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Newsletter



International Society for Folk Narrative Research

Highlights

***New Research:** Dive into an insightful article by Haidamteu Zeme on the oral narratives of the Zeme-Naga*

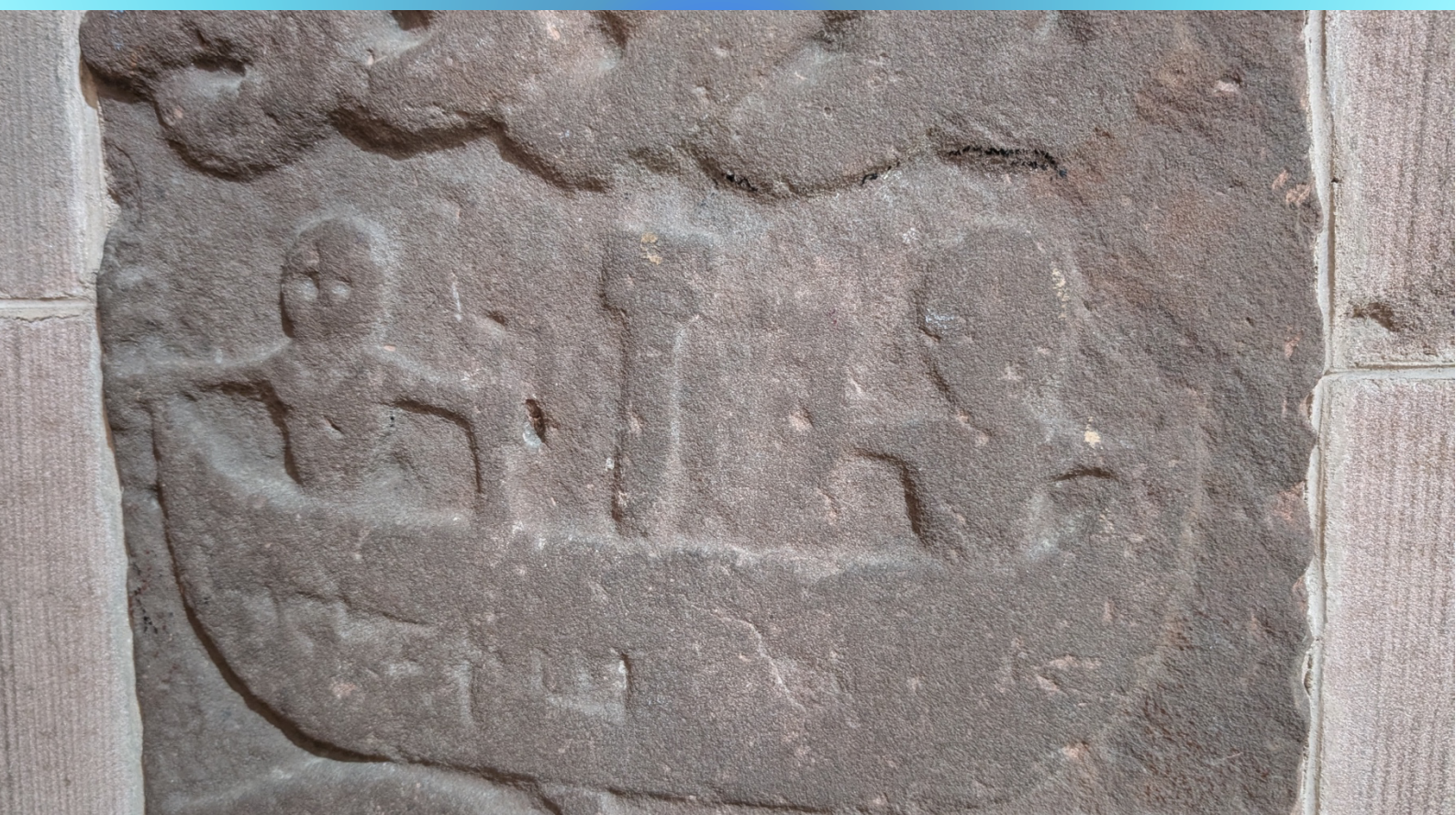
***Mark Your Calendars!** Upcoming conferences you need to know about – don't miss out on key events in your field*

***Event Round-Up:** Reports on the latest conferences*

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News, Notes & Narratives



The **International Society for Folk Narrative Research** (ISFNR) is a scholarly and professional organization of international specialists in the areas of folk narrative, popular literature, folklore, and related fields. The ISFNR works to foster and develop work in the field of folk narrative research and to stimulate contacts and the exchange of views among its members. Our society encompasses all aspects of narrative as a pivotal category of human communication.

ISFNR Newsletter was founded in 2006 as an instrument to stimulate contacts and exchange among the society's members. In addition to news, information about forthcoming events and reports on those recently held, we also publish short research articles, interviews, book reviews and other information of interest to ISFNR members.

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Cover photo: Gosforth Fishing Stone, St. Mary's Church, Cumbria, c. 10th c. (photo by Triin Laidoner)

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What's inside

President's Address <i>Mirjam Mencej</i>	3
Research Article Introducing Kaheletbe: Ethnography of Translation <i>Haidamteu Zeme</i>	6
In Memoriam Prof. Haya Bar-Itzhak (1946–2020) <i>Tsafi Sebba-Elran</i>	18
Conference Reports:	
The 2024 Conference of the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming: Conflicts and Catastrophes <i>Fiorella Di Fonte</i>	22
ISFNR's 19 th Congress: Folk Narratives in the Changing World <i>Rok Mrvič, Anastasiya Fiadotava, Saša Babič, Vita Džekčioriūtė</i>	27
Geomythologies in an Interdisciplinary Perspective <i>Zachariasz Mosakowski, Robert Piotrowski</i>	34
The Agency of the Dead in the Lives of Individuals: Experience and Conceptualization <i>Simona K. Zupanc</i>	38
Calls for Papers:	
Geomythology: Bridging the Humanities and Geosciences	42
The 36 th International Nordic Ethnology and Folklore (NEFK) Conference: Nordic 2.0 and Beyond	44
The Agency of the Dead in the Lives of Individuals: Reasons, Triggers, and Contexts	45
The 2025 Conference of the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming: Syncretic Elements in the Process of Charming	47
14 th International Conference of Young Folklorists: Humble Theory and Power of the Vernacular	49
New Projects:	
Dictionary of Polish Folk Tales <i>Robert Piotrowski</i>	51
Index of Serbian Folktales <i>Nemanja Radulović</i>	52
The Heritage of Frost Giants: from the Geomythologies to the Cultural Geomorphology of Erratic Boulders in the Young Glacial Area of Poland <i>Robert Piotrowski</i>	54
New Books:	
Religions 2024, vol. 15, no. 5 (8). Special Issue: Communications with the Dead <i>Ed. Mirjam Mencej</i>	56
Webspinner: Songs, Stories, and Reflections of Duncan Williamson, Scottish Traveller <i>John. D. Niles</i>	58
ISFNR Expands Its Online Presence!	59

President's Address

Mirjam Mencej

Dear friends, dear colleagues,

First of all, I would like to greet you warmly on behalf of the ISFNR Executive Committee! The committee, consisting of Lina Būgienė (Lithuania), Ann Duggan (USA), Frog (Finland), Ave Goršič (Estonia), Terry Gunnell (Iceland), Sandis Laime (Latvia), María Inés Palleiro (Argentina), Dani Schrire (Israel), Andrew Teverson (UK), Malay Bera (India) as the early career scholar representative, and myself (Slovenia), has already begun its work in full force.



During the previous mandates under the presidency of Sadhana Naithani, the ISFNR achieved several remarkable milestones, including the creation of a wonderful new ISFNR website (thanks to Toni Saarinen, Frog and Terry Gunnell!), the establishment of a regular newsletter (thanks to Frog, Triin Laidoner, and before that Margaret Lyngdoh!), and even the introduction of a dedicated Facebook, Instagram and X accounts for the ISFNR (thanks to Malay Bera!). Building on this foundation, the current board has spent the last few months discussing various ideas to make the ISFNR even more visible, vibrant and inclusive – bringing together folklorists from all over the world, including regions where the ISFNR has not been as present.

One of our key goals is to make the society more appealing to young folklorists, helping them recognise the ISFNR as their own. A major initiative in this regard, which has already proven highly successful over the years, is the Young Folklorists (YOFO) conferences. What started in 2011 in Tartu, Estonia, was expanded in the following years to Vilnius (Lithuania), Riga (Latvia) and Helsinki (Finland). For the past 13 years, these conferences have brought together young scholars from around the world every year, with the next event again set to take place in Tartu on September

25–26, 2025. At the most recent conference, held in Vilnius in October, members of the YOFO organising committee met with an ISFNR representative, and it was agreed that YOFO and ISFNR will work more closely together in the future. This co-operation will hopefully expand the reach of YOFO conferences beyond the Baltics and Finland and encourage young folklorists to organise a dedicated YOFO conference also within the framework of ISFNR congresses, which take place every four years.



Members of the YOFO committee and ISFNR Meeting at the Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Vilnius, 11 October 2024. From left to right: Andrius Kaniava, Ūlo Valk, Vita Dzekcioriute, Asta Skujytė-Razmienė, Lina Būgienė, Mirjam Mencej.

While it is still early to start planning the next ISFNR congress, the board is already in contact with the organising team for the upcoming ISFNR Interim Conference, scheduled to take place in Reykjavik, Iceland in 2026. So far, everything is on track, and we will continue meeting regularly every two months via Zoom to ensure that everything will be ready on time.

In the meantime, I hope you will find many interesting things to read in this “new year” edition of the newsletter! Please do not forget to send us details about conferences, events, new publications, calls for papers, and other activities happening in your country. By sharing these updates, we can include them in our future newsletters – this way we can all find out more about what is going on in folklore worldwide.

I wish you all the best for the coming year!

Mirjam,
on behalf of the EC Committee

Introducing Kaheletbe: Ethnography of Translation

Haidamteu Zeme, Indian Institute of Technology Dehli

The paper was first presented at the “Re-Centering the Periphery” conference organized by the American Folklore Society from October 12th–15th, 2022 in Tulsa, Oklahoma. It focuses on first-hand oral narratives of the Zeme-Naga, an indigenous community inhabiting the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent. The study is based on selected tellings I collected during fieldwork between 2020–2021 in the state of Manipur, which formed the primary focus of my MPhil dissertation¹. The paper argues that the *processes* involved in transcribing orality to writing, through the paradigm of translation, contribute to creating potent archives. This is especially crucial for predominantly oral cultures—where *acts* of translation extend beyond a simple ‘text-to-text’ linear transaction.

A rendition of the Zeme word for ‘translation’ is *Kaheletbe*, which refers to the act of someone giving or returning meanings to you. This idea of ‘return’ can be understood in three distinct ways: firstly, as a migrant individual returning ‘home’; secondly, as symbolic of language transference between Zeme and English, and to a reading audience of both languages; and thirdly, as *Kaheletbe*, where intermediaries ‘participate’ in the act of returning meanings. Translating orality, then, contributes to re-imagining language theories that realize the polysemic multiplicity of expressions as central to indigenous epistemologies.

My paper explores the porosity of meanings expressed in *Kaheletbe* through documented tellings conceptualized as ‘something being told’ while also embracing the paradox of the ‘writing-voice’, as theorized by writers such as Dolly Kikon, Easterine Kire, and Temsula Ao, among others. Despite the existence of Naga-English scholarship today, writings by and about the Zeme (a group under the exonym ‘Naga’) are few. I explain this tenuous relationship in my essay “*Writing Everyday in Translation* (2023):”

¹ The dissertation, titled “The Teller, the Tale, and In-Betweens: Towards a Theory of Translation for the Nagas,” was submitted to the School of Letters under the department of Comparative Literature and Translation Studies (CLTS), Ambedkar University Delhi (AUD) in 2021.

It is to be understood that the terms “Zeme” and “Naga” are interconnected (the latter operating as a generality) yet not interchangeable or substitutional. This distinction is necessary for examining the fibrous nature of this connection (Zeme-Naga or Liangmai-Naga, etc.), which at times, have been assumed to be a homogenous whole.

In this context, the paper seeks to re-center verbal knowledge, while drawing attention to its philosophical and life-affirming properties. It examines how acts of collaboration challenge the one-dimensional ideas of a single translator, speaker, or writer. The placement of orature as a ‘site’ holding the potential for democratizing parochial structures of thought can be seen as an attempt at alternative historiography. The paper engages with keywords such as ‘telling’, ‘teller’, and ‘in-betweens’ in order to address the mutable nature of oral forms, which open up conversations about the origins of writing, “unconscious translating” (Devy 1997) and the *act* of archiving through collective memory.

