

INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM “CHARMS ON PAPER, CHARMS IN PRACTICE”

The 16th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR) took place in Vilnius, Lithuania, on June 25–30, 2013, and within its framework an international symposium under the heading *Charms on Paper, Charms in Practice* was organised jointly by the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming, and the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore.

The ISFNR working group has set an aim to coordinate research into charms in different countries, elaborate systematic methods of analysis and encourage studies into charming traditions, as well as to compile local and international catalogues of charms, corresponding scientific publications and databases. The chairman of the committee initiated in 2007 is Jonathan Roper (Great Britain/Estonia), and the members are Daiva Vaitkevičienė (Lithuania), Mare Kõiva (Estonia), Lea T. Olsan (Great Britain), Haralampos Passalis (Greece), Éva Pócs (Hungary), Emanuela Timotin (Romania) and Andrey Toporkov (Russia). The working group publishes an annual journal entitled *Incantatio* (<http://www.folklore.ee/incantatio>).

Conferences are organised regularly (at least every second year) and the proceedings are prepared for publication. The first conference was held in Pécs (2007), and was followed by similar events in Tartu (2008), Athens (2009), Bucharest (2010) and Moscow (2011). Two pre-conferences on the same topics were organised in London (in 2003 and 2005). An overview of the Moscow conference of 2011, *Oral Charms in Structural and Comparative Light*, was published in *Folklore: Electronic Journal of Folklore* in 2012¹.

Four collections have been published with the proceedings of the previous conferences: *Charms and Charming in Europe* (2004, editor Jonathan Roper); *Charms, Charmers and Charming: International Research on Verbal Magic* (2009, editor Jonathan Roper); *Oral Charms in Structural and Comparative Light. Proceedings of the Conference of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research's (ISFNR) Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming. 27–29th October 2011, Moscow* (2011, editors Tatyana Mikhailova, Jonathan Roper, Andrey Toporkov, Dmitri Nikolayev)²; and *The Power of Words: Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe* (2013, editors James Kapaló, Éva Pócs and William Ryan).

The Vilnius conference held on June 25–29 consisted of seven sessions with twenty-five presentations. Researches originated from the United States, Estonia, Ireland, India, Great Britain, Italy, Japan, Croatia, Greece, Lithuania, Latvia, Switzerland, Hungary, Romania and Russia.

Many of the presentations discussed the traditions of European charms manuscripts, as well as conformity between written and oral texts. A number of speakers touched upon the social practice of manuscripts and the possibilities for using them in reconstructing the ritual practices of the past.

The first session under the heading *Verbal Charms in Practice* dwelt upon Anglo-Saxon, Irish and Bulgarian manuscript charms. Lea T. Olsan (Cambridge, Great Britain) analysed the cases in which medieval Christian charms manuscripts had been supplemented with citations from Roman poets. Ilona Tuomi (Cork, Ireland) spoke about four Irish medical charms that are preserved in the Abbey of St. Gall in Switzerland.

Ciaran Arthur (Canterbury, Great Britain) analysed the literary methods used in an 11th-century Anglo-Saxon charm, which is preserved at the British Library. Svetlana Tsonkova (Budapest, Hungary) characterised medieval Slavic charms and non-canonical prayers, which have survived in manuscript form or in writing on amulets.

The central topic of the second session was contemporary charms. James Kapalo (Cork, Ireland) introduced a peculiar phenomenon in Gagauz culture: Mother of God appears to women in their dreams, providing healing powers to them and helping to acquire literacy. Yukari Nagayama (Sapporo, Japan) shared her observations about the usage traditions of protective and harmful charms in the native people of Kamchatka. Daiva Vaitkevicienė (Vilnius, Lithuania) introduced to the audience the research carried out among the Lithuanian community in western Belorussia in 2010–2012, which was aimed at detecting the influence factors of folk medicine practices as social phenomena, as well as the network of charming specialists. Rajketan Singh Chirom (Imphal, India) analysed the Chupsa Moithemba tradition in Manipur state, India, drawing attention to the usage of charms in ritual contexts.

