Doctoral Dissertation

Charms, Amulets, and Crisis Rites:
Verbal Magic in Daily Life in Medieval and Early Modern Bulgaria

By: Svetlana Tsonkova

Supervisor(s):
Gerhard Jaritz
Gábor Klaniczay

Submitted to the Medieval Studies Department
Central European University, Budapest

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Medieval Studies,

Budapest, Hungary
2015
Lead amulet against the *nežit*, tenth-eleventh century, excavated in the medieval fortress of Odūršti, northeastern Bulgaria.

“A shaman and a researcher, therefore, do not seem to fundamentally differ from one another. In order to achieve a viable result, they both have to act as good translators or interpreters.” 

(Anzori Barkalaja, “Some Personal Notes about the Fieldwork”1)

Introduction

Among its many treasures, the Rila Monastery preserves a source on Bulgarian magic. It is a colorful mural painting on the external wall of the main church2. The image represents cunning women, curing a line of ill people, with the help of devils and evil spirits. The accompanying Old Church Slavonic inscription says:

The [female] magicians and the [female] charmers are servants of the Devil. That is why the Devil is very glad, jumps around and dances in front of those who come to them. What the charmers give them to drink and eat is Devil’s filth. Those who abandon God, the laws and the church, and go to the charmers, are servants not of God, but of the Devil.

Does this fresco represent a fact or a stereotype? Is this painting only a visual expression of ideologically charged artistic program? Is this a real magical or curative practice, which the image employs for didactic purposes? Are there other sources, providing some kind of reference point? Is it methodologically possible and acceptable to use this nineteenth-century fresco as a source on medieval Bulgarian magic? Is it a single exotic and problematic specimen, unsusceptible of comparison and interpretation?

The fresco and the questions around it are good illustrations of the general difficulties in the research of the medieval and early modern Bulgarian magic. Its


2 The Rila Monastery was founded in the tenth century, with a number of subsequent enlargements and reconstructions. Built on the foundations of a demolished medieval church, the current main church was finished in 1837. The frescoes, including the quoted mural painting were finished in 1846.
existence is hinted and its nature seems to be an alloy of aboriginal and borrowed, of canonical and non-canonical, of stereotypes and realities. However, the authentic information is fragmentary, insufficient and often non-contemporary to the original phenomenon. There are a few primary textual and visual sources to rely on, among which the proper medieval material is even scarcer. There are no magical treatises; no witch trials documents nor images of wizards and their rituals. The archeological findings are relatively more abundant, but not systematized. As a whole, the medieval and early modern Bulgarian magic remains an intriguing, but enigmatic and elusive phenomenon.

However, there is one kind of magic, which is much more accessible for an examination. This is the verbal magic, documented in a relatively large number of extant verbal charms, preserved in manuscripts and on amulets, and dated from the tenth to the nineteenth century. Although less spectacular than the colorful mural painting from the Rila Monastery, these verbal charms are crucial primary sources. Consenting with or contradicting to the fresco, the charms and their material carriers definitely show a much broader and richer picture. If the painting provides a problematic glimpse through a thin crack, the charms open a window and let us have a proper and clearer look. They give a relatively stable reference point: authentic information on the verbal magic and its continuity of motives, beliefs and practices. And while in the supernatural sphere, the verbal charms actually offer a view into the ordinary everyday human life.

My thesis takes up this rare opportunity. It looks at the verbal charms with a particular focus on their supernatural figures and quotidian roles. The Other world and Our World are taken separately, but also in constant contact. Up to my knowledge, no such study has been conducted so far in the field of medieval and early modern Bulgarian
magic. The source material is examined in the context of power, rite and crisis management. The approach is comparative and interdisciplinary. While the analysis and the conclusions reflect my own scholarly opinion, they are open for new discoveries, perspectives and alternative interpretations.

I. Framework

Verbal charms “are a cultural near-universal (perhaps, even a universal) way of coping with ill health, with misfortune, and with anxiety about success in fields from agriculture to love. This is a fair claim to their significance.”

Verbal charms and verbal magic are part of the larger context of magic and ritual, which offers a number of terminological challenges and contested definitions.

I. 1. Magic in everyday life

In her monograph *The Genre of Trolls*, Camilla Asplund Ingemark aptly concludes: “So how is a troll to be defined? The best answer to that question might be that it cannot be defined, but this has not stopped scholars from trying.”

This is valid not only for a particular supernatural phenomenon (like the troll), but also for the general term “magic” itself. Both as term and as phenomenon, magic has been many times discussed, defined and redefined by a number of researchers.

---

Greeks magic is simply the art of the magi (the Persian priests), according to James Frazer the phenomenon is more complex:

Magic is a spurious system of natural law as well as a fallacious guide of conduct; it is a false science as well as abortive art. Regarded as a system of natural law, that is, as a statement of the rules which determine the sequence of events throughout the world, it may be called Theoretical magic. Regarded as a set of precepts, which human beings observe in order to compass their ends, it may be called Practical magic.  

According to Frazer, magic is based on two principles: the law of similarity (“like produces like”), which is the basis of homeopathic or imitative magic; and the law of contagion (“things that have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed”), which is the basis for contagious magic.

Later, Mauss defines magic as a vague power, the art of changing, aimed exclusively at producing results, and also a practical idea, concerned with understanding nature. “A magical rite is any rite which does not play a part in organized cults – it is private, secret, mysterious and approaches the limit of a prohibited rite.” According to Malinowski, magic is “a traditionally established power of man over certain natural processes, over some human activities or over other human beings” and “the expression of human hope and confidence, of the need of a morally integrated attitude towards the future.”

The contested nature of magic is exemplified by one ardent scholarly debate. It starts with the definition of magic, given by Keith Thomas in Religion and the Decline of

---


8 Malinowski, Coral Gardens and Their Magic, pp. 244-245.
Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England. The American anthropologist Hildred Geertz finds Thomas’ approach and definitions to be problematic. Specifically, Geertz criticizes Thomas’ sets of oppositions. One of them is between magic ("primitive", "incoherent", "specific", "advancing mundane personal fortunes", "promoting matters of immediate solid everyday physical and social well-being" and "primarily oriented toward providing practical solutions to immediate problems and not referable to any coherent scheme of ideas") and religion ("comprehensive, organized, and concerned with providing general symbols of life"). The other opposition is between magic, which is "ineffective", and technology, which is rational and empirical. Geertz’s main objection is that Thomas uses the categories “magic” and “religion” in the same way as they were used in the medieval and early modern English religious rhetoric. In this rhetoric, “magical” is always a negative label, loaded with disapproval. Geertz states that the categories which he [Thomas] uses when attempting to develop causal hypotheses are those of some of the subjects themselves. In doing so, the researcher takes part in the cultural process that he is studying. What is perhaps even more important, this particular way of labeling beliefs carries with it a whole philosophy, a point of view toward the nature of man and workings of society which influences Thomas’ sense of what seems obvious and what seems puzzling in his data. In his answer, Keith Thomas rejects Geertz’s criticism. He states that he “described the individual practices and beliefs in sufficient particularity for any serious confusion to have been avoided”.

---

9 Thomas, Religion and the Decline of Magic, p. 25.
ineffective technique comes at the very end of his book, and that actually “ineffectiveness was not part of my definition of it [magic].” According to Thomas, in his book he observed and clearly stated that the line between magic and religion is “impossible to draw”. Methodologically, he admits that his book lacks a broader discussion on the shift of the semantics of the terms “religion”, “magic” and “science”. However, Thomas insists that the facts are the important ones, and they will be the same, regardless of labels. On the opposition between magic and technology, he points that in the book he presented and discussed not an opposition between the two, but the doctrinal changes that lead to rejection of magic “long before the practical needs for which it catered had received any alternative technological solution.” Finally, Thomas agrees with Geertz that any “attempt to treat popular beliefs as simple defenses against anxiety, vain compensations for technological inadequacies.” is shallow. However, he insists, “magical rites may have also had their expressive aspects, but in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England their purposes were usually strictly practical… Counterwitchcraft, magical healing, exorcism, were not just expressive or symbolic rites; they were meant to work.”

Valerie Flint’s book *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* is also a response of Thomas’s book. Flint gives the following definition of magic:

Magic may be said to be the exercise of a preternatural control over nature by human beings, with the assistance of forces more powerful than they. This combination of human and superhuman power will sometimes employ strange instruments and is always liable to produce remarkable and unaccustomed results. Thus we may expect an element of the irrational and of the mysterious too, in a process that deserves to be called magical.  

---

Flint puts the emphasis on the irrational aspect of magic, and on the acceptance and continuation of magical practices in the new Christian religion and culture. The theme that early medieval Christian authorities deliberately and purposely accepted, tolerated and even encouraged magic is central for Flint’s book. She regards the Christian miracles, mysteries and rituals to be approved forms of magic.

In its own turn, Valerie Flint’s study and opinions are critically reviewed by Richard Kieckhefer. He points that Flint sees the landscape of medieval culture as a land of grace, filled with diverse manifestations of extraordinary power. The historians she criticizes argue in effect that irrational medieval Christian rituals were equivalent to magic and just as bad; Flint revises this judgment, maintaining that nonrational medieval Christian rituals were equivalent to magic and just as good.

According to Kieckhefer, Flint “insists repeatedly that many approved rituals were magical, even if churchmen said otherwise.” She uses the term magic ahistorically and thus “blurs distinctions vitally important to those who made them.” Finally, Kieckhefer points that “Flint sees the mainstream ecclesiastical policy (after the initial wave of conversion) as one of benign toleration, even encouragement, of pre-Christian ritual,” which is often an overstatement. She provides an “extremely broad definition of magic to highlight what she sees as the unacknowledged similarity, indeed, the functional equivalence, between magic and much Christian ritual.” However, for the Christian authorities and for the medieval contemporaries, these two things “would have been grounded in fundamentally distinct rational assumptions.”

Ibidem, p. 822.
Ibidem.
This clash of definitions is aptly summarized by Michael Bailey:

Magic is a difficult and contested category, often understood quite differently in varying contexts and certainly in different historical periods, and use of the term inevitably obscures as much as it illuminates unless it is defined very precisely each time it is deployed.  

In the same line, Fritz Graf concludes:

Instead of creating a rigid and artificial terminology, thus it will be necessary for us to consider and analyze the ancient use of the term *magic* as it constitutes an element of the indigenous discourse on the relationship between the human and the supernatural.  

Graf indeed turns to the roots and examines magic in a context, where an indigenous terminology is available, as the very word “magic” comes from Greek and Latin languages.

Indeed, magic proves to be something that cannot be defined precisely. Still, for me it is clear that it positions the interactions between humans and their environment in the context of a relationship between the natural and the supernatural worlds. It is also clear for me that the idea of influence, control and power is central for magic.

In my opinion, it is more productive to leave aside the definitions, and to look at two particular features, which I regard important for this study. One such aspect is magic’s mixed syncretic nature, observed by Richard Kieckhefer: magic should be regarded “as a kind of crossroads where different pathways in medieval culture converge.” Magic is a point of intersection between religion and science, between popular culture and learned culture, between fiction and reality, between the exploration

---

of natural forces and the invocations of demonic powers. “In short, magic is a crossing-point where religion converges with science, popular beliefs intersect with those of the educated classes, and the conventions of fiction meet with the realities of daily life.”²⁴ This point is also very much discussed by another scholar, Stephen Wilson, who states that “magic is eclectic to an extraordinary degree, taking components from many different cultural levels and locations.”²⁵

The other important feature is the explanatory function. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England, discussed by Keith Thomas, there is a “preoccupation with the explanation and relief of human misfortune. There can be no doubt that this concern reflected the hazards of an intensely insecure environment.”²⁶ Although the beliefs in magic are inherited from the past, they are strongly influenced by the harsh conditions of everyday life,²⁷ especially in the case of health issues: “But this was above all a time when medicine began at home. Every housewife had her repertoire of private remedies.”²⁸ As a result, “many unorthodox methods of healing enjoyed prestige. …helplessness in the face of disease was an essential element in the background”, where the beliefs in magic flourished. Vulnerability to other kinds of misfortune (for instance plague or fire), particularly when it came suddenly, also gave ground for the employment

²⁴ Ibidem: “Indeed, magic is worth studying largely because it serves as a starting-point for excursions into so many areas of medieval culture. Exploration of this sort can reveal the complexity and interrelatedness of different strands in that culture.”
²⁶ Thomas, Religion, p. 5. For comparison, Evans-Pritchard in Witchcraft, Oracles demonstrates the mechanism of explaining all kind of unfortunate events and troubles through the notions of witchcraft and magic.
²⁷ According to Thomas, these are low expectation of life, shortage of food supply, starvation, improper and insufficient nutrition, illnesses and infections, a low number of trained physicians and the low level of their competence, high prices of their services. Because of these factors, the lower and the poorer strata of the society preferred to consult practitioners like herbalists, cunning folk, etc. See Thomas, Religion, pp. 5-12.
²⁸ Thomas, Religion, p. 12. This was especially valid for the cases of childbirth, when it was almost always a midwife, and not a physician employed.
of magic. The same phenomenon is demonstrated by Evans-Pritchard’s analysis of the Azande’s misfortune-explanation system, based on sorcery and witchcraft.\textsuperscript{29}

1. 2. Verbal charms

Verbal magic functions and operates through spoken or written words, and relies on the supernatural power and effect of these words.\textsuperscript{30} My source material consists of such special powerful words, namely Bulgarian verbal charms. The relevant Bulgarian scholarship calls these texts “апокрифни молитви” (literally “apocryphal prayers”). This terminology is established and broadly used, but its exactness, appropriateness and adequacy are rarely discussed. The Russian scholar Almazov attempts for such a discussion, pointing out that the indexes of prohibited books speak about “false or untrue prayers,” found in the prayer books of the village priests and aimed at curing diseases.\textsuperscript{31} Thus, the “false of untrue prayers” are connected with curative magical practices. Later, the researchers designated these “false or untrue prayers” with the term “apocryphal prayers”. Almazov admits that the category “apocryphal prayers” is rather broad and stretched, comprising various texts, which are not accepted by the official church due to their content, form or purpose. These texts are not admitted in the official religious

\textsuperscript{29} Evans-Pritchard, Witchcraft, Oracles, pp. 18-32.
\textsuperscript{30} Malinowski, Coral Gardens and Their Magic, gives an abundant examples and extensive discussion of a well-developed practice of verbal magic. On p. 444 he states that in the Trobriands "every magical act consists of a spell and of manual or bodily behaviour." He adds: "The spell is an essential ingredient in Trobriand magic. The spell is the most esoteric part of magic. The effective use of spells always constitutes the exclusive prerogative of the magician, whether the words are secret or not. ... The magical power is acquired primarily by learning the spell", where the extreme accuracy of memorization of the exact text is of crucial importance.
\textsuperscript{31} [A. I. Almazov] А. И. Алмазов, Апокрифические молитвы, заклинания и заговоры (Apocryphal prayers, incantations and spells) (Odessa: Летопис Новоросс. университета, 1901, pp. 221-340).
service books, and are spread and used secretly outside of the control of the church authorities.

Later, the Bulgarian scholar Donka Petkanova addresses the question about the relations between “canonical prayers”, “apocryphal prayers” and “folk charms”. Petkanova states that “apocryphal prayers” differ from “canonical prayers” in their form and content. At the same time, there is a significant number of similarities between “apocryphal prayers” and “folk charms” in terms of “ritual, ideology, composition, motives, views and style.” According to Petkanova, the main cause for these similarities is that the authors of the apocryphal prayers experienced influence from folklore:

There is no doubt that folk charms are much older than the apocryphal prayers. The authors of false prayers are borrowing forms, ideas and stylistic elements from the folklore. In a number of cases the whole content and form of the apocryphal prayers is so close to the folk charms, that they can be regarded as adaptations or even as records of folklore texts.

Finally, Petkanova concludes: “It is obvious, that in the Middle Ages both the apocryphal prayers and the folk charms fulfilled the same functions and they both were spread in the same context and milieu.”

The Bulgarian scholar Maria Shniter makes a relatively detailed discussion on the terminology. According to her, Christian prayers and folk charms are closely related variants of the accomplishment of the medieval people’s desire to change nature. This closeness generates different mixed borderline cases, positioned between the two main genres “prayer” and “charm”. Shniter describes the process of intermingling of folklore

33 [Maria Shniter] Мария Шнитер, Молитва и Магия (Prayer and magic), (Sofia: Университетско издателство "Св. Климент Охридски", 2001), p. 27.
and Christian prayers. The aspects of this process are introduction of Biblical characters, motives and phrases in the texts of folk charms, and introduction of folk elements, motives and characters in the texts of Christian prayer. This second aspect leads to the appearance of texts, which the medieval indexes call “false or untrue prayers” and modern scholars label as “apocryphal prayers”. Shniter points out that these terms cover a large number of texts with heterogeneous form and content. The medieval term “false or untrue prayers” covers the narrative magical formulae, functioning as prayers. The term “apocryphal prayers” is rather inadequate, as its definition depends on the scholar’s vaguely determined personal criteria about what is “canonical”, “apocryphal”, etc.

Additionally, Shniter lists three borderline cases. These are:

- “charms” – formulae, containing unintelligible words, letters and symbols, used as amulets;
- “narrative charms” (“charms with a purpose of a prayer”) – texts, containing a narrative, close to the folk charms in its form, and to the canonical prayer in its function;
- “euchemically organized non-canonical texts” – texts which may or may not contain apocryphal or folk elements.

Finally, Shniter concludes:

the term ‘apocryphal prayer’ can only be applied to the prayers, containing apocryphal or folk elements. We have the full reason for calling all the other non-canonical devotional or prayer-type texts “quasi-canonical.”

The transition between the different borderline cases depends on the formal specifics and on the ways of diffusion, circulation and existence of the texts.

---

In sum, the relevant Bulgarian scholarship suggests two ways to define the source material. The first one sees a binary opposition between “canonical” and “apocryphal” texts. This type of approach is precisely described and summarized by James Kapaló:

The definition of the ‘idiosyncratic’ or ‘deviant’ type of prayer, in relation to the ideal type of prayer, encompasses a whole range of binary positions, such as canon versus apocryphal, prayer versus incantation, orthodox versus heterodox, that constitute and construct the discourse that has evolved around these inherited ‘texts’.35

The second way sees the source material as a multitude of different degrees of canonicity or non-canonicity, grouped under different labels. This way can be more productive, but only if accompanied by detailed explanations about the meaningful distinctions between the labels.

Clearly, the term “апокрифни молитви”/“apocryphal prayers” is inadequate and misleading. According to the Bulgarian scholarly tradition, the term “apocryphal” (“апокрифен”) refers to non-canonical Christian texts. In order to be defined as apocryphal, a text has to have functional and genre parallel in the Bible. While many of the texts examined in this thesis contain Christian motives and characters, managed in a non-canonical way, others de facto lack Christian elements in their content. While some of the materials represent borderline cases, most of the texts in this research cannot be defined as “prayers”, as they have completely different form, content and purpose. And finally: the translation of the Bulgarian term “апокрифни молитви” in other languages leads to further complications and confusions, caused by the different nuances of meaning of these two words.

In order to work with clear and adequate English terminology, I prefer to call my source material simply “charms”. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, a “charm” is “The chanting or recitation of a verse supposed to possess magic power or occult influence; incantation, enchantment; hence, any action, process, verse, sentence, word, or material thing, credited with such properties; a magic spell; a talisman, etc.” In a subsection of this definition one finds: “Anything worn about the person to avert evil or ensure prosperity; an amulet.”

In his article on charms in the Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens, the Danish scholar Ferdinand Ohrt describes charms in the following way: “es bedeutet nämlich auch einen fest formulierten Spruch oder Text (gesprochen oder geschrieben), dem eine übernatürliche Kraft beigelegt wird.”36 Further on in the same article, Ohrt relates to the older definition of charm, given by the Grimm brothers:

Formeln im außerkirchlichen Gebrauch, christlicher und nicht-christlicher Art, denen eine übernatürliche Wirkung und zwar meist schützender, heilsamer Art zugeschrieben wird. (verbal formulas, of Christian and non-Christian form, used outside of a Church context, and to which a supernatural effect is attributed, mostly of a protective, healing kind)37

Based on these classic definitions, Jonathan Roper suggests “a more concise definition might simply be that charms are the verbal element of vernacular magic practice”.38 In his book on English verbal charms, he defines “verbal charm” as “a traditional form of words thought to have a direct effect in the world, usually of a protecting, healing kind. These forms of words are often formulaic in character and

repetitive in structure, possessing a high degree of sound-patterning.” The purpose of a verbal charm is to bring change in the world we live in (to heal an illness, to make somebody to fall in love, to cause rain), or to fulfill an apotropaic function (to protect somebody or something, to prevent bad things form happening), or to help in discovering information (where a certain object is or whom a person will fall in love with). Verbal charms can be oral (delivered orally) or written (presented in a written form on an object, which can be worn as an amulet). Concerning the non-verbal charms, these are “a traditional series of wordless actions, often the same or similar to those actions which accompany verbal charms, intended to have similar effects.”

Edina Bozóky provides terminological and conceptual definition of the medieval European charms: “les charmes et les prières apotropaïques constituent un ensemble de sons ou de lettres, censé produire un effet physique ou matériel bénéfique.” The utilitarian purpose of the texts is fundamental for the genre, and the domestic use by lay people separates the charms from the benedictions and exorcisms. However, the charms and the apotropaic prayers share many features with the liturgical prayers, the benedictions and the exorcisms, and it is difficult to establish a clear-cut borderline. According to Bozóky, the charms contain a number of characteristic constructive elements: naming of the evil, conjuration, naming of the helping figures, actualization,

---

40 Ibidem.
42 Also called ratification. It relates the current action or situation to a mythical action or situation, in which the problem was solved successfully. The ratification’s aim is to transmit the positive effect of the mythical event into the current situation. Often, the ratification is provided by the historiola (the narrative) of the charm.
list of impossibilia, dialogue, crystallized motives and formulae, backward counting, various sound effects and rhyming, finalizing formulae.\textsuperscript{43}

In relation with Lithuanian material, Daiva Vaitkevičienė gives the following definition:\textsuperscript{44} “Verbal charms are verbal formulas that are believed to possess magical powers that can be used to alter both physical and psychological reality. Charms can be used to heal illnesses, inspire love, improve crops, call in rain, and so on.” In Lithuanian tradition, the verbal charms are closely related with prayers and divination formulae. The prayers are “formulaic texts spoken either out loud or in one’s thoughts and directed towards a god or another object of worship.” Vaitkevičienė points out: “… prayers differ from charms in that they clearly express a religious relationship between the individual who is saying them and the individual they are addressed to, whereas charms are dominated by the individual power of the person saying them.” At the same time, the Lithuanian charms that plead or ask, are very similar to prayers.\textsuperscript{45}

On the other hand, the Lithuanian charms are quite distinguishable from the divination formulae, which are “verbal formulas, provoking symbols, dreams, and visions, in an attempt to learn about the future (more rarely, to learn about the past or the present.)” The most common use of the Lithuanian divination formulae is to predict the weather or the future. What divide these three genres are their functions:

Charms are used to strive to change an unpleasant situation or to maintain the order that has been disturbed. Divination is used to acquire knowledge. Prayers are used for sacred communication and are oriented towards the

\textsuperscript{43} Bozóky, \textit{Charmes et prières apotropaïques}, p. 36
\textsuperscript{44} The Lithuanian material, as presented in Daiva Vaitkevičienė, ed. \textit{Lietuvių užkalbėjimai: gydymo formulės/Lithuanian Verbal Healing Charms}, (Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2008) shows a number of similarities with the Bulgarian material.
\textsuperscript{45} For example, the charms against snake bite, where the charmer prays to the snake to take back its venom, and to the earth to destroy the snake’s poison. Vaitkevičienė, \textit{Lietuvių užkalbėjimai}, p. 68.
relationship between man and God, and not only towards practical results.\textsuperscript{46}

In addition, there are also other Lithuanian magical formulae: ritual formulae, well-wishing texts, toasts, curses, shepherds’ cries (rhymes, partly spoken like charms, partly sung like songs, and appealing to the sun, the clouds, the rain, the wind, the snow.) Finally, charms appear as formulaic or song interludes in Lithuanian oral folk tales.

Vaitkevičienė’s discussion on Lithuanian material brings up the question of differences and similarities between a prayer and a charm. Prayers are traditional formulaic form of words, thought to have an effect on the world, and have many analogies with charms. As Smallwood writes about English verbal charms: “… they may on occasion come close to being a prayer”\textsuperscript{47}. The major difference is that prayers do not work directly, but rely on a supernatural intervention, or in other words “prayers petition, charms command.”\textsuperscript{48} The major similarity is that both charms and prayers (and everything between them) are words of power and this characteristic is of major importance. As Jacqueline Borsje puts it, the words of power are believed to be capable of influencing reality in a material sense, although not through empirically verifiable methods. These words are believed to have the power to transform reality either through some intrinsic power they possess or through the agency of a supernatural entity.\textsuperscript{49}

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{46} Ibidem.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{48} Roper, \textit{English Verbal Charms}, p. 16. See also Arnold van Gennep, \textit{The Rites of Passage} (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 8, where the author distinguishes between direct and indirect rites. Van Gennep places curses and spells in the first category (as they are “designed to produce results immediately, without intervention by any outside agent”) and vows, prayers and religious services in the second category (as they work with the intervention of supernatural agent). Thus, “the effect of a direct rite is automatic; that of an indirect rite comes as a repercussion.”}
\end{footnotes}
Therefore, when speaking about charms and their connections with prayers, the term “words of power” is very exact and appropriate. It encompasses charms, prayers, curses, blessings, incantations, spells and borderline cases.

The charms, the non-canonical prayers, the magic formulae, the borderline cases – they often originate in the grey area between what is considered folklore proper and the official church benediction and exorcism texts…these texts further illustrate the complexity of the relationship between canon and apocrypha, oral and literary and religion and magic.50

The binary opposition between prayer and charm has its deep ideological implications.

Distinctions between prayer and ‘charm’ based on propositional context and semantic interpretations, themselves the product of the competition between ideological systems of folklore and sociological discourse of the one hand and the Christian Church on the other, often become blurred, especially when ‘charm’ text formulae appear to be deprecatory in nature, calling on the intercession of superhuman powers in much the same way as official prayers of the Church.51

This is connected with the modus operandi of the religious field: it is “a struggle between the body of priests, who seek to monopolize the means of salvation by maintaining control of secret religious knowledge, and those excluded from secret religious knowledge, the laity.” Thus, prayer and charm can be seen as “Christian constructs in so far as they emerged out of the struggle for power over access to the divine realm and they are the continuing site of this linguistic struggle.”52

This bipolar model was used already by Frazer, who defines “spell” as mechanical manipulation and “prayer” as supplication of divine or supernatural beings; ergo they are

50 Kapaló, *Text, Context and Performance*, p. 221.
51 Ibidem, p. 190.
52 Ibidem, p. 191.
radically different kinds of communication with the supernatural. The examination of charms in cultural context offers alternative means of overcoming this binary construction. If magic and religion are to be regarded as separate fields, then the words of power are a crossing-point for their interaction. As Éva Pócs summarizes, “Religion fought using the weapons of magic, and magic too placed in its armory tools with a similar function to those of religion.”

In the field of verbal magic, Tambiah points out that “most ‘magical rites’ (as indeed most rituals) combine word and deed and that the rite is devoted to a ‘imperative transfer’ of effects”. The force of the words in ‘magical rites’ does not rely on the distinction between true and false, but on the validity of the act of pronouncing the words. Thus all forms of ritual (including magical and religious) can be addressed and studied without fixed categorization.

Éva Pócs writes that when a charm is used in attempts to influence something and to reach a specific goal, this is a “magic relationship”. When a charm refers to some intermediary agent to achieve influence or a goal, this is “religious relationship”; when the charm refers to a third party, while also acting to influence directly, this is “magico-religious relationship”. Later James Kapaló refers to this intermingling between religion and magic, when analyzing Gagauz healing rituals and charms. There he demonstrates how in a living verbal magic tradition these rituals and texts combine the two distinct

---

53 Éva Pócs, “Én vagyok mindennél nagyobb orvos, te vagy mindennél nagyobb bájos”: egyházi benedikció-paraszi ráolvasás” (“I am the greatest doctor of all, you are the greatest charmer of all”: church benedictions – peasants’ charms), In Éva Pócs, Magyar néphit Közép- és Kelet-Európa határán (Hungarian folk-beliefs on the border between Central and Eastern Europe) (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2002, pp. 173-211), p. 175.


55 Kapaló, Text, Context and Performance, p. 186.

spheres of action. “The healing system of the Gagauz likewise challenges bipolar distinctions of magic and religion and charm and prayer.” Kapaló establishes “the link between the dichotomous categories of elite discourse – magic and religion and prayer and incantation – and the performative linguistic practices of lay agents that undermine them.” What is important here is “the power of performance, through speech and action, to construct and inscribe realities by means of reference to supernatural realities.”

Regardless of the label, it is crucial to recognize and understand the role of the words of power in the context of the ritual. Tambiah emphasizes how much the effectiveness of the ritual is depending on the power of words. On the other hand, according to Bourdieu “authority comes to language from the outside”, therefore “the force represented or manifested within the words of the speech act resides outside the text.” Therefore, the words of power, the ritual, the human and the supernatural agents, and the dynamics of authority and power between them constitute a complex network. It requires nuanced and differentiated approaches, going beyond the clear-cut categorization of text and beyond the binary opposition between “magic” and “religion”. The Coptic examples demonstrate that there is a “vast borderland between formal liturgy (“prayer”) and independent, practical (“magic”):

Like those spells and rituals devoted to physical afflications in other cultures, the Coptic spells demonstrate that the lines between „magic“, medicine, and religion that are customarily assumed in modern conversation simply did not exist for the clients and purveyors of these texts.

---

58 Ibidem, p. 44.
59 Tambiah, Culture, Thought and Social Action, p. 18.
61 Kapaló, Text, Context and Performance, p. 190.
As there is a large number of borderline cases between charms and prayers\textsuperscript{63}, in numerous occasions it is difficult or impossible to make a clear-cut distinction if a text is a charm or a prayer. As Lauri Honko writes,

The poems and songs composed and performed by shamans are generally classified as charms and prayers. They are, in fact, much more than this. The term ‘charm’ is an inadequate description of long epic poems and detailed myth narratives which should not be regarded as a single genre but rather as various forms of performance.\textsuperscript{64}

According to Honko, the fundamental purpose of charm performance is “the maximization and direction of spiritual tension. In effect, the charm became the instrument for the transfer of power rather than meaning.”

I use the term “charm” as it was defined and characterized by Ohrt, Roper, Pócs and Bozóky. However, I recognize and realize the limitations and the problems of every terminology, especially in connection with mixed, borderline or unclear cases. In such situations, I find the term “words of power” very helpful. It is clear, simple and comprehensive. “Words of power” encompasses all clear-cut cases and all borderline cases, representing their nature and emphasizing their essence. It successfully complements and expands the term “charms”.