I use translation methodology and theory because its experimental paradigm encapsulates the performance of the *non-text* (speech acts, utterances, gestures) within the framework of translation itself. It also addresses the unresolved conundrum encased between the binaries of written and verbal, text and non-text, inside and outside, belonging and unbelonging, among others.

The Ethnography of Rhythm

I begin with a quote from Haun Saussy’s (2016: 157) *The Ethnography of Rhythm*: “A child recites, “Ring around the rosy, /pockets full of posy”: we know that even preliterate children have been doing something like this for generations. So, some kind of inscription and transmission must have taken place, involving mouth and ear and text and eye.” Spoken words inscribe bodies by engaging them through everyday reiterations, repetitions, and retellings. Those listening today metamorphose into tellers tomorrow, carrying forward verbal and non-verbal signs, a history composed of multiple variants. However, orality’s ‘impermanence’ has been misconstrued as unreliable and subjective, as opposed to textual evidence, which is seen as demonstrating scripted existence.

Jan Vansina examines the proverb “*Verba volant, scripta manent*” in his work *Oral Tradition as History* (1985). Roughly translated as “Spoken words fly away, written words remain,” this saying emphasizes the aforementioned bias. Nevertheless, Vansina challenges pre-established conceptions of all cultures following a transitory trajectory i.e., from primitive to developed, overturning this universalistic logic,

which seems to have also extended to literature. Instead, he argues for the necessity of acknowledging the “spoken and remembered” as a valid approach to understanding history. This viewpoint alludes to alternative systems that exist between and beyond the bounds of dominant exclusionary practices.

The insistence that a language must have a ‘written word’ to be considered a ‘proper’ or ‘full’ language reveals how definitions, borders, and binaries of difference have been, and are being, constructed. Language is a complex system of sounds manipulated through semiotics, subjected to the “situatedness” of a place. Consequently, the impossibility of all languages fitting a formula that discredits BIPOC² cultures, encourages interested scholars to seek and study ‘unconventional’ literary forms. My interest here is to document the processes involved in translating from Zeme (source language) to English (target language) from the moment of procuring the tellings to the process of translating collaboratively. Memory, verbal speech, and sounds as simple as humming served as tools with which tellers accessed the intangible repertoire of community knowledge, generating – often unconsciously – a rhizomatic network of communications.

This collaborative process of translation has also been advocated by Ajmal Kamal (2019: 7) for literary works from South Asia, whose readership is primarily multilingual: “Collaboration occurs when either the translation relies on the text of the original language and uses the English (or any other language) as the glossary; or two people – one of whom knows the language of the original really well and the other can handle the target language with facility – join hands to create the translation. The two individuals can communicate in English or another common tongue.”

The Quest for Meanings

Naga is a position, a signifier, much like the markers ‘northeastern’ ‘India’ or ‘South Asia’, all of which require deconstruction. For communities existing along the ‘borders’ and ‘peripheries’ of nation-states, their location is perceived primarily through relational binaries. There is a need to create spaces for new imaginings and to develop platforms for newer methods of expression, experimentation, and hybridity – a movement where “opacities” deemed illegible simply because they escape Eurocentric worldviews, must be appreciated as they are, with all their complexities (Edouard Glissant, 1997).

² BIPOC refers to ‘Black, Indigenous, People of Colour.’ Although specific to the USA, the term has been used to express solidarity across various marginalized communities. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-bipoc.html>

As an insider of the community in focus, my experience of reading the history of ‘the self’ has largely been through the clinical lens of anthropological writings, missionary records, and official policy documents. When one’s community and identity occupy the position of a *subject* or *specimen* of study, this exoticization places the ‘native’ in a quagmire of insecurities. It is not uncommon to question the relevance of a history that is primarily *uttered* and *passed down* through generations. Scholars often search for the ‘value’ ascribed to the lives that make up our genealogies, and, more often than not, we dismiss, or worse, equate our oral tellings and unrecorded living, to ‘fantastical imaginings’ not deemed suitable for the ‘fine print’ in the annals of recorded history.

The reliability of oral traditions lies in their capacity to shape messages through both their form as well as their relationship to historical settings—ranging from the context, tellers’ backgrounds, and the influence of personal experiences, to the processes of recollection, and the rebirth of meanings. To illustrate this experimental terrain that unhinges, and upsets pre-set definitions, I will present an example of orality’s fluidity, specifically drawn from what linguists such as Stephen Morey call “song languages.” The setting for this song, titled *The Honeybee’s Dance* (as imagined by the singers-translators), opens with the image of a girl weaving cloth on the veranda. A bee floats by and inspires her to sing the following:

Version 1:

*Tinggeu na megui lia ri,
Tinggeu na megui lia ri!
Nakim peu ze majang luzu
Zuang megui lia ri
Zuang megui lia ri
Tinggeu ne lam guilia ri alia ri*

My translation:

The honeybees are dancing around!
The honeybees are dancing around!
Like the warm hands of lovers going about in winding roads,
The bees are circling the air!
The bees are circling the air!
Oh Look, a honeybee comes towards me!

Sourced from the Zeme villages of Magulong and Impah in Manipur, the song centers on a young blossoming heterosexual relationship. Traditionally, the appearance of *Tinggeu* (honeybees) in spring was seen as a symbol of good luck and prosperity, in contrast to the arrival of mayflies, which symbolized the opposite. Consequently, the

bee's presence in the milieu of the poem signifies a 'positive message' brought by the *Nakim peu* (lover) as a gentle reminder of his thoughts of her. The bee replaces the girl's lover, who cannot be there as he is away fishing or hunting. The repeated words *ri alia ri*, *tinggeu* and *zuang megui lia ri* have alternative meanings depending on the context in which they are used:

- while *tinggeu* can mean 'caring' in one sense, *tinggeu na* translates to 'honeybee' in this instance.
- *Ri alia ri* refers to the motion of the bee flying specifically in circles, but also functions as an onomatopoeia with the repeated *ri---ri*. The translator used arm gestures to 'explain' the meaning it contained. *Lim* also translates as 'flying.' Returning to Morey, he notes that word-to-word translation of song languages is almost impossible, as meanings always attach themselves indefinitely.
- For example, *zuang megui lia ri* (lines 4, 5) was particularly difficult to translate as *megui* and *zuang* do not have exact equivalents on their own. They act as connectors signifying the bee's continued journey.

On the one hand, this telling reflects everyday rituals and the method of conducting life among the Zeme, while on the other, it narrates the structure of gendered roles, where a woman weaves and a man hunts or fishes etc. This division of labor is further illustrated in Ursula Graham Bower's diaries, published as a book titled *The Naga Path* (1950: 76):

From the day [Zeme boy] assumed the kilt and entered manhood till the day he set up house on his own account were the best years of a male Zemi's life. Excused of all field-work, except the luxury of dress; left all day with nothing to do but drink beer, gossip, make baskets, play music, and finally [go] to bathe and array himself as to be an object of admiration to all the girls as they came in from the fields; permitted, tacitly encouraged, even, to spend his nights in courtship- what more could a youth want...The Zemi with their innate love of pleasure and beauty, of dance, music, colour and the good things in life, gave all they could to their young people in the short space stern economies allowed.

As an insider, reading her writing, the words evoke a sense of proximity to the place. And yet, it is a landscape experienced first-hand and read later. Though Ursula's work contributes to the "non-fiction" (Root 2007) of the Zeme people, it remains an outsider's narrative of discovery, one that is inaccessible to the subjects of her work.

Bower's account of Zeme or "Zemi" life raises questions about representation in colonial writings. Bower's work is not an anomaly; it is just another anthropological record. Nonetheless, this does not warrant its dismissal. Since her work is one of the few documented records on the Zeme, I would like to briefly mention its significance. As a Zeme, reading Zeme, what is my reader's position? How do I hear this story? How do I process its contents? What category does the migrant-native occupy? What position do those who leave their places of stay and read their community's history in print for the first time occupy?

As languages evolve and texts reach a wider native readership, the native (in Root's understanding of native as 'insider') undergoes a re-reading and re-discovery, a paradox of "occupying two (or more) different compass points at once." *Kahaletbe's* idea of return then makes sense. Returning to whatever 'home' is, has been crucial for the Nagas and other people from hill societies. James Scott in *The Art of Not Being Governed* (2009), understands their positionalities as careful historical moments. He interprets the 'difficult' terrain of tribal homes as innately connected to the desire to "evade the state" or dwell in "non-state spaces" (Karlsson 2013). Can this concept of 'returning home', so common among Naga individuals who briefly step out to study or work outside 'home,' be seen as a negation of regularized systems of living? One can only continue to wonder.

Returning to the issue of in-betweenness in binaries of text and non-text, insider and outsider, identities formed through language constructions become sites for inclusion and exclusion. For instance, 'The Honeybee's Dance' has a second version! While the first song was performed during festivals of yesteryear, before the emergence of Christianity and subsequent 'modernity', I inadvertently overheard the second version during a conversation not intended for my ears. After discussing the first version, a fellow Zeme listener began humming the second version, much to the suppressed laughter of other listeners. Upon noticing my interest in *writing* this version down, i.e. documenting history, the teller immediately fell silent!³ However, after much persuasion and embarrassment, the teller reluctantly allowed the documentation of the song. The song goes this way:

Version 2:

Tinggeu ngou nangtak sialei
Hangket puimu netet peize
Puam ngui liari!
Puam ngui liari!

³ The teller expressed concern over 'spoiling' the community's name with 'unnecessary' songs.

My translation:

Ah, evil wild honeybee,
You've stung her down there!
Now like the belly,
The rumors are dancing around, dancing around.

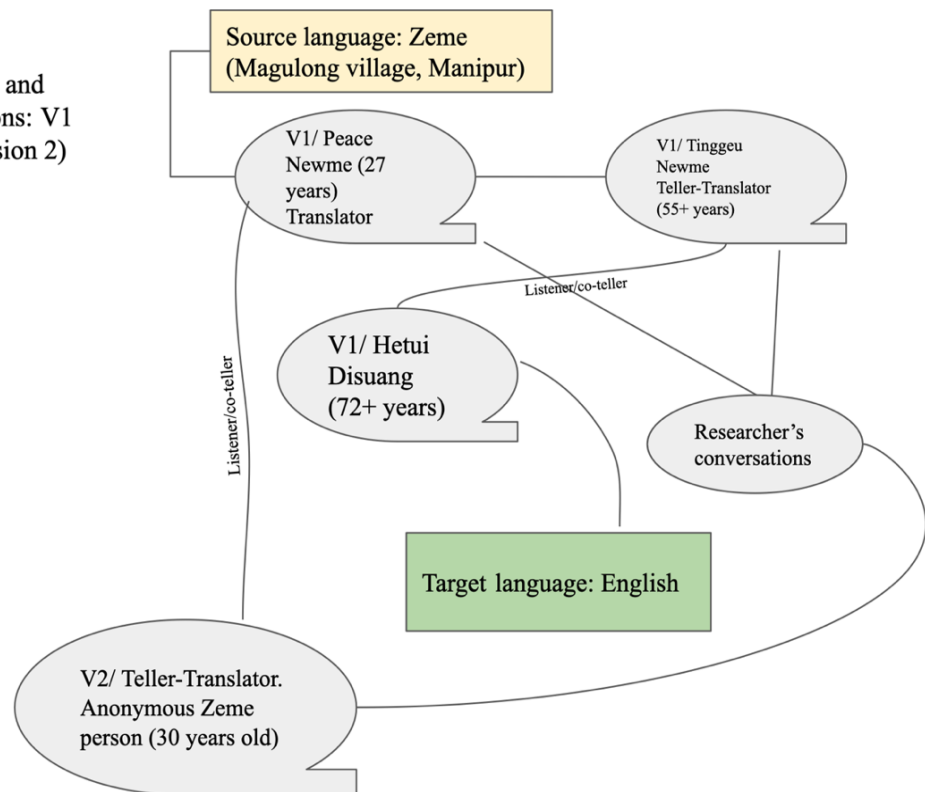
Like the “sliding scale of reality”⁴, the song moves from the domain of performance in a formal setting to a much more ‘life-like’ address of reality. The moment of silence before singing can be interpreted as a conscious marker of the ‘subject’ being aware not only of his/her position as a ‘respected’ individual, but also of the ‘responsibility’ that comes with speaking *of* and *on behalf* of a community. Dolly Kikon (2019: 39) records this moment in her study of the peculiar ‘burden’ of a native scholar:

Anyone trying to write and explain the political history and transformation of the region suffers from the pain of carrying his/her entire people/village/community within the pages of the thesis and research project... Often, it is assumed that the particular scholar's task is to work hard and devote their lives to write and “discover” the histories of their village/clan/tribe/district. He/she is meant to be open minded only as far as the boundary of his/her state or district extends, and ensure that the community history and politics is represented well.

