

Dear BNN members,

According to the rules of the BNN, it is the duty of the chairperson to annually submit a report on previous year's activities to the members of the BNN, on behalf of the Committee. This is the report for 2014-2015:

First of all, I am happy to announce that the number of BNN members has once again increased, and that there are now **83** members. On behalf of the Committee, I welcome all those new members who have joined us over the course of the year! We encourage all members to continue to share information about the BNN among your colleagues – everybody interested in belief narratives is welcome to join our Network!

In 2014, the BNN Committee, together with Professor Bela Mosia of the Shota Meskhia State Teaching University of Zugdidi, organised a conference on *Nature Spirits: Continuity and Change*, which took place in Zugdidi, Georgia, on 1-4 October 2014, where meetings of the BNN Committee and BNN members also took place. Bela is currently editing a book of conference papers, which will be published in English by the Shota Meskhia State Teaching University of Zugdidi, hopefully by the end of September.

The BNN also acted as co-organisers of the conference on *Sacrifice and Divination* organised by Professor Éva Pócs from the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Pécs, which took place in Pécs, Hungary, on 12-14 December 2014. A publication based on the papers presented at this conference is expected to be published in 2016 in Hungarian and English.

As part of the interim ISFNR conference to be held in Ankara on 1-6 September 2015, the Belief Narrative Network will be holding its own symposium entitled *Beliefs in Discussion* which will focus on the following subtopics: *Beliefs in Discussion: From Conspiracy Theories to Vampire Films; Changing Beliefs or Believing in Change: Narrative Approaches to Recent History; Legends and Religion: Exchanging Experiences of the Supernatural; and How Continuous are Belief Narratives? The Dynamics of the Longue Durée.*

Construction of the new BNN website is still in progress. We have nonetheless updated the BNN page on the ISFNR website to include the CV-s and bibliographies of those members who have provided us with such information, as well as with information dealing with European folklore archives (together with websites and contacts of persons in charge), which has been compiled by Willem de Blécourt. The website can be visited at <http://www.isfnr.org/index2.html> We encourage all those who still have not sent in the data, to send us your CVs (including name and

surname; degree; present professional status and affiliation; e-mail address and contact details - if you are happy for them to be published on the Internet), *a list of main research interests* (in the form of key words - please add such information at the end of your CV) and a *personal bibliography*, including works related to belief narratives (that is books written in one of the major languages or with a summary in one of these languages; and papers written in one of the major languages).

I would like to end by announcing some of the plans the BNN has for the following years; more information will follow in due course.

2015/2016

18-22 October 2016: *The BNN conference at the ISFNR/ AFS congress in Miami, Florida.* (Call for papers to be announced.)

2016/2017

May 2017: *A joint conference with the Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming in Pecs, Hungary.* (Call for papers to be announced.)

2017/2018

Spring 2018: *A BNN conference **Changing Shapes. A New Look at the Human-Animal Relationships**, Estonia:*

Preliminary conference proposal composed by Willem de Blécourt:

Current histories of the relations between humans and other species range from hunting and husbandry through to vivisection. They habitually treat humans and animals as two separate bodies, but such a vision is only part of what the human mind has produced. A proper look at the merging between human and animal may yield surprising and intimate insights in human history and culture, both as how we treat animals and how we “think with animals”. The range of human expressions concerning animal metamorphoses encompasses language through to literature, ritual performance, material culture and art, and should offer promising insights as it centres on the concept of physical and conceptual transformation. Yet our understanding of this fundamental aspect of human culture remains fragmented, as studies have focused on specific aspects such as shape changing in East-Asian cultures, metamorphosis in pre-Christian iconography, post-medieval ritual animal disguise, or body metaphors in modern belief narratives. The topic has certainly not been thematised across the different disciplines and in order to catch up with cutting-edge academic paradigms, requires a novel and significant inter-disciplinary framework.

Rather than seeing metamorphoses as something entirely exotic, this conference purports to include the Western World (i.e. Europe and North America), from Antiquity to the twentieth

century. Drawing on a variety of sources, conference participants will chart the range of animal shapes – both wild and domestic – that figure in human to animal shifting, consider the means of transformation, and uncover underlying concepts about body and soul. One of the most important aspects of the conference will be to explore the importance of context in determining specific expressions of metamorphosis. In this respect, key questions will consider the role of individual identity in and outside of society, gender, impacts of religious conversion and the relevance of local ecology. The conference will also explore broader contexts of metamorphoses, such as animal comparisons in language (proverbs, fables), monstrosity and hybridity in art, animal disguise in ritual and custom, totemism, sexuality, bestiality and the animalisation of deviancy. It will also encompass critical and contextually-sensitive biological, anthrozoological and psychological perspectives.

Should you know of any ISFNR member who is not yet a member of the BNN and wishes to become a member, please remind them that they should contact the chairperson directly at mirjam.mencej@ff.uni-lj.si or mirjam.mencej@guest.arnes.si. I will then add them to the list, so that they receive information about all future BNN activities. Potential members should be informed that they need to join **both** the ISFNR and the BNN. If any of you has not yet become a member of the ISFNR, please bear in mind that according to our statute, the BNN forms part of the ISFNR and that official membership is only open and free to those who are members of the ISFNR. If you are not yet a member of ISFNR, you can receive information about our activities, and participate in our conferences and meetings, but you will not have the right to vote for members of the BNN Committee or be able to become a member yourself. Everyone is therefore encouraged to join the ISFNR. Should anyone wish to cease being a BNN member, and receive no further information about our activities, please let me know.

On behalf of the Committee I wish you all the best for the forthcoming year!

Mirjam

BNN Committee:

Willem de Blécourt

Marion Bowman

Terry Gunnell

Anders Gustavsson

Desmond Kharmawphlang

Mare Kõiva

Kaarina Koski

Mirjam Mencej

Maria Ines Palleiro

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