In the last two centuries, a large amount of studies on charms were done and published. The research spreads all the way from general theoretical issues to specific cases and problems and from extensive panoramic studies to restricted research of a


particular text, tradition or period. In order to mention but a few pieces from the most recent secondary literature on verbal magic and charms, there the collected volumes *Charms and Charming in Europe* and *Charms, Charmers and Charming: International Research on Verbal Magic and The Power of Words: Studies on Charms and Charming in Europe*. National traditions are presented by, for instance, *English Verbal Charms*, *Ráolvasások* (Hungarian charms), *Hiedelemszövegek* (Belief narratives), *Lithuanian Verbal Healing Charms, East Slavic Healing Charms from the Comparative Point of View: Motif and Worldview*, *Eesti loitsud* (Estonian charms), *Text, Context and Performance: Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice*, etc.

The Committee on Charms, Charmers and Charming at the International Society for Folk Narrative Research (ISFRN) plays a central role in the research of verbal magic. The committee is an active initiator and accomplisher of various successful scholarly initiatives. It publishes online an *International Annotated Bibliography on Charms*, a list of the recent scholarship pieces on charms and the newest documents and discussion papers. The committee also publishes online *Incantatio: An International Collection*.

---


70 Mare Kõiva, *Eesti Loitsud* (Estonian Charms), (Tallinn: Pegasus, 2011).

Journal on Charms, Charmers and Charming\textsuperscript{72}, and organizes annual scholarly meetings and conferences on a variety of verbal magic topics.

1. 3. Amulets

The source material consists of texts, which are closely related with various material supports. In a number of cases, there are explicit instructions about the charms to be written down on such supports. Part of the source material is preserved on material objects (pieces of lead), used as amulets.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary an amulet is “Anything worn about the person as a charm or preventive against evil, mischief, disease, witchcraft, etc.” As this definition shows, the amulet is an exclusively apotropaic magical object. It can also be regarded as material charm. More specifically, the amulet can be a non-verbal (without texts, phrases, words or letters included in it) or a verbal material charm (containing texts, phrases, words or letters). Dan Skemer clarifies the etymology of the word:

The English word amulet comes from the Latin amuletum, whose etymology has been traced back to the Arabic noun hamalet, meaning an object, not necessarily textual, worn on the body, especially around the neck, as a “preservative” against a host of afflictions.\textsuperscript{73}

According to the above-mentioned dictionary, a talisman is:

A stone, ring, or other object engraven with figures or characters, to which are attributed the occult powers of the planetary influences and celestial configurations, under which it was made; usually worn as an amulet to avert evil from or bring fortune to the wearer; also medicinally used to impart healing virtue; hence, any object held to be endowed with magic virtue; a charm.

\textsuperscript{72} For more information about Incantatio, see http://www.folklore.ee/incantatio/01.html (last accessed in the beginning of May, 2015).
\textsuperscript{73} Dan C. Skemer, Binding Words: Textual Amulets in the Middle Ages (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006), p. 6.
A talisman is also “anything that acts as a charm, or by which extraordinary results are achieved.” Skemer writes “The word talisman, sometimes used loosely as a synonym for amulet, comes from the Greek word τέλεσµα (that is, telesma, a religious rite or ceremony), which became the loan word tilsām in Arabic.”74

The essential difference between the amulet and the talisman is that the latter relies primarily on the power of images, especially on images of heavenly bodies, signs of the zodiac, symbols of the constellations, etc. It is not necessary to wear a talisman on or close to the body, in order to be effective, neither has it needed a text. Also, its production requires a specialized knowledge on astrology, high ritual magic and other elaborated arts, usually of ancient or Eastern origin and accessible through specialized books. “A recent distinction between an amulet and a talisman is that the former protects and the latter brings good luck.”75

The employment of amulets seems to be as a universal phenomenon as the usage of verbal magic. For instance, in the Western medieval amulet traditions and practices:

Textual amulets, as the term is employed in this book, were generally brief apotropaic texts, handwritten or mechanically printed on separate sheets, rolls, and scraps of parchment, paper, or other flexible writing supports of varying dimensions. When worn around the neck or placed elsewhere on the body, they were thought to protect the bearer against known and unknown enemies, to drive away or exorcise evil spirits, to heal specific afflictions caused by demonic invasions of the unprotected self, and to bring people good fortune, even at the expense of others. As a renewable source of Christian empowerment, textual amulets promised safe passage through a precarious world by means of an ever-changing potpourri of scriptural quotations, divine names, common prayers, liturgical formulas, Christian legends and apocrypha, narrative charms, magical seals and symbols, and

---

74 Ibidem, p. 8.
other textual elements that were assembled materially and used physically to exploit and enhance the magical efficacy of words.\textsuperscript{76}

In the medieval period, the usage of apotropaic and curative amulets was omnipresent in both the East and the West.\textsuperscript{77} Most often, these are called \textit{phylacteria}. This term is the Latin version of the Greek word \textit{φυλακτήριον}, which literary means “safeguard” and “protection”. Etymologically, it comes from the Greek word \textit{φύλαξ}, meaning “watcher, guard, sentinel”. Concerning the medieval Bulgarian amulets, the Bulgarian researchers use the terms “амулет” (amulet) and “оловна пластина” (lead lamella),\textsuperscript{78} the later one because the medieval Bulgarian amulets are small lead sheets or pieces. They possess apotropaic functions and properties (due to the apotropaic charms, written on them), and actually correspond to Skemer’s definition.

The definitions confirm the general interconnection between verbal and non-verbal magic, and between charms as texts and charms as objects. Verbal charms can be written on some material support, which thus becomes an amulet and is worn close to the body. Amulets can be used as material or non-verbal charm. However, “charm” and “amulet” are not the same thing. There are verbal charms that have never been applied as amulets, and there are amulets, which do not contain any verbal element.\textsuperscript{79} Don Skemer points also out “that some textual elements found in amulets had never functioned as

\textsuperscript{76} Skemer, \textit{Binding Words}, p. 1. Although focused on the amulet tradition in Western Europe from thirteenth to fifteenth century, the book discusses the use of verbal charms too. Also, the author often refers to the function, the usage and the different contexts of medieval verbal magic in general. He does not miss the verbal magic rituals, and the power of words in the Middle Ages either. The introduction of Skemer’s book contains an overview of relevant scholarship on late antique and medieval textual amulets.

\textsuperscript{77} Athanasius Vassiliev, \textit{Anecdota Graeco-Byzantina. Pars prior}, (Moscow: Universitas Caesareae, 1893), LXIX-LXXII

\textsuperscript{78} For example, see [Kazimir Popkonstaninov] Kazimir Popkonstaninov, “Заклинателни молитви върху оловни амулети от средновековна България и паралелите им във връзка със средновековна Сърбия” (Conjuration prayers on lead amulets from medieval Bulgaria and their parallels in euchologia form Medieval Serbia). Зборник радова Византолошког института 44 (2009): 341-351.

\textsuperscript{79} For example, a canine fang, a rabbit’s paw or a stone with peculiar shape.
verbal charms or “speech acts”. Still, “it can be difficult to draw clear distinctions between amulets (with or without texts) and charms (oral or written).”

1. 4. Crisis rites

Magic is often employed in the case of an accident, abnormality, misfortune, collapse, or threat of any kind. In other words, when there is a crisis. By “crisis”, I mean an unstable or dangerous situation, seriously threatening and damaging the well-being and the existence of an individual or a community. A crisis requires fast decisions and effective measures, in order to eliminate its harmful impact, to improve the situation and to restore the balance. Thus, crisis management is the process of mastering, controlling and eliminating the crisis and its negative consequences. When done through magical or supernatural means, crisis management involves crisis rites. Verbal magic and the words of power (charms, prayers, magic formulae, etc.) are a key part of these rites.

Arnold van Gennep makes a detailed classification of rites, without mentioning or defining a separate category of “crisis rites”. Victor Turner, however, presents two

---

80 Skemer, Binding Words, p. 10. Also see on the same page, footnote no. 19, with a good quotation on the complexity of the matter in Greek, Roman and Jewish tradition.
81 Often, it is also a sudden and unexpected situation.
82 The notion of crisis is very broad and complex. Also, it is culturally defined and dependent. However, there are certain situations, which universally appear as critical for humans, for example illnesses and natural disasters.
83 Together with the term “ritual”, the term “rite” is an object of extensive scholarly definitions and research. It is worth noting its etymological roots. The English word “rite” comes from the Latin “ritus”, which means “religious observance, ceremony, usage, custom”. The Latin word itself is of unknown etymology, but probably related with the Greek adjective “ῥητός”, which means “stated, specified, agreed on”.
84 Lauri Honko, “Types of Comparison and Forms of Variation”, Journal of Folklore Research 23, 2/3, Special Double Issue: The Comparative Method in Folklore (1986): pp. 105-124. On p. 108 the author discusses the environment in which a folk poem was used and performed. He gives three main categories of ritual poems: songs connected with crisis rites, songs connected with rites of passage and songs connected with calendrical rites. He adds “The poetry of the crisis rites is represented by the incantations and prayers recited in the curing of diseases.”
85 Van Gennep, The Rites of Passage, pp. 1-15.
86 Ibidem. For example, the author only discusses a ceremony designed to transfer an illness in the framework of animism or dynamism.
types of rituals: life-crisis rituals and rituals of affliction. The first type is connected with important points in the physical and social development of an individual (birth, puberty, marriage, death, entrance upon office, etc.). The second type of rites are related to the major theme of Ndembu religious life. For some reason, Ndembu have come to associate misfortune in hunting, women’s reproductive disorders, and various forms of illness with the action of the spirits of the dead. Furthermore, whenever an individual has been divined to have been “caught” by such a spirit, he or she becomes the subject of an elaborate ritual, which many people from far and near attend, devised at once to propitiate and to get rid of the spirit that is thought to be causing the trouble.

Later, Turner analyses two crisis rites par excellence: *Isoma*, dealing with female reproductive problems, and meant to remedy a deficiency, to restore the balance and to bring back fertility; and *Wubwang’u*, meant to strengthen a woman who has borne twins or is pregnant with twins. As the existence of human twinship is rather problematic in a number of African cultures, the birth of twins is de facto a social crisis, and the rite deals with it. Comparing the life-crisis rites and the calendric rites, Turner claims that the *rites de passage* can sometimes be also rites of group crisis, aimed at status reversal. They “accompany any change of a collective sort from one state to another, as when a whole tribe goes to war, or a large local community performs ritual to reverse the effects of famine, drought, or plague.”

---

90 The twinship is problematic in terms of physiology, economics, social order and hierarchy. See Turner, *The Ritual Process*, pp. 44-50.
91 Ibidem, p. 169.
Catherine Bell calls the crisis rites “rites of affliction”, and discusses them as a separate type of ritual: “rites of affliction seek to mitigate the influence of spirits thought to be afflicting human beings with misfortune.”⁹² According to Bell, “rituals of affliction attempt to rectify a state of affairs that has been disturbed or disordered; they heal, exorcise, protect, and purify. The type of ritual and ritual expert used will depend completely on the way in which a culture interprets the problematic state of affairs.”⁹³

Fritz Graf discusses the connections between magic and crisis in the particular and well-documented context of the Ancient World. He aptly points out the role of the magical crisis management in a highly agonistic cultural model, characterized by competition and jealousy. In the Antiquity, the ritual binding is very often “performed in the context of a crisis.”⁹⁴ The crisis can be a trial, a risky commercial enterprise, a professional difficulty or a sport competition. According to Graf,

> It is always a situation in which a great uncertainty predominates, one that will be resolved by a future decision, while the ways to influence the results are very limited…. As a competitor in an agonistic struggle, an individual needed a strategy for overcoming a feeling of uncertainty increased by that of a certain powerlessness. The performance (or commission) of a spell made it possible to regain the initiative and the hope that one could affect the outcome. The ritual thus offered both the community and the individual a means to master emotionally an otherwise difficult crisis.”⁹⁵

Lauri Honko provides three categories: rites of passage, calendric rites and crisis rites⁹⁶. The last ones are performed in cases like various disasters (drought, fire, flood, famine, calamities, epidemics, etc.), illnesses, demonic possessions, bewitchments,

---

⁹³ Ibidem.
⁹⁵ Ibidem.
misfortunes, bad luck, etc. In the volume *Science of Religion*, Honko gave a detailed definition of crisis rites. The crisis rites are

Occasional rituals in unexpected situations of crisis. They are organized by an individual or a community, in situations that upset the normal world order and threaten the life of the individual or the community, or the achievement of their immediate aims. The rites organized to channel the anxiety and uncertainty caused by these crises vary greatly, from limited but rapid actions or reactive rites, to wider, collective rituals in which the whole group involved in the crisis takes part.”

The examples are curing an illness, prevention of fire, rainmaking rites to prevent drought, reparation of bewitched tool, prevention rites against theft, envy and malice, etc. The long list of crisis rites takes its shape on the basis of major catastrophes and minor accidents in life. The aim of the rites is to indicate the cause of the accident, to reveal the guilty person, and to ease the problematical nature of an unexpected incident by means of explanations and counter-action.

This happens through finding a mythical primordial precedent for a new phenomenon:

For example, an illness is cured by recalling a myth which tells about the first occurrence of the illness and its cure. The event of the myth is brought into the present, the cure is re-enacted here and now, and the illness is reassigned to its own place in the world order, just as in primordial times; the disorder is eliminated.”

Every crisis management is a result of a certain frame of mind and a certain cultural context, which defines the crisis and recognizes it as such. The effectiveness of the anti-crisis measures is evaluated within this frame of mind. This mentality decides on the elaboration, preservation and transmission of certain types and ways of crisis management. The key requirements for the crisis management are its promptness,

---

98 Ibidem.
reliability and effectiveness. It must be with a high degree of functionality, concrete and adequate in “real-time problem solving”.

As Bell writes,

Rites of affliction demonstrate what has been called the “all too human” side of religion, namely, people’s persistent efforts to redress wrongs, alleviate sufferings, and ensure well-being. Yet these rites also illustrate complex cultural interpretations of the human condition and its relation to a cosmos of benign and malevolent forces.

Bell concludes, “These rites open up opportunities for redefining the cosmological order in response to new challenges and new formulations of human needs.” However, rituals do not solve the problem, but give “a resolution without ever defining one.” The problem is defined in new terms, and the crisis is postponed. “There is no point of arrival but a constant invocation of new terms to continue the validation and coherence of the older terms.”

The attempt to manage and counter the crisis via magic is de facto an act of communication with the supernatural world. In the eighteenth and nineteenth century Orthodox Karelian folk religion, rites in which humans communicated or interacted with supernatural agents ultimately dealt with the question of disorder, in other words, they mediated between ‘pure’ or ‘impure’ categories of phenomena. In some cases these rituals could be classified as crisis rituals because they were carried out in response to some unforeseen event requiring immediate remedy, such as illness or the disappearance of a child or farm animal in the forest. Other such rituals could be designated calendric rituals because they were carried out on a particular day or at a particular point in the annual agrarian cycle.

From the folk’s point of view, however,

---

100 Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, p. 119.
101 Ibidem, p. 120.
calendric rites were in many cases carried out not simply in order to follow a time-honored tradition or celebrate a good harvest, mark the passage of time in the annual cycle, etc., but in order to stave off some possible, or even likely, misfortune.  

In Orthodox Karelian folk religion, the purpose of traditional rites and cults is not so much to “ensure material prosperity” in various activities. Most often, these rituals were a “direct response to disorder or the threat of disorder in individual and communal life.” They were motivated by events, which diminished a sense of order and equilibrium (illness, attack on cattle by forest predators, cattle lost in the forest, deaths in the community). The desired outcome of ritual responses to disorder was thus the restoration of health, the return of lost cattle, and the maintenance of relations with the dead (which preserved their membership in the community).

The purpose of the sacrificial festivals is to “draw a boundary between the human and the threatening wilderness.” According to the legends and the folk beliefs, the original events, which led to the first celebration of the festival, are usually attacks by forest predators. Thus, the ritual sacrifices are crisis rituals rather than calendric rituals.

Honko and Stark clarify the specific nature of crisis rites and give a very clear theoretical frame. For Honko, the crisis rites are in the center of his studies and he provides a working definition. Laura Stark’s book about Orthodox Karelia places this working definition in a particular cultural context, which actually carries many resemblances to the medieval and early modern Bulgarian culture.

---

104 Ibidem, p. 69. Laura Stark groups the disorders of individual and social life in three categories: “disorder of the human body” (especially an unexplained illness); “disorder in the resource spaces shared by humans and the wilderness” (attacks on cattle by predators and entrapment of farm animals and children by the „forest cover”); “disorder threatening internal communal cohesion” (death and socio-economic inequality).

105 I think that in the Bulgarian source material (charms, amulets, rites) there is no opposition or distinction between the provision of material prosperity, and the management and elimination of disorder. The restoration of health, the achievement of material prosperity, etc., are all expressions of successful coping strategy and effective crisis management.

106 Stark, Peasants, Pilgrims, and Sacred Promises, p. 75.

107 Ibidem, p. 118.
2. Sources

The sources of this study are medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms. In order to select them, first I consulted the more general studies on medieval and early modern Bulgarian literature and culture.\textsuperscript{108} Then, I became familiar with the scholarly works particularly on medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal magic.\textsuperscript{109} Based on this specialized secondary literature, I consulted the available editions of medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms.\textsuperscript{110} As a result, I use and rely on 180 published verbal charms. However, the most interesting and peculiar examples are either understudied or unstudied. In my research, I am mainly focused on these charms, while at the same time I take into consideration all the surviving and known source material.

The aim of the selection is to bring together and group verbal charms from manuscripts and amulets in a way, which has not been done so far. This grouping is the basis for the analysis. The aim of the analysis is to look at the verbal charms from a perspective, which so far has been neglected – the power interactions between humans and the supernatural, placed in the context of everyday life.

This source material is rarely discussed in a language other than Bulgarian. Up to my knowledge, none of these charms has been ever translated into English language. In

\textsuperscript{108} For a good starting point, introduction and basics, see [B. Angelov] Б. Ангелов and [M. Genov] М. Генов, Стара българска литература (IX-XVIIIв.) в примери, преводи и библиография. (Old Bulgarian Literature (Ninth-Eighteenth Century) with Examples, Translations and Bibliography), (Sofia: Български писател, 1922); [Donka Petkanova] Донка Петканова, Стара българска литература в седем тома. Том I: Апокрифи (Old Bulgarian Literature in Seven Volumes. Vol. I Apocrypha) (Sofia: Издателство на Българската Академия на Науките, 1981); [B. St. Angelov] Б. Ст. Ангелов, Из старата българска, руска и сръбска литература (Examples from the Old Bulgarian, Russian and Serbian Literature), (Sofia: БАН, 1958 (part one), 1967 (part two), 1978 (part three).


\textsuperscript{110} On the editions of the charms, see below in this chapter.
this thesis, all translations of Bulgarian charms into English are mine. The texts of selected charms in the original language are given in the catalogue, which is at the end of the thesis.

2.1. Description

The source material consists of 180 verbal charms. The verbal charms are clearly distinguishable from the other types of medieval and early modern Bulgarian non-canonical and magical texts. The verbal charms are texts with variable length - the shortest ones only consist of two lines, while the longest one takes approximately a page. The majority of them are of a length between a few lines and a paragraph. Here is a typical example, a charm against water retention from a fourteenth century manuscript:

\[\text{On the banks of the river Jordan three angels stand. One ties, one unties, and one sings: ``Holy, Holy, Holy God Sabbath, the heaven and the earth is full with his glory. Hinen, igis, mantis. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.}\]

The verbal charms are written in Old Church Slavonic language, with Cyrillic and Glagolitic alphabets used. They are preserved in manuscripts and on amulets. In my selection, there are 7 charms preserved on seven amulets, and 173 charms preserved in 59 manuscripts. The amulets are small pieces of lead with the texts of the charms inscribed on them, and are dated between the tenth and fourteenth century. The manuscripts are dated between the thirteenth and the nineteenth century.

\[\text{111 Like for example, apocryphal and heretical texts, prognostication and divination books, and lists of divine names, medical recipes and magical drawings.}\]

\[\text{112 See Yatsimirskii, ``К истории ложных молитв'', passim and the catalogue at the end of the thesis.}\]

\[\text{113 Требник (Веркович), fourteenth century, sine № et loco. Yatsimirskii, ``К истории ложных молитв'', p. 33 and Kovačević, ``Nekoliko priloga'', p. 282. See no. 22 in the Catalogue.}\]

\[\text{114 On the physical parameters and the dating of the amulets with charms, see [Kazimir Popkostantinov] Казимир Попконстантинов, ``Оловни пластиини с надписи'' (Lead Lamellae with Inscriptions), in [Petar Dinekov] Петър Динков, ed., Кирило-Методиевска енциклопедия (Cyrillo-}
There is no full comprehensive collection or catalogue of the medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms. So far, nobody has constituted a real corpus of these charms. They are published in several scholarly works, usually in combination with an analysis.

Chronologically, the oldest editions are made at the end of the nineteenth century by the Croatian scholar Jagić, the Serbian Kovačević, and the Ukrainian Kačanovskij. These works are short unsystematic anthologies containing the original texts of the charms, in combination with introductory words and some basic explanations. The main imperfection of these publications is the chaotic and insufficient information about the dating and the location of the manuscripts, where the charms and other texts were taken from. This defect has an enduring negative impact on the subsequent works on charms (including this thesis), as the quotations from Jagić, Kovačević, Kačanovskij are by necessity incomplete.

In 1910, the Bulgarian scholar Benyo Tsonev published the first volume of the catalogue of the Manuscripts in the National Library in Sofia. Together with the information about the manuscripts, the catalogue also includes text of charms. Only a couple of years later, in 1913, the Russian scholar Yat simirskii published his study on the

---


115 On the physical parameters and the dating of the manuscripts, see below the catalogues by Tsonev and the study by Yatsimirskii.


118 Vladimir Kačanovskij, “Apokrifne molitve, gatanja i priče” (Apocryphal Prayers, Divinations and Fabulae), Starine 13 (1881): pp. 150-163.

South Slavic false prayers.\textsuperscript{120} This work combines the analysis and the commentary of the charms with the publication of their texts in original. Yatsimirskii grouped the charms according to their theme or aim. These groups are: invocations of divine names, invocations to the Holy Cross, protective charms of Archangel Michael, charms against snakebite, charms against dogbite, bloodstaunching charms, charms against water retention, charms against toothache, charms against thunder and lightning, and charms for traveling and going to the court. The study quotes approximately 200 full original texts of charms, together with a large number of fragments. Detailed bibliographical information is available at almost every case. Yatsimirskii’s work is the closest to a comprehensive catalogue or a corpus of the medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms. It is of a big importance for the research of Bulgarian verbal magic.

Benyo Tsonev continued publishing verbal charms in the catalogues from the library in Plovdiv in 1920\textsuperscript{121} and in Sofia in 1923.\textsuperscript{122} After a pause of few decades, in 1954 Tsvetan Kristanov and Ivan Duychev published a volume on knowledge in natural sciences in medieval Bulgaria.\textsuperscript{123} This work has a section on charms and prayers, which contains the original texts of approximately twenty charms. In the subsequent years, the publication of charms in library catalogues was continued by Manyo Stoyanov and Hristo

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{120} Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв.”
\textsuperscript{121} [Benyo Tsonev] Беньо Цонев, Славянски ръкописи и старопечатни книги на Народната библиотека в Пловдив (The Slavic Manuscripts and Early Printed Books in the National Library in Plovdiv), (Sofia: Edition of the Plovdiv Library, 1920).
\textsuperscript{122} [Benyo Tsonev] Беньо Цонев, Опис на славянските ръкописи в софийската народна библиотека, том II (Catalogue and Description of the Slavonic Manuscripts in the National Library in Sofia, vol. II), (Sofia: Edition of the National Library, 1923).
\textsuperscript{123} [Tsvetan Kristanov] Цветан Кристанов and [Ivan Duychev] Иван Дуйчев. Естествознанието в средновековна България. Сборник от исторически извори (The Natural Sciences in Medieval Bulgaria - A Collection of Historical Sources), (Sofia: Българска Академия на науките, 1954). This is a source collection of medieval Bulgarian knowledge on nature The authors Kristanov and Duychev also point out the connections and the fields of interaction between the “apocryphal prayers”, the healing spells and practices, and different popular beliefs. Their study, however, is focused on the role of the magical texts as containers of natural scientific knowledge. See pp. 536-543.
\end{flushright}
Kodov in 1964\textsuperscript{124} and 1971.\textsuperscript{125} This series was completed with the fifth volume, published in 1996 by Boryana Hristova, Darinka Karadzhova and Nina Vutova.\textsuperscript{126} Usually, the catalogue editors regarded the charms to be the most remarkable and interesting parts of the manuscripts, and therefore their entire texts are published in the catalogues.

Similarly to the charms from manuscripts, the medieval Bulgarian amulets with charms have not been published in a comprehensive collection, catalogue or corpus editions. The verbal charms form amulets are published in several scholarly works, in combination with analysis. I use the verbal charms from amulets from the publications, most often made by archeologists and paleographers.

Chronologically, the first such publication is an article by the Bulgarians Lidia Kvinto and Boris Drangov.\textsuperscript{127} They presented a lead amulet from thirteenth/fourteenth century, found in Veliko Tŭrnovo and containing a charm for protection and well-being of the bees, and another one for protection and good luck.

Significant contribution is made by the prominent Bulgarian archeologist Kazimir Popkonstantinov\textsuperscript{128}, who published and analyzed a number of amulets with charms.\textsuperscript{129} In

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{125} [Manyo Stoyanov] Маньо Стоянов и [Hristo Kodov] Христо Кодов, \textit{Опис на славянските ръкописи в софийската народна библиотека, том VI} (Catalogue and Description of the Slavonic Manuscripts in the National Library in Sofia, vol. VI), (Sofia: Наука и изкуство, 1971).
\footnotetext{128} For a full bibliography of Kazimir Popkonstantinov, see the collected volume \textit{Културните текстове на миналото: носители, символи и идеи. Книга I: Текстовете на историята, история на

40
his relatively short articles, Popkonstantinov focuses on the description of the amulets and their archeological environment, transcription of the texts, and paleographical and philological commentaries. Popkonstantinov wrote on medieval lead amulets found in various medieval archeological sites: the Bulgarian Pet Mogili, Odurtsi, Varna, Păciul lui Soare (today’s Romania). He also published an article on parallels between...
the medieval Bulgarian charms from amulets and the charms from medieval Serbian books of occasional prayers.\textsuperscript{134}

The archeological line was continued by Krasimira Stefanova-Georgieva, writing on an amulet from eleventh century,\textsuperscript{135} by Petur Garena and Ivan Iliev, who described in details a lead amulet from tenth-eleventh century with a charm against nezhit.\textsuperscript{136} The archeologist Nikolay Ovcharov contributed too, publishing two articles focused on the charms against the nezhit, where he discusses the connections between archeological, textual and folklore source material.\textsuperscript{137} Ovcharov provided a short anthropological discussion, and gave some medical information about the symptoms, related to the nezhit.


which is a rarity in the scholarly tradition. The archeologist Nikos Čausidis made similar analysis of an amulet with charm, discovered in today’s Macedonia\textsuperscript{138}.

The charms editions vary in terms of exactness of the publishing method. For example, Tsonev, Yatsimirskii and the archeologists provide all the technical, chronological and bibliographical details about the charms. On the contrary, almost all of the charms published by Jagić, Kačanovskij, Kovačević, and Kristanov and Duychev lack essential information like, for example, date and place. Despite these problematic points, the authenticity of the published charms has not been doubted or contested, and the previous scholars used these editions too.

The information about some of the locations of the manuscripts is obscure from today’s perspective. It is not very clear if these collections, libraries and institutions still exist today, and what is their current name. In addition, it is unclear if the respective manuscripts are still kept in these places. For example, such cases appear in the editions of Jagić, Kačanovskij and Kovačević, which are rather old. Actually, it is not guaranteed that the manuscripts physically exist today.

The manuscripts containing verbal charms are of the following types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of manuscript</th>
<th>Number of manuscripts containing charms:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Сборник (miscellany)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Требник (book of occasional prayers)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Служебник (priest’s service book)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Псалтир (psalter)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Часослов (book of hours)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the manuscripts, containing verbal charms, the most important ones are the сборник (miscellany) and the требник (book of occasional prayers or book of needs). In the medieval and early modern period, verbal magic is most often found in these types of books.

The сборник (miscellany) is the main form of medieval and early modern Bulgarian literature. This type of manuscript consists of texts, whose genre and content can be related or not.\textsuperscript{139} The сборник may contain only liturgical and religious texts, or a mixture of religious and non-religious texts, or the content can be entirely secular. The сборник appeared in Bulgaria in the ninth-tenth century and was written by members of the clergy. The content is varied: historical, didactic, religious, juridical, divination books, popular novel-type fiction, entertaining fabulae, sententiae, recipes, lives of saints. It is characteristic for the miscellany that the texts inside are grouped according to their theme or topic\textsuperscript{140}. In the Ottoman period, this type of manuscript dominated the Bulgarian literature. Composed, compiled, copied and spread by members of the low levels of the

\begin{tabular}{|l|c|}
\hline
Лечебник (healer’s book) & 2 \\
\hline
Празничен миней (festal mention) & 1 \\
\hline
Молитвеник (prayer book) & 1 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}

\textsuperscript{139} [Petar Dinekov] Петър Динеков, Стара българска литература (Old Bulgarian Literature), (София: 1953).

clergy, the miscellany is significantly influenced by popular beliefs, tastes and attitudes. Most of all, the miscellanies from after the Ottoman invasion contain Apocrypha.\textsuperscript{141}

The тврбник (book of occasional prayers or book of needs) is one of the main Eastern Orthodox Christian religious and liturgical books.\textsuperscript{142} It contains rituals and prayers for private religious services and for various private occasions. The book covers the services that commonly appear in a parish. The тврбници are compiled by monks and priests, and used mainly by parish priests as their practical professional manuals. In the core of the book are various prayers, corresponding to the needs of the Christian community or of some of its members.

The oldest Bulgarian example of a тврбник is the \textit{Euchologion Synaiticum} (the Prayer book from Mount Sinai) from eleventh century,\textsuperscript{143} written in Glagolitic alphabet. This is the most archaic variant of this liturgical book, and contains liturgical texts and prayers for various occasions. Among them, there are also non-canonical texts (verbal charms) against water retention. The \textit{Euchologion Synaiticum} is an early example of a manuscript, where texts of verbal magic made their way among the canonical texts.

Less often or occasionally, verbal charms can be found in other types of manuscripts. Most of them are Eastern Orthodox Christian religious and liturgical books.