The paper argues that in both versions of the song, despite the content, a listening, reacting audience is very much present and receptive. The version of the song changed twice from its original moment of recording, as did the number of translators. The first translator was Peace Newme (27 yrs.) whom I met through the Zeme Church Delhi (ZCD) circuit. During the process of searching for equivalences in the target language, Peace's doubts about his Zeme ‘spellings’ led the team to consult an older speaker, Reverend Tinggeu (55+ yrs.), a missionary working in Jharkhand among the Malto community. Unsure of his telling, Tinggeu then consulted another community elder, Reverend D. Heutui (72+ yrs.), who serves as a pastor in Nagaland.

⁴ Adejunmobi (2013) refers to Esslin's “sliding scale of reality” as a means to examine the assumed gap between two supposed opposites, in this case, performance and reality.

Chain of Collaborations and Collaborative Translations: V1 (version 1) and V2 (version 2)



What we witness here is a circular movement of references, setting off a chain reaction as a result of “community translating” (Dickie 2017), which adds interpretative dialogue and insights relevant to the materials as it evolves. This experimental translation allows indigenous, minoritized literature to blur the boundaries of the “isomorphic fit” (Apter 2006) between *one language* and *one identity*.

The second version adopts a much ‘cruder’ language. The word *puimu* (vagina) in line 2 refers to female genitals and uses the metaphor of the bee’s sting, *netet*, as a symbol of heterosexual copulation. The uncomfortable, rancorous laughter this metaphor provoked reminds one of the position Yiddish occupies in the German-speaking terrain. Yiddish speech not only invoked contempt among the Jewish bourgeoisie but also summoned a “dread mixed with a certain fundamental distaste” (Deleuze and Guattari 1986). Although a direct comparison may be a stretch – since the Zeme used here is a lower register of the same language – the sacrilegious intermixing of the poetic sensibilities conveyed in *ri alia ri* with the ‘hidden’, ‘vulgar’, and ‘explicit’, portrays a language experimenting within itself.

On Yiddish, Deleuze and Guattari (1986: 25) state, “It is a language that is lacking in grammar and that is filled with vocables that are fleeting, mobilized,

emigrating, and [being] turned into nomads". Again, I cannot help but draw parallels and wonder if the *absence* of an original script disallows a central point or system of signifiers in the Zeme language, thus untethering it. Moradewun Adejunmobi (2008: 164) presents an interesting definition of 'vernacular' as the "mother tongue" spoken, written, and read first-hand by the inhabitants of the place. Although the Roman script has been employed to concretize language, its free flowing, blurred tones reflect a fluidity fundamental to the Zeme people and culture. Despite there not being an active revival of regionalisms or what Sheldon Pollock understands as "vernacularizations", I argue for studying Zeme, or Naga literature more broadly, as holding the potential for *becoming* a people to come.

The tellings, which serve as a supplement to the translation concerns surrounding the birth of writing, unconscious translating, and the growing readership of regional writings, as well as works that constitute 'Northeast Anglophone Literature', are briefly referenced here to examine the fibrous and mutable nature of oral forms. Their innate ability to conflate and interpolate diverse moments in history makes them a fascinating subject for study in the fields of translation and comparative literature. As Haun Saussy (2016: 137) writes in *Ethnography of Rhythm*, "the criteria for authorship, authenticity, and consistency, and what counts as a doublet, a gap (...) differ once we are circulating in the domain of oral style".

Translation like orality, embraces regeneration and the existence of alternate networks of minute mutations, reconstructions, and overlaps of divergent meanings. The act of placing minor narratives at the forefront of this exercise is a significant intervention in the re-centering processes that present Indigenous peoples' perspectives within hegemonic discourses of mainstream scholarship.

Transformative Collaborations Within Margins

Equivalent to the aforementioned collaborative project of translating Psalms in the Zulu praise poetry tradition (*Izibongo*), which involved community performance and interpretation, Zeme tellings often engage local people or "ordinary speakers" (Dickie 2017) by mutating "texts" (Zemke 2016) for the listeners/readers. After all, translation is a form of experimentation with sounds and their signifiers, allowing an elusiveness to narratives, consequently highlighting their evocative properties. If Zemke understood performances of orality or verbal art as "texts" due to their "formal, thematic and pragmatic" properties, Haun Saussy (2016: 132) refers to Alfred Loisy's perception of texts as a "bundle of discrepant intentions made to hold together by external and internal pressures, a patchwork that a more searching reading can always tear apart and recompose." The force of memory residing in oral tellings ruptures linear structures of time.

In a rather radical move, Saussy uses orality to challenge notions of modernity that disassociate the *archaic* from the *new*. She sees orality's resistance to being defined or set in script as the *very* rationale for its continued relevance. Recognizing orality as a valid marker of accessing the past makes archiving essential for minoritized cultures, especially for communities without a written script. It is imperative to continue engaging in translation through community, through a collaborative network of individuals who add organic meanings to languages beyond their lexical properties.

Although re-telling can be seen as a self-preservative act, a factor pervasive and necessary in disenfranchised societies, it is equally vital to understand this act as one of self-representation. And in heterogeneously knit communities such as the Zeme, or Nagas, the enunciation of the 'I' is at times misunderstood as speeches of 'We'. From addressing fellow Naga scholars as "brothers" (*Achi* in Zeme) to interviewees as "uncles" (*Apou* in Zeme), the scholar's writing is monitored by a plethora of "elders," whose positions of power range from political, religious, administrative, to cultural. As one strives towards archiving community histories, the lines demarcating speaking *for*, speaking *about*, speaking *of*, and speaking *with* are intertwined.

With English being the only mutual language among all sixty-six Naga communities across states, yet accessible only to the literate few, writing by the Nagas, or any writing emerging from the Zeme, will occupy the minor condition of "the impossibility of not writing, the impossibility of writing in German [English], and the impossibility of writing otherwise" (Deleuze and Guattari 1986: 16). The minor is not "weak" as Peter Zhang writes in *Deleuze and Minor Rhetoric* but is a misnomer in the meaning-making enterprise controlled by the major (Zhang 2011). In countering the Enlightenment vocabulary of 'coherence' and 'sense' (the aesthetic of representation), local and minor literatures break away from language signifying specific meanings into more democratic forms, characterized by webs and endless circuits. This creates and ignites a chain of horizontal networks, leading to many conceptualizations, many singularities, and many possibilities. The center is no longer the center, as in a fixed point; instead, it is an amoebic structure that emphasizes community.

'Telling' Ourselves

In the words of Atalia Omer, we need to engage in examining epistemologies that arise from the margins and acknowledge the voices of the politically, economically, and socially disenfranchised (Omer and Springs 2013, Omer 2023). Emad Mirmotahari (2016: 53) foregrounds minor or local literature as an entryway into Goethe's vision of *weltliteratur*. Reiterating Goethe's interest in local/regional literature or "subnational" literature, he argues that the local re-imaginings "deprovincialize" national boundaries. "They occasion thinking about literary canons in ways that converge with larger conversations about (un)belonging in lived social communities and how these

communities are produced and policed". From reading the colonial archive that has attempted to 'write' the native, the voices of indigenous scholars, writers, poets, storytellers etc., are now speaking with conviction what has always been spoken and uttered. There is a heightened consciousness to remember, to hope, and to write. Speaking, writing, and imagining for the Zeme, who struggle for recognition within layered markers of 'Zeliangrong', 'Naga', and 'Indian', adds to the discourse of power relations and the politics of representation.

K. B. Veio Pou (2018: xii), in *Naga Writing in English*, states that oral traditions mean more than just stories or songs; they constitute "the philosophy and the life world of a people." To emphasize the necessity of passing knowledge on, he dedicates his book "to the undying spirit of the storytelling tradition of the Nagas." Naga theorist, Tezenlo Thong (2014: 3), while interviewing over 20 individuals in their 80s regarding traditional stories on warfare, head-taking, peace-making, and festivals for his research project, realized mid-way that most of them, while speaking, would pause and say, "I don't remember any more, because I have not told the story for many years."

Translation operates as a 'bringing out' or 'adding to' that, in many ways, *returns* meanings, histories, and genealogies to 'us' by moving back and forth between Zeme-English-others. It also democratizes parochial structures of language ideologies. We need to write, to create an archive, to contribute to a literature of the local, not merely for posterity, but primarily for ourselves.

An image comes to mind: The Zeme-Nagas have a tradition of heaving ceremonial boulders from nearby mountains during festivals to commemorate important events. This act is usually accompanied by pitfalls (when the stone falls) and triumphs (when the stone is steadied). What is notable, however, is the sustained and collaborative way community members come together. The rhythmic chorusing and 'ho-ho-ing!' of people as they work can perhaps be read as a tribute to life's ordinariness and the creation of everyday meanings.

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Obituary

In memoriam Prof. Haya Bar-Itzhak (1946–2020)

By Tsafi Sebba-Elran, University of Haifa, Oct. 30, 2024



Prof. Haya Bar-Itzhak was an internationally renowned researcher of Jewish folklore and one of the “founding mothers” of folklore studies in Israel. She passed away on October 25 at her home in Haifa, Israel, after an extended illness. She was born on August 17, 1946, in Berlin, Germany, to Polish Holocaust survivors. After emigrating to Israel, she received her bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Haifa and completed her Ph.D. in 1987 at Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She returned to the University of Haifa as a professor in 1992, became chair of the Department of Hebrew and Comparative Literature, and in 1994, head of folklore studies and the Israel Folktale Archives.

Her contribution to the growing discipline of Israeli folkloristics began auspiciously as a student participating in ethnographic expeditions to peripheral towns in the late 1970s. These expeditions recorded hundreds of narrative traditions from Moroccan Jewish immigrants in their original languages, while documenting their various contexts. Some of them were published in books Bar-Itzhak wrote with Aliza Shenhar-Alroy in Hebrew and are also discussed in their jointly authored book *Jewish Moroccan Folk Narratives from Israel* (1993), and in an article they wrote about documentation in contextual research. Bar-Itzhak’s masterful essay “‘Smeda Rmeda Who Destroys Her Luck with Her Own Hands’: A Jewish Moroccan Cinderella Tale in an Israeli Context” (1993) is used by almost every teacher of Jewish folklore who wishes to demonstrate to students how to conduct a multidisciplinary comparative

and contextual reading. Her ethnographic experience also enriched her comprehensive dissertation under the supervision of Prof. Dov Noy, “The Saints’ Legend as a Genre in Jewish Folk Literature,” in which she established the ethnopoetic perspective that characterized her work throughout her career. This emphasis on ethnographic and poetic aspects in her work concerns the connections between genre formation and the construction of space, time, and characters in the folkloric text, and the use of performative means of expression as part of the narration process as a communicative act.

These first publications also heralded the repertoires and themes that would occupy her later work and address fundamental questions of Israeli society at that time. One prominent theme concerns transnational ties of Jews, explored in books such as *Jewish Poland – Legends of Origin* (2001, winner of the National Jewish Book Award) and *Israeli Folk Narratives: Settlement, Immigration, Ethnicity* (2005), which covers the stories of the founders of *kibbutzim* (Israeli communes). As a multilingual scholar, who published essays in a variety of languages, including Hebrew, English, French, German, Yiddish, Polish, Ukrainian, and Russian, she was distinctively enabled to conduct transnational research.

Israeli Folk Narratives reflects not only the adaptation processes of narrative traditions in Israel, but also the formation of new genres, which frame new life experiences and the new collective horizons of East-European socialist immigrants. Bar-Itzhak also describes in her books the literary world of “Legends of Origin” and “Local Legends,” and points out the interrelationships between these genres and Jewish and Israeli canons.

Mindful of the relation of Jewish folklorists to the history of the broader folkloristic discipline, Bar-Itzhak edited *Pioneers of Jewish Ethnography and Folkloristics in Eastern Europe* (2010), which includes translations and contextual readings of foundational texts by the first Jewish ethnographers (scholars such as S. An-Ski, Y.L. Cahan, Alter Druyanow, Regina Lilienthal, Itzik Manger, and more). She also edited the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Folklore and Traditions* (2013) in two volumes (initiated by Raphael Patai), which has become a standard reference in the field. These were comprehensive and demanding projects that still stand as pillars not only of Jewish folkloristics but of ethnographic studies generally.

