Russian herbalist manuscripts from the 17th-20th centuries.

New parallels were drawn from Antiquity traditions: Ida Fröhlich described the blessing and cursing formulae of 7th-century Neo-Assyrian treaty or covenant documents and the links of these texts to amulet-type texts and apotropaic practices. Erica Hunter showcased Syriac prayer-amulets among some 519 Syriac fragments discovered at a monastery site near Turfan and the transmission of texts that continued until as late as the 19th century in northern Iraq.

In the section dedicated to the medieval tradition, Jacqueline Borsje presented the eastern roots of a medieval Irish charm for healing the eyes, Eleonora Cianci analysed medieval German love charms and their parallels and Maria Eliferova introduced charms (*galdr*) incorporated into legendary sagas.

Some of the presentations were dedicated to charmers, the transmission of knowledge, professionals who acted as charmers and ethnic groups in the role of mediators. Those examined were the Romanian priest as charmer in Transylvania during the 19th century (Simion Valer Cosma); Ell Savisik (1837-1927), known as Serva Ell, a charmer who used written and oral traditions whose notebook with incantations passed from person to person before being copied for the Estonian Folklore Archives in 1971 (Mare Kõiva); and the shepherd as charmer in the Carpathian region and the transmission of knowledge of charms (Laura Jiga Iliescu). James Kapalo and Olga Khristoforova looked at contemporary data: Kapalo spoke about the mixed and intertwined traditions

of the Gagauz (a Turkish-speaking Orthodox Christian minority in Balkan and south-eastern European countries) and the role of the Gagauz as cultural mediators across ethnic, religious and linguistic boundaries; while Khristoforova analysed the traditions of the Old Believers in the Verkhokamie region.

There were also talks on the symbiosis of verbal magic and the visual arts; condemnation and punishment; charmers and their clients in Bulgarian and Ukrainian iconography; 18th- and 19th-century visual representations of witchcraft (Betea Raluca); the small group of Russian charms in which Saint Clement of Rome is one of the personages; and the influence of hagiography and iconography on charms (Liudmila Fadeyeva).

Theoretical papers provided a new and broader overview of charming processes, including Emese Ilyefalvi's paper examining the relationship between taboo words, swearing, threats and charms in 20th-century Hungarian practice.

The conference covered all of the main areas of charm research. Characteristic of the scholarly event, all three days in Pécs were marked by friendly discussion, exceptional papers and learned debate.

Andres Kuperjanov
Estonian Literary Museum

ISNFR Committee on Charms, Charmers and
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Contents

<https://doi.org/10.7592/Incantatio2017>

Introduction	7
Mare Kõiva	
https://doi.org/10.7592/Incantatio2017_Introduction	
“Red Growth, Yellow Growth, White Growth...”: Chromatic Beliefs in Udmurt Folk Medicine and Healing Charms	9
Tatiana Panina	
https://doi.org/10.7592/Incantatio2017_Panina	
Salome on Ice: A Case of a Rare Latvian Fever Charm	29
Toms Kencis	
https://doi.org/10.7592/Incantatio2017_Kencis	
Poetics of Mari Incantations	36
Natalia Glukhova	
https://doi.org/10.7592/Incantatio2017_Glukhova	
Charms against Worms in Wounds: The Text and the Ritual	53
Tatjana Agapkina	
https://doi.org/10.7592/Incantatio2017_Agapkina	
Serpent Symbolism in Vepsian Incantations	65
Irina Vinokurova	
https://doi.org/10.7592/Incantatio2017_Vinokurova	
BOOK REVIEWS	75
https://doi.org/10.7592/Incantatio2017_BookReview	
Vinokurova, Irina Iur’evna. <i>Mifologiiia vepsov. Entsiklopediia.</i> [Encyclopaedia of Vepsian Mythology]. Petrozavodsk: Izdatel’stvo PetrGU, 2015. 524 pp. (Mare Kõiva)	

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CONFERENCE REPORT

81

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