Verbal charms may appear in the служебник (priest’s service book), which contains the liturgical texts, pronounced by the deacons and priests during the liturgy, and also in the псалтир (psalter), which contains the psalms, the biblical songs and other texts with liturgical and practical functions (prayers, divinations books, didactic texts, commentaries, etc.). One can find charms also in the часослов (book of hours), containing the prayers for the services in the 24-hour liturgical cycle, and used by the church singers,\textsuperscript{144} and also in the праздничен миней (festal menaion), which contains the services for the big feasts (Christmas, Candlemass, Annunciation, Palm Sunday, etc.). In the books of this type, the texts are in calendric order, starting from September 1 (the beginning of the Church Year). In addition, verbal charms may turn up in the молитвеник (prayer book), which contains the parts of the services, which the priests read during the liturgy.

Among the manuscripts with verbal charms, there is a peculiar case. These are the books of the type of the лечебник/лековник (healer’s book), which are handwritten collections of medical recipes and curative instructions.\textsuperscript{145} The oldest manuscript of this type in Old Church Slavonic is from around the seventeenth century. The manuscripts of the лечебник/лековник type present a syncretic approach towards the health problems. They combine empirical medical knowledge, usage of herbs, substances and tools, surgical and physiotherapeutic manipulations and procedures, with mythical worldview, 

\textsuperscript{144} The oldest часослов in Old Church Slavonic is from the thirteenth century.

magical beliefs, ritual actions and supernatural elements. The patient is regarded to be under the influence of supernatural powers. The illness is often personified as demonic being.\footnote{Петкова, “Неволите на тялото”} The preparation and employment of amulets is quite usual. The practical medical procedures are often required to be done at certain time and on a certain place.

Logically, one would expect to find plenty of verbal magic in such books. This type of magic is present indeed, under the general term баене (verbal charming) and да се пребае (to do verbal charming).\footnote{For example, in the case of pregnancy complications, certain substances should be taken, a verbal charm should be uttered over them, and then should be applied on the woman. See Петкова, “Неволите на тялото”; [Hristo Kodov] Христо Кодов, “Един ръкописен лекарственик от миналия век” (A Handwritten Healer’s Book from the Last Century), Известия на Народния етнографски музей в София 8-9 (1929).} However, concrete texts of verbal charms rarely appear in Bulgarian healer’s books. I could only find two such cases: a charm against the nezhit\footnote{The nezhit is a personification of headache and main antagonist in a number of Bulgarian verbal charms. See below the chapter on evil supernatural beings.} from a лечебник from 1800\footnote{Sofia, National Library, № 799, fol. 15v. See Tsonev, Catalogue vol.2, p. 493.} and a charm against snakebite from a лечебник from sixteenth-seventeenth century. In other words, it is clear that there is verbal charming practice and ritual, but it is not clear what particular texts are used. It seems that the healer’s books contain information on the curative procedure, including the magical ritual, while the books of occasional prayers and the miscellanies contain the texts of the curative verbal charms. So far, this fact has no satisfactory interpretation and explanation.\footnote{The medieval and early modern Bulgarian healer’s books are not very well studied. The possible connections between these manuscripts and other medieval and early modern books with curative magical content are da facto untouched by researchers. See Петкова, “Неволите на тялото”.

146

147

148

149

150

151
In my material, there are six manuscripts, which are of bigger importance, as they contain a larger number of charms. They are presented in the table below. The other 63 manuscripts contain less than five charms each.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Manuscript</th>
<th>Number of charms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Требник, seventeenth century, Sofia, National Library, № 622&lt;sup&gt;152&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Часослов, 1498, Jerusalem, Library of the Orthodox Patriarchate, LGOPI № 22&lt;sup&gt;153&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Требник, sixteenth century, Savina monastery, sine №.&lt;sup&gt;154&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Никетово молитвениче, 1787, Sofia, National Library, № 646&lt;sup&gt;155&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Требник, unknown location, fourteenth century, sine №.&lt;sup&gt;156&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Сборник, seventeenth century, Belgrade, National Library, № 555&lt;sup&gt;157&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Требник № 622 from the seventeenth century is the manuscript with the largest number of verbal charms. The book has 165 folios, with missing beginning and end and a number of lacunae inside the volume. Until fol. 133v, the content is completely canonical: akathist and parts of the services at various occasions (baptism, wedding, confession, blessings, etc.). On fol. 133v, there is the title Prayers against the Cursed Nezhit. This is followed by twelve verbal charms against the nezhit. They continue until fol. 137, followed there by canonical prayers and blessings until fol. 144v, where there is one charm against illness and two charms against complications at delivery. On fol. 145...

<sup>152</sup> Detailed description of the manuscript and publication of its charms in Tsonev, Catalogue, vol. II, pp. 132-138.  
<sup>153</sup> Charms from the manuscript are published in Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв“, pp. 17-18, 23-24, 34, 37-38, 43-44, 66, 74-76, 82, 89, 93.  
<sup>154</sup> Charms from the manuscript are published in Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв“, pp. 33 and in Kačanovskij, “Апокрифные молитвы”, pp. 154-157 and 159-160.  
<sup>155</sup> Detailed description of the manuscript and publication of its charms in Tsonev, Catalogue, vol. II, pp. 161-166.  
<sup>156</sup> Charms from the manuscript are published in Kačanovskij, “Апокрифные молитвы”, pp. 153-154  
<sup>157</sup> Charms from the manuscript are published in Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, pp. 28, 33, 65 and 100.
and 146, there are a charm against a rival, a charm for going to the court of law, a charm for staunching blood, one against sudden pain and a charm against illness. On fol. 147, there is a part of a canonical exorcism, followed on fol. 147v by a charm against insomnia. On fol. 148, there is the fragment of a charm against the Devil. On fol. 149v, there are a charm again draught and two charms for rain. From fol. 157 until the end of the book, there is a canonical service with missing end.\textsuperscript{158}

The content of \textit{Trebnik № 622} is coherent and there are no marginalia. The canonical and the non-canonical texts follow each other. There is a completely merging between the official normative Christian prayers and the verbal charms.

The \textit{Никетово молитвенче № 646} from 1787 is another very important manuscript. It not only contains a number of verbal charms, but the name of the user (Niketa) appears throughout the book. The manuscript has 80 folios. On the cover, there is the drawing of a cross and the inscription \textit{holy righteous cross... help your servant Niketa}. On fol. 1-3, there are protective charms against fright and desperation. On fol. 3, there is a list of the names of Virgin Mary. On fol. 8v, there is a list of the name of the archangels. On fol. 9-31, there are charms against fright. On fol. 31v, there is a charm for the protection of the whole body. On fol. 33v, there is a charm for the health of all joints. On fol. 37, there is a charm against unclean spirit, and on fol. 46 a charm against the Devil, followed by a charm against fright and by 17 names of the archangels. On fol. 51, there is a charm against the \textit{nezhit}, followed by a charm against storm and wind. On fol. 53v, there is a charm against thunder and lightning. On fol. 55v, there is a charm against wind and storm. On fol. 57v, there is a charm against fright. On fol. 58v, there is a charm against spasms. On fol. 60, there is a charm against the cursed Devil, which has to be

worn on the person. On fol. 61, there is another charm against the Devil. On fol. 63, there is a charm for going to the court of law. On fol. 64v, there is a charm for a good journey. On, fol. 65v, there is a list of God’s names. On fol. 67, there is a charm for killing an enemy. On fol. 69, there is a charm against illness. On fol. 69, there is a charm for going to the court of law. On fol. 75v, there is a charm against the devil. On fol. 77, there are five partially erased amuletic drawings (against night fright, wind, evil beings, and for a good journey and when going to a superior). From fol. 77v until the end of the book, there is a part of an apocryphal narrative. At the very end of the manuscript, there is a note that this prayer book is written on December 4, 1787.159

There is no general information available about the Часослов LGOPI № 22 from 1498 and the Сборник № 555 from the seventeenth century, apart from the fact that these manuscripts contain verbal charms. They are published and quoted by Yatsimirskii160. The general information about the Требник sine № from the sixteenth century and the Требник sine № from the fourteenth century is even scarcer. Jagić, Kovačević and Kačanovskij quote verbal charms from these books161.

The verbal charms are part of the medieval Bulgarian literature. This literature (also called Old Bulgarian) is manuscript literature162, written in Old Church Slavonic language. Its beginnings are at the end of the ninth century, after the acceptance and the spread of the Glagolitic and Cyrillic alphabets. Based on the Christian worldview and the Byzantine models and experience, this literature is predominantly religious. Its main

160 Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, passim.
162 In the late medieval and early modern Bulgarian literature, there are also a few pritned books. However, these are exceptions from the manuscript tradition. See [Petar Atanasov] Petър Атанасов, Начало на българското книгопечатане (The beginnings of the Bulgarian Printing), (Sofia: Наука и изкуство, 1959).
characteristics are canonicity and normativity. The canons and the norms are defined according to the Christian ethical and esthetical values and views.\textsuperscript{163}

The medieval Bulgarian literature exists through the medieval and the early modern period, which in Bulgaria continues until the end of the seventeenth century. The majority of the medieval Bulgarian manuscripts do not contain data about their author and place of production.\textsuperscript{164} However, the available sources show that most of the books were written and copied by members of the clergy (monks and priests).\textsuperscript{165} This tradition begins with Cyril, Method, and their disciples, all of which were clerics. As a result, the manuscripts were produced mainly in clerical environment. The authors and the copyists work in various cultural centers, which can be urban (especially the capital cities) and monastic. After the Ottoman invasion, the literature was created mainly in monastic milieu.\textsuperscript{166}

In terms of genres, models, motives and ideas, the medieval Bulgarian literature is under strong Byzantine influence. The first books are translations from Byzantine originals. Via Byzantium, the Bulgarian literary production experienced Mediterranean, Coptic, Jewish and Eastern influences. The Byzantine tradition brought not only the official, but also a number of apocryphal, non-canonical and pre-Christian notions,


\textsuperscript{164} [K. Kuev] К. Куев, \textit{Съдбата на старобългарската ръкописна книга през вековете} (The Fate of the Old Bulgarian Hand-Written Book through the Centuries), София: 1986.

\textsuperscript{165} Petkanova, \textit{Encyclopaedia}, pp. 468-469.

\textsuperscript{166} Ibidem.
elements and texts. The majority of the medieval Bulgarian verbal charms came from Byzantium already in the tenth century and in large numbers.\textsuperscript{167}

This Byzantine influence is present through the entire period. However, there were other powerful factors, which shaped the medieval Bulgarian literature. One of these is the pre-Slavic (Balkan) and Slavic archaic pre-Christian mythologies, belief systems and worldviews. They had a serious impact, especially visible in the Apocrypha and the non-canonical texts, like the verbal charms.\textsuperscript{168} This influence is probably facilitated by the fact that the medieval and early modern Bulgarian literature was written in Old Church Slavonic (the vernacular language of the local population), and the writers (although members of the clergy) came from this same population.

Another powerful factor is the dualistic Bogomil heresy, which appears in the tenth century.\textsuperscript{169} Its impact is visible in a number of medieval Bulgarian Apocrypha. Bogomilism and its dualism are definitely connected with the verbal charms. In the second half of the tenth century, the official church authors accused the Bogomil priest Jeremy (поп Йеремия) of “telling lies” and “practicing verbal charming”. Among other literary works, priest Jeremy wrote also “false prayers against fever”. These are de facto verbal charms from the so-called Sisinnius-type, where the personified fevers and encountered and defeated by the legendary saint Sisinnius\textsuperscript{170}. It also seems quite possible that the Bogomilism and its dualism interacted with the archaic pre-Christian dualistic worldview and cosmology. This interaction is visible in the encounters, the dialogues and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[167] Ibidem.
\item[168] [Donka Petkanova] Донка Петканова, “Фолклорът в апокрифните молитви” (The Folklore in the Apocryphal Prayers), Български фолклор 2 (1976): pp. 28-40.
\item[170] See below the chapter on good supernatural figures.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
the struggles between negative and positive supernatural powers, which are central elements for many of the verbal charms.¹⁷¹

The third important factor is the Ottoman invasion. As a result, the urban cultural and literary centers disappeared. The Bulgarian Orthodox church lost its autonomy. Either the monastic centers disappeared or their literary production decreased significantly. The educational levels of the clergy dropped significantly. De facto, there were no official church authorities and no official church control on the content of the manuscripts, produced and used by the monks and the priests.¹⁷²

From the table above, it is visible that the verbal charms appear in certain types of manuscripts, in particular in miscellanies and in books of occasional prayers. It seems that these types of manuscripts are naturally predisposed to deviation from the canonical norm.¹⁷³ In the case of miscellanies, the varied mixed content naturally allows the inclusion of all kind of texts. In the case of the books of occasional prayers, the non-canonical texts (like verbal charms) crept in, probably due to the practical focus of this type of book.¹⁷⁴ This process is even easier, when the charms have the formal characteristics of a Christian prayer, and when there is not enough control and knowledge about the canonicity of the manuscript. The требници more or less reflect the popular

¹⁷³ Shniter, Молитва и Магия, passim.

\footnote{Shniter} Shniter, \textit{Молитва и Магия}, p. 49.

\footnote{Borsje} Borsje, “Druid, Deer and “Words of Power,” p. 34, where the author refers to the genre of medieval Irish \textit{lorica}.


\textbf{2. 2. Influences}

Medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms are highly syncretic, which is typical for verbal magic in general. The Bulgarian verbal charms appear as a product of the merging between Pre-Christian folklore magical texts and Christian texts.\footnote{Shniter} They are “part of the twilight zone between the pre-Christian and the Christian worldviews.”\footnote{Borsje} Due to the heterogeneity and syncretism, it is difficult to trace back the origins of the charms. The picture, however, has some clear components.

On the one hand, the medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms have elements and features, which come from the pre-Christian South-Slavic magical tradition. This is an old, intricate and to some degree enigmatic phenomenon, which is part of the pre-Christian South-Slavic religion and culture. The pre-Christian South-Slavic magic probably contained both Slavic and non-Slavic elements, motives and ideas.\footnote{M. Arnaudov} In the medieval Bulgarian verbal charms, the pre-Christian South-Slavic influence can be seen...
for instance on the lexical level\textsuperscript{179} (realia, names, specific vocabulary and terminology) and on the mythological level (characteristics of supernatural beings and locations, cosmological notions, worldviews and magical beliefs).\textsuperscript{180}

On the other hand, a major impact on Bulgarian verbal magic is given by the cultural contacts between Bulgaria and Byzantium, reaching various levels and affecting various spheres. Especially from ninth century onwards, in the course of the official Christianization of medieval Bulgaria, Byzantine tradition provided important models, notions and motives. A number of Christian apocryphal and heretical ideas and writings reached medieval Bulgaria via the mediation of the Byzantine tradition. Through Byzantium, also a great deal of verbal magic, charm-types and amulets reached the Bulgarian lands. The Byzantine connection is very strong – the Bulgarian verbal charms have very close parallels in Byzantine non-canonical prayers of the same content and function.\textsuperscript{181}

The Byzantine charming and amulet tradition is a complex successor of late antique and early medieval pagan and Christian Mediterranean and Eastern verbal magic.\textsuperscript{182} Via the contact zone between Byzantium and Bulgaria, the Bulgarian charming and amulet tradition came into touch with these influences. As a result, some general origins of the Bulgarian charms can also be traced from ancient Mesopotamian and Egyptian prototypes. These models were adopted and adapted in late antique milieu, \textsuperscript{179} The language is the most accessible entrance point for the South-Slavic elements, as the charms were translated into the vernacular.

\textsuperscript{180} [Ivanichka Georgieva] Иваничка Георгиева, Българска народна митология (Bulgarian Folk Mythology), (Sofia: Наука и Иизкуство, 1993), pp. 5-14.


especially by the Coptic tradition. From there, they entered the Byzantine culture, which
in turn influenced the medieval Bulgarian verbal magic.\textsuperscript{183}

Formed in such a way, the medieval Bulgarian verbal magic kept developing, and
on its own turn influenced other Balkan traditions. For example, the charms against the
nezhit\textsuperscript{184} clearly point to a contact zone between Bulgarian and Romanian medieval
verbal magic.\textsuperscript{185} In the late medieval and early modern period, another contact zone
appeared where Bulgarian Christian verbal magic interacted with Ottoman Turkish
Muslim influences. The Christian-Muslim contact zone exists also today.\textsuperscript{186}

Due to the two main factors (the pre-Christian South Slavic and Balkan traditions,
and the Christian Byzantine tradition), the comparison with corresponding South Slavic,
Balkan and Byzantine parallels proves to be the most productive. However, the
comparison with Late Antique Mediterranean, Coptic, Eastern Slavic (Russian), Baltic
and Ugro-Finnic (Hungarian and Estonian) examples is useful too.

2. 3. State of scholarship

The Bulgarian scholar Donka Petkanova has a major contribution in the
philological and literary study of charms. She examines the charms as literary
phenomena, closely related with the apocryphal literature, especially with the Biblical
Apocrypha.\textsuperscript{187} To a certain degree, she goes beyond pure literary analysis, and places the

\textsuperscript{183} Petkanova, \textit{Encyclopedia}, p. 40.
\textsuperscript{184} Personified headache, see below the chapter on evil supernatural beings.
\textsuperscript{185} Emanuela Timotin, “Ieşi, năjite, pricăjite… de la molitvele mincinoase le descântece.” (Get out,
\textsuperscript{186} For example, some charms collected in twentieth century show celar traces of Islamic influences.
See [Iveta Todorova-Pirgova] Ивета Тодорова-Пиргова, Баяния и магии (Charms and Magic), (Sofia:
Академично издателство "Марин Дринов", 2004).
\textsuperscript{187} Petkanova, Apocrypha. This book contains Modern Bulgarian translations of selected charms,
accompanied by an introduction on medieval apocryphal literature and on “apocryphal prayers” in
particular.
charms in the context of mythology and popular belief, and studies in more details the links between the medieval “apocryphal prayers” and the folklore. By comparing examples from manuscripts, and the charms and songs from folklore collections, she points out the similarities in their narrative structures, stylistic figures, ritual practices and mentality models. Petkanova’s view is that the medieval “apocryphal prayers” are strongly influenced by folklore, and vice versa. This is, because the authors of the “apocryphal prayers” borrowed forms, ideas and expression models from the folklore.

Petkanova however, regards the medieval and early modern charms from manuscripts to be different from the charms from the later folklore collections. Her approach is mainly a comparative one.

In her book Молитва и магия (Prayer and Magic) Maria Shniter makes a detailed analysis of the linguistic, stylistic and formal structures found in the verbal charms. Her attention is on the structural and formal similarities and differences between the canonical and non-canonical texts. Shniter compares and juxtaposes folklore magical

---


191 Петканова, “Фолклорът”, p. 39. However, the author does not elaborate on the matter, and does not explain the routes of borrowing and influence.

192 Through all her publication, Petkanova calls the former “апокрифните молитви” (“apocryphal prayers”), and the later “баяния” (“charms”).

193 This approach can be seen in all of Petkanova’s works, for a summary, see the conclusion in Petkanova, “Апокрифните лечебни молитви”, pp. 84-85.

texts and Christian prayers based on the common causes for their origin. On the basis of these comparisons, Shniter points out the borderline between the folklore incantation and the prayer as “the moment of the change in the human position: from equal subject, opposed to the personified Evil through the magical power of the speech, the human being becomes an object of the activity of the almighty God.” Shniter presents the characteristics of the proper “apocryphal prayers” as a mixed genre and a field of interaction and conflict between folklore and normative religion, between the different worldviews and cultural system on the Bulgarian territory. Shniter’s book traces the processes in Bulgarian verbal magic in the Ottoman occupation: the merging between folklore and Christian texts due to the lack of a clear distinction between canonical and uncanonical, and the survival of medieval magical texts up to the eighteenth century.

[Adelina Angusheva] Аделина Ангушева and [Margaret Dimitrova] Маргарет Димитрова examine the medieval Slavic prayers, charms and recipes for childbirth, with a focus on the lexical structures, variability of textual forms and ritual symbolism of the texts. Based on comparison with Byzantine parallels, the authors point out the ritual importance and practical flexibility of the words of power. The authors continue with the topic in another article, where they compare the medieval Bulgarian and Byzantine

---

195 Shniter regards both the folklore texts and the Christian prayers to be “forms of interpretation and manipulation of the world and the events in it.” See Shniter, *Prayer and Magic*, pp. 16-17
196 Ibidem, pp. 19 and 33-56.
197 Ibidem, pp. 22-23.
childbirth prayers with a text preserved on a Glagolitic apotropaic amulet. The focus is again on the linguistic and literary structures and models, and the way they were employed in the construction and use of sacred and magical texts. Angusheva and Dimitrova also examine the verbal magic in the context of medieval and early modern Christian sermons against magical practices and practitioners. The lexical level is of special interest, as it gives information about popular beliefs, practices and feasts. While comparing folklore material and medieval manuscript texts, the authors conclude that the late medieval Bulgarian magic had two spheres: written and folkloric (oral, popular). According to Angusheva and Dimitrova, the two spheres interact in the context of non-existing higher clerical institutions and lack of normative regulations for distinguishing the canonical from the non-canonical.

[Vasya Velinova] Вася Велинова contributes with a short, but important article on a cycle of the so-called Prayers of St. Sisinnius, which are apotropaic charms against demonic beings and the Devil. She presents different Slavic and Greek variants of the texts, with emphasis on philological features, but also point the cultural connections and the transmission of motives. When discussing the various manuscripts, Velinova touches on the question of who the people were who wrote down and recorded the charms. The center of her analysis is a medieval manuscript from the thirteenth...

201 Ibidem, pp. 90-93.
century, and it demonstrates the written Bulgarian tradition of verbal charms from the middle Ages proper.

In her substantial volume Баяния и магии (Charms and Magic), the folklorist Iveta Todorova-Pirgova presents rich folklore source material, arranged according to the functions of the charms. Although this is mainly material attested and collected in nineteenth and twentieth century, the author gives some parallels with charms from medieval manuscripts. Todorova-Pirgova discusses the need to look at the verbal magic as a syncretic complex, with all its textual, material and ritual elements. She refers to basic cultural paradigms and to theory of ritual in particular.

In sum, the medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms were studied mainly from philological and literary perspective. Often, the research is purely descriptive. If present at all, the cultural analysis and the interdisciplinarity are rather scarce and supplementary. Many interesting charms and a number of challenging problems are completely neglected. Also, the relevant scholarship is mainly done and published in modern Bulgarian language, with a few exceptions in Russian and Croatian. Hence, this thesis is aiming at a contribution in respect of these missing aspects: more cultural analysis and writing in English language.

\[203\] Драголов сборник (The Miscellany of Priest Dragol), thirteenth century, Belgrade, National Library, № 651.
\[204\] Much larger number of Bulgarian charms come from early modern manuscripts. The Bulgarian charms from medieval sources are valuable pieces.
\[205\] Todorova-Pirgova, Баяния и магии, passim.
\[206\] Ibidem, p. 9
\[207\] Ibidem, pp. 18-19.
3. Features

3.1. Elements, structures and forms

Verbal charms have specific constructive components. Usually, a verbal charm (regardless of period and tradition) contains at least some of these elements. They are presented here, mainly based on Edina Bozóky’s classification, with additions and examples from the medieval and early modern Bulgarian material:

- naming of the evil/the illness/the problem;
- naming of the helping figures or powers;
- *historiola* (narrative);
- dialogue/dramatization;
- actualization (especially of the *as...so...* type);
- ratification phrases (for example “Amen”, “Let it be so!” or “Proven”);
- *impossibilia* and *absurda*;
- reverse count;
- lists of names and titles;
- conjuration/expulsion command;
- fixed formulae;
- sound effects;
- separate symbols, letters or list of letters
- foreign, garbled or gibberish words or phrases

Among these elements, the *historiola* (literary meaning “little story”) has a special significance: “Historiola is the long-standing term for abbreviated narrative that is

---

208 Bozóky, *Charmes et prières apotropaïques*, pp. 36-45.
incorporated into a magical spell.” The majority of the charms contain this little story or short narrative. The *historiola* describes episodes with the participation of supernatural agents, and it is often followed by a magical formula or conjuration. As Jonathan Roper aptly defines it, “The *historiola* is very much a micro-narrative, sometimes less even than a sentence in length.”

The micro-narrative is most often found in healing charms and transmits crucial information: the story of a successful healing or cure in the past. Thus, the healing narrative provides the present healing or cure with authority and proof of its effectiveness. The charm applies the successful precedent from the *historiola* to the present situation. For example, in Finno-Ugric tradition, the *historiola* may dominate the charm, or may function as an introductory element or core. If the *historiola* is missing, it is still marked by the use of names, epithets, etc. “Whatever structural device is used, however, the materials remain clearly rooted in a myth world.”

Thus, the *historiola* is an element, which is structurally and formally significant. It may be the central pillar of the charm or a peripheral addition to the other parts. It can be long and elaborated, or short, simple or even fragmentary. The *historiola* (and the dialogue inside it) reveals and expresses the complex relations between the supernatural figures and the intense power interactions between the human and the supernatural world.

---


The following three charms represent good examples for a *historiola*. The first one is the famous Second Merseburg Charm for curing the sprained leg of a horse. It contains a typical *historiola*, followed by a typical fixed magical formula:

_Phol and Wodan were riding to the woods,  
And the foot of Balder's foal was sprained  
So Sinthgunt, Sunna's sister, conjured it.  
and Frija, Volla's sister, conjured it.  
and Wodan conjured it, as well he could:  
Like bone-spray, so blood-spray,  
so joint-spray:  
Bone to bone, blood to blood,  
joints to joints, so may they be glued._\(^{214}\)

The second example is a Bulgarian charms against the _nezhit_ (perpetrator of headache), from a seventeenth-century manuscript. Here the *historiola* tells about an encounter and a dialogue between good and evil supernatural figures.\(^{215}\) It is followed by a conjuration and expulsion formula:

_Jesus came down from the Seventh heaven, from his home, met the nezhit and asked it: “Where are you going?” The nezhit answered: “I am going into the human head, in order to bemuse the brain, to break the teeth and the jaws, to deafen the ears, to blind the eyes, to distort the mouth, to block up the nose, so there will be headache day and night.” And Jesus said to the nezhit: “Go back into the forest and enter the deer’s head and the ram’s head, because they can suffer everything and can survive. And stay there until the end of Heaven and Earth. And be afraid of the Lord, who is sitting on the cherubim throne, until He will come to judge the entire universe and you too, rabid nezhit, who are the source of every infirmity. I am conjuring you, nezhit! Go away from the God’s servant (say the name) in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost._

---

\(^{214}\) The charm is preserved in a manuscript from ninth/tenth century, found in Fulda, Germany. The English translation given here is from Benjamin W. Fortson, *Indo-European Language and Culture: an Introduction* (Chichester UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 368-369.

\(^{215}\) See below no. 4 and no. 5 in the Catalogue and the subchapter The illness. On the encounter-charms, see the papers from the symposium *Encounter Charms*, held in Tartu, Estonia on May 9, 2008, accessible on [http://www.folklore.ee/rl/fo/konve/2008/charms/](http://www.folklore.ee/rl/fo/konve/2008/charms/).
The third example is a Bulgarian charm to cure a wounded horse, from a fifteenth century manuscript. Here the *historiola* is combined with an encounter, a dialogue and an as...so... – type of conjuration formula:

Find a dry bone from a horse, cast a spell with it and then return it back to the place where you took it from. Draw a line with the bone and say the following:

In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost a certain person (say the name) was walking, neighing and crying. The Mother of the Lord, the healer saints Cosmas and Damian, and Cyprian, Pantaleymon, Manuel, Savel, Ismail and Roman met him and asked: “What is wrong with you (say the name), so that you are neighing and crying?” “I am crying, because a thorn hit my good horse and now the wound collects pus.” The holy healers told him: “Turn back, you (say the name), go to God’s servant (say the name), let him take a dry bone and to give the illness to the dry bone, the dry bone to give the illness to the earth, the earth to the grass, the grass to the dew, the dew to the sun, the sun to the wind. And let the illness dissipate, may it have neither a top up, nor roots down.” Say three times: “Let us stand with fear!”

Often, the *historiola* contains a dialogue between its characters: benevolent or malevolent supernatural agents, personified illnesses, forces of nature and humans. This dialogue is a key moment. Here the protagonists of the charm meet for a verbal dueling. Here the malevolent agents declare their intentions and activities. The dialogue also provides the benevolent figure with an opportunity to oppose the evil threat and to exercise her or his power towards the adversary. The dialogue and the verbal dueling is where the crisis or the problem is defined, controlled and solved successfully. Through the conversation, the conflict between the malevolent and the benevolent figures starts, develops and culminates. The result of this battle depends exclusively on the

---

216 See no. 25 in the catalogue.
power of words, and the dialogue is the key element and the crucial weapon in this verbal dueling between the protagonists.

Being such central parts of the charm, the *historiola* and the dialogue are inseparably connected with the other very important elements: the magic formulae. These can be invocations, opening commands, expulsion commands, conjurations, adjurations and ratification formulae. If the *historiola* is a story, a narrative, then the formulae are direct speech, often incorporated as part of the dialogue. They can, however, appear in charms, which lack a *historiola* or a dialogue. The magic formulae can be pronounced by the characters of the charm, by its performer or by the patient. In a certain sense, the magic formulae can be regarded as the strongest words of power, standing at the highest level of verbal magic. They represent the concentrated magical verbal energy of the charm and focus it at the target. The magic formulae are the culmination of the whole charm, the guarantee for its success.

The *historiola* is very flexible and changeable, while the healing formulae usually remain fundamentally the same\(^\text{218}\). Good example for this is again the Second Merseburg Charm and its parallels in a number of European languages and traditions. The comparison of these parallels shows that there is a big variety of narratives and characters, but the healing formula ("bone to bone, blood to blood...") remains more or less the same ("this part at least is extremely ancient"\(^\text{219}\)). In charms, it is possible that the


healing formulae are much older than the medieval *historiolae*, with which they are often found\textsuperscript{220}.

The medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms contain most of the elements from the list above. The *historiola* usually contains an encounter and a dialogue. There is a recurrent circle of characters and protagonists, there is the anti-world of *impossibilitia*, the list of names, and also the ratifications are very characteristic. The Bulgarian tradition demonstrates a high level of flexibility: the same recurrent phrases are employed in a big variety of situations. On the one hand, the magic formulae are relatively few in number, stable, fixed, and with proven efficacy. On the other hand, they are flexible, adaptable and applicable in numerous situations. Even the most immutable and crystallized phrases are actually rather mobile and well adaptable and adapted for a variety of situations and needs. Together with variation, combination, recombination and adaptation are the most prominent characteristics of the verbal charming tradition in general.