Over the years, Bar-Itzhak also emphasized the representation of women in Jewish folklore by pointing out forgotten cultural heroes and models of femininity. She shed new light on the unique roles of the legend in cultivating counter-memories, and on the contribution of the folkloric text as a cultural-historical document (for example, in her articles, “Women and Blood Libel,” “The Legend of the Jewish Holy Virgin of Ludmir,” “Women in Holocaust [...] A Folkloristic Perspective”).



As part of her role as academic head of the Israel Folktale Archives (IFA) named in honor of Dov Noy (the largest collection of Jewish folktales in the world, recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage Cultural Site), Bar-Itzhak initiated and led numerous field projects, edited and annotated scientific publications (see IFA's jubilee book: *The Power of a Tale* [2019]). She also launched an extensive digitization project to computerize IFA's vast collection, a project now being completed by Prof. Dina Stein (the current academic head of the archives). This ongoing project, involving a complex index of search categories, is supported by the Israel Science Foundation.

Bar-Itzhak served as a visiting professor at many universities, including the University of Pennsylvania, University of California, University of Michigan, Indiana University, Penn State University, and was a fellow of the Simon Dubnow Institute in Leipzig, Germany. She received international recognition through prestigious awards and grants from the Koret Foundation, Lucius N. Littauer Foundation, S.O. Sidore Foundation, The Memorial Foundation of Jewish Culture, The Lerner Foundation for Yiddish Culture, Fulbright Fellowship Program, and the Schusterman Fellowship Program. A highlight of this recognition was her election in 2019 as an International Fellow of the American Folklore Society.

Bar-Itzhak supervised and encouraged dozens of research students, held leadership positions at the University of Haifa and in the city of Haifa, and, with a sense of mission characteristic of the founders of Israeli folkloristics, served as a board

member for many associations and cultural institutions. She also developed educational programs for teaching folklore and folkloristics in schools, and gave special importance to scholarly communication in Yiddish, the language of Eastern European Jews, as part of her work as the editor of *Chuliyot: Journal of Yiddish Culture* and as a member of the publication committee of the National Authority of Yiddish.

Following her retirement, her students compiled a Festschrift in her honor, a rich collection of folk narratives and essays in Hebrew and English (*Masoret Haya [A Living Tradition]: 33 Essays in Folklore in Honor of Professor Haya Bar-Itzhak*, 2020). This volume represents a wide variety of groups and languages in Jewish history and culture, as well as theoretical and methodological turns in the field. It reflects Bar-Itzhak's unique contribution not only as an original interpreter of folklore but also as an academic *leader* who fostered essential research infrastructures for future generations and harnessed her experience and knowledge to clarify key issues in Israeli culture, while emphasizing its humanistic values.

The 2024 Conference of the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming

Conflicts and Catastrophes

12-15 June 2024, Helsinki, Finland

Fiorella Di Fonte, University "G. d'Annunzio" of Chieti-Pescara

The International Conference of the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming, titled "Conflicts and Catastrophes," was held at the Finnish Literature Society in Helsinki from June 12th to June 14th, 2024. It was organised by a committee from the Folklore Studies Department of the University of Helsinki, in collaboration with the Finnish Literature Society. The conference received financial support from the Kalevala Society and the "Materiality, Verbal Art, Mythic Knowledge and the Lived Environment" (ASME) project (PI Frog, funded by the KONE Foundation).

The occasion brought together scholars from various nations to explore the fascinating intersection of ancient and modern chants and technologies. With a focus on exploring the practical applications of the politics of traditions, the environmental impacts of charms, and the role of sacred prayers in contemporary contexts, the conference fostered a vibrant exchange of ideas and insights. In recent years, global crises such as pandemics, wars, the rise of artificial intelligence, and environmental challenges have significantly impacted daily life. However, social and individual conflicts have existed throughout history, prompting people to develop various coping mechanisms. Ritual behaviour and charms have long been part of managing these crises. The conference explored written and spoken verbal rituals, charms and practices used in crisis management, featuring papers from multiple disciplines covering regions and historical periods.

The event started with registration and welcoming words by Aleksi Moine (University of Helsinki, Finland), followed by an opening address by a representative of the Finnish Literature Society, who described the history and organisation of the society's rich archive, which includes a relatively substantial section of material related to folklore and magic.

Session I, “Ancient Incantations and New Technologies” was chaired by Siria Kohonen (University of Helsinki, Finland). **Lisa Donovan (Liverpool John Moores University, UK)** opened the session with her presentation «*Speaking to the New Gods*». She examined how contemporary society interacts with emerging deities, shedding light on the evolving nature of spiritual practices. **Mare Kõiva (Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia)** followed with her talk, «*Do Online Incantations Resemble Previous Texts?*», providing an insightful analysis of digital-age spirituality by comparing the similarities and differences between former Estonian incantations used during crises (pandemics, wars, and accidents) and texts used in new rituals.

After a coffee break, Session II, “Charm Ideologies and Politics of Traditions,” chaired by Emanuela Timotin (Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy, Romania), began. **Aigars Lielbārdis (Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia, Latvia)** discussed the revitalisation of healing traditions as part of the Latvian folk revival. His presentation, «*Revitalisation of Healing Traditions as Part of the Latvian Folk Revival*», highlighted how cultural heritage is preserved and adapted in modern Latvia. **Karina Lukin (University of Helsinki, Finland)**, «*Conflicting Regimes of Openness and Prohibition in a 1928 Shamanic Song*», explored the conflicting regimes of openness and prohibition in a 1928 shamanic song, offering a compelling narrative on the complexities of shamanic traditions. She examined Yadne’s shamanic text within its highly tense ideological context. Lukin also focused on how Nenets’ language ideologies, which regulate communication with the Otherworld, interact with the methods for recording shamanism and language samples, all set against the backdrop of the anti-religious Soviet atmosphere. **Katherine Hindley (Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)** concluded the session with «*How to Win Friends and Influence People: Interpersonal Charms in Medieval England*», providing a fascinating glimpse into the social uses of charms in the Middle Ages; she focused on Old English charms designed to manage interpersonal interactions, particularly spells to punish a thief, bring them to justice, and protect victims of theft. Hindley also examined examples of the language of charms to understand how they used interpersonal relationships to coax or compel favourable outcomes.

The first day ended with a delightful reception at the Laterna Magica bookshop. Attendees enjoyed snacks and drinks, fostering informal discussions and networking.

The second day began with Session III, “Monsoon and Thunderstorms: Charms and the Environment,” chaired by Tuukka Karlsson (University of Helsinki, Finland). **Eleonora Cianci (University G. d’Annunzio of Chieti-Pescara, Italy)** presented «*Medieval German Charms against Wind and Storms*», highlighting the connection between weather and human life that has influenced history, religion, and law, and focusing on the structure of the charm itself. **Frog (Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, Finland)** discussed «*Temporal Ideologies and Positioning: Charming*

Encounters and Outcomes», providing a theoretical framework for understanding charm dynamics. He introduced the concept of ‘fractal recursivity’ developed in linguistic anthropology to describe the reproduction of phenomena on different levels of scope. **Mir Masudul Hoque (Aligarh Muslim University)** spoke on «*Singing to the Trees: Baul's Revival of Barsha Mangal to Cope with Environmental Crises*», highlighting the cultural responses to ecological challenges. He investigated the Bauls’ reinterpretation and developments of this socio-cultural practice, offering a poignant response to the escalating environmental crisis in the region.

After a coffee break, Session IV, “Culture and Community: The Context of Charming,” chaired by Ilona Tuomi (Finnish Society for Celtic Studies), commenced. **Karolina Kouvola (University of Oulu, Finland)** focused on healing mental health crises through charms, emphasising the therapeutic aspects of traditional practices. Her presentation «*Healing of a Mental Health Crisis*» looked beyond the analysis of healing charms and explored their cultural context in the early 20th century. **Fionnán Mac Gabhann (Indiana University, USA)** discussed «*An Irish Priest's Charming amid Conflict*», revealing the role of charms in navigating social turmoil and demonstrating how Fr. Éamonn represented conflicts between his community’s vernacular healing traditions and the beliefs of the reformed Catholic Church. **Nicholas Wolf (New York University, USA)** examined «*Irish Charms in Transatlantic Print*» from 1800 to 1920, tracing the dissemination and adaptation of charms across the Atlantic. He explored the conflicted context of publishing Irish-language charms in the 19th and 20th centuries, arguing that, in print, charms were considered part of the larger fabric of hidden folk customs. This context persisted among the growing global Irish diaspora, symbolised by publications like *An Gaodhal*, which catered to an Irish American audience.

Session V, “Charms and Sacred Prayers to the Saints,” chaired by Aleks Moine, began after lunch. **Haralampos Passalis (Center for Greek Language, Dept. of Medieval Lexicography, Thessaloniki, Greece)**, «*Production and Reproduction of Religious Legends and Words of Power in Our Modern, Globalised and Digitised Era. The Case of the Healing Prayer to Saint Judas Thaddeus*», discussed the modern production and reproduction of religious legends and words of power, focusing on a healing prayer to Saint Judas Thaddeus. In her talk «*Shifting Hagiographies: St. Michael the Archangel in Supplication and Exorcism Formulas*», **Edina Eszenyi (HEI Pegaso International, Malta)** explored shifting hagiographies of St. Michael the Archangel in supplication and exorcism formulas, providing a historical perspective on saintly intercessions. **Lili Di Puppo (Aleksanteri Institute, Finland)**, «*Preserving the Harmony between Humans and the Environment by Caring for Muslim Saints in Russia's Urals*», explored the concept of a sentient and living landscape in Bashkortostan, Russia, through the experiences of Sufi Muslims and volunteers. She highlighted how Sufi traditions such as “open heart” and “heart-knowledge” fostered

a sense of oneness with the animate landscape, emphasising the sacred role of Muslim saints' graves and mythical sites in maintaining harmony and peace amidst contemporary challenges.

The day concluded with a memorable conference dinner cruise, where attendees enjoyed scenic views and engaging conversations.

The final day featured a visit to the Finnish Literature Society Archives, followed by Session VI, "Evil Spirits, Malefic Agents, and Hostile Charmers," chaired by Katherine Hindley. **Emanuela Timotin (Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy, Romania)** examined rhetoric devices employed in descriptions of malefic agents across Romanian charms from the 17th to the 20th century. By analysing these devices over time, her talk «*A Stereotyped Enemy. Describing Malefic Agents in Romanian Charms*» aimed to highlight their persistent use and evolution within Romanian charm traditions, offering insights into changing perceptions of malefic agents throughout history. **Daiva Vaitkevičienė (Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuania)**, «*Wise Men or Sorcerers? The Demonisation of Charmers in Lithuanian Legends*», discussed the demonisation of charmers in Lithuanian legends, examining the social dynamics of suspicion and magic and outlining how the process of demonising charmers is reflected in legends and emic terminology. **Fiorella Di Fonte's (University G. d'Annunzio of Chieti-Pescara)** talk «*Outsider Antagonism and Cursing Dynamics in Old Norse Sagas*» discussed the narrative strategies of curses in conflicts between Icelandic characters and foreign witches in Old Norse Sagas. She highlighted a shift in how curses and their officiants were portrayed over time when the sagas were composed. This change could suggest a deliberate attempt to undermine the authority of magical practitioners and ancient pagan beliefs beyond Scandinavian borders. **Karuna Kanta Kakati (Anundoram Borooah Institute of Language, India)** examined «*Beliefs and Superstitions Associated with the Terrestrial Spirits of Assam*». Kakati focused on regional spiritual practices, investigating the beliefs and superstitions surrounding ghosts and evil spirits in Assam, India, and emphasising the persistence of traditional beliefs in contemporary society. Her work explained how local narratives and superstitions reflect and address societal fears and uncertainties during conflict. She discussed selected narratives from various localities in Assam.

