

NEWS IN BRIEF

CHARMS, CHARMERS AND CHARMING IN PÉCS, HUNGARY AND TARTU, ESTONIA

In 2005 the first ISFNR conference “Charms, Charmers and Charming” was organised by the London Folklore Society and the event was held in London. The second conference, held in May 2007, was organised jointly by the London Folklore Society, the International Society for Folk Narrative Research and the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology at the University of Pécs. On 9 May 2008, researchers of charms from different parts of the world met at the conference in Tartu.

The 2005 conference in Pécs brought together scholars from nearly twenty European countries. The sessions took place in the building of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences.

The papers delivered at Pécs could be tentatively divided in three groups: (i) papers dealing with typology (Edina Bozoky, Jonathan Roper, Andrei Toporkov, Vladimir Klyaus, Tatiana Minniakhmetova, Daiva Vaitkevičienė); (ii) papers about history of mentality, taking as its sources court records, church literature and manuscripts (Lea T. Olsan, Christa Tucza, Emanuela Timotin, Dániel Bárh, Éva Pócs); (iii) case studies which were based on fieldwork and analysed the use of charm texts in life performances and healing rituals (Tatjana Bužeková, Zuzana Profantová, Judit Kis-Halas, Laura Iancu, Maria Vivod and Vesna Petreska); and (iv) papers about reappraisal of archive material and temporal preferences in collection history (Arne B. Amundsen and Domhnall U. Stiùbarthi).

A year later, in 2008, the conference on charms in Tartu focused on narrativity in charms, the historiolas which plots, in Europe, are mostly based on Christian source texts. The papers focused on the different types of narrative charms.

Mare Kõiva's (Tartu) paper was a thorough insight into the poetics and functionality of the different types of dialogical charms. Andrei Toporkov's (Moscow) presentation focused on three narrative charm types (*Begegnungssegen*). While the topic of syncretism was discussed at the Pécs conference by several scholars, in Tartu the aspect was tackled by Tom Ҡencis (Riga), who engagingly analysed the mythical-poetic mental space of narrative charms on the example of Latvian material. Lea T. Olsan's (Cambridge) paper focused on one of the earliest known examples of the St Peter charm for toothache. The different variants of this charm appear in the 10th- and 11th-century Anglo-Saxon parchment manuscripts. Emanuela Timotin (Bucharest) analysed one of the most archaic pre-Christian exorcist charm historiola which has been used as a prayer formula in the monastic context, looking deeper into the structure and poetic peculiarities of narrative charms. Daiva Vaitkevičienė (Lithuania) described a type of Lithuanian snake charms, which feature a dialogue between a mythical snake (also a demon or a devil) and the charmer. Vladimir Klyaus (Moscow) explored the charm repertoire of mixed Russian-Chinese and Russian-Evenki communities, focusing on three Russian-Evenki informants whose repertoire was largely Slavonic. Jonathan



Jonathan Roper, Lea T. Olsan, Emanuela Timotin. Photo by Alar Madisson 2008.

Roper (Edinburgh) focused on encounter charms, the *Begegnungssegen*, relying on his corpus of English narrative charms. Michály Hoppál (Budapest) encouraged approaching charms from the aspect of speech act theory, claiming that this would enable researchers to analyse more specifically how an expert in rituals (versus a shaman), the actants and the surrounding community relate in a specific context. Sadhana Naithani (Dehli) explores the magic charms with which people solve karma problems in narratives.

The two conferences provided interesting insights into the study of charms and served as a valuable meeting place for scholars interested in the topic of charms, charmers and charming.