The formulaic language is a language of power: to heal, to damage, to summon, to expel, to control and to change. Giving an example with a charm for curing a cow, Ulrika Wolf-Knuts points out: “the content of the charm was constructed in order to correspond to the needs of a certain situation in human life and the components were taken from several spheres, culturally inherited as well as self-experienced. We must assume that charms were used in critical existentially important situations where the person who utilized the text referred to his or her own environment.” A crisis could put the economic well-being and the physical existence of a rural household at a great risk. Therefore, the inhabitants had two choices: to give in, or to counteract the difficult situation. The use of

\textsuperscript{220} Bozóky, *Charmes et prières apotropaïques*, pp. 39-40 and 42-43.
charms means, “to oppose the powers that cause the crisis and try to thwart them. Saying a charm would be one of several ways of coping with the dangerous situation.” Charms are part of the system of counteracting and coping, and “Coping is a cultural, socially anchored, repetitive activity that opens a person’s eyes to new opportunities in time of distress.”

3.2. Stability and variation

A number of scholars has addressed the questions and issues of stability and variation of the verbal charms. Verbal charms are texts, which dwell and constantly move between the oral and the written. As every oral genre, they are an object of constant change. Even when recorded and transmitted in a fixed written form, they still fluctuate and vary significantly. De facto, verbal magic and verbal charms exist and function through stability and variation. Yet, even in the midst of most radical mutations and modifications, some elements, characters and topics are preserved and stay ever constant.

The main and most common types of Eurasian verbal charms are regarded to be of rather ancient origin. Often, they can be traced back to very old basic models and types. Back in the distant past, we can see (whole or fragmented) primal narratives, pristine motives and primordial characters. These are resourceful archetypes with

---


223 One excellent example for such a character is the child-stealing/child-killing supernatural demon/witch Gyllou (to call her by her Greek Byzantine name) and her numerous metamorphoses through the millennia. See below the chapter on evil supernatural beings. A good example for an archetypal verbal magical formula is the phrase “Bone to bone, blood to blood...” in the Second Merseburg Charm.
immense potential for survival and endurance. These archetypes traveled between territories and peoples, crossing temporal, special and cultural frontiers and exhibiting high levels of stability. This is clearly demonstrated by the motif-indexes of the verbal charms.\(^{224}\) It can also be seen in the historical parallels of a given verbal charm.

On the other hand, the ancient supernatural beings adopted new specific names, features and actions, which are characteristic for the different cultures, where they appeared. Similarly, the *historiolae*, the elements, the rituals and the aims of the charm can be changed and adapted to different new traditions, cultures and situations. In addition, the notions, the characters, the features and the images can be mixed, merged, confused and contaminated with each other and among each other. In some traditions, two, three or more separate verbal charms can be merged in one single charm.

The main contributors here are the religious and spiritual complexes, the mythology, the belief systems, the rituals, the general attitude towards magic and the state of its practice. However, factors like social structures and demographic specifics, mentality, rulership, nature and ecology, material culture, languages, existence and levels of literacy, communication routes, mobility of population, natural disasters, epidemics and wars may have significant input too.

Variation of verbal charms can also be observed within a single tradition. This can happen in a very broad range. The variants of a charm can differ in only minor details of

expression and style, while de facto staying essentially the same text; or the variants of a charm can significantly differ from one another, displaying big structural and semantic differences. Alternatively, the variants of a charm can be so various, so radically different, that they are actually not variants, but different charms.

Finally, the questions of stability and variation are also questions of memory and mistake. Traditions or parts of traditions can be forgotten or semi-forgotten. The same is true about verbal charms. Fusions, distortions and disappearances may happen due to oblivion, especially in a culture (or in a layer of a culture) which is predominantly oral. Defective memory, oblivion and lack of language knowledge can also lead to misunderstanding (or new understanding) of notions, symbols and names, whose original meaning is forgotten or incorrectly translated. Memory, oblivion and misunderstanding are also reflected, when a verbal charm is recorded in a fixed written form. Here, the scribal and sectorial mistakes often intervene into the picture and influence the further form and transmission of the charm.

Many charms have a number of variants within a single tradition and numerous parallels in other traditions. Yet, there are charms, which so far appeared in only one single text, in one variant. The belief in the power of words is essentially uniform and stable, while the variants and the multiplicity of the particular words of power build an immensely rich and complex picture.

3.3. Transmission

“There is no single model of charm transmission or charm performance suitable as a description for the entire genre.”

• a tight transmission, which is the passing of an oral text from one charmer to another without changes
• a loose transmission, which allows deletions and innovations; or
• a forgetful transmission, when sections of the text can be partially or completely lost or affected by cross-contamination by parts of other charms.226

The tight transmission, however, may include auditory substitution, mishearing, misreading and miscopying.

It is always oral-and-written transmission. This transmission is shaped by several major factors, well-illustrated by two quotations from relevant Russian sources. The first chronicle goes as follows:

And the priests have false writings in their Euchologia, like the bad Penitentials (Nomokanony) and the false Prayers for the Fevers. Heretics had distorted the traditions of the Holy Apostles, writing false words to deceive the vulgar; but the Council investigated them and cleansed them and cursed them.227

And the second chronicle:

And in their Euchologia, among the Divine Writ, the stupid village priests have false writings – sown by heretics for the destruction of ignorant priests and deacons – thick village manuscripts and bad Penitentials (Nomokanony) and the false healing Prayers for the Fevers and for infections and for sickness. And they write fever letters on prosphorae and on apples, because of sickness. All this I done by the ignorant, and they have it from their fathers and forefathers, and they perish in this folly. Heretics had distorted Church and the Canons of the Holy Apostles, writing false words.228

228 Ibidem, pp.162-163. This quotation is from a fourteen-fifteenth-century longer redaction of the same text.
The role of the clergy appears to be central in the charms transmission. Popkonstantinov connects the introduction of the charms in Christian religious books with the daily life needs and practice of the local priests.\textsuperscript{229} Maria Shniter shares a similar position.\textsuperscript{230} As Ryan points out, in Russia, the Church despite its official attitudes, was certainly one route for the importation of particular kinds of charms: uncanonical prayers and practices in many cases from fairly early periods of Christianity in the late antique Mediterranean world, with apocryphal motifs and persons and intermixed with pagan elements.\textsuperscript{231}

Examples for this are the St. Sisinnius exorcistic charms against the twelve fevers, the St. Paul charm against snakebite, and the charms against the \textit{nezhit}. “And it seems clear that the importers were for the most part the minor clergy, who until quite recently could be practitioners in magic and divination among the East and South Slavs, both Orthodox and Catholic, as they could in the West.”\textsuperscript{232}

Then, the “stupid village priests” and “the minor clergy” possibly formed a real “clerical underground”, as defined by Richard Kieckhefer\textsuperscript{233}. Judging by the large amount of Bulgarian religious manuscripts containing verbal charms, such a “clerical underground” was probably very real and active in medieval and early modern Bulgaria.

4. Functions

There are three main models of classifying verbal charms.\textsuperscript{234} The first one is according to function or aim, where the emphasis is not on the textual characteristics, but on the purpose of the charm. This is also the most traditional method of classification.

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{229} Popkonstantinov, “Оловна пластинка с надпис от Х век”, pp. 149-150.
\item \textsuperscript{230} Shniter, \textit{Prayer and Magic}, passim.
\item \textsuperscript{231} Ibidem.
\item \textsuperscript{233} Kieckhefer, \textit{Magic in the Middle Ages}, passim.
\item \textsuperscript{234} Vaitkevičienė, \textit{Lithuanian Verbal Healing Charms}, p. 76.
\end{itemize}
The second model is according to structural and semantic type, where the focus is on similar motives and structural analogies between the texts. Such a classification is a result of the scholar’s interpretation of the charms. The third model is according to the dominating action of the text or the plot. This model is especially applicable for healing charms, whose textual organization depends on the actions and on the healing strategies. In general, the three models of classification should be regarded side by side, because each one of them has its advantages and limitations.235

Here, I present a functional classification of the medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms. Such a classification has not been done so far. The content of the charms cover three themes: health (127 charms), protection (42 charms), good luck (11 charm). The chronological distribution in the first group (health) goes as following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Number of charms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 c. – 12 c.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 c.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 c.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 c.</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 c.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 c.</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 c.</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 c.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undated</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The thematic distribution in the same group goes as following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Health issue</th>
<th>Number of charms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nezhit</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>water retention</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rabies</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>snakebite</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>blood-staunching</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>toothache</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>illness</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>spasm</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sudden pain</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>headache</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>giving birth</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>problems of the joints</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fever</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insomnia</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“worm”</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wound on horse’s leg</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chronological distribution in the second group (protection) goes as following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Number of charms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 c.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 c. - 14 c.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 c.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 c.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 c.</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 c.</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 c.</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 c.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undated</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The thematic distribution in the same group goes as following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Number of charms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Devil</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>general protection</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thunder and lightning</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enemy</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>veshtitsa</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bad rain</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>zhitovabets</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>enchantment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wolf</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mice</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>crops' infestations</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>demonic possession</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thieves</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fugitive slave</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hale</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>storm and wind</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>birth problems</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>infants’ mortality</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The chronological distribution in the third group (good luck) goes as following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time period</th>
<th>Number of charms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16 c.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 c.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 c.</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>undated</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The thematic distribution in the same group goes as following:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>Number of charms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>journey</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>court of law</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>12(^{236})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. 1. Health
The health of humans and animals is one of the big themes in verbal magic in general.\(^{237}\) Prevention and healing, specific illnesses, afflictions and injuries, corporal and mental well-being, physical strength, stamina and longevity are all addressed by the charms. For example, the Lithuanian charms can be used for a variety of purposes: to provide success in agricultural activities, hunting, fishing, weaving; to inspire or discourage love; to bring or stop the rain, the snow, or storms; to protect from lightning; to put down fire.\(^{238}\) However, the majority of Lithuanian verbal charms are aimed at healing and preventing human and animal illnesses.\(^{239}\)

\(^{236}\) One of the charms is applicable for both situations.

\(^{237}\) Together with bringing love and good luck, influencing the weather and cursing. The prevalence of one theme or another may vary from one tradition to another.

\(^{238}\) Vaitkevičienė, *Lithuanian Verbal Healing Charms*, pp. 67-68.


75
The medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal magic follows the same tendency and the health-themes predominate. Here is a typical example: a tenth-century charm against the nezhit, preserved on an amulet

[Front side] Jesus was going down from the seventh heaven, met the nezhit and asked him: “Where are you going, nezhit?” The nezhit answered: “I am going into the human’s head, to suck his brain, to break his bones, to blind his eyes.” And Jesus told him: “Turn around and go in the forest, in the head of the deer and [back side] of the ram, for it is patient. Now and forever and for eternity, amen! Jesus Christ wins!

And another example: three fourteenth century charms against water retention, written together in a manuscript.

[I] Prayer for water retention at a horse or a human. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Three angles were standing at the banks of river Jordan, holding copper intestines. One was tying, the other one was untying, and the third one was praying to the Lord: Holy, holy, holy Lord Sabbaoth! Fill the heaven and the earth with your glory!

[II] Prayer for the same. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. I went out in a fiery field and I found a burning lake. Three sisters were sitting into it and holding three dishes full with crayfish intestines. The oldest one was tying, the middle one was untying, the youngest one was praying to God: O, Lord, please let the water pass through this man (the person’s name) in the name of the Father. [III] In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, write: on the front right leg – Tigris, on the on the left rear leg – Physon, on the front left leg – Euphrates, on the left [sic!] rear leg – Gyon. All over the earth, in the name of the Father and the Son. Read each of them four times. It will relief.

And a sixteenth century charm against rabies, preserved in a manuscript:

Prayer against rabid dog or wolf. When someone was bitten, do this. Take wine, sour bread and your knife. Put the wine on the ground, take the bread in your hands and the knife in your right hand and say the following

---


prayer to the Holy Mother of God: O, Lord! St. Ivan was walking through the holy mountain carrying a holy axe, to cut a holy tree. Mad dogs met him, rabid wolves met him, and he heard a voice from the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost: Ivan, Ivan, turn back! Do not be scared, but give to that man the Lord’s flesh and the Lord’s blood, to be healed and to be smeared with it. Read this prayer nine times in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, make the sign of the cross with the knife. If the bitten person is near, give him wine and bread. If he is far away, quickly pour out of the wine, and at midnight put the knife under a big stone and say the following prayer twice: In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost! St. Ivan was traveling and saw iron soldiers and rabid wolves. He got scared, started trembling and screaming. And God told him: Ivan, do not be scared! Take the Lord’s flesh and the Lord’s blood and give it to the man to eat and to be healed from the east to the west in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, today and forever. Amen.

4. 2. Protection

It is difficult to draw a clear-cut borderline between the healing verbal charms and the general protective verbal charms. Many of the curative charms are also apotropaic ones. In the framework of magic, the preservation of the health and the general protection against various evil powers and beings can be de facto the two sides of the same concern. The personified illnesses can be addressed and treated through the same apotropaic means, as the other malevolent spirits. This is clearly seen in the Bulgarian case, where the protective charms are focused on the Devil, the veshtitsa and the mora, who bring all kind of evil and trouble.

Certainly, the apotropaic verbal charms can also serve as protection against all kind of dangers, not only against the health-related ones. These are, for example, natural disasters, accidents, misfortunes, predators, thefts, war, death, etc. Depending on the tradition, such natural dangers can be more or less personified, or seen as caused directly

243 The veshtitsa and the mora are malevolent supernatural beings, which attack people. See below the chapter on evil supernatural figures.
by supernatural agents. In the Bulgarian case, the powers of nature are personified and hostile, or natural disasters are caused directly by evil beings, like the Devil.

Here follows a tenth century charm against veshtitsa, preserved on a lead amulet:

*The veshtitsa was saying: “I eradicate a fruit tree, I dry female beauty, I defeat female malice, I approach and enter into the human’s place as a hen, as a dove, as a snake... ”* And Archangel Michael said: “Tell me your clan!” 1st name mora, 2nd veshtitsa, 3rd vizusa, 4th makarila, 5th siyana, 6th evgelusa, 7th navradulia, 8th living fire, 9th midday one, 10th strangler of children ...

Another example: a seventeenth century charm against evil supernatural beings, preserved in a manuscript:

*Prayer of St. Sisinnius, St. Simeon, St. Sidorius and St. Theodor. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Sisinnius was standing in front of the gates of the God’s servant (say the name), leaning on a spear, with a sword on his waist, watching at the moras and the veshtitas and at all kind a of vilas and vilitsas. Together with him, I called all the angels, and archangel Michael and Peter and Paul, the apostles of Christ. It came invisible from the sky and cast away the moras, the veshtitas and all the evil spirits from this place: in the evening, at midnight, when the sea is resting, when the water is not flowing, when the roosters are not singing and when the dogs are not barking – then they cast away all the devils and the dark spirits from this place, from this temple, from these four directions. Here, at the God’s servant (say the name), there is no place for you, here are the four evangelists, here are the twelve apostles, here are the sixteen prophets, they will guard and protect the God’s servant in the name of the Father, the son and the Holy Ghost.*

And another example, a seventeenth century charm for protection against the enchantment of the bees, preserved a manuscript:

---

244 Lead amulet from the tenth century. Popkonstantinov, “Оловен амулет с апокрифен текст от Варненския музей”, p. 283. See no. 11 in the Catalogue.


Prayer against the enchantment of the bees. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Take three sticks from pumpkin, three from vine, and three from wattle fence. With three stones on the door, fumigate three times with incense, in the month of March, on the first day.

At the dispersing of the bees: sweet and kind little bees were rattling and flying, St. Zosim met them and asked them: Where are you going, kind little bees? We are going to the Galilean mountain to build houses. St. Zosim told them: I swear you, do not go into the Galilean forest, and do not build there neither houses, nor cells. Return to the God’s servant (say the name) and there you do build houses and cells! St Zosim turned my bees back to their mother.

4.3 Success

In Bulgarian verbal magic, health issues and apotropaic matters are closely interrelated. This complex is supplemented by a third theme: the provision of good luck and success in certain activities.

One example from this group is a sixteenth century charm for a good journey, preserved in a manuscript: 247

Prayer for the ones, setting on a journey. God, Our Lord! You accompanied your servant Jacob and you were at the side of your slave Joseph. Please, walk together with your servant (the name)! Lord, deliver him from danger and from every trouble! And give him peace and to be healthy, when on the road, and to follow the truth, according to your orders! Fulfill his life with all the heavenly and earthly goods! While being on the road, may he be back safely, praising your holy name! Because it is your kingdom, and your power, and your glory! In the name of the Father, the son and the Holy Ghost, now and forever and for eternity! Amen.

And another example: a seventeenth century charm for success at the court of law, preserved in a manuscript 248:


Prayer for those, who go at the court. O, God, bless me, Father! I woke up early in the morning and asked God Lord and the Holy Dennitsa [Morning star], which comes from the lap of Abraham with 327 iron, leaden and cuprous keys: Please, lock the mind and the heart of those, who think bad things about me, let them become dump, and let my tongue fly like the gospel of the priest. Please, Lord, close the mind and the heart of my rival and of all lords and judges. And me God’s servant (say the name), came out from the envy and entered into the beauty, today and forever.

Again, there is no clear-cut distinction between these charms and the charms from the other two groups. For instance, the charm against enchantment of the bees is placed here in the protection-group. It can, however, also be seen as a good luck-charm, aimed to help at beekeeping and to bring success in this activity.

5. In the Other world – supernatural powers

5. 1. Typology

The extant medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal magic has a very clear typology. It is curative (charms for health and healing), protective and aversive, i.e., apotropaic (charms for protection), as well as preventive and beneficial (the charms for good luck and success). Such a typology has a number of parallels. Apotropaic and healing verbal magic is a universal phenomenon, and in a large number of cases, these themes are more or less dominating. Again, the Mesopotamian tradition establishes a paradigm. One significant portion of the Babylonian verbal charms belongs to the series “Evil Spirits” (Utukki Limnûti), which are apotropaic. Another large number of Babylonian texts are from the series “Fever sickness” (Ašakkû Marṣûti) and “Headache” (Ţi’i), which are curative.

---

249 Again, it should be kept in mind that the borderline between the types is rather blurry.
250 Thompson, The Devils and Evil Spirits, the prefaces and the introductions of vol. I and vol. II.
In the Byzantine tradition too, there is a strong line of apotropaic magic, and a large number of such amulets with corresponding inscriptions. Their main aims are to solve health problems and to protect against demonic powers. The defense against the harmful impact of the Evil Eye is an omnipresent concern too. The apotropaic verbal magic plays a major role in the late medieval and early modern Russian tradition, together with love charms and curses. Written verbal charms are broadly used for protecting one’s health, body and property. A large share of the early modern Hungarian verbal magic consists of healing and apotropaic charms. Here, both illnesses and bewitchments are among the main concerns. In the Romanian tradition, the charms against the năjit and other afflictions demonstrate close relations with the Bulgarian texts against the nezhit. The above-quoted Coptic, English, Lithuanian, Estonian and Gagauz verbal magical traditions are good examples too. In contrast, the Bulgarian oral folklore from twentieth and twenty-first century shows a much bigger variety of themes and a significant presence of aggressive and love magic. Still, the majority of charms are dedicated to apotropaic and healing magic.

The typology of medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal magic can be better understood in the framework of usage and transmission of the charms. The effectiveness and the apotropaic functions can be a decisive factor for being chosen for written

---

254 Pócs, *Magyar ráolvasások*.
257 Todorova-Pirgova, *Баяния и магии*, passim.
transmission. If the users of these written charms were mainly local priests, then the
apotropaic and healing charms were most probably the ones they needed the most.
Consequently, this type of charms was preserved in a written form. This may also explain
why the manuscripts do not contain any aggressive verbal magic or love charms. Finally,
it is logical that the amulets with apotropaic functions contain charms of the aversive and
protective type.

Within this typological framework, the three themes represent not only spheres of
human life, but also operational fields of supernatural agents. These supernatural agents
occupy a specific double position. On one hand, they are representatives of the Other
World; on the other hand, they operate in Our World, causing various positive and
negative effects, and influencing key aspects like health and illness, success and
misfortune, life and death.

Essentially, “apotropaic” means “averting evil”, “turning away harm” and
“deflecting misfortune”. The evil, the harm and the misfortune can come from different
sources: natural and supernatural, human and superhuman.258 Most often, however, the
trouble is believed to be caused by a malevolent supernatural power.259 Evil spirits,
personified illnesses, etc. are involved in harming humans and disturbing the order of
everyday life. The belief in evil and harmful supernatural agents is the main reason for
the existence of the apotropaic verbal magic. Because of that, the evil figures are the first
ones to be discussed here.

---

258 For a general overview of supernatural powers and figures in magic, see Flint, The Rise of Magic.
259 Moses Gaster, “Two Thousand Years of a Charm against the Child-Stealing Witch”, Folklore
(1900): 129-62; Alfons Barb, “Antaura, the Mermaid and the Devil’s Grandmother”, Journal of the
The medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms are inhabited by a variety of complex and syncretic supernatural figures. The religions and mythologies of Mesopotamia, Egypt, Ancient Greece and Rome, Byzantium, the Mediterranean area and the Slavic area contributed to the image and the nature of the Bulgarian supernatural beings. Acknowledging the long journey and development of these supernatural figures, it is even more important to look at their quotidian roles and functions. Being active in the daily life environment, the supernatural agents reflect the way of thinking behind the verbal magic. As the “images of invisible reality are for many periods and peoples an archaic area of common mentalities,”\textsuperscript{260} the bearers of supernatural power represent the crystallized attitude towards quotidian problems, fears and challenges to be coped with.

The supernatural figures’ syncretic and heterogeneous character is connected with the practical bent of verbal magic, which “is eclectic to an extraordinary degree, taking components from many different cultural levels and locations.”\textsuperscript{261}

We can distinguish between the different traditions, and to determine the origin of certain elements and features. But we should also consider the supernatural agents from Bulgarian verbal magic in their cultural context. Neither the charms, nor their potential users differentiated between pre-Christian and Christian, or between Slavic and foreign supernatural figures\textsuperscript{262}. The distinction was seen much more along the line of good versus evil.

\textsuperscript{260} Seppo Knuuttila, “How to Seize Mentalites,” in Runnel, \textit{Rethinking Ethnology and Folkloristics}, p. 37.
\textsuperscript{261} Wilson, \textit{The Magical Univerise}, p. xxvi.
\textsuperscript{262} For an overview of the Bulgarian popular beliefs and demonology, see Georgieva, Българска народна митология, pp. 144-194 and 196-230. For an overview of the personified illnesses in Bulgarian popular demonology, see Todorova-Pirgova, Бяния и магии, passim. For a broader central European perspective, see Pöcs, \textit{Between the Living and the Dead}, pp. 107-119 and 121-163. For a comparison, see also Stark, \textit{Peasants, Pilgrims, and Sacred Promises}, p. 7, where the author says about supernatural powers in Karelian folklore “…to consider Christian saints separately from nature spirits was to draw an artificial
5.2. The evil ones

Based on their functions, the supernatural figures encountered in Bulgarian verbal charms can be grouped in two categories. The first category consists of the evil ones. These are the malevolent possessors of supernatural power, whose role and intention is to bring harm, trouble, misfortune, disorder, bad luck, illness and death. In the framework of verbal magic, they are the ones, which cause problems and crisis.

The representatives of evil are the most complex and the most ancient supernatural figures in the Eurasian and the Mediterranean charming traditions and practices. The variety of religious traditions (Zoroastrian, Neo-Platonist, Jewish, Gnostic, Christian, etc.), which were in contact in the Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages, “had one strong link between them. This link is in the belief in demons as spirits of evil.” Thus, a complex and heterogeneous demonology emerged, developed and was transmitted and merged with the charming traditions of other cultural areas, like Northern Europe and the Slavic peoples.

In the medieval and early modern Bulgarian source material, the following evil supernatural beings appear:

- нежит (nezhit) – 28 charms
- snake – 16 charms
- дявол (the devil) – 6 charms
- вещица (veshtitsa) – 3 charms
- demon – 1 charm

boundary where, at the lowest social levels of the semi-literate rural populace, the existence of such a boundary was questionable."

264 The numbers indicate the number of charms from my source material, where the supernatural agent appears as a protagonist.
265 The specific features of the snake as a supernatural being are discussed below.
• уроци (enchanters/spellbinders)\textsuperscript{266} – 1 charm

Typically, these figures do not stand alone in the texts, but are opposed by good supernatural actors: for example Jesus Christ versus the nezhit, archangel Michael versus the veshtitsa, St. Sisinnius versus the unclean spirits and the Devil, etc. Thus, the protagonists and the antagonists are involved in intense confrontations and power relations.

5. 2. 1. The illness
Health is the main theme of the Bulgarian material, and the supernatural perpetrators of illnesses and injuries are the most prominent of the evil powers. Harmful and dangerous, and threatening a crucial aspect of human existence, these malevolent agents occupy a key position among supernatural beings. The counteraction to these perpetrators constitutes an important part of the magical practice.\textsuperscript{267} In the Bulgarian verbal charms, this is well demonstrated by the figure of the nezhit.

The незгъм (nezhit) is a supernatural illness-perpetrator, believed to cause health problems, mainly connected with the head. In one word, the nezhit can be defined as “personified headache”. The actual medical diagnosis varies significantly: migraine, fever, brain tumors, teeth and gum afflictions (for instance, gingivitis), eyes and nose inflammations, contagious infections of the bones and the joints, meningitis purulenta, or different mental disorders.\textsuperscript{268} In comparison, the Romanian tradition (where the nezhit appears too) associates it also with afflictions like stomatitis ulcerosa, catarrh, various

\textsuperscript{266} Very tentative translation, as the Bulgarian word carries a complex of very specific notions.
\textsuperscript{268} Овчаров, “Проклетият нежит”, p. 107. Unfortunately, the author does not give more detailed reference to studies, dealing with the question which actual disease(s) is presented by the nezhit.
skin diseases or purulent wounds. The Greek and Roman equivalents of the *nezhit* are associated with headache, often combined with acute inflammations of the eyes, believed to be caused by the wind. According to medieval South Italian charms, the personified headache affects the teeth, the face (the mouth) and the heart. It also brings hallucinations and lethargy. The overall effect is similar to that of intoxication and paralysis.

The medieval and early modern Bulgarian charms against the *nezhit* come from the following sources:

- amulet (lead lamella) from the tenth century, excavated in the medieval fortress on the island of Păcuiul lui Soare – one charm.
- amulet (lead lamella) from the tenth-eleventh century, excavated near the village of Odürtsi, northeastern Bulgaria – one charm.
- amulet (lead lamella) from the eleventh-twelfth century excavated in 2002, in a medieval grave near the town of Kŭrdjzhali, Southern Bulgaria – one charm.

The charms from these three amulets are variants of the same encounter-type of text. In the *historiola*, Jesus Christ meets the evil *nezhit*, the *nezhit* tells about his harmful activities (to bring illness to humans), and is then expelled by Christ.

---

271 Ibidem, p. 84.
272 The island is located in the Romanian part of the Danube, fifteen kilometers from the town of Silistra, northeastern Bulgaria. The fortress was Bulgarian and Byzantine, and existed between eight and fourteenth century. The charm was published in Popkonstantinov, “Молитва против нежит върху амулет от X век от Пъкуйул луй Соаре”, p. 124.
273 The charm was published in Doncheva and Popkonstantinov, “Апокрифна молитва от X-XI век върху оловен амулет от с. Одърци, Толбухинско”, pp. 288-289.
274 The charm was published in original and in Modern Bulgarian translation by Garena and Iliev, “Новооткрит старобългарски надпис-заклинание”, pp. 152-153.
- an amulet (lead lamella) from the thirteenth-fourteenth century, excavated in the medieval fortress Chreshche, Eastern Macedonia\textsuperscript{275} – one charm. The text tells that Adam was ill (had the \textit{nezhit}) and gave him to Eve, who gave him to the wind, who transmitted him to the river, etc., until the \textit{nezhit} disappears completely.

- \textit{Требник}, fourteenth century, sine № et loco\textsuperscript{276} – seven charms. The first two texts are from the encounter-type, where Jesus Christ meets and expels the \textit{nezhit}. The third text is from the encounter-type, where Archangel Michael meets and expels the \textit{nezhit}. The fourth text is from the encounter-type, where Archangel Gabriel meets seven armed angels, who are going to defeat the \textit{nezhit}. The fifth text is from the encounter-type, where the archangels Michael and Gabriel and St. Cosmas and St. Damian meet seventy armed angels and seventy armed archangels, who are going against the \textit{nezhit}. The sixth charm’s \textit{historiola} is about Adam, who had the \textit{nezhit} and gave him to Eve, etc. The seventh text is an expulsion formula, addressed directly to the \textit{nezhit}.

- \textit{Часослов} (book of hours) from 1498, LGOPI № 22, fol. 410, Library of the Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem\textsuperscript{277} – one charm. The text is from the type Adam giving the \textit{nezhit} to Eve.

- \textit{Сборник} (miscellany) from the fifteenth and sixteenth century, № 308, fol. 116r. Sofia, National Library\textsuperscript{278} – one charm. The text is from the as... as... – type: as


\textsuperscript{276} The charms were published by Kačanovskij, “Apokrifne molitve”, pp. 153-154. See no. 4 in the catalogue.

\textsuperscript{277} The charm was published in original and in Modern Bulgarian translation by Ovcharov, “Some Little Known Apocryphal Prayers”, p. 82.
Jesus once put his hand on Adam’s head and cure him, so now the servant of God may be cured.

- Требник (book of occasional prayers) from the seventeenth century, № 622, fol. 133v-136, Sofia, National Library – twelve charms. The first text is from the encounter-type, where Jesus Christ meets and expels the nezhit. The second text is from the encounter-type, where Archangel Gabriel meets and expels the nezhit. The third text is from the as... so... – type: as Jesus once put his hand on Adam’s head and cure him, so now the servant of God may be cured. The fourth text is from the encounter-type, where the archangels Gabriel and Michael meet seven armed angels, who are going against the nezhit. The fifth text has is from the encounter-type, where angels meet a person suffering from the nezhit and cure him. The sixth text is an invocation to Christ and to St. Cosmas and Damian to help and cure the nezhit. The seventh and the eight texts are expulsion formulae, addressed directly to the nezhit, which is expelled in the name of supernatural authorities (God, archangels, St. John the Baptist). The ninth text is a direct request addressed to the human body to be healthy and free from the nezhit. The tenth text’s historiola tells how the nezhit fell from the sky and was destroyed by blind shepherds. The eleventh text is from the encounter-type, where Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist meet a person, suffering from nezhit and cure him. The twelfth text Adam giving the nezhit to Eve.

---

278 The charm was published by Tsonev, Catalogue, vol. I, pp. 252-253.
279 The charms were published by Tsonev, Catalogue, vol. II, pp. 132-135. See no. 5 in the catalogue.
- Часослов (book of hours) from 1744, № 1391, Sofia, National Library\textsuperscript{280} – one charm. The text is from the type Adam giving the \textit{nezhit} to Eve.

