

ISFNR Congress, Zagreb September 2021

Sunday, September 5th

Session: **Charms as Text**

Convenor Jonathan Roper

Eleonora Cianci (University 'G. d'Annunzio', Italy)

***Charms as Texts: The Transmission of Medieval German Charms and the Problems of Textual Criticism***

Aigars Lielbārdis (University of Latvia, Latvia):

***Curses and Eliminating Formulas in Latvian Charms***

Katherine Hindley (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore):

***Digital Charms: Building an Online Database of Medieval English Charm-Texts***

Emese Ilyefalvi (Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary):

***Looking through the Digital Database of Hungarian Verbal Charms***

Nicholas Wolf (New York University, USA)

***Mining for Charm Information in Large-Scale Digital Library Corpora***

Session: **Charms and the Fear**

Convenor: Emanuela Timotin

Saša Babič (Scientific Research Centre SAZU, Slovenia):

***Dealing with Fear: What Kind of Dangers do Incantations Ward off?***

Laura Iliescu Jiga (Romanian Academy of Science, Romania):

***Against Fear: Between Demon and Psychic Emotion***

Mare Kõiva (Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia)

***Illnesses due to Fright and Treatment of such Illnesses***

Emanuela Timotin (Institute of Linguistics 'Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti', Romania)

***Healing Emotions in Romanian Charms***

## Abstracts

Babič, Saša (Scientific Research Centre SAZU, Slovenia)

### DEALING WITH FEAR: WHAT KIND OF DANGERS DO INCANTATIONS WARD OFF?

Fear is one of prime emotions. It is feeling induced by perceived danger or threat. The response to fear arises from the perception of danger, which could lead to confrontation with fear, an escape from it or avoiding the threat. Threats can be understood as true, realistic (like hail) or invented, imaginary (like spell with evil eye), though all of them seemed to represent danger for one's existence. To avoid different kinds of threats people used incantations or/and magical signs and objects with apotropaic functions for prevention. Words, signs or rituals gave them a kind of certainty and hope and – most of all – feeling that they have done all that was in their power to stay on the safe side of situation.

The contribution will look at the context of incantations with the preventing function, threats that were removed by incantations or/and magical signs and objects. In addition, it will investigate over preventing incantations itself: their form and usage.

Cianci, Eleonora (University 'G. d'Annunzio', Italy)

### CHARMS, CHARMERS AND CHARMING

Medieval German charms are among the oldest texts ever written in German. The oldest one dates back to the 9th century (the Old High German charm against worms) and the manuscript transmission of charms continues until the end of the Middle Ages and beyond. Before the 13th century, the texts are almost always written in "codex unicus", and we can sometimes identify a Latin version as a source text translation. After the 12th–13th century and during all the 15th there is an evident change of attitude: many more charms and charm types find their way on the parchment and each one counts many same–but–different versions. In this paper I will offer a case study in order to find a shared method of analysis of the problems of textual criticism. Indeed, a philological edition of charms must take in exam a set of different concerns such as: many "codex unicus" charms, many versions of similar but not identical charms (they contain the same motifs but are not exactly the same text), internal code switching (Latin and German) in the same text, often in the same phrase or verse. Moreover, the philologist has to find internal and external evidence to identify the beginning and the end of a charm, or to understand corrupted or deleted words or phrases. In addition, other big issues of this kind of edition is to verify the assumed translation from unknown written Latin sources or the assumed oral transmission.

Hindley, Katherine (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)

### DIGITAL CHARMS: BUILDING AN ONLINE DATABASE OF MEDIEVAL ENGLISH CHARM–TEXTS

In this paper, intended for the digitization strand organized by the Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming, I will discuss my in–progress creation of a new, partially–crowdsourced digital database of over 1000 charm–texts from medieval England, funded by a grant from Singapore's Ministry of Education. Although the database focuses on medieval England, its approaches aim to enable broader, cross–cultural study of the ritual use of spoken and written words.

The database will focus not on charm motifs, as most published catalogues do, but on materiality and performance: who should speak the charm? What should its text be written on? How should the patient interact with it? Such questions link practices that are distant in place and time. For example, a number of medieval English charm texts were intended to be dissolved into water and drunk. Similar healing practices exist in many countries today, across many religious traditions. By providing a common framework for thinking about these uses of text, the project will enable wide–ranging, data–driven comparisons, allowing scholars to re–evaluate ideas about which practices are unique to particular cultures or time periods and which are widely used.

Iliescu Jiga, Laura (Romanian Academy of Science, Romania)

### **AGAINST FEAR: BETWEEN DEMON AND PSYCHIC EMOTION**

Magically speaking, fear is not just a psychic emotion, but a state of mind induced by a demon. My paper will deal with Romanian charms against this evil entity. In the beginning, it will describe the verbal rhetoric and dramatic repertoire of gestures and charming tools the very demon of fear is assaulted with, in order to provoke its own fear towards the charmer. Secondly, I will compare them with those used against other disease demons, in order to indirectly find out how fear is perceived as an apart psychic emotion.