After lunch, the final session (Session VII), "Vernacular Knowledge and Charms Scholarship," was chaired by Frog. **Shantanu Chakraborty and Kishore Kumar Bhattacharjee (Gauhati University, Guwahati, India)** shared insights on traditional herbal medicine practices in the Himalayas. Their talk «*Traditional Herbal Medicine Practices of the Himalayan: A Case Study of the Nomadic Sellers*» examined the Bhagoriya community's traditional herbal medicine practices in Uttarakhand, India, emphasising their role in preserving biodiversity and cultural heritage through ethnographic methods. **Davor Nikolić (University of Zagreb, Croatia)**, speaking also

on behalf of his colleagues **Evelina Rudan** and **Josipa Tomašić Jurić** (**University of Zagreb, Croatia**), «*Where There is Strife, there is Pride: Conflicts Among Scholars of Charms*», discussed conflicts in Croatian scholarship on verbal charms, focusing on discrepancies between academic classifications and practitioners' views. Nikolić highlighted common conflicts, such as charms being seen as vernacular prayers, and discussed the debates over influences on charm structures and motifs, including religious and magical beliefs. **Nidhi Mathur** (**Kurukshetra University, India**) presented a recorded talk titled «*Kedarnath: A Personification of Charms in Indian Society*», offering a contemporary view of traditional practices in Indian society, focusing on the emotional, spiritual and religious response to the Kedarnath floods. Mathur explored how disasters challenge religious beliefs, leading to the reuse and creation of charms to cope with the resulting crises. She discussed how old charms were repurposed and new ones were invented in response to the disaster.

The conference concluded with final remarks and a committee meeting to plan future events. The gathering was intellectually stimulating and socially enriching, offering abundant opportunities for networking and cultural exchange. Attendees departed with a renewed sense of purpose and excitement for the next event, scheduled for 2025 in Bucharest, where they look forward to further exploring the different worlds of charms and incantations.

ISFNR's 19th Congress

Folk Narratives in the Changing World

17-19 June 2024, Riga, Latvia

Rok Mrvič, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology

Anastasiya Fiadotava, Estonian Literary Museum

Saša Babič, Institute of Slovenian Ethnology

Vita Džekčioriūtė, Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

The 19th ISFNR Congress was held in Riga, Latvia, organised by the International Society for Folk Narrative Research and the Institute of Literature, Folklore, and Art of the University of Latvia, commemorating the centennial anniversary of the Archives of Latvian Folklore. Themed “Folk Narratives in the Changing World,” the Congress addressed immediate challenges such as the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war in Ukraine, as well as longer-term shifts like global warming, increasing digitalisation, and social and political polarisation. These changes affect our lives in a multitude of ways and transpire through habits, ways of life, and narratives. The Congress provided an opportunity for researchers to pinpoint these changes and to look at the narratives not only as static representations of culture, but also as dynamic reflections of people’s ideas, fears, and hopes. Many participants were inspired to adopt a diachronic perspective on their data, comparing folklore from 19th-century rural societies with contemporary folklore to explore the extensive changes over time. The Congress participants acknowledged that some of the contemporary changes lead to crises and discussed the ways in which folk narratives can mitigate crises and help their performers and audiences to make sense of the ever-changing world.

All five keynote lectures examined different aspects of change in narrative folklore and various disciplinary shifts in folkloristics. The opening lecture, “Archives of Latvian Folklore in the Changing World” by Rita Grīnvalde, outlined the evolution of the Latvian Folklore Archives (ALF) since 1924, highlighting its institutional changes and the impact of geopolitical events. Grīnvalde emphasised the dedication of researchers in maintaining both national and international collaborations, ensuring

the continued vitality of the folklore archive amidst a changing world. She discussed the diverse collections preserved by the ALF, including Latvian, Livonian, and German folklore, and concluded with an optimistic outlook on future international cooperation and cultural preservation.

Veronica Strang's lecture, "Serpent Tales: Water Beings and Transformational Narratives in Contemporary Environmental Activism," explored the historical significance of water deities in early human societies and their role in origin stories and societal laws. Strang highlighted how certain indigenous societies still value these narratives, promoting collaboration with non-human entities and ecosystems. She noted that larger societies shifted to exploitative practices, sidelining water deities, which had negative social and environmental impacts. Strang suggested that revitalising water being narratives could inspire contemporary environmental activism and promote balanced human-non-human relationships.

"Digital Orality and Folk Orality: The Queer Affordances of Remediation in the Podfic Community" by Anne Kustritz was the third keynote lecture. Kustritz examined the role of audio in modern life, suggesting we are in an era of digital orality where spoken media dominate communication. Kustritz analysed the role of amateur media, using podfic – a spoken version of fan fiction – as an example of digital forms revitalising folk culture. Podfic, primarily created and consumed by women, emphasises performativity and collective authorship, highlighting complex queer dynamics in fanfiction communities. In the lecture, the necessity for folklorists to recognise and understand emerging trends in the multimedia world was underlined.

The keynote lecture, "Narratives in the Crosshairs: Morphometry of the Fairy Tale" by Sándor Daranyi, discussed the evolution of information management and the application of morphometry to tale classification, emphasising the current expansion through big data, digital collections, and AI. Daranyi argued that narrative research can adapt methods from biology and astronomy to better understand changes. He detailed ongoing research, provided a roadmap for reproducible results, and advocated for integrating new technologies into university curricula to preserve intangible cultural heritage, sparking significant interest among participants.

The final keynote lecture, "The Narrative Grip: Folk Narrative and Ecology" by Sadhana Naithani, explored the influence of narratives on the environment and their impact on human-animal relationships. Naithani focused on the transformation of Indian folk narratives under British colonial rule and their ecological implications. She questioned how folk narratives fit into ecological balance and their historical reflections on ecological issues. Naithani concluded that stronger connections between folk narratives and the environment correlate with a healthier natural world, suggesting that folk narratives hold significant ecological value.

Regular attendees of ISFNR Congresses are accustomed to separate sessions organised by each Committee. The Belief Narrative Network (BNN) Committee

curated four sessions to showcase a diverse range of research on belief narratives, particularly focusing on themes of the uncanny and encounters with the other world. Presentations in the first session explored various topics: personal experiences of the uncanny among Tantriks and wizards in vernacular Hinduism, Myntor magical practices in northeast India, Lithuanian countryside life stories, the role of the Ukrainian house spirit Khatnyk in sleep paralysis stories, and South African healing practices involving spirit possession and knowledge production. The second session featured discussions on Estonian supernatural stories related to Soviet military power, Bosnian Muslim narratives of disturbed graves causing traffic accidents, slander and folklore in the 2020 US presidential coup attempt, the Serbian Dancing Lady horror narrative during COVID-19, human-weasel interactions in South Slavic folklore, and the evolution of Serbian narratives on post-mortal existence. The third session included contemporary adaptations of Little Red Riding Hood in Buenos Aires during the COVID-19 pandemic, Icelandic teenagers' supernatural encounters via the Ouija board, and the application of phenomenology in folklore research. The final session covered a wide range of topics: mysterious stories surrounding Glastonbury Abbey, reinterpretations of Slavic myths among Polish pagans, contemporary sensory experiences of the supernatural, Estonian narratives relating to Noah's Ark, traditional beliefs related to mushroom picking in Lithuania, and traditional belief legends found in the experiences of patients at Croatia's first Psychiatry Clinic.

The ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming (ChChCh), known for its independent gatherings at distinct conferences, took part in the ISFNR Congress with a dedicated session to reflect on recent advancements and offer a general overview of the Committee's activities. The session began with an overview of the committee's history, recent activities and meetings, online presentations, and research themes, followed by the presentation of *Incantatio*, the renowned open-access journal dedicated to research charms, charmers, and charming and a discussion on developments in digital catalogues and databases pertaining to charms. After the break, attendees enjoyed a screening of the ethnographic film *Story of the Anklet*.

This year marked the first occasion for the Committee on Folk Narrative, Literature, and Media (FNLN) to organise separate sessions at the ISFNR Congress. The first FNLN session explored themes in folklore and fairy tales, focusing on gender, nationalism, and cultural narratives. Topics included the Shaatnez project blending Jewish folklore with fantasy, Bengali fairy tales constructing national identity, women's wedding songs in Uttar Pradesh, the #MeToo movement's impact on fairy tales, gender and sexuality in graphic novels, and transgender characters in fairy tale adaptations. The second session opened with an analysis of Lithuanian folklore in literature, the preservation of Assamese cultural heritage in film, visual treatments of Madame d'Aulnoy's tales, picture book adaptations fostering ecological resilience, and paranormal legends in horror games during the COVID-19 pandemic. The third

session focused on societal changes and critical issues in fairy tales, including French colonial power dynamics in food narratives, resistance to evolving fairy-tale trends, anti-colonial theories in Grimm's Rumpelstiltskin, industrialisation's impact on folklore, contrasts between nomadic and consumerist societies, and debates on authenticity in fairy tale studies. The final session explored the reinterpretation and performance of fairy tales, including 18th-century oral performances, dual roles in Swan Lake, question of mistreatment and relationships changes in Cinderella adaptations, and Georgian stage adaptations of classic fairy tales becoming integral to national theatre for young audiences.

Several contributions not included in the aforementioned committee sessions have been thoughtfully organised into following subtopics: "Changing Environment," "Narratives of Crisis," "Oral vs Online," "Digital Approaches," and "Theoretical Paradigms." The three sessions under the Changing Environment subtopic were highly attended, featuring papers that explored various facets of environmental changes and their cultural impacts. The first session included discussions on how counterknowledge challenges scientific authority amid climate change, human and non-human interactions on Iceland's coasts, the influence of 19th-century Hungarian print adaptations of Grimm Brothers' tales on local storytelling, and the folklore of Latgale's hillforts centred on themes of sunken castles and hidden treasures. The session concluded with an exploration of Latvian hillforts as important national symbols and sites for mysticism and New Age practices. The second session began with reflections on visions of an ideal society from marginalised groups, exploring a world free from violence and corruption. It included analyses of readers' letters in the first Finnish-language periodical, eco-narratives in Latvian ecotheatre, and the metaphorical use of flax processing as torture in European folklore. The session ended with a discussion on Slovenian weather proverbs as vernacular perceptions of climate change. The final session in this subtopic addressed the digital narrative transformation of Medusa influenced by feminism and the #MeToo movement, the use of psychoanalysis in everyday communication, changes in the dynamics of female storytellers in China, beliefs and superstitions surrounding plants and animals in Assam, and the varied narratives of "animals reward the kindness" tales in China.

The Congress subtopic titled "Narratives of Crisis" addressed a wide range of genres and topics such as politics, religion, Covid-19, feminist poetics, and heroes. The first session featured discussions on the new application of lyric-epic genres in feminist poetics, women's personal narratives about their crises, the concept of time in Slovenian paremiological units, the evolution of Slovenian verbal bonds, the behavioural changes of Finno-Karelian ritual specialists, and guest books at Hungarian Catholic shrines. Subsequent sessions included analyses of Greek pandemic narratives, narratives and images of evil during Covid-19 in Latvia, folklore of artificial intelligence, disease narratives in Lithuanian interwar press, and the

industrialisation of nightmares. Discussions also covered end-of-the-world myths, conspiracy narratives, legend and politics, and personal ethnological experiences during crises. Further sessions examined the image of the ideal hero in Ukrainian legends and contemporary war narratives, politics and folk narratives surrounding Rachel's Tomb, postcarding during cataclysmic events, and men's grief and glory. Discussions included the crisis of birth and death in Polish and East Slavic folktales, the concept of 'unforgetfulness,' twin dialogues for decolonising fairy tales, the impact of narratives on religious persecution and discrimination in Latvia, and crisis narratives. The sessions concluded with analyses of miraculous salvation narratives, hitchhiker narratives, heroes in belief narratives, remnants of East German anti-fascism, changes in letter writing, and Indian folk narratives of social crisis.

The "Oral vs Online" subtopic explored the role of digital technologies in promoting and preserving folklore. Presentations discussed the creative use of social media in sharing folk collections, online Tibetan proverbial competitions, and fairy tale preservation through voice. Comparative analyses were made between different narrative formats, personal narratives on TikTok, and YouTube comments as folk narrative practice. Additional discussions covered the use of social media by the Serbian diaspora to preserve cultural heritage, popular humour genres among Russian-speakers in Estonia, and the continuity and differences between oral and digital gossip narratives. The final session explored folklore in vernacular imagination and institutional media, discussing concepts such as ostention instantiated by horror stories and crime legends, intersectional subalternity in cinema, folk narratives in cinema, nostalgic feelings evoked by 1990s memes, and interdisciplinary approaches to Totam oral narratives.