- Никетово молитвениче, 1787, Sofia, National Library, № 646, fol. 51v – one charm. The text is from the type Adam giving the \textit{nezhit} to Eve.

- Лечебник (healer’s book) from 1800, № 799, fol. 15v, Sofia, National Library\textsuperscript{281} – one charm. The text is from the type Adam giving the \textit{nezhit} to Eve.

Summarized in numbers, the extant medieval and early modern verbal charms against the \textit{nezhit} belong to the following types:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of text</th>
<th>Number of charms</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam transmits the \textit{nezhit} to Eve</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The \textit{nezhit} meets Jesus Christ</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The archangel(s)/the saints meet the angels/archangels, going against the \textit{nezhit}</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The \textit{nezhit} meets the archangel(s)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expulsion formulae, directly addressed against the \textit{nezhit}</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus cured Adam</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The angels meet a person suffering from the \textit{nezhit} and cure him</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ, Virgin Mary and St. John the Baptist cure a person with the \textit{nezhit}</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Blind shepherds destroy the \textit{nezhit}</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Direct request the human body to be free from the \textit{nezhit}</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invocation to Christ and to St. Cosmas and Damian to cure the \textit{nezhit}</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textsuperscript{280} The charm was published by Hristova, \textit{Catalogue}, vol. V, p. 89. See no. 8 in the catalogue.

\textsuperscript{281} The charm was published by Tsonev, \textit{Catalogue}, vol. II, p. 493. See no. 9 in the catalogue.
The nezhit is presented by a relatively large number of charms, which constitute a corpus. The texts are of different types, and recombine and re-use a variety of elements. The nezhit is of highly syncretic nature – an alloy between the Slavic motives and the Byzantine influence, where the later in its turn carry even older motives and elements from other traditions.

The type of story, where Adam transmits the illness to Eve, can be seen in the following charm from a manuscript from 1498:

Prayer against nezhit. Adam had nezhit and passed it to Eve. Eve to the lead, lead to the sea, the sea to the wave, the wave to the foam, the foam to the edge, the edge to the sand, the sand to the grass, the grass to the dew, the sun rose and dried it. Thus the nezhit to disappear from the God’s servant (say the name). In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Now and forever and for eternity. Amen.

The charms from this type is a variant of the as... so... - type of formula: as the illness is passed from one person or thing to another and eventually disappears, so it should disappear from the afflicted person. As Adam successfully got rid of the nezhit, so may the afflicted person get rid of it successfully too. There is no description of the problem or of the supernatural being, which causes it. Actually, the text does not say at all what a nezhit is. It seems to be understood that it is an issue or a being with supernatural origins. In order to cope with it, the charm employs the images of the mythical ancestors (Adam and Eve) and a metal with magical properties (lead).

It seems that this transmission-historiola does not have a parallel in Byzantine verbal magic. However, it is related to some other traditions. For example, a Hungarian text from 1656 tells how the joists of the house and other parts of the building’s

---

283 Literary, the Old Church Slavonic text says “to dry away” or “to dry out”.
284 At least, Pradel’s and Vassiliev’s collections do not contain any such parallels.
construction transmit the illness one to another.\textsuperscript{285} Going back in time, there is also a Syriac charm against lunacy,\textsuperscript{286} which says:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Evil Spirit of Lunacy, you will needs to go forth from the bones, from the sinews, from the flesh, from the skin, and from the hair unto the ground, and from the ground passing to iron, and from iron to stone, and from stone you will pass on to the mountain. This writing must be sealed. Amen! Amen!}
\end{quote}

Another parallel can be seen in the Babylonian \textit{Legend of the Worm}, which explains the origins of the gum afflictions\textsuperscript{287}:

\begin{quote}
\textit{After Anu had created the Heavens,}
\textit{The Heavens created the Earth,}
\textit{The Earth created the Rivers,}
\textit{The Rivers created the Canals,}
\textit{The Canals created the Marshes,}
\textit{The Marshes created the Worm.}
\end{quote}

In a way, the Bulgarian charm and the Babylonian charm complement each other. The Babylonian text tells how the illness was created via transmission, while the Bulgarian charm shows the opposite process – how the illness was destroyed via transmission. The Babylonian text also provides a kind of pre-history of the \textit{nezhit}. The \textit{Legend of the Worm} tells that the worm was originally given dry bones and scented wood for food\textsuperscript{288}. However, it preferred to drink among the teeth and to destroy the gums. The worm became \textit{sickness of the head, of the teeth, of the heart, heartache/Sickness of the eye, fever, poison}.\textsuperscript{289} Because of this, it was cursed to be smashed by the fist of Ea.

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{285} Pócs, “Én vagyok mindennél”, p. 185.
\textsuperscript{286} Thompson, \textit{The Devils and Evil Spirit}, vol. I, p. XL.
\textsuperscript{287} Thompson, \textit{The Devils and Evil Spirits}, vol. II, p. 161.
\textsuperscript{288} Thompson, \textit{The Devils and Evil Spirits}, vol. II, pp. 160-163.
\textsuperscript{289} Thompson, \textit{The Devils and Evil Spirits}, vol. I, p. 145.
\end{flushleft}
The type of encounter-historiola about Jesus meeting the nezhit can be seen in the following text from a seventeenth-century manuscript:290

Jesus came down from the Seventh Heaven, from his home, met the nezhit and asked him: “Where are you going?” The nezhit answered: “I am going into the human head, in order to bemuse the brain, to break the teeth and the jaws, to deafen the ears, to blind the eyes, to distort the mouth, to block up the nose, so there will be headache day and night.” Then Jesus told the nezhit: “Go back into the forest and enter the deer’s head and the ram’s head, because they can bear everything and still survive. And stay there until the end of Heaven and Earth. And be afraid of the Lord, who is sitting on the cherubim throne, until He comes to judge the entire universe and you too, rabid nezhit, who are the source of every infirmity. I conjure you, nezhit! Go away from God’s servant (say the name) in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.”

Another variant of this story is the narrative, where the nezhit meets the archangel291:

St. Archangel Michael Gabriel was walking, carrying iron bow and iron arrows, and he wanted to shoot a deer and a stag. He did not find there a deer and a stag, but he found the nezhit, who was sitting and splitting stones. The archangel asked him: “Who are you, who is sitting and splitting stones?” He answered him: “I am the nezhit, I will split the human head and will take out the brain, will spill the blood.” Michael Gabriel said: “Cursed damned nezhit, neither take out the brain, nor split the head, but go into the desert mountain, enter the head of the stag, it is patient, it can tolerate this. If I find you after seven days, I will cut you in pieces or will shoot you.” The nezhit begged: “Do not cut me into pieces, do not shoot me, I will escape into the mountain and into the head of the stag.”

This encounter-historiola has direct parallels in the medieval South Italian Greek text Εὐχὴ ἡμικράνη εἰς πονοκεφάλι (Migraine prayer against headache)292:

-------
The migraine came out from the sea striking and roaring, and our Lord Jesus Christ met it and told it: “Where are you bringing headache and migraine and pain in the skull and pain in the eyes and inflammation and tears and leukoma and dizziness?” The headache answered to our Lord Jesus Christ: “We are going to sit down in the head of the servant of God So-and-So.” Then, our Lord Jesus Christ tells it: “Look here, do not go into my servant, but go away and go into the wild mountains and settle into the bull’s head. There you may eat flesh, there drink blood, there ruin the eyes, there darken the head, seethe and wriggle. But if you do not obey me, I shall destroy you there on the burning mountain where no dog barks and the cock does not crow. You who have set a limit to the sea, stop headache and migraine and pain in the skull and between the eyes and on the lids and from the marrow from the servant of the Lord So-and-So. To stand well, to stand with fear from God, amen.

Another parallel is to be found in the Byzantine charm Περὶ ρεύματος καὶ πόνου κεφαλῆς λέγε τὴν εὐχὴν ταύτην (Say this prayer against discharge and headache):

Jesus Christ, our Lord, have mercy on us. Three angels were climbing the Mount Sinai, met the discharge (ῥεῦμα) and asked it: “Where are you going, discharge?” It answered: “I am going into the son of man, to freeze the hands, the feet and the flesh, to dry and to freeze the head and the body, and to make the discharge to flow. The Lord’s angels said: “We exorcise you, discharge, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, in the name of the heavenly powers, the evangelists, the twelve apostles of Christ and all the saints, so that now you will not have power to do evil or hurt the servant of God So-and-So.

On its own turn, the Byzantine narrative of the angels meeting the illness has a Bulgarian equivalent in the charm where the archangels meet the angels going against the nezhit (from a seventeenth century manuscript):

Seven angels, seven archangels were going, sharpening seven knives, carrying seven candles. The archangels Michael and Gabriel met them and asked them: “Where are you going, seven angels?” They answered: “We are going to cut the nezhit and to burn him with candles, and to

---

293 This is the literary translation of the Greek word. Probably, here the discharge (ῥεῦμα) signifies catarrh or a purulent flux.
294 Vassiliev, Anecdota, p. 331-332.
remove the blood from the eyes for the servant of God (the name), now and forever and for eternity."

This type of *historiola* has also a Medieval Latin variant:296

*In nomine Domini nostri Ihesu Christi. Tres angeli ambulaverunt in monte Synay, quibus obviavit Nessia, Nagedo, Stechedo, Troppho, Crampho, Gigihte, Paralisis. Ad quos angeli dixerunt: quo itis? Qui dixerunt: nos imus ad famulum Dei N. caput eius vexare, venas eius enervare, medullam evacuare, ossa eius conterere et totam compaginem membrorum eius dissolvere. Quibus angeli iterum dixerunt: adiuramus te Nessia, Nagedo, Stechedo, Troppho, Crampho, Gigihte, Paralisis per patrem et filium et spiritum sanctum, per martires, per confessores, per virgines, per omnes sanctos et electos Dei, ut non noceatis huic famulo Dei N. non in capite, non in venis, non in medullis, non in ossibus suis nec in aliqua parte corporis eius. Amen.*

The Byzantine and the South Italian texts are connected with verbal charms from ancient Mesopotamia. In the Mesopotamian tradition, the spread of certain diseases was attributed to certain demons, like for instance Ura (the plague-spirit) and Ashakku (the fever-spirit).297 There are series of charms against these supernatural perpetrators of headache and fever. Thus, in Babylonian verbal magic, the headache is personified too, and is referred to in the following way:298

*Headache – in its face venom putrefieth,*  
*Headache hath come forth from the Underworld,*  
*It hath come forth from the dwelling of Bel,*  
*From amid the mountains it hath descended upon the land,*  
*From the ends of the mountains it hath descended,*  
*From the fields not to return it hath descended;*  
*With the mountain-goat unto the fold it hath descended,*  
*With the ibex unto the Open-horned flocks it hath descended,*  
*With the Open-horned unto the Big-horned it hath descended.*

---

296 Vassiliev, *Anecdota*, pp. LXVII-LXVIII.  
297 Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits*, vol. I, p. XLVII.  
298 Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits*, vol. I, p. XL.
The Babylonian tradition connects the headache with water\textsuperscript{299} and this is a feature, which survived in later periods in other traditions too:

\begin{quote}
Headache like a flood roameth loose,  
Headache from Sunrise of Sunset,  
Headache shrieketh and crieth.  
Through the Sea – the Broad Earth –  
The Little Floods – (its) flood goeth,  
Its flood is (as) the Mighty Floods.
\end{quote}

In variants of the Bulgarian encounter- charms, the \textit{nezhit} comes from the Red Sea. This is the case with the two charms, written on amulets from the tenth-eleventh century and from the eleventh-twelfth century, which say: “The \textit{nezhit} was coming from the Red Sea and met Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{300}

Another persistent feature is the association with deserted and remote places\textsuperscript{301}:

\begin{quote}
Headache roameth over the desert, blowing like the wind,  
Flashing like lightning, it is loosed above and below;  
It cutteth off him who feareth not his god like a reed,  
Like a stalk of henna, it slitteth his thews.
\end{quote}

Clearly, the Babylonian personified headache is connected with the chthonic deities. One of the Babylonian charms asks directly “May Ereshkigal, the wife of Ninazu, turn her face elsewhere”, so that the “headache, shivering, heartache, cold” to be removed.\textsuperscript{302} In another text the illness-perpetrator seems to be under the power of Ishtar: “Ishtar, besides whom there is none to give rest and happiness, hath let it come down from the mountains”.\textsuperscript{303}

\textsuperscript{299} Thompson, \textit{The Devils and Evil Spirits}, vol. II, pp. 73-75.  
\textsuperscript{300} Doncheva and Popkonstantinov, “Апокрифна молитва от X-XI век върху оловен амулет от с. Олдъри, Толбухинско”, pp. 288-289. See no. 2 and no 3 in the Catalogue.  
\textsuperscript{301} Thompson, \textit{The Devils and Evil Spirits}, vol. II, p. 65.  
\textsuperscript{302} Thompson, \textit{The Devils and Evil Spirits}, vol. I, p. 199. Ereshkigal is the goddess of Irkalla (the Mesopotamian underworld).  
\textsuperscript{303} Thompson, \textit{The Devils and Evil Spirits}, vol. II, p. 77. As a goddess of fertility and war, and sister of Ereshkigal, Ishtar is related to the underworld.
Although explicitly demonic, the Babylonian illness-perpetrator is also connected with the celestial realm, and it may actually appear from above, falling from heaven: “Headache, though bound in heaven, hath escaped on earth”. Employing verbal magic and rites, Marduk drives out the headache-demon and sends it away, in the sky: “The Headache may ascend to heaven like the smoke from a peaceful homestead”. This motif appears in the Bulgarian charm, where the nezhit falls from the sky and the blind shepherds.

In the Bulgarian charms, there is no a description of the physical outlook of the nezhit. It is described with adjectives and phrases, as “rabid”, “origin of every illness”, “cursed”, “deaf”, “unclean illness”, “menacing”. It is a single agent, unlike other malevolent figures (like, for example, the personified fevers tresavitsi, which most commonly appear as a group of women). The nezhit is referred to as “him”; therefore, it is regarded to be a male. This distinguishes him from other perpetrators of illnesses, which very often are female.

The relation to water as an element of origin is clearly testified in the Bulgarian material:

Dear Lord Christ, win! The nezhit was coming from the Red Sea and met Jesus. And Jesus asked him: “Where are you going?” He answered: “I am going to the human, to drink his brain, to shed his blood, to break his bones”. Then Jesus said: “I conjure you, nezhit! Do not go to the human, but go to a deserted place...find the deer...enter their [sic!] heads, drink their brain, shed their blood, break their bones and tear their joints, because they can stand any illness. Go there and do not come back!” Now and forever, until the Judgment Day, prepared for him. Be afraid of the

304 Thompson, The Devils and Evil Spirits, vol. II, p. 77. The nezhit falls from the sky too, as it is said in the charm with the blind shepherds. This charm is discussed below, in the sub-chapter on the blind shepherds.
306 In the Babylonian tradition, there seems to be both female and male supernatural bringers of illnesses. However, later figures like Lilith, Gyllou and Abyzou are always female. Barb, “Antaura”, pp. 5-6; Ryan, “Ancient Demons”, pp. 44-46.
Lord, sitting on the cherubim throne, everything visible and invisible is afraid of him. Most of all, be afraid of the Lord, the glory belongs to him forever. Amen.³⁰⁷

The association of the nezhit with the human head and the senses also emphasized in the Bulgarian sources³⁰⁸:

I am going into the human head, in order to bemuse the brain, to break the teeth and the jaws, to deafen the ears, to blind the eyes, to distort the mouth, to block up the nose, so there will be headache day and night.

The Bulgarian nezhit is rather specialized. In this respect, it follows closely its archaic predecessors, the Mesopotamian headache demons. The comparison with parallels shows a broad range of health problems and afflictions. Alternatively, the personified illness acts in rather animalistic terms, ripping off and devouring. For instance, this is the case with a Hungarian charm, which tells about the seventy-seven and a half evils. They meet Virgin Mary and explain that they are going to a certain woman to “drink her red blood, to tear away her fresh flesh.”³⁰⁹

In the direct conjuration formulae, the nezhit is commanded: “do not go into the human head, do not devastate the brain, do not distort the eyes!” and a few lines later the demon himself declares: “I am the nezhit; I am going into the human head, in order to bemuse the brain and to drink the blood”. The same being is causing “headache all day and all night long”. The texts describe a man tortured by a severe pain in the head, and

³⁰⁷ Amulet (lead lamella) from the tenth-eleventh century. For detailed paleographical and philological discussion of the text, see Popkonstantinov and Konstantinova “За два оловни амулета с апокрифни молитви от X в.”, p. 29. See no. 2 in the Catalogue.
³⁰⁸ See no. 5 in the Catalogue.
the nezhit is conjured to leave the head and the eyes, not to “bemuse the brain or to blind the eyes”, and not “to shed blood or to twist the joints or to collect puss”.

The expulsion of the nezhit in remote places and in the heads of animals are elements, which can be also seen in the expulsion formulae of the South Italian charms. There, the “wild mountain” and the “head of the bull” are stable motifs. The same is true for the Babylonian texts, where the fever most often is like bull. The remote uninhabited places and the wild undomesticated animals are not simply distant and wild. They are also supernatural, located in the Other World. The wilderness, the mountains, the rocks, the deers, etc. are not only outside of and far away from the cultivated and inhabited human sphere. They are on the Other Side, beyond the human control. The wilderness and its inhabitants are the realm of the supernatural beings and the dead.

The direct expulsion formulae have a parallel in a Byzantine charm against “worm”. The affliction is exorcised in the name of the Lord, the angels, and the apostles. The same type of direct expulsion appears in a Babylonian text:

From the man, the son of his god,
Thou shalt have no food to eat,
Thou shalt have no water to drink,
Thou shalt not stretch forth thy hand
Unto the table of my father Bel, thy creator.
Neither with sea-water, nor with sweet water,
Nor with bad water, nor with Tigris water,
Nor with Euphrates water, nor with pond water,
Nor with river water shalt thou be covered.

---

If thou wouldst fly up to heaven
Thou shalt have no wings,
If thou wouldst lurk in ambush on earth
Thou shalt secure no resting-place.
Unto the man, the son of his god,
Come not nigh,
Get thee hence!

Clearly, the Bulgarian nezhit can be related to the Mesopotamian primordial malevolent elemental force Lilû (the male) and Lilîtu (the female), later known as Lilith from the Jewish tradition. Originally, Lilû and Lilîtu were Mesopotamian ghosts and windstorm demons. Lilîtu was associated with night, wind, illness and death. She defines a primordial paradigm and an operational field, later followed by many malevolent supernatural beings. Her activities include attacking pregnant women, kidnapping children, disturbing sleeping people and (which is important here) bringing diseases in general. It was suggested that Lilîtu/Lilith causes fever, various disturbances of the senses and migraine, which is the exact field of the nezhit too. This points out towards a parallel with another Mesopotamian female demon: Lamashu. Along with the harming of pregnant women, slaying children and drinking blood, she is responsible also for infesting the water, causing nightmares and bringing diseases, plague and death.

---

317 The oldest sources about Lilû and Lilîtu are Sumerian cuneiform inscriptions, circa 4000 BCE. The first pictorial representation of Lilîtu is circa 1950 BCE. She appears also in Assyrian sources, and later in numerous Jewish texts and in the Bible. See Barb, “Antaura”, pp. 4-5, Thompson, Babylonia, The Devils and Evil Spirits, vol. I, pp. XXVI-XXXVIII, and Siegmund Hurwitz, Lilith, the First Eve: Historical and Psychological Aspects of the Dark Feminine (Einsiedeln: Daimon Verlag, 1992), pp. 31-84.
In the Bulgarian encounter-type narratives, the *nezhit* shows similarities with other demons, known from the Byzantine, Jewish and Slavic traditions.\(^{321}\) One of them is Gyllou, responsible for infertility, child mortality, sickness, demonic possession and death. Another such demon is Abyzou (responsible for strangling newborn babies, deafness, blindness, severe pain, madness).\(^{322}\) Further on, the *nezhit* is clearly related to Antaura – a demon that comes out of the sea and brings migraine\(^{323}\) and to Abra – a demon that comes out of the sea, eats the bones of the afflicted person and wastes away her/his flesh.\(^{324}\) These female demons will also be discussed in the subchapter below, in relation to the figure of the *veshtitsa*.

Clearly, the *nezhit* took many features and motifs from the Byzantine and Mesopotamian traditions. However, it is a Slavic supernatural being and has a Slavic name. Literary, the name means “non-alive”. It is encountered among both the Southern and the Eastern Slavs. The Slavic name was adopted by the Romanian tradition too.

Apart from the name, when going into further details, the different distinct Slavic traditions attribute different characteristics to the *nezhit*. For example, the Russian tradition describes the *nezhit* as unclean power, without soul and flesh, but with human looks.\(^{325}\) The *nezhit* is an elemental force, neither a human, nor a spirit. The term is used to designate a group of supernatural beings, namely the леший (forest spirit), the водяной (water spirit), the русалка (female water spirit), the полевой (field spirit), the домовой

\(^{321}\) For example, Abyzou (under the name Vizusa) appears in a seventeenth century Bulgarian charm against the *veshtitsa*. In this text Vizusa is one of the names of the witch, listed by her in front of Archangel Michael. For more discussion on Gyllou and Abyzou, see the next sub-chapter “The Witch”.

\(^{322}\) Barb, “Antaura”, p. 5.

\(^{323}\) Known from a Greek inscription, found on a third century CE silver lamella from Carnuntum, Austria. See Barb, “Antaura”; pp. 2-4, and Spier, “Medieval Byzantine Magical Amulets”, pp. 33-34.


\(^{325}\) Ryan, “Ancient Demons”, p. 38.
(house spirit), the кикимора (female house spirit), but not the supernatural dead (the упырь and the еретик), neither the чёрт or the бес. Further on, the term can be used as name for personified illness and as a synonym of demon.

The Balkan traditions (Slavic and others) regard the nezhit to be an evil spirit, sometimes even the Devil himself. It is an unclean power, the bringer of different illnesses, which makes the affected person “non-alive”. However, the nezhit can also be a creature, similar to vampires, “the soul of a dead relative, which attacks sleeping people, sucks out their brain and makes them ill”. According to the Bulgarian tradition, the nezhit appears mainly as a perpetrator of illnesses of the head and of the senses. Interestingly enough, the Bulgarian nezhit does not have so much of a connection with fever. Causing fever is reserved for the other key Slavic perpetrators of illnesses: the тресавици (tresavitsi) – a group of female demons, with a strong connection with the sea.

Clearly, the nezhit is a composite figure. It seems that an archaic pre-Christian South Slavic supernatural being underwent strong Byzantine influence, when the Christian Byzantine motives met the South Slavic mythology. In its own turn, the Christian Byzantine tradition came as a carrier of older Mesopotamian elements. In its

---

330 “Tresavitsa” means “shaking” or “shaker”, of the same stem like “treska” fever.
essence and image, the Bulgarian nezhit processes old prototypes of the illness demon (like Lilitu/Lilith and Abyzou) and old Slavic mythological notions (like the elemental forces)\textsuperscript{331}, and reconnects them in an Eastern Orthodox non-canonical context, where the evil being meets powerful Christian figures. The nezhit appears in encounter-charms, which is typical. The nezhit keeps most of the features, characteristic for similar older illness perpetrators: it comes from the sea or from the sky; it brings headache and fever; it is expelled in remote places and in animals’ heads.\textsuperscript{332} The difference is that the nezhit is male and one single figure.

Although the nezhit is one (and not a group), he is still connected to the тресавици (tresavitsi), which are the Slavic female personifications of fever and other related ailments and symptoms. The tresavitsi are an interesting case by themselves. To begin with, the medical condition of fever is a palpable health problem, often encountered and treated in healing and apotropaic verbal magic. However, the fever does not appear in the form of personified evil power (or powers) in the extant medieval and early modern Bulgarian charms. At least, I did not find the tresavitsi as characters or protagonists in the source material of this dissertation.

In her anthology of medieval Bulgarian literature, Petkanova presents a text against fever from an undated Russian manuscript. While sharing a number of common features and historical routes, the Russian and the Bulgarian verbal magic traditions are

\textsuperscript{331} On the unanswered question about the connections between the nezhit and different Slavic pre-Christian supernatural beings, see Ovcharov, “Проклетият нежит”, pp. 106-107, and W. F. Ryan, “Eclectism in the Russian Charm Tradition,” in Roper, Charms and Charming in Europe, pp. 113-127.

\textsuperscript{332} Several key books provide valuable materials for comparison. For example, Ferdinand Ohrt, Danmarks Trylleformler 1 (Magic Formulae of Denmark) (Copenhagen:, Kristiania: FF publications, Northerns series, 3, 1917, 1921) gives opportunity for comparison with Danish material. Also, Fritz Pradel, Griechische und südtalienische Gebete, Beschwörungen und Rezepte des Mittelalters (Giessen: Alafred Töpelmann, 1907) provides Greek parallels. Adolf Spamer, Romanusbüchlein: historisch-philologischer Kommentat zu einem deutschen Zauberbuch (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1958) gives Western-European medieval parallels. Winkler, Salomo und die Karīna provides an insight to the Arabic tradition.
also rather different from each other. This is due to a number of various factors, which shaped the specific characteristic features of the two traditions, and determined the surviving amount of source materials. As William Francis Ryan aptly points out, “The peculiarity of the main Russian belief about the *triasavitsi* is that it has departed some way from the known Greek and South Slavic tradition.”

Indeed, the evil supernatural *tresavitsi* are present in other Slavic traditions from the Middle Ages and the Early Modern times, especially in Russian verbal magic. They are also largely present in the Bulgarian oral folklore tradition too. Based on secondary sources and comparisons, it is very probable that the *tresavitsi* as personifications of fever existed and occupied an important position in the medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal magic. However, there is no direct proof from primary Bulgarian sources from the period. For comparison, here is the Russian charm, presented by Petkanova:

*On the coast of the Red Sea, there is a stone tower, the great apostle Sisinnius is standing in the tower and sees that the sea rises up in a storm to the sky and twelve longhaired women emerge out of it, like a cursed devilish vision. The women said: We are the tresavitsy (тресавици) – the daughters of Tsar Herod. St. Sisinnius asked them: Cursed devils, why did you come here? They answered: We came here to torment the human race. We are going to hold and tie down and torment the one who is resisting us. And the one who is sleeping until late, who does not pray to*

---

333 Ryan, „Ancient Demons“, pp. 42-43.
334 Extensively discussed by Ryan in his book *The Bathhouse* and in his article „Ancient Demons and Russian Figures“.
335 As it is discussed above, there are differences between the medieval and early modern sources, and the oral folklore material, collected in nineteenth and twentieth century. See Todorova-Pirgova, Баяния и магия.
336 For example, the Pogodinov Index from eleventh century and the sermons of Joseph the Bearded from the eighteenth century. See Petkanova, “Апокрифните лечебни молитви”, pp. 66-68, and Angusheva and Dimitrova, „Другиите авторитети“, pp. 82-83.
337 Published in Modern Bulgarian translation by Petkanova, Стара българска литература т. 1, pp. 304-305.
338 The Bulgarian term *tresavići* literary means “shakers”. The name of the first sister derives from the same stem.
God, who does not keep the holidays, but after getting up starts eating and drinking, is a fawner of ours.

St. Sisinnius prayed to God: O, Lord, Lord! Save the human race from these accursed demons! And God sent him two angels Sachiel and Anos and the four evangelists. They started to beat the tresavitsy with four iron clubs, causing them three thousand wounds each every day. The tresavitsy begged: O, great St. apostle Sisinnius, Sikhail and Anos and the four evangelists: Luke, Mark, Mathew, John! Please, stop torturing us! In a place where your sacred names can be heard and in a family where your sacred names are praised, from this family we shall run away by three days and through three regions.

Then St. Sisinnius asked them: What are your devilish names? The first one answered: My name is Treseya (Тресья). The second answered: My name is Ogneya (Огнея) – like the stove is getting hot from the pinewood, the same way Ogneia is burning the human body. The third one said: My name is Ledeya (Ледея) - like a cold ice, Ledeia hates the humankind and because of her one cannot warm oneself even in a stove. The forth one said: My name is Gneteya (Гнетья). Gneteia settles in the human ribs and human internals squirm, and if this man wants to eat, he can eat, but everything is coming out from his soul. The fifth said: My name is Grunusha (Грунуша). She settles in the human chest, the lungs are starting to rot and the chest starts to rattle from the inside. The sixth said: My name is Gluheya (Глухея). She settles in the human head, blocks up the ears, breaks the head and the person becomes deaf. The seventh said: My name is Puhneya (Пухнея). Puhneia makes the people to swell. The ninth said: My name is Zhulteya (Жълтея). Zhulteia is like the yellow flowers growing in the field. The tenth said: My name is Karkusha (Каркуша). She too is more evil than the others are, she does not let the man to sleep at night, the devils go to that man and his mind goes mad. The twelfth said: My name is Gledeya (Гледея). She and she too is more evil than the others are, she does not let the man to sleep at night, the devils go to that man and his mind goes mad. The twelfth said: My name is Neveya (Невея). Neveya is the oldest sister of the tresavitsi, she is the one that cut the head of John the Baptist; she is the most evil of all. She catches the man and he cannot survive.

339 The Shaking One
340 The Fiery One
341 The Icy One
342 The Oppressing One
343 The Gnawing One
344 The Deaf One
345 The Swelling One
346 The Yellow One
347 Literary, “The one that is always awake”
348 Probably the name is etymologically related to the Slavic mythological being навь, in plural нави, which are the ghosts of unbaptized babies and small children.
Unlike the *nezhit*, who is always one and a male, the personified *tresavitsi* always appear as a group of females (sisters). According to the *Pogodinov Index*, the Bogomil priest Yeremiya (поп Йеремия) wrote a prayer against fever, where the *tresavitsi* are seven sisters. In the example above, they are twelve in number. The Russian tradition always presents them as a group of sisters, the daughters of King Herod or even Satan. In the Bulgarian folklore tradition, the *tresavitsi* fit in the usual pattern to present certain illnesses as sisters, who appear and act together. For example, that is the case with illnesses like smallpox (presented as two sisters) and erysipelas (presented as two sisters, a red one and a white one). The Slavic fevers have a Mesopotamian parallels. In one Babylonian charm, the headache, the “sickness of night and day” brings burning in the muscles, scorches the members, shakes the limbs, wastes the body, weakens the whole man, etc.

The number of illnesses or illness-perpetrators is employed differently in the different cases. Although in the Byzantine charms the headache is both “I” and “we”, the *nezhit* in the Bulgarian texts is always one. The fevers are many in number. The South

---


351 Yeremiya (Йеремия) is Bulgarian Christian priest, who lived in tenth century. He is regarded to be a disciple of priest Bogomil (поп Богомил), the heresiarch of the Bogomilism in Bulgaria. The data about priest Yeremiya are rather scarce and unclear. Most probably, he wrote several apocryphal texts, including a prayer against fever. See Dimitri Obolensky, *The Bogomils: A Study in Balkan Neo-Manichaeism* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 111-167 and 271-277.