The third session focused on the topics of charms and Christianity. Toms Kencis (Riga, Latvia) dedicated his presentation to the Latvian version of the *Super petram* charm (St. Peter sitting on a rock). Haralampos Passalis (Thessaloniki, Greece) discussed the motifs connected with St. Sisinnius and the demonic Gillo in Late Byzantium and post-Byzantium Greek tradition. Andrey Toporkov (Moscow, Russia) generalised the use of the beginning and particularly the first verse of St. John's gospel ("In the beginning was the Word") as part of a charm and magic practice on the example of Christians of different countries.

The fourth session dealt mainly with magical manuscripts. Emanuela Timotin (Bucharest, Romania) shared her knowledge of the codicological features and spread of Romanian manuscript charms dating from the 17th–19th centuries. Eleonora Cianci (Pescara, Italy) analysed, on the basis of German medieval and Early Modern Age manuscripts, the versions of the Three Good Brothers charm. Aigars Lielbārdis (Riga, Latvia) introduced Latvian charm manuscripts as well as heavenly and chain letters similar to them.

The fifth session was dedicated to charms studies. Jonathan Roper (Tartu, Estonia) introduced two significant archives of European charms: the texts archive on approximately 23,000 index cards, established by Adolf Spamer (1883–1953) in Dresden, and the one deposited in Copenhagen, which was created by Ferdinand Ohrt (1873–1938), researcher in the field of European word magic. Nicholas Wolf (New York, United States of America) spoke about charm manuscripts in English and Irish, dating from the years 1700–1850, which include materials on medicine, as well as prayers and secular poetry. Saša Babič (Ljubljana, Slovenia) discussed the research traditions of Slovenian charms, as well as the main types of healing charms. Davor Nikolić and Josipa Tomašić (Zagreb, Croatia) introduced the rich prayer-like charms collection in Croatian archives, the texts of which can be divided into exorcism and apotropaic prayers.

The sixth session dwelt upon charms, demons and fright. James Kapalo (Cork, Ireland) and Haralampos Passalis (Thessaloniki, Greece) compared Greek and Gagauz healing rituals against fright. These charms are used in the case of diseases and post-traumatic conditions caused by fright. Judit Zsuzsanna Kis-Halas (Tartu, Estonia)

presented the Hungarian versions of the same charms, supplementing them with comparisons from all over the world, including South America. Larissa Naiditch (Jerusalem, Israel) analysed dialogue in German charms (“Begegnungs Segen”).

The last session focused on various phenomena bordering between charms tradition and social practices. Emese Ilyefalvi (Budapest, Hungary) discussed obscenity in Hungarian charms. Åsa Ljungström (Uppsala, Sweden) gave an overview of attitudes towards charms manuscripts preserved in family lore throughout four hundred years (from the 17th to the 20th century). Evgeniya Litvin and Anna Kozlova (St. Petersburg, Russia) analysed the new forms of charms aimed at losing weight and enlarging breasts, which are disseminated on the Internet. Julia Ladygienė (Vilnius, Lithuania) discussed, by way of communication theory, standard situations between the magic specialist and the patient.

The conference programme and abstracts have been published in the book entitled *Folk Narrative in the Modern World: Unity and Diversity. The 16th Congress of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research. June 25–30, 2013. Vilnius, Lithuania. Program and Abstracts. Vilnius 2013.*

Andrey Toporkov

Notes

¹ Vol. 50, pp. 156–161, available at www.folklore.ee/folklore/vol50/n04.pdf, last accessed on December 4, 2013.

² The collection is in two languages and its parallel heading in Russian is *Zagovornye teksty v strukturnom i sravnitel'nom osveshchenii. Materialy konferentsii Komissii po verbal'noi magii Mezhdunarodnogo obshchestva po izucheniiu fol'klornykh narrativov.*