The "Digital Approaches" subtopic reflected rapid advancements in narrative research technology. In the first session, a digital repository, garamantas.lv, was introduced, featuring over 3,000,000 folklore texts, including a thematic corpus of 2,000 witchcraft-related texts with mapping and classification tools. The Sagnagrunnur database, housing about 10,000 Icelandic folk legends, was also showcased. Discussions revolved around the Norwegian online archive SAMLA and the digitisation of the Hannaas Collection. A novel digital approach to studying narratives through the digitisation and mining of archival folk collections was presented. In the second session, computational methods for analysing Ukrainian folk lyric-epic songs were explored, alongside digital strategies at the Kule Folklore Centre to make local culture collections accessible online. Other presentations examined formulaic language in Scottish Gaelic narratives, computational analysis of rhythmic and stanzaic structures in Podillia's musical folklore, and computational methods for comparing narrative songs across Karelian, Western Finnish, and Estonian regions using digitised texts.

The “Theoretical Paradigms” subtopic featured discussions on Latvian folktales of the ATU 780 type, focusing on the ‘singing bone’ motif and the symbolic significance of the Baltic psaltery in funeral rites. A retrospective of the 1974 ISFNR Congress highlighted the shift towards oral communication and tradition redefinition. Lithuanian folk love songs from the 19th to 20th centuries were examined, noting a shift from communal symbolism to individual emotional expression. Serbian folk narratives from the late 19th to mid-20th century were reassessed for historical allegations of plagiarism. Contemporary Swedish folk narrative concepts were explored, showing how genre choices reflect current and historical contexts. The final paper investigated how artefacts like food vessels and textiles evoke narratives about human values and cultural contexts.

In addition to the valuable exchange of ideas and perspectives through presentations and research discussions, the General Assembly of the Society members on the fourth day of the Congress played a crucial role in shaping the future trajectory of ISFNR for the upcoming years. The Assembly was chaired by the Society’s outgoing president, Sadhana Naithani. The proceedings commenced with treasurer Ave Goršič presenting a detailed report, highlighting her dedicated and meticulous work that has ensured the Society’s stable and transparent finances. Sadhana Naithani followed with a comprehensive report, expressing gratitude to the hosts of the 19th Congress and announcing that ISFNR is now officially registered in Tartu, Estonia, thereby resolving its formal status permanently. Encouraging news included an increase by 48 new members since the last Congress, signalling renewed strength in the Society. Updates were also provided on the ongoing publication efforts of the ISFNR Newsletter and Lecture series, along with the launch of a new website that will serve as a central communication hub. Following the President’s report, brief updates were given by all ISFNR Committees. The second part of the General Assembly commenced with invitations to the Interim Conference in 2026 and the 20th ISFNR Congress. Members unanimously confirmed that the 2026 Interim Conference will be hosted by the University of Iceland in Reykjavik, with a warm invitation presented by Kristinn Schram, Dagrún Ósk Jónsdóttir, and Rósa Þorsteinsdóttir. Nicolas Le Bigre extended an invitation to Aberdeen, Scotland, where the 2028 ISFNR Congress will be hosted by the University of Aberdeen. Subsequent voting addressed the Executive Committee’s proposals for new ISFNR honorary members (Ulrich Marzolph, Margaret Mills, Bengt af Klintberg, and Ulf Palmenfelt), as well as the appointment of a new member Malay Bera to represent young scholars as an observer without voting rights. Further changes to the Executive Committee included the confirmation of Anne Duggan as Vice-President for North America, Sandis Laime as Vice-President for Europe, and the election of Lina Būgienė as the new member responsible for the ISFNR Lectures. Unfortunately, the position of Vice-President for Africa remains vacant. As Sadhana Naithani’s second term as President concluded, Mirjam Mencej

was nominated and unanimously elected as the new President of the ISFNR Executive Committee.

From the very first day of the Congress, which culminated in a dinner accompanied by enchanting folk singers and traditional Latvian dances, to the week-long festivities woven into Midsummer celebrations throughout Riga, the atmosphere was joyously imbued with local culture. The introduction of Latvian folklore songs was brilliantly presented at a Midsummer celebration in the park, where numerous choirs and soloists graced the stage, showcasing their diverse repertoires and vocal prowess. A standout event in the Congress programme was a guided excursion to Gauja National Park. Despite the downpour, participants explored Sigulda, listened to stories from a local craftswoman renowned for her handmade walking sticks, marvelled at the vistas of the River Gauja, deciphered centuries-old graffiti in Gutman's cave, and joined in singing Latvian folk songs with our guide at Turaida Castle. To ward off the chill of that damp summer day, organisers treated participants to delicious Latvian cuisine on the castle grounds. The prevailing sentiment among attendees was that the Congress program, enhanced by a diverse array of lecturers and keynote speakers, illuminated a wide spectrum of questions and topics, highlighting the vitality of the research community united under ISFNR's umbrella. Many of the issues discussed are as old as narrative research itself, while others remain fresh and unexplored in our ever-changing world. The enduring impact of human interaction with one another and our environment is often described with words like chaos, turbulence, instability, and many others. The current age is also referred to as the age of "permanent crisis." Regardless of the term we decide to use, it is clear that these dynamics present themselves as new challenges and underscore the significance of ISFNR gatherings and the need for them in the future. As the Congress drew to a close, attendees shared their final impressions during the concluding dinner and amid the spirited Midsummer festivities in the city, anticipation for the 2026 Interim Conference in Iceland began to take shape on the horizon.

Geomythologies in an Interdisciplinary Perspective

25 June 2024, Toruń, Poland

Zachariasz Mosakowski, Robert Piotrowski (Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Research into the Anthropocene, Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, Polish Academy of Sciences)

Nonconformity, originality, and the synthesis of different approaches in considering specific issues have been key factors in enhancing the quality of science in recent years. Collaborations among scientists from various fields within research teams multiply the possibilities of solving specific problems, broadening perspectives, and expanding the pool of methods that can be used in research. The added value of these collaborations includes opportunities for the mutual exchange of ideas and learning from one another.

One such dynamically developing subdiscipline of science that encourages an interdisciplinary research approach is the study of geomythology. According to the definition by Dorothy Vitaliano, a pioneer in this field, true geomyths are narratives that contain information about sudden and extreme geological events, while attempts to define pre-existing geomorphological features are “ex post facto” geomyths (Vitaliano 1973).

At the end of June, a landmark event for Polish science took place: the first-ever seminar in Poland dedicated to this topic, titled *Geomythologies in an Interdisciplinary Perspective*. The event was conceived by Dr. Robert Piotrowski and Dr. Dariusz Brykała from the newly established Interdisciplinary Anthropocene Research Team, a scientific unit within the Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization of the Polish Academy of Sciences, founded in February 2024 to facilitate broad cooperation between representatives of the natural and human sciences, and to conduct effective research on the mutual interactions between humans and the environment.

On June 25, 2024, 42 participants, including scientists from diverse fields (geographers, geologists, anthropologists, ethnologists, archaeologists, historians, and art researchers) as well as guests, gathered at the Marshal’s Office in Toruń.

They listened to 14 presentations focusing on various issues related to human perception and interpretation of natural phenomena as being caused by supernatural forces, the genesis of various landforms conveyed in myths, legends, and tales, as well as the places around which such stories have grown. The participants represented 13 scientific institutions and 2 museums, while two were independent researchers.

The event was held under the honorary patronage of the Marshal of the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship, Piotr Całbecki, and was partially funded by the budget of the Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship Self-Government, as well as by funds from a National Science Centre grant led by Dr. Robert Piotrowski, titled *Heritage of the Ice Giants. From Geomythology to the Cultural Geomorphology of Erratics in the Postglacial Zone in Poland* (No. 2023/49/N/HS3/02181).

The first session, chaired by Prof. Violetta Wróblewska (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń), opened with a presentation by Dr. Robert Piotrowski and Dr. Dariusz Brykała (AnthroGeoLab), introducing the topic of geomythology and presenting the current state of research and future perspectives. The presenters highlighted the most important international publications on geomyths and outlined the brief history of this subdiscipline's development. The next speaker, Prof. Andrzej P. Kowalski (University of Gdańsk), discussed the mythical perception of "geocatastrophes" by the peoples of northern Barbaricum, using historical sources to illustrate these communities' attitudes toward their often rapidly changing natural environment. The session concluded with a presentation by Prof. Jacek Woźny (Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz) on telluric anthropology, discussing various perspectives of primitive communities (e.g., hunter-gatherer or agricultural societies) on the issue of anthropogenesis.

An unusual event occurred during the break between the first and second sessions: the unveiling of the map *Pomeraniae Polonicae et Germanicae Phaenomena Supernaturalia Nova et Ampla Descriptio Geographica*, documenting supernatural phenomena present in the folklore of Polish Western Pomerania and German Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. This map was a collaborative effort by Włodzimierz Juśkiewicz from IGiPZ PAN (responsible for the cartographic layer), Dr. Robert Piotrowski, and Dr. Dariusz Brykała. It was designed in an eclectic style, drawing from the works of Renaissance masters of cartography, and adorned with graphics created using linocut technique by Dr. Jakub Jaszewski from the Faculty of Fine Arts at Nicolaus Copernicus University.

Immediately after the map presentation, the second session of the conference, chaired by Dr. Dariusz Brykała, began. Due to the absence of one of the speakers, this session was entirely devoted to Dr. Andrzej Piotrowski (Polish Geological Institute – Szczecin Branch). In his first presentation, he introduced the audience to the geological conditions of the Vineta legend, a city mentioned in the writings of

Adam of Bremen, whose location and existence are still debated. His second presentation addressed legends about Fenris and the Sea Bear, explaining how seismic phenomena were interpreted in the Baltic Sea region.

The third session, chaired by Dr. Robert Piotrowski, began with a presentation by Prof. Violetta Wróblewska on narratives about sunken inns and churches. She discussed the phenomenon of peasant imaginations regarding the causes of local tragedies, which, from a broader perspective, led to beliefs in the cursed or unholy nature of certain places. Dr. Małgorzata Telecka (Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin) spoke about geotourism and the commercial aspect of attributing legends to geological features, highlighting how mythologizing the landscape strengthens local identity and attracts potential tourists. The third presentation focused on the landscape of former East Prussia, with Dr. Jerzy Łapo (Folk Culture Museum in Węgorzewo) explaining the folk perception of the young glacial landscape.

The fourth session, chaired by Prof. Piotr Migoń (University of Wrocław), focused primarily on topics related to impactology and planetary geology, or the study of meteorites. Two of the three presentations in this session dealt with meteorite impacts and the narratives surrounding them. Dr. Anna Łosiak (Polish Geological Institute, Wrocław) spoke about myths surrounding impact craters worldwide, particularly in Europe and Australia. Prof. Piotr Grochowski (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń) explored whether a meteor shower fell on Toruń in 1572, using excerpts from the chronicle of Jakub Zerneckie and contemporary news songs. The session concluded with a presentation by Prof. Agnieszka Latocha-Wites (University of Wrocław) on caves in myths, fairy tales, and world religions.

The final session was chaired by Prof. Jacek Woźny, featuring presentations by three archaeologists. The session opened with a presentation by Prof. Tomasz Gralak (University of Wrocław) on stones in culture from an archaeological perspective. Dr. Agnieszka Matuszewska (University of Szczecin) discussed the topic of kurgans and megalithic tombs, while Dr. Paweł Szczepanik (Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń) concluded the proceedings by illuminating issues related to Rowokół – a postglacial hill in the Słowiński National Park, on top of which a wooden stronghold stood in the early Middle Ages. This hill, a site of both native Slavic and Christian worship, has been shrouded in many legends, particularly those related to the foundations of the former sanctuary of the Blessed Virgin Mary, which existed there between the 12th and 16th centuries.

Both the discussions between sessions and at the end of the conference suggested great interest in this relatively young subdiscipline in Poland. The thematic range of the presentations gives reason to believe that the research prospects in this field are vast. This creates opportunities for further extensive,

highly interesting, and interdisciplinary research, for which the recent meeting in Toruń was undoubtedly an excellent prelude.

The conference materials are available on the RCIN (Digital Repository of Scientific Institutes) platform at this link <https://doi.org/10.7163/Konf.0007>.

Cited:

Vitaliano, D. (1973). *Legends of the Earth: How the New Science of Geomythology Explains Them*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

The Agency of the Dead in the Lives of Individuals

Experience and Conceptualization

30 August–1 September 2024, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Simona K. Zupanc, PhD Student

From 30 August to 1 September 2024, the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana hosted an international conference entitled *The Agency of the Dead in the Lives of Individuals: Experience and Conceptualization*. The conference was organized as part of the ERC project DEAGENCY and brought together researchers from various disciplines to discuss the role of the dead in the lives of the living and how we conceptualize their presence in contemporary society.