354 Petkanova, “Апокрифните лекебни молитви”, p. 67; Todorova-Pirgova, Бания и магия, passim.

Italian charms speak of numerous illnesses and afflictions, usually nine or twelve\textsuperscript{356}. As it is showed below, the evil veshtitsa is one, but has many names.

In its own turn, the Slavic charm with the twelve fever-sisters has a number of Mesopotamian parallels. In the Babylonian tradition, there are certain evil spirits, which are called The Seven\textsuperscript{357}. They are “the evil cough”, who live in the depth of Ocean and bring illnesses to humankind.\textsuperscript{358} They are also described as forces of nature and animals: the South Wind; a dragon with mouth agape; a grim leopard that carries off the young; a terrible serpent; a furious beast; a rampant [evil being]; and the evil windstorm.\textsuperscript{359} Such remote and desolate locations are the birthplace of The Seven:\textsuperscript{360}

\begin{quote}
Those seven were born in the Mountain of Sunset, 
And were reared in the Mountain of dawn, 
They dwell within the caves of the earth, 
And amid the desolate places of the earth they live, 
Unknown in heaven and earth, 
They are arrayed with terror, 
Among the Wise Gods there is no knowledge of them, 
They have no name in heaven or earth.
\end{quote}

Probably due to Babylonian influence, a Syriac charm tells about “seven accursed brothers, accursed sons, destructive ones, sons of men of destruction”\textsuperscript{361}. They creep along on their knees and move upon their hands. Their activity is to eat flesh and to drink blood. These seven ghoulish beings are cursed in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Also, God is asked to break their teeth and cut their sinews and the veins of their neck, thus the evil seven brothers will not be able to harm either the sheep nor the

\textsuperscript{356} Pradel, Gebete, p. 75. 
\textsuperscript{357} Thompson, The Devils and Evil Spirit, vol. I, p. XLII. 
\textsuperscript{359} Thompson, The Devils and Evil Spirits, vol. I, p. 89. The Seven are represented on a Mesopotamian amulet. Placed above an image of Lamashu, The Seven stand in line, with their right hands raised in the air. Each of The Seven has a human body, but a head of a different animal. See Pócs, “Lilith és kísérete”, p. 220. 
\textsuperscript{360} Thompson, The Devils and Evil Spirits, vol. I, p. 191. 
\textsuperscript{361} Thompson, The Devils and Evil Spirits, vol. I, p. XLIV.
oxen of the person, who carries they charm in a written form. Finally, the evil beings are bound in the name of Gabriel and Michael, and ordered to vanish forever, like smoke before the wind.

Another curious parallel can be seen in a Byzantine charm against epilepsy and problems with the bile.\textsuperscript{362} In the text, Jesus Christ, Michael and Gabriel meet not the illness, but thirteen different plants and herbs, some of which are poisonous. The plants are going to God’s servant, in order to drink his blood, to eat his flesh and to darken the light, so that the human will not be able to praise God’s creation. Jesus Christ expels them in the mountain and into the head of the deer.

5. 2. 2. The witch

The tresavitsi have their main adversary in the person of Saint Sisinnius: a complex figure, composed of the features of different Christian figures, intermingled with Jewish, heretic and pagan elements and beliefs\textsuperscript{363}. While the personified fevers themselves do not appear as protagonists in the Bulgarian material, St. Sisinnius can be found in Bulgarian charms against the veshtitsa and the Devil. Being a good supernatural figure, St. Sisinnius will be discussed in more details below, together with positive figures like Archangel Michael. Their evil adversary the веџица (veshtitsa), and her companions the мора (mora), the вила (vila), and the дявол (the Devil), who all share common features with both the nezhit and the tresavitsi, will be presented here.

Etymologically, the Bulgarian word веџица (veshtitsa) means “skillful”, “knowledgeable”, “wise”\textsuperscript{364}. It can be roughly translated as “witch”, although this

\textsuperscript{362} Vassiliev, Anecdota, p. LXVIII.
\textsuperscript{364} On the veshtitsa in Bulgarian folklore and popular beliefs, see [Dimitъr Marinov] Димитър Маринов, Народна вяра и религиозни народни обичаи (Popular Beliefs and Popular Religious Customs),
translation does not transmit all the complex notions behind the Bulgarian and the English terms. The veshtitsa from the Bulgarian verbal charms is an evil supernatural female being. In the magical context of eastern and central Europe, this veshtitsa/witch belongs to “type “C”, the “supernatural” or “night” witches”.\textsuperscript{365} Having the basic characteristics of a chthonic goddess,\textsuperscript{366} the figure of the veshtitsa is an alloy of features, coming from various belief traditions. This alloy is clearly visible in the charms too.

The medieval and early modern charms against the veshtitsa come from the following sources:

- Amulet (lead lamella) from the tenth century, excavated near the city of Varna (Eastern Bulgaria) – one charm. The text is of the encounter-type of narrative, where the veshtitsa meets Archangel Michael and tells him her names.\textsuperscript{367}

- Требник sine №, from the seventeenth century, kept in the National Library in Belgrade – one charm of the same type.\textsuperscript{368}

- Часослов, seventeenth century, Sofia, National Library, № 631, fol. 162 – one charm. The text tells how St. Sisinnius defeats all kind of evil beings, including the veshtitsa.\textsuperscript{369}


\textsuperscript{365} Pócs, \textit{Between the Living and the Dead}, p. 11. Concerning the veshtitsa/witch as malevolent human, see Éva Pócs, \textit{Fairies and Witches at the Boundary of South-Eastern and Central Europe} (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia/Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1989), especially pp. 7 and 39-66, with a comprehensive presentation of “the process by which mythical beings were transformed into human beings and “demonic” characteristics became attributes of the “human witch”.

\textsuperscript{366} On the chthonic side, the most relevant here are the Thraco-Greek goddesses Hekate, Artemis (in her chthonic aspect) and Semele. There were well-developed and widespread independent Slavic system of beliefs in chthonic deities and nature spirits. The Thraco-Greek notions influenced these beliefs only later, when the Slavs arrived on the Balkan Peninsula. See Pócs, \textit{Fairies and Witches}, p. 15.

\textsuperscript{367} Popkonstantinov, “Оловен амулет с апокрифен текст от Варненския музей”, p. 281.

\textsuperscript{368} Kačanovskij, “Апокрифне молитве, гатanja и приче”, p. 155
• Clerical book sine №, from 1827, kept in a monastery in Montenegro – one charm of the encounter-type, where the veshtitsa meets Archangel Michael.\textsuperscript{370}

In addition to these, the veshtitsa is mentioned in three protective charms against evil powers, coming from the Никетово молитвениче, 1787, Sofia, National Library, № 646, fol. 51v, 61, and 69. The texts are direct commands to the evil beings (including the veshtitsa) to do no harm to humans. Two of the Sisinnius-charms from the thirteenth century Драголов сборник, discussed below, also contain lists of names.\textsuperscript{371}

The typical narrative of the veshtitsa can be seen in the charm, preserved on the amulet from the tenth century\textsuperscript{372}:

\textit{The veshtitsa said: “I uproot a fruit tree, I tie female youth, I defeat female malice, I approach and enter the human dwelling as a hen, as a dove, as a snake...” And Archangel Michael said: “Tell me your clan!” 1\textsuperscript{st} name mora, 2\textsuperscript{nd} veshtitsa, 3\textsuperscript{rd} vizusa, 4\textsuperscript{th} makarila, 5\textsuperscript{th} siyana, 6\textsuperscript{th} evgelusa, 7\textsuperscript{th} navradulia, 8\textsuperscript{th} living fire, 9\textsuperscript{th} midday-one, 10\textsuperscript{th} strangler or children...}

Although the amulet itself is not very well preserved, the content of the text is clear. It is a typical encounter-charm, very similar to the charms against the nezhit. The pivotal element and the big difference here is the list of the veshtitsa’s names. The same charm appears again, several centuries later, in a seventeenth century manuscript\textsuperscript{373}:

\textit{The witch said: “I uproot a fruit tree, I tie female beauty, I defeat female malice. I am coming closer and I shall enter the human dwelling as a hen, as a she-dove, as a snake. I strangle the beautiful children and that is why they call me „murderer”. When the true word of God was born, I went there to deceive it. Archangel Michael found me and fettered me, and I swore and said: “I swear in the throne of the Supreme and in the supreme...}

\textsuperscript{369} Tsonev, Catalogue, vol. II., pp. 149-150.
\textsuperscript{370} Kovačević, “Nekoliko priloga staroj srpskoj književnosti”, p. 283
\textsuperscript{371} The charms from the Драголов сборник are analysed in the subchapter on St. Sisinius, because of their relevance for the discussion on the legendary saint, and because there the lists of names a more of an attribute of the devil.
\textsuperscript{372} Amulet (lead lamella) from the tenth century. Popkonstantinov, “Оловен амулет с апокрифен текст от Варненски музей”, p. 283. See no. 11 in the catalogue.

The witch told Archistrategos Michael: “Let me go and I shall swear: wherever they pronounce these names, no devil will ever enter. Amen. Neither to the sleeping one, nor to the eating ones, nor at midnight, nor at noon, today, ever and forever, through the ages. Amen.”

This narrative is fuller and more elaborated, but the focus is the same: the list of the veshtitsa’s names. There is no such list in the charms against the nezhit, but the naming is essential in the charm against the tresavitsi. Knowing and pronouncing the name (or the names) of a supernatural entity is a way to control or defeat it. This is a common notion in verbal magic. The name of a divine being or thing is the simplest form of word of power. Knowing the name means to know and to control the supernatural enemy.

To mention a few relevant examples, there is the Egyptian (and later Coptic) mythology and magic, where the goddess Isis has a large amount of various names, employed in spells. There is the Jewish tradition, where King Solomon orders the demons to tell their names, and thus he has the power to command them. There is the Jewish folklore, where the prophet Elijah encounters Lilith, and forces her to tell him the full list of her names (twelve in number). Then Lilith promises that she will not harm the

---

374 For Mesopotamian examples, see Thompson, The Devils and Evil Spirits, vol. II, p. XXII.
house, where these names are at display. There are the Byzantine verbal charms and later the Greek folklore, where Gyllou has a long list of names (twelve or twelve and a half or forty).

On the native Bulgarian side, there is the Slavic mythology and folklore, where it is very common for spirits, demons, illnesses, certain plants and animals to have euphemistic or flattering nicknames, or to be addressed via a list of names and titles. For example, the elemental spirits (like the domovoy, the leshii and the rusalka) are referred to as “the lord”, “the master”, “the kind one”. Animals like the snake and the bear are called “king of the forest” and “the golden one”.

In the Bulgarian charms, the veshtitsa’s supernatural adversary (archangel Michael) is able to apply physical means against her – fettering her in chains and beating her with an iron rod, as we can see in the charm below. Thus, he receives the list of names, which is the strongest and most effective weapon, which the humans can have and use against it. The archangel defeats the evil being in physical battle and through physical strength and weapons, because they both come from and inhabit the same supernatural realm – the Other World. They are both supernatural figures with supernatural powers. The humans, however, can only achieve such a victory through the magical names of the veshtitsa. The real victory of the archangel is the purchase of the names. Thus, the inhabitants of Our World too can defeat the invader from the Other World. This can happen only with this special piece of verbal magic: the list of names.

---

379 Ryan, The Bathhouse, pp. 245-266.
In contrast to the nezhit, the veshtitsa is addressed by a list of names and has a physical description. This can be seen in a charm from an eighteenth century manuscript.\(^{380}\)

_Then saint archangel Michael went on the Eleon Mountain and met a veshtitsa, who had long hair down to the ground and eyes of fire and rapacious hands and teeth. And the archangel asked: ”Where do you come from and what are you?” And she answered: ”I am a veshtitsa and I enter the house as a snake. Since Virgin Mary gave birth, I’ve been learning to steal new-born babies.” The archangel tied her and started beating her with an iron stick with iron nails. And told her: ”I shall not let you go, until you tell me your names.” And she swore: ”I swear in Lord Sabbaoth, whoever knows my names, I cannot do any harm to him, and neither to the one, who caries them with him. My names are: first – veshtitsa, second – twice circumcised, third – circumcised, fourth – nerusha, fifth – veda, sixth – murderer, seventh – osina, eighth – vila, ninth – vilana, tenth – moon, eleventh – harlot, twelfth – slanderer, thirteenth – multiple, fourteenth – saula, fifteenth – inasina, sixteenth – mora, seventeenth – enemy, eighteenth – sati, nineteenth – kumnago.” She said all the names._

In the Bulgarian material, the number of the veshtitsa’s names varies ten,\(^{381}\) twelve and nineteen. While some of the epithets are quite clear, others remain obscure and enigmatic. Up to my knowledge, there is no research, dealing with the meaning, the origin and the etymology of these names.\(^{382}\)

To start with the clearer cases, like for example, the name _vizusa_ (vizusa). It is a corrupted form of the name of the female demon Abyzou, whom we met already above, and who is responsible for miscarriages and infant mortality.\(^{383}\) The epithet _vizusa_ represents perfectly the general profile of the veshtitsa, like a distinctive “business card” for her child-killing/child-stealing activities. As a reincarnation of the old Mesopotamian

---

\(^{380}\) Kovačević, “_Nekoliko priloga_”, p. 283. See no. 13 in the catalogue.

\(^{381}\) In the case of the amulet, there were probably more names on the damaged part.

\(^{382}\) For a summary and comparative tables of the lists of names, see Velinova, “Българо-Сръбските книжовни връзки”, pp. 172-173.

female storm-demon\textsuperscript{384}, \textit{vizusa} is one more example of how stable and widespread is the Lilîtu/Lilith/Gyllou motive\textsuperscript{385}. The name \textit{vizusa} corresponds to other nicknames in the lists, like “strangler of children” and “thief of the milk of the newborns”.

As a name of the night-witch, the name Abyzou appears in two South Italian variants of the charm\textsuperscript{386}. In both texts, Archangel Michael meets an evil supernatural being. In the first text, the being is called Ἀβυζοῦ and has forty names. The third name from the list is ταβυζου. In the second text, the evil is called Pataxaria (Παταξαρία), but also has a many names, twelve in number. In this list, the fourth name is βυζου and the fifth name is ἀβυδαζου. In the Jewish encounter-charm with the prophet Elijah, there are the names Abithu, Amisu and Amisrofuh.\textsuperscript{387}

In broader European context, the name \textit{mopa} (\textit{mora}) signifies “human beings who are able to send their souls out at night while in trance. Thus, they can make journeys by assuming the shapes of animals (snakes, butterflies, mice, hens, cats). They infiltrate people’s dwellings as incubi, confinement demons, or even as vampires, and they “ride upon” or torment people.”\textsuperscript{388} In the south Slavic context, the name \textit{mopa} (\textit{mora}) stands also for an evil spirit, which is usually female. The \textit{mora} can be a returning dead soul, or the soul of dead people, who were \textit{moras} during their lifetime.\textsuperscript{389} This last definition matches the \textit{mora} from the charms. As another name of the \textit{veshtitsa}, it clearly expresses

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{384} Barb argues that the name Abyzou comes (via the Greek ἀβυσσος “bottomless pit”) from the Mesopotamian Abzu (the primordial sea). See Barb, “Antaura”, p. 6.
\textsuperscript{385} In the Bulgarian case, this is not a surprise, give the strong influence from the Byzantine tradition, where Gyllou/Abyzou occupies a prominent position.
\textsuperscript{387} Pócs, “Lilith és kísérete”, p. 214.
\textsuperscript{388} Pócs, \textit{Between the Living and the Dead}, pp. 31-33. The word “mora” is related to the Indo-European root *mor-/*mer-, meaning “death”, “horror” and “to die”. Compare with the Latin word \textit{mors} “death”, the Slavic word \textit{mop} “death, pestilence, plague”, the English and French words “nightmare” and “cauchemar”, the Romanian evil supernatural being \textit{moroi}, and with the name of the goddess Morrígan (“Phantom Queen”) from the Irish mythology.
\textsuperscript{389} Ibidem.
\end{flushright}
her aggressive and invasive supernatural essence. The *mora veshtitsa* disguises as an animal, and penetrates the human habitat, in order to harm and damage. Her transfiguration abilities make her aggression effective and dangerous. These abilities are also very characteristic feature of the fairies (like the *вила* (*vila*) – often they are zoomorphic beings or can easily turn into a bird, wolf or a snake.\(^{390}\)

The name *mora* can be related to a name, found in a South Italian charm, written in Greek letters.\(^{391}\) There, the text exorcises an evil supernatural being, called *Μούρου/Muru*, in the name of God, Virgin Mary, St. John the Baptist and all the saints. Pradel comments that the name *Μούρου/Muru* maybe has some etymological connection with the Greek word μαῦρος. As the Devil is called ὁ μαῦρος (the black one), possibly the epithet was transferred to other evil demonic beings.\(^{392}\)

This leads to the next name, the *вила* (*vila*), which is a native Slavic word. In the south Slavic tradition, the names *вила* (*vila*) and *вилана* (*vilana*)\(^{393}\) stand for a fairy, which is a demonic or goddess-like supernatural female being who appears periodically among the humans. Closely connected with death, the *vila* has harmful, trouble-making, illness-bringing aspects. On the other hand, she has fertility preserving/fertility-providing features.\(^{394}\) The fairy is also a nature spirit. As cultural phenomena, the fairies are very complex figures. They

---

\(^{390}\) Pócs, *Fairies and Witches*, p. 15.


\(^{392}\) Ibidem, p. 95.

\(^{393}\) Both names come from an Indo-European root, meaning “wind”. Appearance in a storm or a whirlwind is an important characteristic of the *vilas*. It is a sign for their relations with the storm demons of the Balkans, which is discussed below. For comparison, the Mesopotamian Lilitu was originally a wind demon or storm demon. See Pócs, *Fairies and Witches*, pp.13-14.

the combination of the death/fertility goddess and nature spirit/nymph features which particularly characterizes the Balkan fairies.\(^{395}\)

Most importantly, the fairies on the Balkans are connected and contaminated with other demonic beings, namely the infernal or winter or storm demons. These are for example the dragons, the unbaptized and the werewolves. They bring bad weather and destroy the crops, or appear around the winter solstice, at new moon, and in other “dark” periods, invading human dwellings, assaulting people and kidnapping children.\(^{396}\)

For some of the other names of the veshtiitsa, only hypothetical conjectures can be made. For example, the name \(наврадулия\) (\(navradulia\)) is most possibly a very corrupted form of the name Anabardalea,\(^{397}\) which appears as the second name of Abyzou in apotropaic silver amulet from Byzantium.\(^{398}\) Anabardalea is also one of the names of Gyllou.\(^{399}\) In a Romanian version of the charm, quoted by Winkler,\(^{400}\) a demoness has nineteen names, among which there is the name \(novadaria\). Winkler does not give any etymology.

The name \(евгелуса\) (\(evgelusa\)) seems to be of Greek origin, or shaped after a Greek model. Maybe it is a placating epithet for Gyllou, meaning “Good Gyllou” (from the Greek \(εὖ\) meaning “good, well” and \(γελλώ\) (plural \(γελλοῦνες\)), which is one of the variants of the demoness’ name). It may possibly also come from the Greek \(εὖ\) and

---

\(^{395}\) Pócs, *Fairies and Witches*, p. 12.

\(^{396}\) Pócs, *Fairies and Witches*, pp. 22-27.

\(^{397}\) \(Αναβαρδάλεα\) in the Greek original. Phonetically, the transformation of the word “anabardalea” into the word “navradulia” is possible, especially in the light of factors like the phonetic developments in the Greek language and the corruption of words, borrowed from foreign languages and cultures.


γενούσσα meaning “born” (such a name could be a placating epithet meaning “of good birth”). However, the relation with the Byzantine Gyllou seems the most probable.401

The name макарила (makarila) seems to be of Greek origin too. It is a possibility that it hints to the Greek goddess Makaria, mentioned in the tenth-century Byzantine encyclopedia *The Suda*. Makaria is a daughter of Hades and brings blessed death.402

Other names from the list remain without any real meaning and etymology. For example, the word сияна (siyana) only exists as a female name in modern Bulgarian language, and means, “glowing”. However, some lists contain the names сана (sana), сина (sina) and синая (sinaya), which seem to be related to the name of the Mount Sinai.403 The name неруша (nerusha) seems to be Slavic too, probably etymologically related to the word нав,404 meaning an evil spirit of a child, who was stillborn or died unbaptized. The name саула (saula) maybe comes from the name of the biblical king Saul, who consulted a necromancer, the so-called Witch of Endor (I Sam. 28: 3-25).405 The name кумнаго (kumnago) is very unclear too. In the late Byzantine demonology, discussed by Greenfield,406 there is a demon called Gukumon (Γούκουμόν). Another (very hypothetical) option is the female demon Kumeatēl from *The Testament of Solomon*, who causes shivering and torpor.407

---

402 From the Greek μάκαρ, meaning “blessed, happy”.
404 See above, the Russian charm against *tresavitsi*.
The physical look of the veshtitsa is described too, albeit rather briefly. She has “long hair down to the ground and eyes of fire and rapacious hands and teeth”. Such an image is rather typical for the winter demons, with their hellish and deformed bodies and features. The outlook of the veshtitsa has a close parallel in the physical appearance of the longhaired female tresavitsi. The long loose hair is one of the main physical attributes of the fairies; they even cover their naked bodies with it. The shiny eyes, the eyes like fire or other accompanying luminous phenomena are related to various liminal and chthonic beings: to the souls of unbaptized, the returning dead, the werewolves, the guardian animals from the underworld, and to goddesses like Hecate. The horrific physical appearance of the Bulgarian veshtitsa has a parallel in a Babylonian charm, where the headache is described as following:\footnote{409}

A rushing hag-demon,  
Granting no rest, nor giving kindly sleep.  
It is the sickness of night and day,  
Whose head is that of a demon,  
Whose shape is as the Whirlwind;  
Its appearance is as the darkening heavens,  
And its face as the deep shadow of the forest.

The physical appearance of the veshtitsa carries similarities to the Mesopotamian descriptions of gods, demons and monsters.\footnote{410} For example, the goddess Nin-tu has horns and her lower body is covered with scales like those of a snake. The sea-monster Sassu-urinnu has the head of a serpent, feet with claws and curled horns. Another goddess (probably an avatar of Ereshkigal) has horns and the body of a fish. An unknown Babylonian god has horns, the body of a lion, wings and a human face. Laḫmu has wings.

\footnote{408}{The very long hair is very typical for the Slavic nature spirits and other supernatural beings.}  
\footnote{409}{Thompson, \textit{The Devils and Evil Spirits}, vol. II, p. 87.}  
\footnote{410}{Thompson, \textit{The Devils and Evil Spirits}, vol. II, pp. 147-159.}
half of his body is human, the other half if that of a dog. Two other goddesses have wings like birds.

In terms of names, image and actions of the veshtitsa, the medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal magic has a rich variety of traditions to draw upon. In her own words, she has significant supernatural abilities and her focus is on harming and killing children. In this respect, she is very close to the Lilith/Gyllou figure. The shape shifting is central for the veshtitsa. She can turn into a hen, a dove and a snake. The veshtitsa’s ability for transfiguration connects her once more with the chthonic aspects of both the fairies and the winter demons.

The same is valid for the animal symbolism and imagery, which stays more or less the same in all the charms. The snake has an immensely rich and complex history as special mythical animal, and it will be addressed below. Clearly, all the supernatural figures, relevant here, are de facto related to the snake too. In the Slavic mythology, this animal is an important supernatural being, regarded to be a chthonic elemental spirit, a magical king or queen of the forest, a patron and guardian of the house, or a zoomorphic manifestation of unclean infernal powers. The chthonic goddess Hecate has snakes as companions. In the Balkans, the fairies can appear as partially women, partially snakes. The storm demons are most often in the shape of a dragon or a snake. Even the winter demons can be cynocephalus dragons, i.e. snakes with wolf or dog heads.

The snake imagery of the veshtitsa has even older parallels in the Mesopotamian tradition too. The headache is “like a snake, like a snake, a snake it bindeth the head, so that he [the ill person] cannot rest by day or night.”

---

called The Seven have animalistic behavior, creep like a snake, pollute the room like mice, and give tongue like hounds.

The bird imagery (hen and dove) connects the veshtitsa with the fairies in their role as nature spirits: “The most usual is the transformation of a woman figure into a bird, and vice versa, e.g. the women flying in flocks settle on the trees and are transformed into crows or wild geese.” Even when anthropomorphic, the fairies may have some bird attributes, like bird’s talons and wings. The souls of the unbaptized also appear as birds or as birds with a child’s head. For comparison, Lilîtu/Lilith has bird wings and legs. The Greek and Roman striges appear as owls. The Thraco-Greek harpies are half-birds, half-women, and the lamias have bird wing and legs, eat human flesh and kill or steal newborn babies. In a South Italian charm the evil spirit can appear as both a human and a bird. There the demon says: “Here is my name, they call me Pataxaria (Παταξαρία)”, which seems to be connected to a Greek exclamation to frighten away birds.

The shape-shifting ability (especially into an animal) is very important. In the magical belief system, it is this particular transformation that makes the veshtitsa so dangerous and so successful in her evil activities. On the one hand, her animal metamorphoses are well known, and the belief and the charms warn against them. The humans should be aware and careful, when encountering such animals, especially in unusual or sinister circumstances. On the other hand, the complete avoidance of such common animals is de facto impossible, especially in rural and pre-industrial settings.

---

413 Pócs, Fairies and Witches, pp. 15-16.
414 The harpies bring sudden death. Literary, the name means “snatchers”.
415 Pradel, Gebete, pp. 20 and 95.
416 Pradel, Gebete, p. 89.
417 For example, at times (at night, at noon, on unclean days, at full moon, etc.) and at places (crossroads, wells, forests, barns, etc.), connected with the Other World and the supernatural.
Thus, the *veshtitsa* has all chances to cross the border and to sneak into Our World, into the human dwelling places and families. As a Babylonian charm says, the shivering “hath covered the man like a garment…it taketh his shape in the street and none can bind it.”

Another Babylonian text tells that “The evil Fever hath come like a deluge”, yet the biggest danger comes from its sneaky ways.

> It standeth beside a man, yet none can see it,
> It sitteth beside a man, yet none can see it.
> When it entereth the house its appearance is unknown,
> When it goeth forth from the house it is not perceived.

A central element of the charms’ narrative is that the *veshtitsa* invades the human homes. She shape shifts into a common, ordinary and unremarkable animal, sneaks into the house and harms its inhabitants. The *veshtitsa* completely and aggressively crosses the border between the supernatural and the human world. While the *nezhit* is simply focused on bringing the affliction to a human individual, the *veshtitsa* assaults the humans, their dwellings and (most importantly!) their newborn children. While the *nezhit* and the *tresavitsi* are rather specialized illness-perpetrators with a limited operative field, the *veshtitsa* carries on a total massive attack against the entire human life. Her aggression is mainly towards the newborn babies, she says: “I strangle the beautiful children and that is why they call me „murderer” and “Since Virgin Mary gave birth, I’ve been learning to steal new-born babies.” Yet, there is a clear indication for other harmful activities too: “I uproot a fruit tree, I tie female youth”.

There is also the clear statement: “I am a *veshtitsa* and I enter the house as a snake”. “Enter the house” is the center of the phrase. Clearly, it is not possible to carry on each of these particular evil deeds, without transgressing into the human daily life. This is

---

418 Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits*, vol. II, p. 81
419 Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits*, vol. II, p. 11.
the evil essence of the *veshtitsa*; this is why she is so dangerous. For once, she is capable of shape shifting, of disguising herself, and of creeping into the human world and into the human abode. Already inside, she is capable of killing and stealing newborn babies, of damaging the crops and the health, and even of threatening the entire community with her slander. She is a supernatural deceiver and killer, who penetrates the actual fabric of human everyday life and existence.

The supernatural invasion in the human world is described in the Mesopotamian tradition. According to a Babylonian charm, the evil spirits behave in the same way as the *veshtitsa*:

> The highest walls, the thickest walls,  
> Like a flood they pass.  
> From house to house they break through,  
> No door can shut them out,  
> No bolt can turn them back,  
> Through the door like a snake they glide,  
> Through the hinge like the wind they blow,  
> Estranging the wife from the embrace of a husband,  
> Snatching the child from the loins of a man.

Another Babylonian text describes the demons that rage against humankind, spilling the human blood, devouring human flesh, sucking human veins:

> Demons like raging bulls, great ghosts,  
> Ghosts that break through all houses,  
> Demons that have no shame,  
> Seven are they!

A third Babylonian charm directly expels the demons:

> Into my house may they not enter,  
> My fence may they not break through,  
> Into my chamber may they not enter.

---

422 Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits*, vol. I, p. 11.
The picture, described by the Mesopotamian texts is essentially the same as the picture from the Bulgarian charms. There is an evil supernatural being (or beings) with semi-human, semi-animal features. Disguised as a snake and a windstorm, this evil being enters into human dwellings in order to steal children and to bring illness, harm and death. Remarkably, this archetypical evil supernatural figure remains more or less the same in the course of several millennia, and is persistently transmitted between traditions.

There are cases, when the *mora* and the *vila* are not names of the *veshtitsa*, but separate figures. There is an example in two charms from the eighteenth century.\(^{423}\) The text of the first one is as follows:

*In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. I step up at the peak, Satan, and I see you condemned by the Lord and by the Lord’s Prayer, to be dust and ashes. In the name of the Holy Cross, if the guardian angel that protects me steps away from me, the deceiving evil spirits and their servants will attack me. I praise Christ and I fear the Lord. St. Peter and St. Paul and the Holy Mother of God and St. Cosmas and Damian and Joachim and Anna, amen, and all the saints. May you shut down the jaws of the vila, the jaws of the Devil, all horrible jaws, take them into the sea, shut down the mouth of the veshtitsa, shut down the jaws of the vampire, tie them and throw them into the sea, let them stay there until the end of time. Glorious and pure Holy Cross, protect and guard this home and the ones living in it, here a prayer is being said from dawn till dusk, from dusk till dawn, from dawn until the end of the world and time. Amen.*

The texts of the second charm is the following:\(^{424}\)

*Go away, cursed Satan from all the corners of the temple and from this place, where the servant of God Niketa is bowing down, sleeping, and praying to the angels. They are standing in front of the gates, at the Eleon Mountain and holding swords of flames. They are chasing away all the evil and the evil power and deceit. And the apostles Peter and Paul are summoned to curse the mora and the veshtitsa and the Devil and all the envious and unclean spirits. In the evening and at midnight, when no dogs...*
are barking and no roosters are singing, then you, cursed Satan, shall do no harm to Niketa, but go to your ugliness, I curse you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, now and forever. Amen.