Ilyefalvi Emese (Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary)

### **LOOKING THROUGH THE DIGITAL DATABASE OF HUNGARIAN VERBAL CHARMS**

Based on Éva Pócs manual charm index an online database was created for Hungarian verbal charms within the East–West Research Group at the Institute of Ethnology, Hungarian Academy of Sciences (Budapest), between 2013 and 2018. (See: <http://eastwest.btk.mta.hu/>.) The main goal was to create a multidimensional digital database. Digital text preparation would open the gates to new interpretations and analyses, which would bring us closer to understanding the compound and complex phenomena of charms. In the digital database of Hungarian verbal charms users can search by various metadata, like date and place of collection/recording, name of collector/scribe, informant, type of source, function of the charm, rites/gestures, language of the text, keywords etc. Free word search is also possible within the entire corpus. (See: <http://raolvasasok.boszorkanykorok.hu/>) The trial version of the database contains 1712 texts, but more than 6000 verbal charms were digitized during the project. In my paper, I will analyze the entire corpus with the help of Voyant Tools, which is web–based text reading and analysis environment for digital texts, developed by Geoffrey Rockwell and Stéfan Sinclair. (See: <https://voyanttools.org/>). Using Voyant Tools, I will show how different new arrangements and distant reading of the corpus can reshape our knowledge about the Hungarian verbal charms.

Kõiva Mare (Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia)

### **ILLNESSES DUE TO FRIGHT AND TREATMENT OF SUCH ILLNESSES**

Fright and startle, but primarily unexpected and profound fright was believed to be dangerous for one’s health, as it would bring about symptoms for medical conditions (palpitations, malaise, dizziness etc.), while the popular belief was that it also indicated “weak nerves”.

Fright was however seen as a cause for real illnesses as well, such illnesses would be skin conditions like erysipelas and different marks on skin, but also mental disorders, incl. sleep disorders and other illnesses. It was believed that “blood becomes entangled with fear” and that would in turn cause more serious illnesses. It was also believed that fright would carry over from a pregnant woman to their future child. Contact with animals was seen as especially dangerous, as this would trigger the transmission of more complicated illnesses which needed to be treated with symbolic rituals and spells.

Frequently, in incantations fright is transmitted to natural objects (swamp, forest, wind, water, specific animal, but also to the dead). Also some international and Biblical motifs was also used (Three men in an oven, Saint Mary and Jesus in a church). Written formulas and other techniques were common. My data was organised using the digital environment Skriptorium and an incantation database.

Lielbārdis Aigars (University of Latvia, Latvia)

### **CURSES AND ELIMINATING FORMULAS IN LATVIAN CHARMS**

Curses are one of the emotional expressions of relations within traditional societies. First written evidence in Latvian folklore and history of used curses with the aim to harm were documented in witch trials protocols of the 16th century.

Constant formulas and linguistic constructions with curses elements and meaning are discoverable in many genres of folklore, including verbal charms. Curses are used both against the person and

disease. In Latvian charms eliminating formulas are common and constitute a significant element of charm structure, especially in healing charms. More frequent formulas in charms are: “vanish like morning dew”, “wither like swamp rush”, “become naked like finger or tree” etc., which are directed to elimination of the disease.

The paper involves analysis of curses and eliminating formulas in Latvian charms, providing insight into historical context and giving comparative examples of charms and other folklore genres

Timotin Emanuela (Institute of Linguistics ‘Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti’, Romania)

### HEALING EMOTIONS IN ROMANIAN CHARMS

In Romanian magic, there is a rich terminology regarding the names of the diseases which charms are supposed to heal. Some refer to the patient’s bodily parts which are affected through a magic action (e.g. mătrice ‘womb’), others – to the supernatural agents who inflict diseases (e.g. iele ‘fairies’; zburător ‘loving-spirit’) or to the objects the (supernatural) magician uses when he casts the spells (e.g. cuțite ‘knives’) etc. Among these there are also several names the main meaning of which refers to emotions.

The present paper focuses on this last category of names and is twofold. First, it analyses if these polysemic words have enjoyed a large transmission in the history of Romanian. Secondly, it establishes if diseases associated with emotions concern a specific age or gender, it analyses to what extent they describe both the patient’s, and the charmer’s emotions, and inquires whether their symptomatology is less clear than that of diseases the names of which designate bodily parts, magicians or magic objects.

Wolf Nicholas (New York University, USA)

### MINING FOR CHARM INFORMATION IN LARGE-SCALE DIGITAL LIBRARY CORPORA

Print sources describing the use, contents, and practitioners of charms became increasingly rare in many national contexts by the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, a reflection of the rise of professionalized medicine, a redefinition of charm practices as “folklore,” and the capitalization via the printing press of the publishing process. However, charms—and descriptions of what they were and how they were deployed—were not unknown in printed texts of the past two hundred years. Finding such references are, however, often still a matter of directed browsing through hundreds of texts by dedicated folklorists and charm researchers.

The creation of large-scale digitized corpora of printed texts, most notably the HathiTrust Digital Library established as a cooperative effort of the Universities of Michigan, Indiana, and Illinois, offers an alternative approach. Home to machine-searchable full-text records for 17 million books, a good portion of them published between 1800 and 1920, and with half of the corpus representative of languages other than English, the Library offers a strong opportunity for scholars to collect bibliographic references to thousands of printed works mentioning charms. This paper will detail efforts to programmatically assemble this bibliography as well as parse some of the contexts in which charms were discussed in texts found in the project’s search.