The conference began with the premise that in modern Western societies, communication with the dead is often overlooked or dismissed as a mere "folk belief". In contrast to pre-modern European societies, where the dead were considered active members of the community, contemporary Western societies no longer view the dead as influential actors in everyday life. Nevertheless, numerous studies indicate that interactions with the dead, even though transformed, do not entirely cease for many people after death.

Kaarina Koski delivered the opening keynote, entitled *The Dead Among the Living: Agency, Intention and Power*. Koski explored how the dead influence the living, either as intentional beings or through their memory and legacy. She questioned who controlled this agency, suggesting that while memories are easier to manage, the influence of the dead in real-life situations is more complex.

On the second day, Ülo Valk gave the second plenary lecture, offering a comparative perspective in his talk, *From Peaceful to Restless Afterlife: Encounters with the Dead and Ghosts in Contemporary Estonia*. Valk discussed how, contrary to scholars' predictions of the decline of supernatural beliefs with the spread of rationalism, ghosts and hauntings have remained prominent in Western culture.



Lecture by Ülo Valk: *From Peaceful to Restless Afterlife: Encounters with the Dead and Ghosts in Contemporary Estonia*. Photo: Simona K. Zupanc.

In addition to the plenary lectures, the three-day conference featured in-depth discussions through thematic sessions, each focusing on specific aspects of the agency of the dead. These sessions offered a comprehensive exploration of the continuing influence of the dead in various cultural, spiritual and technological contexts.

The *Experience and Conceptualization* session explored how people remain in touch with the dead through dreams, memories, and symbols. For example, Ágnes Hesz explored how individual views of the dead in rural Hungary are shaped by family, religious actors and local discourses, establishing a link between these beliefs and shifting social values in the community.

Similarly, the sessions on *Encounters and Communication with the Dead*, as well as *Dreams and Visions*, examined how altered states of consciousness, such as dreams, facilitate communication with the dead. Meanwhile, the *Folk Narratives* session examined the role of traditional stories and beliefs in shaping contemporary understandings of death.

In the *Narratives and Practices* session, researchers discussed how personal and cultural narratives help preserve the memory of the dead. Vito Carrassi, for example, discussed Catholic traditions such as the Neapolitan cult of *capuzzelle* and the 'Rosary of 100 Requiem' prayer, illustrating how these rituals maintain connections between the living and the dead.



Lecture by Vito Carrassi: *The Purgatory Souls as Interceding Agents Between Earth and Heaven*. Photo: Simona K. Zupanc.

The *Popular Culture and the Digital World* session explored how digital technologies are reshaping grief and remembrance practices. Emese Ilyefalvi examined online candle-lighting sites, memorial pages, and AI-based griefbots, raising questions about the agency of the digital footprints left by the deceased. Jasmine Erdener explored thanabots—AI-driven digital replicas of the deceased—raising questions about extending life beyond the body and the impact of this on identity in the digital realm.

The *Memory, Identity, and Materiality* session explored how memory and material culture intersect with identity and death, while the *Rituals* session examined how various rituals mediate relationships between the living and the dead. For instance, Michal Uhrin's presentation focused on how people experience the agency of the dead through collective practices such as cemetery visits, commemorations, and other religious rituals.

One of the most emotional sessions, *Mass Deaths, Massacres and Human Remains*, dealt with the exhumation of mass graves. Aleksandra Krupa-Ławrynowicz and Sebastian Latocha examined the impact of the Katyn massacre on the lives of widows and orphans, exploring how the absence of mourning rituals and the political taboo surrounding the massacre shaped their biographies. On the other hand, Jaka Repič presented on the exhumation of mass graves in Slovenia, analyzing how individuals involved in these processes — whether through research, memorialization, or

commemoration — experience and interact with the dead and the materiality of mass graves, often through the lens of artistic and emotional expression.



Lecture by Nilou Davoudi: *Algorithms of the Afterlife: Death, Dignity and (Digital) Remains*. Photo: Simona K. Zupanc.

The conference successfully highlighted the broad spectrum of ways in which the dead continue to act in the lives of the living. The discussions were interdisciplinary, bringing together researchers from around the world and enabling a deep comparative analysis of different cultural, religious and political contexts. One of the key achievements of the event was the emphasis on seriously considering the agency of the dead as an integral part of modern life, rather than merely as relics of folklore or cultural symbols. The conference concluded with an invitation to the next conference in the DEAGENCY series, entitled *The Agency of the Dead in the Lives of Individuals: Reasons, Triggers, and Contexts*, which will take place in Ljubljana from July 2–4, 2025.

Call for Papers

Geomythology: Bridging the Humanities and Geosciences

Vienna, Austria & Online | 27 April-2 May 2025

Convener: Dariusz Brykała

Co-conveners: Timothy Burbery, Andrea Fischer, Robert Piotrowski, Kevin Page

We would like to inform you about our initiatives in the field of Geomythology. The organizing committee of one of the world's largest congresses in geosciences – the EGU General Assembly (which this year gathered over 20,000 participants) – has decided to include a session specifically dedicated to Geomythology in the 2025 program. The call for abstracts for this congress has just opened.

<https://meetingorganizer.copernicus.org/EGU25/session/54109>

Geomythology is not only a perspective that allows for the reinterpretation of mythological narratives through the lens of extreme events, but also an inclusive research approach that appreciates the value of oral tradition and local knowledge. These narratives and knowledge relate to geomorphological and hydrographic features, as well as geohazards.

Grassroots interpretations of the origins of geomorphological and hydrographic features, local knowledge, and the narratives associated with them – myths and legends – create a network of dependencies illustrating the interactions between humans and the environment. This synergy led to the emergence of a long neglected but now strongly promoted need for the protection of geoheritage. Incorporating a humanistic perspective into the study of geological processes, landforms, and hydrometeorological phenomena elevates the value of individual geosites to a much broader category: the geocultural heritage of civilizations. This

approach supports the development of geotourism and holds potential for geoeducation.

The session aims to give new impetus to interdisciplinary discourse on the environment through the lens of geomythology.

We invite you to submit abstracts in the proposed thematic blocks; however, we are also open to new thematic proposals beyond those we have suggested:

- Meteor impacts, earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions in myths and oral tradition.
- The potential of research on local knowledge regarding geomorphological and hydrographic features, as well as geological processes and hydrometeorological phenomena.
- Oral tradition in the context of empirical evidence and the dating of geomorphological processes.
- Local knowledge about sudden phenomena and extreme events, such as rockfalls, landslides, extreme floods, karst phenomena, hailstorms, etc.
- Geomythical perspectives in oral traditions.
- From Geomythology to Geoheritage – exploring the often-elusive meanings of geosites.
- Geo-Mytho-Tourism – new types of local and regional geobrand.
- The potential of geomyths for geoeducation.

Call for Papers

The 36th International Nordic Ethnology and Folklore (NEFK) Conference

Nordic 2.0 and Beyond

11–14 June 2025, Turku, Finland

It is time to meet again at the Nordic Ethnology and Folklore Conference. The 36th edition of the conference aims to reconnect with the roots of NEFK. We therefore invite all Nordic scholars, and scholars of the Nordic, to Turku/Åbo in Finland to expand our horizons once more.

We invite proposals for panels, posters, workshops, and roundtable discussions that explore contemporary perspectives on culture, cultural identities, representations, and socio-cultural changes in the Nordic region and beyond. How do we approach everyday life, traditions, history, and futures in times of migration, fluctuating borders, environmental change, and artificial intelligence? What is the role of academic scholarship, archives, museums, and art in problematizing identity policies, heritage, and power in contemporary societies? What kind of methodological challenges are we facing as we analyse society, including its values, conflicts, and inconsistencies?

The Nordic region is frequently viewed as a model welfare society. However, what is meant by referring to the Nordic, both historically and presently? Is it a geographic region, an imagined community, a way of life, or a theoretical framework? Finally, what could Nordic 2.0 and beyond be and become? Let us explore these and other questions together!

The conference welcomes abstracts reflecting the conference theme "Nordic 2.0 and beyond", for presentation in panels, roundtables and workshops, or as posters.

Call for Papers & Posters: **1 December 2024–7 January 2025**

Registration opens – **15 February 2025**

Further information on the website:

<https://nefk2025.fi>

Call for Papers

The Agency of the Dead in the Lives of Individuals: Reasons, Triggers, and Contexts

International Interdisciplinary Conference

2-4 July 2025, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Organised by ERC project The Roles of the Agency of the Dead in the Lives of Individuals in Contemporary Society (DEAGENCY, ERC No 101095729).

Contrary to pre-modern European societies, and many contemporary non-Western societies, where the dead were considered members of the community and continued to be significantly involved in people's everyday lives, the dominant Western ontology nowadays does not integrate communication and exchange between the living and the dead. However, as a bulk of quantitative as well as qualitative research testify, for people in many contemporary Western societies, social interactions do not necessarily cease after death but are merely transformed. The dead continue to be involved in our lives, affecting our thoughts, emotions, values, behaviour, and social relations. While scholars have often treated the accounts of the agency of the dead as expressions of "folk belief", and ghosts as symbols and metaphors of larger cultural and social problems and changes, our aim is to take the effects of the agency of the dead in the lives of individuals seriously, as people themselves experience them.

The aim of this conference is to gain an insight into the situations in which the agency of the dead manifests itself and the presence of the dead is experienced. What are the reasons, the triggers and the contexts in which the dead affect the living? The violation of social norms of behaviour and cultural and religious values is generally seen in traditional cultures as a typical reason for the manifestation of the agency of the dead. Temporal contexts traditionally regarded as triggers for unwanted interaction with the dead as ghosts, were usually critical, liminal periods in the daily, annual and life cycle. The same applies to the spatial context: boundary sites within the social construction of space, but also places associated with death (where people

died or were buried), buildings with particular physical features and history, as well as places associated with mourning and the commemoration of the dead, were typical locations where the encounters with the dead were expected and where the agency of the dead was invoked. But do such “traditional” reasons and contexts still have meaning for people today? Or have new reasons and triggers emerged for the dead to affect the living? And how have new platforms for post-mortem communication – such as social media and the digital space – influenced the interactions between the living and the dead?

We invite folklorists, ethnologists and anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, thanatologists, but also scholars from other disciplines who deal with the dead in contemporary society to submit an abstract and participate in the conference. Papers may be based on a variety of sources – ethnographic, archival, digital, media, etc. The conference language is English; the expected length of papers is 20 minutes. There is no conference fee, but you will have to cover your own travel, accommodation and catering costs. Please use the following link to submit your application: [Application Form](#)

The deadline for submission of applications is **31 December 2024**. Acceptance of papers will be confirmed by 31 January 2025.

Should you have any questions, please contact Marja.Kovanda@ff.uni-lj.si

Prof. Mirjam Mencej

Principal investigator of the ERC project DEAGENCY

Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana.



Call for Papers

The 2025 Conference of the ISFNR Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming

Syncretic Elements in the Process of Charming

24–26 September 2025, Bucharest, Romania

Emanuela Timotin, Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy

The International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR) Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming invites submissions for its 2025 conference. The conference is organised in collaboration with the “Constantin Brăiloiu” Institute of Ethnography and Folklore of the Romanian Academy and the “Iorgu Iordan – Al. Rosetti” Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy and will be held in Bucharest, Romania, from 24 to 26 September. The conference will be followed by a trip outside Bucharest (27 September).

The conference will explore the constitutive elements in the construction of charms and the process of charming, with a particular focus on their syncretic features, as they manifest both in the actual processes of charming and in their reflections as documents preserved in archives.

Topics may include:

- the representation of charms and charmers’ scribal competences
- images in charms and the legitimation of charming
- music, voices and tonalities of charming
- the materiality of charming: scenography, props and magical objects.

A special session will be devoted to the history of research on charms and charming in national schools of philology and folklore.

The deadline for submissions is **30 April 2025**.

Proposals for 20-minute papers should be sent to etimotin@yahoo.com and laura.jiga.iliescu@gmail.com. They should include a title, a 250-word abstract and a short biography of the presenter. The conference language will be English. The conference will be held at the Institute of Linguistics of the Romanian Academy (Bucharest, Calea 13 Septembrie no. 13).

There is no participation fee, but the trip will be charged. Participants are responsible for their own travel and accommodation costs in Bucharest.