In these two examples, we can see the veshtitsa in the company of several other evil beings. In the first charm they are called “deceiving evil spirits and their servants”, and in the second charm “envious and unclean spirits.” Two of them are the mora and the vila, whose nature was discussed above. The others are Satan (Сатана), the Devil (дявол), and the vampire (вампир). As notions, characteristics and images, all three of them have a long and complex history and development, both canonical and non-canonical. There is also a lot of scholarly research done, and abundant and extensive secondary literature is available on these topics. Here, I shall discuss Satan, the Devil and the vampire only in terms of their role in the charms, where they appear as unclean spirits, connected to the veshtitsa.

Up to my knowledge, this is the one and only appearance of the word “vampire” in the medieval Bulgarian material of verbal charms. Actually, it is not very clear what exactly the term signifies here: a blood-sucking evil supernatural being, or a blood-sucking dead human, coming out from the grave. There are blood-sucking evil supernatural beings in the Thraco-Greek belief system, for example the above mentioned

---


striges and lamias. The blood-sucking beings and spirits appear in the Slavic mythology too, for example the upyr, the bias and the souls of the people who died from unnatural/untimely death. As this particular Bulgarian text comes from a relatively late manuscript (dated 1787), hypothetically it might have been also influenced by the wave of early modern vampirism cases and stories about dead people, who return form the grave to attack and suck blood.⁴²⁷

In this particular charm, it seems that the vampire is simply one from the group of the evil spirits, threatening Niketa. While Satan is presented as the chief evil supernatural figure, the vampire seems to be one of his servants. The two charms give kind of hierarchy of the evil beings. Satan is on the top, he commands the unclean and evil spirits, and unleashes them on the humans. The vila, the veshtitsa, the vampire and the mora are the members of Satan’s sinister horde. In my opinion, this host of evil supernatural beings, lead and commanded by Satan, is reminiscent of the hierarchy of Hell, as we can see it in the canonical Christian demonology. Here, the legions and ranks of demons are replaced by the evil beings from the popular beliefs. Satan remains as the supreme evil head, in the canonical Christian sense. Defeated and condemned by the Lord, Satan is a deceiving evil spirit, destined to preside over other deceiving evil spirits. This time, however, he is ruling over unclean and evil figures, coming from various mixed Christian and pre-Christian sources. These two charms clearly reflect the merging of Christian and pre-Christian traditions. They are a good example not only for syncretism in verbal magic, but also for popular religion in practice and use.

Concerning the more specific features of the vampire, the texts speak about "jaws of the vampire", which suggests some kind of biting/devouring/blood-sucking activity. Clearly, the information is rather scarce. In my understanding, the vampire stands a bit out of place here, in this charm. To me, it seems like a ready model or construct, borrowed or copied from some source, different from verbal magic and canonical prayers. Perhaps, the presence of the vampire in the charm is a result of an actual strong impact of the oral folklore tradition. Of course, this is only a hypothesis. Further research can place this particular charm and its vampire can in the context of rural Bulgarian folklore from the twentieth and twenty-first century. The history of the manuscript and its owner/author Niketa can also be examined in more details. This might possibly reveal texts, traditions, ideas and motives, which influenced the author and the shaping of the content of his book, including the appearance of the vampire in the text of the charm.

In the last two charms above, the figure of the Devil (дявол) is the canonical Christian supernatural evil figure. There is, however, another charm, where this being appears with a peculiar shift. He is in particular relation with bad weather and natural disasters, which is a specific supernatural profile. The following fifteenth-sixteenth century charm from a manuscript is an example:

Let us pray to the Lord! The priest must say: Indeed Our Lord Jesus Christ justfully, rightfully and well put Archangel Michael to guard the rivers, so that the Devil will not have any power upon them. God came with a great oath with the Father, with the Holy Ghost, to expel through

---

428 The Никетово сборниче (Miscellany of Niketa). Tsonnev, Catalogue, vol. II, pp. 161-166. It is one of the rare cases, when we know by name who is the author and owner of an early modern Bulgarian manuscript. See Diana Atanassova, “The Prayer-Book of Niketa (No. 646 NBKM): A Case Study” (Scripta & e-Scripta (1/2003), pp. 187-196.
the Holy Trinity the Devil from the rivers, so that he will not have any power over the labor of the Christians, destroying it with a heavy rain. I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the Living True God and His Pure Mother Mary, betrothed to Joseph! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of all the angels, created by God! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the four angles of the sky! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the four evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, who are supporting the sky and the earth! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the great city of Jerusalem, where all the righteous people are resting! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the twelve apostles! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the sixteen prophets! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the forty martyrs! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the great John the Baptist! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the 318 holy fathers, gathered at Nicaea – may it be that you do not have any power over the labor of the Christians! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the angels and the archangels of our Lord Jesus Christ! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the Lord’s baptism! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the resurrection of Lazarus! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the Flower-carrying of our Lord Jesus Christ! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the Lord’s resurrection! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of His most beautiful glory! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of power of the justful and live-bringing Cross – may it be that you do not have any power to devastate the Christian fields! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of Sidrach, Micah and Abdenago! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the two stars created by the Lord: the sun of the day and the moon of the night – may it be that you do not have any power to flood the Christian fields! I conjure you, Devil, in the name of the cherubim and the seraphim of Our Lord Jesus Christ and in their never-ending singing. Let our voice will be accepted with diligence and confession, now and forever and for eternal centuries! To be read at the feast of St. George, at the Day of the Ascension and at the feast of the Holy Ghost. To be read at the four corners of the village up to three times.

This is one of the longest verbal charms from the source material. It has its roots in the canonical Christian exorcism. In the beginning of the text, it is said that a (Christian) priest has to pronounce the charm. It is a remarkable text, because is features an actual practitioner: an Eastern Orthodox Christian priest. In the end, there is an instruction about the time, the place and the manner – when, where and how the charm
should be said. It is a classic case of apotropaic spatial framework and ritual behavior: the charm is to be read “at the four corners of the village up to three times”. Actually, this charm contains a complete apotropaic rite, with text, actions and participants. On one hand, this rite is obviously calendric, as it is explicitly connected with certain dates of the year. On the other hand, what we have here is clearly a crisis rite against flood. It is a classical example for a crisis management through verbal magic.

The temporal frame of the charm consists of three Christian holidays: St. George’s day (April 23)\(^430\), the Ascension (forty days after Easter) and the Holy Ghost (fifty-one days after Easter). These three feast days blend a number of popular Christian and pre-Christian beliefs, connected with fertility, health and supernatural beings. St. George is the patron of the livestock and the shepherds, and of the rain, the springs, and the vegetation. His feast day and its rituals are focused on the fertility of the livestock and of the land, and on the health of the people. The agricultural summer labor season starts on St. George’s day. Clearly, the charm against the Devil is part of this ritual context. It is to be read as a prevention against natural disasters and crop damage.

The charm fits perfectly into the context of the other two feast days too. According to popular beliefs, on the feast of the Ascension, the souls of the dead return to the Other World, after visiting their living relatives around Easter. This is also the day, when the fairies and the nature spirits visit humans and heal them. On the feast of the Ascension, the healing herbs and plants are very strong and effective, especially against human barrenness. Similarly, the feast of the Holy Ghost\(^431\) opens the Rusalian Week (Русалска седмица). This is the time, when the rusalia (русалии)/the vilas/the fairies/the

\(^{430}\) In today’s Bulgaria, this is May 6.

\(^{431}\) The feast is always on Monday.
nature spirits walk among the humans and bring fertility to the land. On this feast and
during the whole week, a number of agricultural and household taboos should be strictly
observed.

Thus, the text of the charm is situated in the ritual framework of three pivotal
spring feasts, focused on the fertility, health and prosperity. These feasts themselves are a
complex alloy of beliefs, coming from various traditions. The charm against the Devil is
such an alloy too. It is an apotropaic text-conjuration against an evil supernatural being,
called the Devil/дявол, who has power over the rain and the rivers. In the beginning of
the text, Archangel Michael is placed to guard the rivers, “so that the Devil will not have
any power upon them.” The Lord himself expelled the Devil from the rivers, and
prevented him from pouring a heavy rain over on the fields of the Christians. The motive
is repeated through the text, and all the positive and benevolent Christian supernatural
figures are summoned with one aim: to deprive the Devil from “any power to flood the
Christian fields”.

The charm, the crisis rite, and their context are part of a syncretic belief system.
This is valid for the main evil antagonist in the text: the Devil. According to the Christian
tradition, the Devil is the bringer of every evil; therefore, he is also responsible for the
floods and devastating rains. No doubt that his features and actions are that of the arch-
evil supernatural figure, as it is perceived in the Christian canon. In this charm, however,
the Devil can be seen from another perspective too. Here, he is a lord of the rivers and
rain. In this respect, he is very similar to the fairies (in their destructive aspect) and to the
winter demons.432 He can bring heavy rain and bad weather, can make the rivers

432 Pőcs, Fairies and Witches, pp. 27-29, and p. 73, note 95, where it is demonstrated how the
Christian devil adopted a number of destructive features from the winter and storm demons.
overflow, can flood the fields and devastate the crops. In my mind, the Devil here is actually a devil: much more a bad destructive water/weather spirit, than a canonical Christian personification of evil. I would say, he could be seen as a malevolent water demon, a water *exotiká*, very similar to the Greek *exotiká*, examined by Stewart.\(^{433}\)

Of course, it is difficult to make a definite conclusion based on a single charm. Still, a transformation of the Christian Devil into a devil, which is de facto a water/weather spirit or demon, is not surprising for the medieval and early modern Bulgarian charms. In my mind, such an interpretation is valid and logical in the context of syncretic figures like the *nezhit* and the *veshtitsa*.

5. 2. 3. The snake

Another syncretic evil figure of this type is the snake. While the Devil possibly shifts from an arch-demon to a specialized water-demon, a common reptile rises to a mythical malevolent beast. All through human history, certain animals have been and are objects of a special attitude and attention. They play a wide range of roles and bear numerous connotations in various contexts: all the way from the physical features and behavior of the actual animal to the deep mythological symbolism and religious allegory. In terms of rich, multileveled and symbolic presence and significance in human culture, the snake occupies one of the top positions. Regarding the snake to be special in some way (for example sacred, divine, cursed, unclean, wise, evil, benevolent, helpful, harmful, superior, inferior, etc.) appears as an universal cultural phenomenon through time and space.

\(^{433}\) Stewart, *Demons and the Devil*, pp. 137-194, and 251, where the author summarizes about *diávolos*: “In the folk tradition he is given considerably more elaboration in respect to form and he is often referred to in the plural, as one of many such beings. These multiple *diávoloi* are able to assume many forms, especially those of a dog, cat, and even a human being.”
Before looking at the snake in the Bulgarian charms, it is appropriate to provide short information on the actual venomous snakes existing in Bulgaria. These are from four such species, all belonging to the Viperidae family. The first two species is *Vipera Berus* and *Vipera Ammodytes*, which have always been typical reptiles for the Balkan Peninsula, and can be found in Bulgaria today too. The second two species are *Vipera Ursinii* and *Vipera Aspis*, which are currently extinct in Bulgaria. They were still to be found in the nineteenth century, although rather rarely, and scientists agree that *Vipera Ursinii* and *Vipera Aspis* have never been widely spread species in Bulgaria. All the four snakes are venomous, but their venom is relatively weak, and the bites are rarely fatal.\footnote{D. Mallow, D. Ludwig and G. Nilson, *True Vipers: Natural History and Toxinology of Old World Vipers*, (Malabar, Florida: Krieger Publishing Company, 2003), pp. 358-360.}

In sum, the venomous snakes on the territory of Bulgaria were and are relatively rare and do not represent an extreme danger.

In Bulgarian verbal magic, however, venomous snakes are often to be found, and their image is rather extreme. The medieval and early modern charms against snakebite come from the following sources:

- *Псалтир* sine № et loco, fol. 263, from the thirteenth century – one charm. The text consists of words of unknown meaning, probably gibberish, among which the words *apostle Paul, Peter, aspida, basilisk* and *Christ* can be read. The text ends with *amen*, repeated three times.\footnote{Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, p. 65.}

- *Сборник № 632*, fol. 110-111, from the beginning of the fourteenth century, National Library, Belgrade – two charms. The texts are expulsion formulae.\footnote{Ibidem p. 69.}
• Сборник № 11, from the fourteenth century, National Library, Paris – one charm.
   The text is a direct command to the snakes to obey the person, saying the charm.\textsuperscript{437}

• Псалтир № 6, fol. 148r-149r, from 1479, National Library, Sofia – one charm.
   The text is from the type \textit{Prayer of Apostle Paul against Snakes}.\textsuperscript{438}

• Часослов LGOPI № 22, fol. 386 and fol. 415-417, from 1498, Library of the Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem – two charms. One of the texts consists of words of unknown meaning, followed by ritual instructions. The other text is from the type \textit{Prayer of Apostle Paul against Snakes}.\textsuperscript{439}

• Служебник с Требник № 836, fol. 229, from the fifteenth century, Library of the Seminary, Sofia – two charms. The first text consists of words of unknown meaning. The second text is a direct expulsion formula, with the list of the snake’s epithets, very likely a variant of the \textit{Prayer of Apostle Paul against Snakes}.\textsuperscript{440}

• Требник № 725, fol. 97, from 1505, Library of the Seminary, Kazan – one charm.
   The text is a request to God to cure the bitten person.\textsuperscript{441}

• Требник, № 1181, fol. 159, sine loco, from the first half of sixteenth century – one charm. The text is a combination of words of unknown meaning and ritual instructions.\textsuperscript{442}

\begin{footnotes}
437 Ibidem, p. 66
439 Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, р. 66.
440 Ibidem, p. 65.
442 Ibidem, p. 108.
\end{footnotes}
• Лечебник № 321, fol. 75, from the sixteenth-seventeenth century, National Library, Belgrade – one charm. The text is a combination of words of unknown meaning and ritual instructions. 443

• Marginalia from the sixteenth-seventeenth century in a Празничен миней, Q. I. № 1299, fol. 301 from the fifteenth century, Public Library, St. Petersburg – one charm. The text is a combination of words of unknown meaning and ritual instructions. 444

• Требник № 42, from the sixteenth-seventeenth century, Library of the Rila Monastery, Bulgaria – one charm. The text is from the type Prayer of Apostle Paul against Snakes. 445

• Сборник № 555, fol. 157-158, from the seventeenth century, National Library, Belgrade – one charm. The text is a combination of words of unknown meaning and ritual instructions. 446

• Сборник IX. H. 23, fol. 188, from the seventeenth century, Czech Museum – one charm. The text is a combination of words of unknown meaning and ritual instructions. 447

In sum, the snakebite charms belong to three types. Seven of the texts consist of words of unknown meaning (probably gibberish), combined with ritual instructions. Five texts are expulsion formulae or direct commands, addressed to the snake. Four texts are of the type Prayer of Apostle Paul against Snakes.

443 Ibidem, p. 66.
444 Ibidem.
445 Ibidem, p. 76.
446 Ibidem, p. 65
447 Ibidem, p. 66
From the first type, one text is of special interest. This is the snakebite charm on the fol. 263 of the Псалтир sine № et loco, from the thirteenth century\textsuperscript{448}:

\begin{verbatim}
\end{verbatim}

The text starts and ends with typical Christian ratification formulae, which are commonly used in verbal magic too. The use of abracadabra-type of words is typical too. In this case, they are “Sarandara, sarandara, marandara, marandara”, etc. The meaning and the origin of these words is unknown. To me, the most logical hypotheses are that sarandara, etc. are either corrupted versions of words or phrases from some Eastern language (for example Hebrew or Arabic), or pseudo/gibberish words, made to sound like Hebrew or Arabic.

The abracadabra is followed by a sentence, in which it seems that Apostle Paul and Apostle Peter evidently do something, as a result of which then the aspida and the basilisk (i. e. the snake) do something too, and finally Christ also does something. The word after aspida looks a bit like the Bulgarian verb “to be extinguished”, usually used for fire or flame. The word after Christ looks a bit like the Bulgarian verb “to skin”. In this case, the phrase can be tentatively translated: “Apostle Paul does something, Peter does something, the aspida was extinguished, the basilisk does something, Christ skins.” Clearly, this is a \textit{historiola}, in which the actions of the apostles neutralize the snakes (extinguish the venom of the aspida), and then Christ skins them.

\textsuperscript{448} Псалтир, thirteenth century, sine № et loco, fol. 263, Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, p. 64. See no. 36 in the Catalogue.
Despite the concrete linguistic difficulties, the overall meaning is clear. The charm’s narrative presents the case, when the apostles and Christ defeated the snake. Based on this mythical success in the past, the charm is believed to help against snakes now and to cure the patient in the current moment. Such a *historiola* is typical and commonly used in verbal magic. The narrative, where three (or more) supernatural helpers cure through different actions is discussed in more details below, in the next subchapter.

The current snakebite charm offers a peculiar configuration of the actors. The format is two positive figures defeat two negative figures, and then the supreme positive agent confirms the victory and finalizes the process. Such a format can be very syncretic. The *historiola* employs Apostle Paul (who is closely connected with the snakebite theme) and mythical epithets of the snake (aspida and basilisk), which are typical for another type of snakebite charm, namely the *Prayer of Apostle Paul*. On the other hand, the configuration “two-two-one” seems a bit unusual, at least to Bulgarian verbal magic, where the supernatural helpers usually are three. In my understanding, this peculiar configuration (combined with gibberish words) is probably a result of some kind of corruption of the charm. It is very possible that motives, characters and parts of the plot were misunderstood or simply forgotten. In general, such corruptions and omissions are common in verbal magic. For example, some English verbal charms against fever and burning only tell about two (instead of three) angels, or do not tell what is the third angel doing. In the Bulgarian snakebite charm, there is a positive duo, helping against two evil adversaries are only two. Similar Bulgarian case (a charm using the name Agrippa twice instead of thrice) is discussed below.
Among the snakebite charms, which are direct commands or expulsions, the text from fol. 111 of Сборник № 632, from the beginning of the fourteenth century, from the National Library in Belgrade, is interesting. It goes as following:\(^{449}\):

*Deformed wild venom, insane venom, what you do...to his health. Whom the snake bit, go out from the heart into the bones. Form the bones into the flesh. Form the flesh into the hair. From the hair into the ground,...you have it now and forever.*

Clearly, this is the same transmission-type of *historiola*, which we already saw in the charms against the *nezhit*. Here, the personified evil is the snake’s venom, which is commanded to pass from one element into another, until it disappears. This is the only medieval and early modern Bulgarian example, where the transmission-narrative is used against snakebite.

Four of the charms are of the type, called *Prayer of Apostle Paul*, which expels the snake through a long list of epithets.\(^ {450}\) The *Prayer of Apostle Paul* against snakebite usually contains five parts: title and instructions about the ritual; narrative about the Apostle Paul’s miraculous recovery from a snake’s bite; narrative of how archangel Michael (or Gabriel) appeared to Apostle Paul in a dream and gave him written charms, aimed to help all people; list of names of snakes, accompanied by an expulsion formula; promise for healing everybody, who applies this text. Here is an example, a charm from a fifteenth-century manuscript:

*Apostle Paul’s prayer against snakebite:*

*If a snake bites somebody, he should do the following: bring a new vessel, make the sign of the cross in the vessel, saying all the prayers about the Holy Cross, and write this troparion around the cross: “Let Moses rise complete on the standard of healing.” He must wash himself with holy water from a new moon, if he can find one. If not, he must find clean*

\(^{449}\) See no. 10 in the catalogue.

\(^{450}\) Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, pp. 64-90 and Kristanov, Естествознанието в средновековна България, pp. 544-547
water, to wash the whole vessel and if the person bitten by the snake is near, he must drink the water. If he is not nearby, the curing person must
drink the water.
Charm:
In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost! Once I was a
persecutor, now I am an honorary vessel. I went out of my home in Sicily
and while I was gathering dry woods, an echidna suddenly appeared
because of the heat, bit my right hand and remained hanging there. But I
had the power of the Holy Ghost inside me, shook it away in the fire, it
burnt completely, and I did not suffer any harm from its bite. I fell asleep,
and the great archangel Michael came, turned to me and said: “Saul,
Paul, get up, take this piece of paper and you will find words written on it,
saying: “I conjure you, sixty-five and a half kind of beasts, which creep on
the ground, in the name of the Lord, creator of heaven, earth and sea and
in the name of his immovable throne. Pernicious snake, I conjure you in
the name of the fiery river, which rises from under the foot of our Lord
and Savior Jesus Christ and the unearthly angels. Snake born from a
basilisk, tetrachalin snake, dodekachalin snake, lagodroma snake, snake
with twelve heads, snake like fire, snake like raven, snake climbing on
oaks, snake like an arrow, snake like ashes, snake echidna, who has
poison in the right side and whoever is bitten by it, cannot live anymore.
And the twenty-four kinds of reptiles, whom the prohibition and the prayer
of the holy apostle will reach. When a snake bites a human, let it die
immediately, and let the bitten person remain alive in the glory of the
Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost now, and forever and ever. Amen”.

The summarized list of names, titles and epithets of the snake looks as follows:

snake (змия), scorpion (скорпион), pernicious (гibelna), venomous (отровна), harmful
(вредна), fierce (яростна), with venom in the right jaw (с отрова в дясната челюст),
born from a basilisk (родена от базилиск), asp (аспида), like a cloud (като облак), like
fire (като огън), like hair (като коса), creeping on trees (пълзяща по дървета), flying
(летяща), like a raven (като гарван), with three jaws (с три челюсти), three-headed
(триглава), tetrachalin / with four mouths (тетрахалина), dodekachalin/with twelve
mouths (додекахалина), twelve-headed (дванадесетглава), with twelve skins/mouths (с
dvanadeset кожи/усти), lagodroma/moving like a hare (lagodroma), blind (слепа),

451 Псалтири, 1479, Sofia, National Library, № 6, fol. 148r-149r. OCS edition in (Tsonov, Catalogue,
vol. I, pp. 6-8). See no. 34 in the Catalogue.
like an arrow (како стрела), black (черна), from the ground (от земята), biter of women (хапеща жени), like sea (като море), echidna (ехидна), like ashes (като пепел), like a sly mouse (като лукава мишка), from the Devil (от дявола).

The list of names is rather eclectic and heterogeneous. There is a thick layer of canonical and apocryphal Christian symbolism. The reference to the basilisk and the asp a very clear example of biblical elements. The first one is connected to a passage in Isaiah 14:29, saying: “the serpent's stock can still produce a basilisk, and the offspring of that will be a flying dragon.” The second one comes from Psalm 91:13, where the text goes: “Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.”

Here, the impact of Byzantium is clearly visible, as the Bulgarian charm against snakebite has direct Byzantine parallel – the Prayer of St. Paul against the Biting Snake (Εὐχὴ τοῦ ἁγίου Παύλου εἰς τὸν δάκνοντα ὄφιν)\. Large number of the epithets in the Bulgarian charm have direct parallels in Byzantine text. There, “snake born from a basilisk” is τὸν βασίλισκον δρακόντα τὸν γενναίον, “snake like a cloud” is ὄφιν τὸν νεφελεσθήν, “snake climbing oaks/trees” is ὄφιν τὸν δέντροαναβάτην, “snake like a raven” is ὄφιν τὸν κορακοειδή, “tetrachalin snake” is ὄφιν τετραχάλινον, “dodekachalin snake” is ὄφιν δωδεκαχάλινον, “lagodroma snake” is ὄφιν λαγοδρόμονα, “blind snake” is ὄφιν τὸν τυφλὸν, “snake without eyes” is αόμματον, and “snake like sea/fierce echidna

---

452 Tatjana A. Agapkina, Татяна А. Агапкина, Славянская мифология: энциклопедический словарь (Slavic Mythology: Encyclopedia), (Moscow: Международные отношения, 2002), passim; and Georgieva, passim.
454 Vassiliev, Anecdota, pp. 330-331.
455 Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, pp. 88-89, where the author quotes apocryphal Byzantine texts against snakebite.
with poison in the right jaw” is ἔχιδνα τὴν σκολίαν τὴν ἔχουσαν τὰ φάρμακα εἰς τὴν δεξιάν αὐτῆς σιαγώνα.

It seems that the list of epithets has also a layer of various pre-Christian elements. For instance, the obscure epithet “like a cloud” probably has relation to a Mesopotamian parallel. A Babylonian charm compares the evil spirits: “They are the wide spreading clouds which darken the day.” The winged or flying snake and the fiery snake are images, typical for the Slavic and Balto-Slavic traditions. Already in a syncretic cultural context, the snake plays a key role in the Slavic apotropaic and amulet tradition, expressed in the zmeevik (змеевик). This is a medallion and pendant amulet with a Christian motif on one side and an ancient pagan motif (involving serpents) on the other. The zmeevik appears from the eleventh century onwards and is extensively widespread and used among the Slavs, especially the Eastern Slavs. Some scholars connect this popularity with a supposed ancient cosmic serpent cult. On the other hand, Ryan points out that the zmeevik has primarily Christian (albeit non-canonical) interpretations. They are based on Byzantine and Near Eastern models and relates to the Biblical text in Numbers 21: 8, 9, saying: “And the Lord said to Moses, “Make a fiery serpent and set it on a pole, and everyone who is bitten, when he sees it, shall live. So, Moses made a bronze serpent and set it on a pole. And if a serpent bit anyone, he would look at the bronze serpent and live.”

---

456 Agapkina, Славянская мифология, p. 58 and Georgieva, Българска народна митология, pp. 36-40.
458 The snake is “a fiery queen”, and the lord of the snakes is “flaming king” in Lithuanian charms. See Vaitkevičienė, Lietuvių užkalbėjimai, pp. 745 and 839.
459 Ryan, The Bathhouse, pp. 42-44.
The lists of names, comparisons and color symbolism is common for the Baltic traditions too. The Lithuanian verbal charms present the snake as a powerful fiery being, but also as a “horrible crawling thing” and “cold metal”.\textsuperscript{460} The color-associations are important too. A number of Lithuanian charms are focused on a list of different colors, like in the following examples:

*Peter ploughed, John ploughed, Jesus ploughed; they ploughed three beds and turned up three little worms: one black, one red and one speckled. Praised be Jesus Christ!*\textsuperscript{461}

*God was walking through the forests and found a nest of snakes. There were red ones, green ones, white ones. God buried the green one, killed the red one, and put the white one in his pocket. God climbed out of the place and he was bitten in the leg. He chopped the head of the white snake off and rubbed the wound. Get out on your own, you cursed snake, image of the devil, die!*\textsuperscript{462}

*Gray snake, mottled snake, brown snake, take your pain back because you will end up on God’s trial!*\textsuperscript{463}

*Mottled, black, or blue, stranger! Red-mottled, rufous-mottled, stranger! Red one, sorrel, rufous, stranger!*\textsuperscript{464}

The Estonian verbal charms speak about “coppery snake”, “blade snake”, “bush snake”, “water snake” and “clay snake”. It lists certain colors, for example:

\begin{quote}
*Snn, snn, snakekins  
White snakekins  
Black snakekins  
Many-colored snakekins!  
I know where you live:  
Under the fence…*\textsuperscript{465}
\end{quote}

A Finnish charm conjures the snake and asks it to cure the injury from its own bite:

*Black worm under ground*

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{460} Vaitkevičienė, *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai*, p. 735.
\textsuperscript{461} Lithuanian charm, see Daiva Vaitkevičienė, „Lithuanian and Latvian Charms: Searching form Parallels”, in Roper, *Charmers and Charming*, pp. 186-213, p. 205.
\textsuperscript{462} Ibidem, p. 737.
\textsuperscript{463} Ibidem, p. 747.
\textsuperscript{464} Ibidem, p. 840.
\end{footnotesize}
Wriggler in the grass
Rod among brushwood
Snake under fences
Bright under the rock
Coiled under the knoll
Iron-hued wretch, thin
Under the steel-glass
You did well to strike
Better if you make better:
bring honey from the hive, mead
from your meadery
drip honey from your tongue, pour
mead out of your mouth
for the time being
for the best ointment.466

In the belief system of the Bulgarian and Balkan folklore, the snake is bringer of evil, but also of good luck. It is a devilish creature, biting the sun or trying to swallow it, but also protecting the house and the crops. The snake is closely associated with fertility (can stop the flow of a river and cause drought, but it can also bring rain), with storms and with the ancestors. It may act as a messenger between the living and the dead.467

The snake’s chthonic nature is expressed through the close relations with the earth (compare the Bulgarian word “змия” meaning “snake” and “земя” meaning “earth, soil, ground”) and with water, wetness and moisture. In this respect, the animal is inseparably associated with the Other World, the Underworld and the Land of the Dead, and even plays an important role in the cosmic opposition between the Earth and the Sun.468

In the folklore, the snake’s character is ambivalent, combining the positive and the negative. The snake is apotropaic and curative, but it also brings damage. It is unclean and evil, but also possesses enormous wisdom, fantastic powers and protective functions.

The ambivalence of the snake is very clearly expressed in its double fiery and watery nature, and its ambiguous influence on meteorological phenomena, crops and domestic animals.\(^{469}\)

In Bulgarian verbal charms, however, the snake is exclusively a negative figure. This figure has two sides. There is the snake as a physical reality: a venomous reptile, whose bite is a threat for the health of humans and other animals. Names like “pernicious”, “venomous”, “harmful”, “fierce”, “black”,\(^{470}\) “blind”, “climbing trees”, “coming from the ground”, refer to the physical appearance and characteristics of the snake. There is the snake as a figure with supernatural mythical characteristics. It is a *polycephalous* (three-headed) reptile, which can fly and has three, four or twelve jaws. There are also the comparisons with elements of nature (fire, clouds), with other animals (scorpion, asp, basilisk, raven, hare, echidna, mouse), an with objects (hair, arrow, ashes).

In the context of medieval Bulgarian verbal charms, the snake is connected with the *veshtitsa*. As quoted above, the *veshtitsa* transforms into a snake, in order to sneak into the human dwellings. This transformation demonstrates a higher (or even the highest) level of supernatural power: the evil supernatural being becomes an ordinary animal, which will pass unnoticed in human daily life environment. In one charm, the *veshtitsa* is temporarily reduced to a common reptile; in another charm, the common reptile is elevated to a powerful supernatural being.


\(^{470}\) In the context of Bulgarian snakebite charms this colour is always with negative connotations and again referring to the strong chthonic nature. For comparison, in Swedish material we find *svarta snuva* (black snake), and in Finnish material *mato musta* (black worm). See Ritwa Herjulfsdotter, “Swedish Snakebite Charms from a Gender Perspective”, in Roper, ed. *Charms, Charmers and Charming*, pp. 54-61, p. 57 and Ilomäki, “Finnish Snake Charms”, p. 167.
Both of these supernatural figures have many faces, and both are defeated by lists of names. The lists organize and define the supernatural adversary, and thus control it and place it a new framework of meanings.\textsuperscript{471} Thus, the evil being is effectively recognized, understood, controlled and expelled. In Finnish charms, the purpose of a euphemistic description of the snake is “to create a situation in which the opponent and the charmer are at the same level of authority, and can recognize one another. At the same time, by revealing the outlook and the origin of the snake, the charmer dominates it.”\textsuperscript{472} In Bulgarian charms, this system is applied for both the venomous reptile and the evil supernatural female figure.