Taisto Raudalainen

9TH SIEF CONGRESS IN DERRY, NORTHERN IRELAND

My first impression of the 9th SIEF Congress entitled “European Heritages”: Liberating the Ethnological Imagination” was that of an emotional journey through contemporary and historical Ireland. While a major academic event may not be the best way to get acquainted with a region, the plenary papers, special sessions, publications, studying and research environment still give an idea of the hosting institutions; this time the Magee Campus at the University of Ulster and the Academy for Irish Cultural Heritages. In the maelstrom of the congress, the general impression of Derry was that it is a favourable environment for studying and research, there are libraries at convenient distance, friendly people, a considerably changed population in the past six years, and probably somewhat stagnated economy. Academic events of this kind usually offer

interdisciplinary and international experiences, present innovative ideas and tendencies, an independent forum where scholars look beyond their academic positions and the institutions they represent, where close cooperation is developed and personal contacts are established. The international conferences also tend to be the main meeting places for scholars of the same field, who are working at different institutions of the same country, as attested by groups walking around in Derry, speaking Finnish, German, Hungarian or other languages.

The three congress days opened with the papers of keynote speakers Gulnara Aitpaeva, Pertti Anttonen, Tony Candon, Wolfgang Kaschuba, Peter Jan Margry, Sharon Macdonald, Regina Bendix, and Helena Wulff. Tony Candon's paper explored the recent history of Derry and introduced the congress audience the messages behind the graffiti by hostile political sides.

The congress themes which focused on the analysing of the innovative aspects of theory, practice and outlets ranged from politics, history, musical tradition, folk religion, (folk) medicine, ritual and calendar traditions to property relations, ethics, oral history and to some degree traditions mediated by information technology and the Internet. The general topics were spread over three congress days and the number of speakers in each session was strictly limited to 3–8, aiming for more mobility and providing opportunities to introduce innovative tendencies. As an active member of the SIEF working groups of the Ritual Year and Ethnology of Religion, I was once again drawn between two sessions, which both started on the third conference day in different buildings and lecture halls. Some idea of the papers held in a parallel section could be gained only in informal conversations before and after the sessions.

Scandinavian research paradigms were represented by papers delivered during the session 'Filed Emotions'. The call for panels opposed the emotions written down and stored in the archives with the material of interviews and questionnaires (where the verbalisation of the respondents is freer and more versatile). The archive documents are characteristically restricted to facts and are recorded in a rather dry style; at the same time the recorded materials are neither objective nor truthful. In addition, factors like age, class and gender do not shape experience knowledge. The papers in this session mostly discussed recent research projects and newer questionnaires, which elicited lively discussion.

Emotions and the expression of emotions have been a leading trend in applied folkloristic research in the past ten years and the panel papers contributed interesting angles and observations in ethnology and folklore studies. During the same period, theoretical reinterpretations of neo-religions, reforms in religious phenomena and the connection of rituals and religion have also been in focus. Three papers of the section 'The Ritual Year and Folk Religion' discussed sanctuaries, saints and the calendar traditions connected with saints in different European regions and in the sphere of influence of different religious confessions.

The congress programme included workshops on topical themes and ethnographical documentaries. The video documentary by Séamas Ó Catháin and Críostóir Mac Cárthaigh, who are involved in the Masking and Mummie project of Ireland, explored the masked mummies' visiting of homes and pubs, rhymed plays and types of masks, with commentary by Séamas Ó Catháin. This event led to thinking about the necessity of the screening of audio- and video-recorded folkloric material, and the subscribing

system of these materials, since the congress participants were scholars, degree students and lecturers. Thematic link collections would also be a good idea – comparative material available online would be useful for educational purposes.

The Irish music, dancers and singers, who entertained the congress participants on the concluding banquet into the small hours of the morning, left a warm afterglow from the congress. I personally was endowed with professional luck, highly useful for folklorists, archive and museum workers, which I experienced during the visit to the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum. Our group was fortunate to travel through the fieldwork area of a colleague who told us stories of local storytellers and the places. In the museum were introduced digitization projects of the sound and photo archives, the library and manuscripts. Next to oral tradition, the archive holds ample visual material, the variety and range of which is a worthy example for museums in Estonia.

Mare Kõiva