More information will be available on:

<https://isfnr.org/special-committees/committee-on-CHARMS-CHARMERS-AND-CHARMING/>

Call for Papers

14th International Conference of Young Folklorists

Humble Theory and Power of the Vernacular

25–26 September 2025, Tartu, Estonia

Organising Committee: Anastasiya Astapova, Kristel Kivari, Margaret Lyngdoh, Abhirup Sarkar, Elo-Hanna Seljamaa, Pihla Maria Siim, Ülo Valk

We invite submissions for the traditional conference, encouraging young folklorists to explore and redefine the theoretical frameworks that guide our discipline. This conference seeks to engage participants in a dialogue with “humble theory”, outlined by Dorothy Noyes (2016) as a theoretical and methodological approach, born in the “middle territory between grand theory and local interpretation”. Humble theory prioritizes the ethnographic and practical aspects of folklore research over grandiose theoretical constructs and focuses on studying the meanings driven from the vernacular. It is equally important to address the anxieties and challenges faced by folklorists in positioning their work within broader academic and social contexts. Among many questions, we suggest addressing,

- How can folklorists cultivate a theory that is rooted in practice and ethnography?
- In what ways can humble theory help us navigate our disciplinary identity?
- How might our historical and institutional contexts shape our theoretical aspirations and practices?
- How does humble theory hold up in digital realms and realities shaped by algorithms and AI?

We welcome case studies that exemplify the application of humble theory in folkloristic practice, original research findings, and theoretical reflections on the issue.

We also encourage papers that address our traditional topics, such as transmission, performance, and differentiation.

Plenary Speakers:

Dorothy Noyes (Ohio State University)

Mariya Lesiv (Memorial University of Newfoundland)

Cited:

Noyes, Dorothy. 2016. *Humble Theory: Folklore's Grasp on Social Life*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

We ask you to submit the titles of your papers, abstracts of 200–250 words, and information about your affiliation via the **Registration Form** <https://forms.gle/5L6SpeNnSYabwy8t6> at the latest on March 15, 2025. Notifications of acceptance or rejection will be sent out by April 10. There is no conference fee, but participants are expected to cover their travel and accommodation expenses. This is an in-person conference, a hybrid or virtual participation is not possible. Each speaker is allotted 20 minutes to present, followed by 10 minutes of discussion. The working language of the conference is English.

Organisers:

Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore, University of Tartu.
Tartu Nefa Group

In cooperation with:

Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore

Institute of Literature, Folklore and Art, University of Latvia

Folklore Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Helsinki

International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFNR)

Contact: youngfolklorists@gmail.com

Project

Dictionary of Polish Folk Tales

Online Digital Database of Folkloric Material

Robert Piotrowski, Polish Academy of Sciences

This project focuses on Polish folk tales – their traditions, themes, forms, most popular plots and motifs, as well as the key researchers and storytellers. Its goal is to create the *Dictionary of Polish Folk Tales*, which provides a comprehensive overview of traditional Polish folk tales from both literary and cultural perspectives. The dictionary is based on published and unpublished folk stories, mainly from the 19th and 20th centuries, collected from various regions of Poland. It is also available in print (*Dictionary of Polish Folk Tales*, vols. 1–3, ed. Prof. Violetta Wróblewska, Nicolaus Copernicus University Press, Toruń 2018), but its online version is continuously updated and supplemented with new reviewed entries and materials. This project is a valuable source of knowledge on Polish folklore and folk narratives. Although only a Polish version exists at the moment, it provides a rich resource for international researchers interested in Polish studies, comparative folklore, and cultural history, offering insights that can support cross-cultural research and analysis. The project is being carried out at Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, within the Department of Cultural Studies.

Link: <https://bajka.umk.pl/>

Index of Serbian Folktales

Nemanja Radulović, University of Belgrade

Over the last two decades, there has been a revived interest in indices, as evidenced by publications of the FFC and, of course, Uther's 2004 index. The internet has made such works accessible to the global community of folklorists, not only by providing access to published indices but also by prompting researchers to work on indexing in new media: there are Dutch, Irish, Norwegian, Georgian, and Russian indices, to mention just a few. Following this trend, a new folkloristic site launched in June: <https://snpindeks.weebly.com/en.html>. It is a digital (AaTh/ATU) index of Serbian folktale types. The site includes the following sections: the index itself, as the primary component; a list of sources; a history of indexing in Serbian folkloristics; links to studies on specific types in Serbian material if available online (313, 327, 431, 510A, 706, 930, 934, 980, 981 – all in Serbian) or on archive sources; and a description of the project. Searches can be conducted either through the on-page *search* function or by scrolling. The index is also available as a Word document on Google Docs: (https://docs.google.com/document/d/1PRhL7MfNRYFBry_pbcEXdGPWnGdaM_DUx/edit, no log-in needed). The site's design was created specifically for this purpose (by team member Ivan Praštalo).

This is not an electronic version of a previously published index of Serbian tales. In Serbian folkloristics, there is no published index of tale types. However, since the 1920s, Serbian folklorists have worked on indexing folk narratives, though this work remained scattered across various publications: as apparatus accompanying published collections (for example, Nada Milošević-Djordjević's 1988 edition of tales and legends from Southern Serbia), in articles or in unpublished BA, MA and PhD theses. This digital project aims to unify all this work, making it available to folklorists both in Serbia and worldwide. For this reason, the site includes an English version.

The sources comprise 95 publications, with the oldest dating back to 1821 (by Vuk Karadžić, founding father of Serbian folkloristics), and the most recent from 2007. Some of these sources, like Karadžić's work, are already familiar to international folkloristics and have been included in Thompson's and/or in Uther's versions of the index. Since the studies used come from different periods, older ones used the AaTh 1961 classification, while newer ones are based on Uther's revision. For some types,

the Eberhad-Borataw index was used, and there is at least one type that may be regarded as an ecotype.

The team consists of three members: Nemanja Radulović, a professor of folk literature at the Faculty of Philology, University of Belgrade; Marina Mladenović Mitrović, PhD, a researcher at the Institute of Literature and Arts, Belgrade; and Ivan Praštalo, a teaching assistant for folk literature at the Faculty of Philology. Team members have included their theses in this project.

The project is hosted on a free website (Weebly), which may be useful for anyone interested in do-it-yourself presentation of similar work. It is supported by links from the institutions where the team members work and by the Association of Serbian Folklorists.

Finally, this is an ongoing project with planned expansions. More material has already been indexed and is waiting to be added to the site. Additionally, there are plans to index as-yet unindexed tales in the future. While the current site is a repository of existing research, it is hoped that it will serve as the foundation for a more comprehensive index of Serbian tales.

Project

The Heritage of Frost Giants From the Geomythologies to the Cultural Geomorphology of Erratic Boulders in the Young Glacial Area of Poland

*Robert Piotrowski, Laboratory for Interdisciplinary Research into the
Anthropocene, Institute of Geography and Spatial Organization, Polish
Academy of Sciences*

Project funded by National Science Centre, Poland, 2024–2027, no grant
2023/49/N/HS3/02181.

Erratic boulders are not only a significant element of the natural landscape but also of the cultural one. They have had an enormous impact on the perception of space. These boulders were referenced in belief narratives, and their origins became mythologized. They were treated as objects with a specific sacral status, functioning as sacrificial sites or being considered as pre-Christian altars.

Paraphrasing the words of Dorothy Vitaliano, we can say that the relationship between the natural environment and cultural expressions was a continuous process marked by changing configurations. Local narratives associate the existence of these objects with supernatural creatures. The most popular variant of belief narratives in the 19th and early 20th century – known also from other regions of today's Poland, and more broadly in Europe – links the occurrence of erratic boulders with the activities of supernatural figures, such as the Devil, the Giant, or other characters with supernatural features. These creatures are characterized by immense strength, height/size, and stupidity. Many of the boulders feature imprints or cracks interpreted as traces of the Devil's claws, the Giant's feet, or a blow from the Devil's whip.

The main objective of this project is to reconstruct the mythical perspective on the value of erratic boulders, their role in shaping perceptions of the natural landscape, and their influence on the creation of specific belief motifs occurring in the area of the last glaciations, which covered northern Poland. This will make it possible to isolate beliefs that correlate with geological events from the declining

period of the last glaciation or elements of local knowledge. An attempt will be made to analyse these correlations in the context of the long duration of the beliefs. It will also allow for the analysis of the phenomenon of convergence and/or migration of motifs related to erratic boulders, considering regional specificity in the ethnographic sense, as well as the search for the sources of particular belief motifs in natural determinism.

Thanks to this, an attempt can be made to verify the sources of belief motifs preserved in 19th century traditional culture, as well as to define the liminal status of erratic boulders as part of geocultural heritage. Achieving these specific objectives will facilitate: the identification of boulder geosystems in the area of the last glaciation; the selection of geosystems for ethnographic field studies; the identification of narrative relationships related to geosystems in the studied area based on ethnographic and archaeological sources from the 19th and early 20th centuries; the identification of cult sites using erratic boulders; the identification of the dynamics of perception of erratic boulders in particular ethnographic regions and subregions of Northern Poland; the identification of geological and geomorphological processes responsible for formation of “supernatural” microforms on boulders; and a comparative analysis of the phenomenon of convergence and migration of geomythological motifs characteristic of the Young Glacial areas.

The proposed project is a pioneering endeavour aimed at the cultural-geological identification of the significance and value of erratic boulders in the young-glacial landscape from an anthropological and geomorphological perspective, with particular focus on belief narratives, local knowledge, and local legends. In its scope and approach, it aligns with research in geom mythology. The novelty of the project lies in its interdisciplinary approach to the subject of geocultural features, such as erratic boulders, by a cultural anthropologist and a geomorphologist. Such a comprehensive approach to the mythologization process of erratic boulders has not been carried out on a larger scale before. The ethnographic field research planned in the project, along with the interpretation of folklore source materials, will allow for a holistic approach to the problem of erratic boulders, accounting for the complexity of geological-cultural interactions. The interdisciplinary approach in research will reveal the specificity of geological-cultural relations and allow them to be described from the perspective of long-term human-environmental impacts and interactions.

New Book

Religions 2024, vol. 15, no. 5 (8).

Special Issue: Communication with the Dead (ISSN 2077-1444), 12 articles

https://www.mdpi.com/journal/religions/special_issues/2Z58T45TMM

Guest Editor(s):

Prof. Mirjam Mencej, Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Prof. Éva Pócs, Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Pécs, Hungary

Authors of chapters:

[Folk Spiritism: Between Communication with the Dead and Heavenly Forces](#)

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[Enacting Ghosts, or: How to Make the Invisible Visible](#)

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by Tatiana Bužeková

The Dead in Vernacular Magic Practices among Bosniaks

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The Living and the Dead in Slavic Folk Culture: Modes of Interaction between Two Worlds

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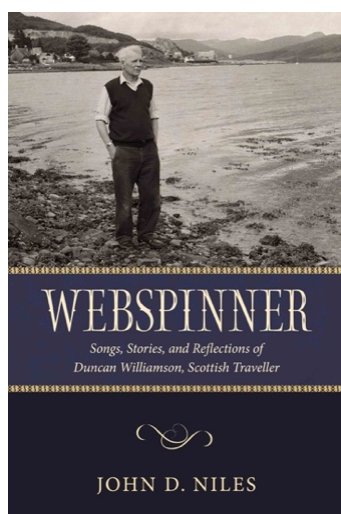
New Book

Webspinner: Songs, Stories, and Reflections of Duncan Williamson, Scottish Traveller

Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2022, 360 pages

Professor Emeritus John D. Niles, University of Wisconsin – Madison and University of California, Berkeley

Born in 1928 in a tent on the shore of Loch Fyne, Argyll, Duncan Williamson (d. 2007) eventually came to be recognized as one of the foremost storytellers in the world. *Webspinner*



is based on more than a hundred hours of tape-recorded interviews undertaken with him in the 1980s. Williamson tells of his birth and upbringing in the west of Scotland, his family background as one of Scotland's semi-nomadic travelling people, his varied work experiences after setting out from home at age fifteen, and the challenges he later faced while raising a family of his own, living on the road for half the year.

Transcriptions from Niles's field tapes are presented with scrupulous accuracy, set alongside photos, commentary, and other scholarly aids. The book is a mine of information concerning a vanished way of life and the place of singing and storytelling in Traveller culture. In chapters that feature colorful anecdotes and that mirror the spontaneity of oral delivery, readers learn about how Williamson had the resourcefulness to make a living on the outskirts of society, owning very little in the way of material goods but sustained by a rich oral heritage.

Scottish Voices

Webspinner is released in conjunction with an online resource, [Scottish Voices](#), which includes audio recordings of songs and stories featured in the book. These are set amidst a comprehensive set of audio recordings, video recordings, and still photos drawn from Niles's fieldwork in Scotland over the years.

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