5. 3. The good ones

The powerful evil beings presented above are opposed by powerful benevolent figures, providing help and protection. The nezhit meets Jesus Christ; the veshtitsa is defeated by archangel Michael, the venomous snake is neutralized by Apostle Paul. Medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms rely on a number of good supernatural agents. Most of them are Christian, for example, Virgin Mary, the four evangelists, the archangels and the angels, the apostles, and saints like George, John the Baptist and Cosmas and Damian. They appear in typical roles as protectors and healers, helping the humans, and expelling and destroying the evil supernatural beings. For instance, in the charms above, Archangel Michael fulfills the functions of the positive celestial solar male figure, defeating a negative chthonic demonic female figure, like the veshtitsa.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[472] Ilomäki, “Finnish Snake Charms”, p. 169.
\end{footnotes}
Indeed, benevolent supernatural presence of this type is not at all surprising in a Christian context. Jesus Christ and Archangel Michael appear in typical roles, their activities follow usual patterns, and their abilities and features are shaped after common paradigms. Of course, all Christian figures appearing the Bulgarian charms have characteristics, which come from and reach beyond the borders of the canonical Christian tradition. Yet, their images are within the limits of the expectable for a medieval and early modern European verbal magical tradition. In other words, the nefarious nezhit and the vile veshtitsa are much more remarkable and extraordinary than their positive adversaries.

5. 3. 1. The saint

However, there are good and positive supernatural agents, who are at least as interesting and noteworthy as the vicious ones, if not even more. One such very prominent and original figure is St. Sisinnius whom we already met above, fighting against the veshtitsa and the tresavitsi.

The medieval and early modern charms with St. Sisinnius come from the following sources:

- Драголов сборник № 651, fol. 52-60, from the thirteenth century, National Library, Belgrade. The book contains four charms with St. Sisinnius. The first text tells how the saint chases and defeats the Devil, who stole the children of Sisinnius’ sister Melentia. This historiola contains a list of the secret names of the Devil. The second charm is the same story, but this time the Devil is chased by St. Sisinnius, St. Sinodor and St. Theodor, and there is no list of names. The third
charm is a shorter variant of the first text, without list of names\textsuperscript{473}. The fourth charm is an encounter-\textit{historiola} about St. Sisinnius, who meets the child-stealing \textit{veshtitsa}. The saint beats her and she tells her twelve secret names.\textsuperscript{474}

- Часослов № 631, fol. 162, from the seventeenth century, National Library, Sofia.

The book contains two charms with St. Sisinnius. The first text is a narrative how St. Sisinnius Isidorus, St. Simon and St. Theodor saved the children of their sister Melentia, kidnapped by the devil. The second text tells how St. Sisinnius is chasing all evil beings and spirits\textsuperscript{475}. It is as follows:

\textit{Sisinnius was standing in front of the gates of the God’s servant (say the name), leaning on a spear, with a sword on his waist, watching at witches and at all kinds of evil spirits. Together with him, I called all the angels, and archangel Michael and Peter and Paul, the apostles of Christ. It [sic] came invisible from the sky and cast away the evil spirits, the witches and the Devil from this place: in the evening, at midnight, when the sea is resting, when the water is not flowing, when the roosters are not singing and when the dogs are not barking – then they cast away all the devils and the dark spirits from this place, from this temple, from these four directions. Here, at God’s servant (say the name), there is no place for you, here are the four evangelists, here are the sixteen prophets, they will guard and protect God’s servant in the name of the Father, the son and the Holy Ghost.}

The etymology of the name Sisinnius\textsuperscript{476} in apocryphal and magical context is unclear. Barb interprets it as a Christian reduplicative adaptation of a Semitic \textit{vox magica} or angelic name with uncertain or misunderstood meaning.\textsuperscript{477} In the light of the strong Mesopotamian influence in verbal magic, it is also possible that the name Sisinnius has

\textsuperscript{473} In the charms from this manuscript, the Devil introduces himself with the words: “I am \textit{veshtitsa}” and “My name is \textit{veshtitsa}”.

\textsuperscript{474} The manuscript is unpublished. For a list of partial publications, see Velinova, “Из българо-сръбските книжовни връзки”, p. 163, n. 10.

\textsuperscript{475} Tsonev, \textit{Catalogue}, vol. II, pp.149-150 and no.15 in the Catalogue.

\textsuperscript{476} Spelled also \textit{Sisinnios} and \textit{Sissinnios}, in Greek \textit{Σισίννιος}. See Velinova, “Из българо-сръбските книжовни връзки”, pp. 161-177.

its roots in the ancient Akkadian word “sīsû”/“sissû”, meaning “horse”. If this is correct, then Sisinnius should mean “a horseman”, and indeed this is how he is presented in some traditions (for instance, on the fifth-century Coptic wall-painting from the Monastery of St. Apollo in Bawit in Egypt). However, the Mesopotamian texts of verbal magic do not mention any horseman, fighting against the demons.

Saint Sisinnius from the charms is actually not a saint at all. He is not identical to any of the historical and saintly Christian figures with the same name. St. Sisinnius can be called a legendary or folk saint. With his specialized curative-protective functions, he is similar to the folk versions of St. Antipas and St. Cosmas and Damian. Most of all, St. Sisinnius is a positive male warrior-hero-saint type of figure, similar to Archangel Michael and St. George. Armed with a spear, he is victorious against the female demonic beings, coming from the sea, like the personified fevers and the child-stealing Devil.

Clearly, St. Sisinnius originates from the archaic archetype of “positive celestial solar igneous divine male hero versus negative chthonic lunar aquatic demonic female monster”. The closer and more relevant parallels, to mention a few, include the battles of Marduk versus Tiamat, Perseus versus Medusa, Perun versus Veles, King Solomon versus Obyzouth, the prophet Elijah versus Lilith, Archangel Michael/St. George versus

478 Velinova, “Из българо-сръбските книжовни връзки”, passim.
481 Popularly regarded in the Slavic tradition as helper against toothache.
482 Popularly regarded and summoned as healers saints.
483 Of course, this archetype may vary from culture to culture. For instance, the chthonic monster can be male (for example, a dragon), or can be defeated by a female supernatural figure, like for example Virgin Mary or Artemis of Ephesus.
Satan/the dragon, etc. Thus, the battle of St. Sisinnius against the veshtiša/tresavitsi/the child-stealing devil fits perfectly in this epic mythological framework. Both the saint and his enemies are syncretic composite figures, who walked the long way from Mesopotamia to medieval Bulgaria, with all the attached innovations, variations and transformations, and yet remaining remarkably persistent and close to the prototype. They are perfectly adapted and incorporated in Christian context too. The chthonic monster adopted features of the biblical evil beings, while the celestial hero Sisinnius is equipped with the title “saint”. Thus, he is recognized and accepted as an authentic Christian figure, and is smoothly integrated in the Christian apocryphal (and not so apocryphal) tradition.

It seems that St. Sisinnius reached the Slavic verbal magic via Byzantium.\textsuperscript{484} In Byzantium, the legendary saint is an actual popular saint with important practical protective functions. In his role of a rider warrior hero, he appears on a significant number of apotropaic Byzantine \textit{hystera} amulets.\textsuperscript{485} There, the nimbate St. Sisinnius is usually mounted on a horse and spears a female demon\textsuperscript{486}. Often, he is also accompanied and assisted by an angel or archangel.\textsuperscript{487} In the Byzantine amulet tradition, St. Sisinnius is closely and naturally associated with King Solomon. The names of these two victorious heroes are interchangeable on many of the Seal of Solomon-type of Byzantine amulets from the sixth and the seventh century.\textsuperscript{488} The earliest example of a Byzantine amulet only with the name of Sisinnius is from the same period too. However, there is the fifth

\textsuperscript{484} Greenfield, “Saint Sisinnios, the Archangel Michael and the Female Demon Gylou”, passim and Velinova, “Из българо-сръбските книжовни връзки” (“On the Bulgarian-Serbian Literary Connections in Thirteenth Century”), passim.
\textsuperscript{485} Spier, “Byzantine Magical Amulets”, passim.
\textsuperscript{486} Ibidem, pp. 61-62.
\textsuperscript{487} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{488} Spier, “Byzantine Magical Amulets”, p. 37.
century Coptic wall painting from the Monastery of St. Apollo in Bawit in Egypt, where the legendary saint already has a full heroic iconography: with a halo around his head, mounted on a horse and armed with a lance and a shield, he spears an apparently evil female figure, called Alabasdria.489

The Byzantine tradition of St. Sisinnius has strong roots not only in objectual and visual magic, but also in verbal charms. For example, the Byzantine apotropaic amulets often contain inscriptions like “φευγε, φευγε, Αβιζου, Σισινις και Σισινια ένθαδε κατωι και λάβραξ ο κών” (“run, run, Abyzou, Sisinis and Sisinia [chase you]. The voracious dog dwells here”)490 or “φευγε, Αβιζου, Άναβαρδαλεα Σισινίς σε διόκι ο άγγελοι Αραφ” (“run, Abyzou Anabardalea, Sisinis chases you, the angel Araph”).491 In their own turn, these amulets have parallels in the Byzantine charm against bile-illness492: “Φεῦγε σκίον, φεῦγε ἡμίσκιον, ὁ βασιλεὺς τὸν ἄδον σε δεσμεύει.” (“Run shadow, run half-shadow, the king of hell (spell) binds you”)

These inscriptions represent direct expulsive formulae, but also compressed historiolae, referring to the victory of the mythical hero-saint over the demonic being or illness. Actually, if we put the medieval Byzantine amulets and the late medieval Slavic charms side by side (as they actually stand historically too), we can immediately see the continuity, going through several centuries and several levels. The Byzantine amulets present the image and the actions of the saint and of his adversary. This visual-objectual side is accompanied with a short verbal formula. The Slavic charms elaborate on the narrative, developing an entire historiola, with almost all the characteristic elements

491 Ibidem.
492 Vassiliev, Anecdota, p. 334.
493 The Greek verb means “to bind” both by physical and by magical means.
present. If the Byzantine amulets are the pictorial representation of St. Sisinnius’ battle, the Slavic charms tell verbally how St. Sisinnius defeated the evil.

St. Sisinnius was successfully adopted and adapted in North-Slavic context. Ryan gives a comprehensive overview of the saint’s presence in the medieval and early modern Russian traditions. There, as illustrated by the Russian charm above, St. Sisinnius cures the fevers, defeating and expelling their personifications as twelve demonic women. As Ryan aptly points out, the Slavic notion of the legendary saint was quickly connected with the apocryphal and Bogomil traditions. The eleventh-century *Euchologion Sinaiticum* contains a charm, which mentions St. Sisinnius, Mount Sinai, the Archangel Sachiel and seven fevers, the daughters of Herod.

The notion of the positive figure of Sisinnius kept living in other medieval and early modern traditions too. He appears in Arabic, Abissinic, Modern Greek, Romanian and Armenian texts. The narrative is more or less the same (the saint/the hero defeats the demons/the illnesses, while the name can be modified respectively. For example, the Abissinic version is Susneyos and the Armenian version is St. Sisi. In the Arabic tradition the role of Sisinnius is taken over by Sulayman (king Solomon), who wins a victory against the child-harming demon Qarīna.495

One peculiar example of continuity can be seen in the Hebrew charm of Elijah meeting the child-stealing Lilith is preserved on an early modern Jewish apotropaic amulet496. It was used to protect women in childbirth. Together with the charm, the amulet is also inscribed with the names of mythical helpers – four pairs of biblical characters and three angels. The names of the angels are Sinov, Vsininov and Isomngolof. In such a

---

494 Ryan, *The Bathhouse*, pp. 244-252.
In Byzantine and especially in Slavic contexts, the legendary saint is closely related to the archangels Michael and Sachiel. The latter one is notable, because Slavic apocryphal Christian texts (as the above-quoted Russian charm) explicitly mention him as a defeater of the evil spirits\textsuperscript{498}. St. Sisinnius and Archangel Sachiel are represented together on a silver triptych, dated 1412 and coming from the Suzdal region, central Russia. The triptych is de facto a composite apotropaic curative amulet. The saint appears also in nineteenth-century Russian icons and popular prints, where he is called “The Wonderworker” and expels the tresavitsi personified as women\textsuperscript{499}. Clearly, St. Sisinnius has a strong position in the Slavic Christian apocryphal traditions, in both textual and visual contexts - in charms, on icons and on amulet objects.

In the Bulgarian variant of the charms, St. Sisinnius is in his typical role of a victorious horseman warrior-protector. Armed with the symbolic weapons (sword and

\textsuperscript{497} Ibidem, pp. 217-218.
\textsuperscript{499} Ryan, The Bathhouse, p. 247.
spear), located at a symbolic setting (near the sea), he successfully fights against the evil supernatural monster, represented by the *veshtitsa* and the child-stealing Devil. St. Sisinnius is also referring to the supreme divine intervention and help of Archangel Michael and the apostles Peter and Paul. The connection and intermingling with Archangel Michael is a typical element too. As Greenfield demonstrates\(^{500}\), the Byzantine material contains numerous variants of the charm, where St. Sisinnius is replaced by Archangel Michael and vice versa. There is a similar fusion in the medieval and early modern Bulgarian charms too\(^ {501}\). In the Bulgarian cases, regardless of the variant of the story, the main protagonists can be both St. Sisinnius (with or without his brothers), and Archangel Michael. As we saw above, there is a certain tendency Archangel Michael to be the one that appears more often in the list-of-names-type of charms against the *veshtitsa*.

5. 3. 2. The shepherds

Most often, St. Sisinnius acts alone. Yet, sometimes he appears in the charms together with his brothers. The names of the brothers have different variants: Sisinnodorus, Sinodorus, Sisoe, Theodorus, etc., which suggests that these may be seen as alter egos of the legendary saint himself. He and his brothers are presented as a group of positive figures, chasing and defeating the evil, with St. Sisinnius as the central and most active character. In this sense, the legendary saint is similar to another group of mysterious positive figures from the charms, namely the blind shepherds.

\(^{500}\) Greenfield, “Saint Sisinnios, the Archangel Michael and the Female Demon Gylou”, passim.

\(^{501}\) As for example in the charms, preserved in the manuscript Драголов сборник dated thirteenth century. See Velinova, “Из българо-сръбските книжовни връзки”, pp. 161-177.
In the above-quoted mini-corpus of twelve charms against the nezhit, there is one
text\textsuperscript{502}, where certain blind shepherds confront the nezhit and manage to eliminate it:

\begin{quote}
The nezhit fell from the sky, the blind shepherds saw him. They chased him without feet, caught him without hands, tied him without a rope, burned him without fire, killed him without a knife, and ate him without mouths. From the bones, the nezhit went into the flesh, into the skin, into the hair, and melted, like salt in water. Let it disappear in the same way from God's servant (say the name) now, and forever and always.
\end{quote}

This charm contains a number of typical verbal magical elements. There are the
impossibilia (seeing without eyes, chasing without feet, catching without hands, etc.), the
physical disability of the positive figures (despite of which they are successful against the
illness), and the formula of the as...so... - type, combined with transmission of the
affliction from the ill body to various objects, leading to its annihilation.

The impossibilia represent a special condition for controlling the evil/the illness.
When put in the “impossible” situation and confronted in “impossible” ways, only then
the nezhit it becomes vulnerable, manageable and defeatable. The impossibilia-motive
connects the Bulgarian text for example to the eighteenth century German Gerichtssegen,
presented by Spamer\textsuperscript{503}. In this verbal charm aiming to provide good luck and success we
see the three dead men, each of them with different physical defects:

\begin{quote}
Vor Gericht und Rath zu Recht behalten.
Jesus Naarenus Rux Judzorum.[sic!] Zuerst trag diesen Charakter bei dir
in der Figur, alsdann sprich folgende Worte: Ich N. N. trete vor des
Richtes Haus, de schauen 3 todte Männer zum Fenster heraus, der eine
hat keine Zunge, der andere hat keine Lunge, der dritte erkrankt, erblindt
und verstummt. Da ist, wann du vor's Gericht gehest. Oder Amt und eine
Rechtsache hast, dagegen dir der Richter nicht günstig ist, so sprich:
 wenn du gegen ihm gehest, den oben schon stehenden Segen.\textsuperscript{504}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{502} Tsonov, Catalogue, vol. II., pp. 132-135 and no. 5 in the Catalogue.
\textsuperscript{503} Spamer, Romanusbüchlein, p. 54 and pp. 317-319.
\textsuperscript{504} Ibidem.
It is not surprising that there are also other, much older parallels of this peculiar combination: handicapped supernatural helpers and successful completion of various actions without the necessary tools or body parts. One such charm comes from the Coptic tradition. In a Coptic spell for relieving stomach pain, Horus plays music and captures birds, which he cuts without a knife, cooks without fire and eats without salt. Then, he feels stomach pain, and three demons called Agrippas help him to get in touch with his mother Isis, in order to be cured by her.\textsuperscript{505} The text of this exemplary charm is as follows:

\begin{quote}
Jesus! Horus [the son of] Isis went upon a mountain in order to rest. He [performed his] music, [set] his nets, and captured a falcon, [a Bank bird, a] wild pelican. [He] cut it without a knife, cooked it without fire, and [ate it] without salt [on it].

He had pain, and the area around his navel [hurt him], and he wept with loud weeping, saying, “Today I am bringing my [mother] Isis to me. I want a demon so that I may send him to my mother Isis.”

The first demon Agrippas came to him and said to him, “Do you want to go to your mother Isis?”

He said, “How long will it take for you to go there and how long for you to come back?”

He said, “How long will it take for you to go there and how long for you to come back? I can go there in two hours and I can come back in two.”

He said, “Leave, you do not satisfy me.”

The second demon Agrippas came to him and said, “Do you want to go to your mother Isis?”

He said, “How much time do you need to go there and how much time to come back?”

He said, “I can go there in one hour and I can come back in one.”

He said, “Leave, you do not satisfy me.”

The third demon Agrippas, the one with a single eye and a single hand, came to him and said to him, “Do you want to go to your mother Isis?”

“How long will it take for you to go there and how long for you to come back?”

“I can go there with the breath of your mouth and I can come back with the breath of your nose.”

“Go then, you satisfy me.”
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{505} Coptic manuscript on a papyrus (Berlin 8313). See charm 49b in Meyer and Smith, \textit{Ancient Christian Magic}, pp. 95-97.
He went upon the mountain of Heliopolis and found his mother Isis wearing an iron crown and stoking a copper oven. She said to him, “Demon Agrippas, from where have you come to this place?”

He said to her, “Your son Horus went upon a mountain in order to rest. He performed his music, set his nets, and captured a falcon, a Bank bird, a wild pelican. He cut it without a knife, cooked it without fire, and ate it without salt on it. He had pain, and the area around his navel hurt him.”

She said to him, “Even if you did not find me and did not find my name, the true name that the sun bears to the west and the moon bears to the east and that is borne by the six propitiatory stars under the sun, you would summon the three hundred vessels that are around the navel: Let every sickness and every difficulty and every pain that is in the belly of N. child of N. stop at this moment. I am the one who calls; the lord Jesus is the one who grants healing.”

This text shares a number of features with the Bulgarian charm. We can see the impossibilia cutting without a knife and cooking without fire; then, there are the supernatural figures, helping against the pain; and finally, the demon who actually helps Horus is exactly the physically disabled one, with only one eye and one hand. This disability-motive has a peculiar inverted parallel in a Babylonian charm\textsuperscript{507}, which expels an evil demon that had no mouth and no limbs. This demon cannot hear and had no form.

It seems that the Coptic charm represents an older text, to which Christian elements were added later. There is the name of Jesus in the beginning and in the end, in the typical ratification formula \textit{I am the one who calls; the lord Jesus is the one who grants healing}. In the Bulgarian charm, the phrase “God’s servant” is the only explicit Christian reference.

The name Agrippas is a very peculiar element. In the syncretic Coptic context, it is possible that this is a Christian element too\textsuperscript{508}. Whoever the demon Agrippas was

\begin{footnotes}
\item \textsuperscript{506} Ibidem.
\item \textsuperscript{507} Thompson, \textit{The Devils and Evil Spirits}, vol. I, pp. 129-139.
\item \textsuperscript{508} \textit{Agrippa} is an old Latin \textit{praenomen} and \textit{cognomen} of uncertain etymology. It was commonly used in Rome during the entire Antiquity. However, the name was carried also by two Judean monarchs – Herod
\end{footnotes}
originally, his variant appears in Bulgarian verbal magic, probably via Byzantium. One Bulgarian verbal charm against water retention, coming from a manuscript from the end of the sixteenth century, has the following text\textsuperscript{509}:

\begin{quote}
Against retention.
Agripa Agripa. On horseshoe [?].\textsuperscript{510}
On the banks of Jordan, three angels stand. The first ties, the second unties, the third prays to God: “Holy, holy holy God God Lord Lord Lord, may it passes through the servant of God (say the name) now and forever and for eternity”.
\end{quote}

Here, we can see a number of typical features: the appropriate mythical location (the biblical river Jordan); the supernatural trinity (the angels), performing the curative rite (imitative tying and untying, and pronouncing the words of power); the charm per se, which consists of three sacred words (invocation to God), repeated three times and combined with Christian ratification formulae. In respect to these elements, the charm is nothing exceptional among the other medieval Bulgarian texts against water retention. Usually, these charms include three angels, three ritual actions, triple invocation to God and three magical words of unknown meaning\textsuperscript{511}. This \textit{historiola} takes place at the river Jordan. The four biblical rivers Gyon, Physon, Tigris and Euphrates are present too, as their names should be written on nails, fingers or hooves.

However, this particular water retention charm has a unique feature – the name Agripa, repeated twice in the beginning of the text. This name does not appear anywhere

\begin{flushright}
Agrippa (11 BCE – 44 CE) and his son Herod Agrippa II (27–100 CE). They are respectively the grandson and the grand-grandson of Herod the Great. These kings are both mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles as being hostile to Christianity. Thus, it is possible that the Christian tradition associated the name \textit{Agrippa} with evil and devilish figures and powers, and the demons from the Coptic charm are named Agrippas due to this association.
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{509} See no. 24 in the catalogue.

\textsuperscript{510} The meaning of this phrase is not very clear. It seems to be an instruction, according to which the name/the word Agripa should (probably) be inscribed on a horseshoe. This means that the charm is meant to cure horses. However, the \textit{historiola} only refers to a sick human, and not to a sick animal.

\textsuperscript{511} These words go by three, in various spellings: \textit{hinen, igis and mantis, or geris, tortos and gideon}, or \textit{igin, igin and netaitis}.
else in the medieval and early modern Bulgarian source material, and it has not been discussed or analyzed in the secondary literature either. Although it is not very clear how the name Agrippas came into the Coptic charm, it is certain what does it stands for: supernatural helper of demonic nature. It seems that it was adopted by the late medieval Bulgarian charm, in order to fulfil the same role. Although it is not sure that in the Bulgarian text Agripa was understood exactly as a name of a supernatural entity, clearly it was perceived as some kind of magical word of power.

The difference in numbers (three Coptic Agrippas, but only two Bulgarian Agripa) can be explained in several ways. The simplest one is that the Bulgarian text was physically damaged or corrupted. However, this is rather unlikely, as the text seems to be physically well preserved\(^{512}\). Another explanation can be a random omission, oblivion or a copyist’s mistake. This is possible, especially if the copyist did not understand the word. However, the text’s punctuation and graphics is quite clear, which indicates that the repetition is on purpose double (and not triple). This leads to another explanation, namely that the Bulgarian charm was maybe translated from or adapted on the basis of an original, which only contained two Agripa. In this case, the Bulgarian text used a “template”, which is already modified or a priori different from the Coptic charm. Finally, it is maybe a case of contamination or merging between motives. It is possible that the Bulgarian charm is a conscious modification of another text, which repeated the name three times. Maybe, the Bulgarian text is an original composition, which drew from several sources and processed the original motives in a new way. Instead of being a

---

\(^{512}\) At least, that is how it looks in the publication in Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, p. 34.
helpful trinity, Agripa became a word of power, meant to be inscribed (probably symmetrically), followed by the typical trinity-based *historiola*.

In my understanding, the Coptic charm with Horus has two direct Bulgarian parallels or descendants: the charm against the *nezhit* with the blind shepherds and the charm against water retention with the repetition of the name Agripa. The *nezhit* charm inherited the disability-motif and the impossibilialia-motif. The water retention charm kept the Agripa Agripa. This probably has something to do with the fact that the water retention charm contains the same number of helpers, like the Coptic one: three.

The professional occupation and the status of the supernatural helpers vary from example to example. In the Bulgarian text, there are blind shepherds, without number specified. In the German charm, there are three dead men, each of them with some physical disability. In the Coptic text, there are three demons with the same name, one of them handicapped. While the helpers always have certain supernatural abilities or status, the specific occupation of shepherds lacks from the Coptic and the German charms.

The motif “shepherds and illness” can also be seen a healing charm in Bulgarian folklore recorded in a later period\(^{513}\):

> Three brothers were shepherding the *stranitsi*\(^ {514}\),
> The first one is dumb,
> The second one is deaf,
> The third one is blind.
> Until the dumb one speaks,
> Until the deaf one hears,
> Until the blind one sees –
> A wolf took away the *stranitsi*.\(^ {515}\)

\(^{514}\) *Stranitsi* is the Bulgarian folklore name of an inflammation of the submandibular gland.  
\(^{515}\) The English translation is mine, after the Bulgarian text, published by Georgieva, “Баянята като космогонична концепция”, p. 13.
This is a completely inverted situation – the three shepherds are guarding and looking after the illness (an inflammation). Because of the disabilities of its guardians, the illness escapes and later is eaten by a wolf. In the text against the nežhit quoted above, the strange shepherds are benevolent supernatural agents, successfully defeating the illness. In the folklore tradition recorded later, the three shepherds are demonic figures, which ensure the success of the evil activity of the illness.516

The shepherds can be seen as positive figures also in late antique and early medieval charms, where the defeaters of the illness have this specific occupation. Exactly shepherds appear in the following two Latin charms, given by Marcellus Empiricus in his book De Medicamentis. The first text is against heart illness or pain:

Corce corcedo stagna, pastores te invenerunt, sine manibus collegerunt, sine foco coxerunt, sine dentibus comederunt.517

The second charm is against some kind of internal infection in humans or in animals:

Stolpus a coelo cecidit, hunc morbum pastores invenerunt, sine manibus collegerunt, sine igni coxerunt, sine dentibus comederunt.518

It is difficult to say why exactly the shepherds counteract the illness. In Christian context, the occupation and the work of the shepherds has very positive and exemplary symbolic meaning. The image and notion of the “Good Shepherd” is central for Christianity, it applies to Christ and to the Christian clergy. The human and the supernatural shepherds have very special role in a number of Biblical narratives. At his

516 Ibidem.
517 Spamer, Romanusbüchlein, 323. This Latin text is a quotation from De Medicamentis, XXI, 3 written by Marcellus Empiricus (Marcellus Burdigalensis/ Marcel of Bordeaux) – a Gallic medical writer from forth/fifth century CE. See also Jerry Stannard, “Marcellus of Bordeaux and the Beginnings of the Medieval Materia Medica,” Pharmacy in History 15 (1973): pp. 48-51.
518 This is another example by Marcellus Empiricus (De Medicamentis, XXVIII, 16), quoted by Éva Pöcs, “Miracles and Impossibilities in Magic Folk Poetry,” in Roper, Charms, Charmers and Charming, p. 34. The article discusses also the interpretations of the “demon falling from the sky” motif and its parallels.
birth on earth, Christ is first met and praised exactly by the shepherds. Thus, the motif “good shepherds versus bad illness” has its Christian background and explanation, and it is not surprising to be seen in a late medieval Bulgarian charm. At a second sight, the charm has a Christian narrative. The shepherds emerge as positive Christian characters, acting according to a typical Christian paradigm.

The positive connotation of this particular occupation may possibly have its roots in the Mesopotamian verbal magic. One of the Mesopotamian charms exorcises the fever by the names of many deities, among which there is “Nin-Tara, the shepherd of flocks”\(^{519}\). It seems that this line refers to Ninurta, the deity of the ancient Mesopotamian city of Lagash. On one hand, Ninurta is a farmer and a healer, helping against the sickness and demons. On the other hand, he is identified as the South Wind. As we saw already, the first evil spirit from The Seven is the South Wind\(^{520}\). Thus, there is a Mesopotamian archetype of a good shepherd, related to healing.

However, the physical disability (the blindness) of the shepherds goes beyond the conventional Christian positive model. Generally, the sight impairments have special place and meaning in culture, mythology and demonology. Important biblical figures like Isaac and Eli have sight disability. Being blind or one-eyed is a main characteristic feature of mythological figures like Odin, the Cyclopes, Tiresias. The third dead man from the German charm is blind too, and the third demon Agrippas from the Coptic charm only has one eye.

In my opinion, this Coptic parallel provides context for the better understanding of the blindness of the shepherds from the Bulgarian text. On one hand, the demon that

\(^{520}\) The storm and pest-bringing Mesopotamian demon Pazuzu is also associated with the southwestern wind.
helps Horus is exactly the one with sight disability. On the other hand, Horus himself is symbolically connected with the eyesight. In the ancient Egyptian religion, one of his aspects is as god of the moonless nights\textsuperscript{521} and as god of the blind. He lost his left eye in a battle with Set. Later, the eye is restored magically and became a symbol of healing and protection. This is the ancient Egyptian apotropaic symbol in the shape of a falcon’s eye, called the Eye of Horus.

Possibly, these old Egyptian motives and notions were adopted by the Coptic and later in the Byzantine tradition. Via the Byzantine route, they probably also reached the Balkans and Bulgaria. In my opinion, the Coptic and Byzantine motives probably met with the local (Slavic and others) pre-Christian elements and traditions. There, for example, we can see Slavic mythological figures like the Liho (Лихо) and the Pesoglav (Песоглав, a cynocephalous winter demon). Both of them are explicitly evil and one-eyed\textsuperscript{522}.

Regardless of the tradition, the physical disability/the blindness most often means belonging to the Other World. Unlike the ordinary disabled humans, the disabled supernatural beings are able to complete successfully the most difficult deeds, good and evil. The blind shepherds see the dangerous nezhit, the one-eyed and one-handed Agrippas help in a nick of time, etc. They manage so well exactly because of their supernatural otherworldly blindness, crippleness, etc. The impossibilia make things possible. In my opinion, this explains why Bulgarian verbal magic has a curative charm, where the blind shepherds are positive figures, and another curative charm, where the blind shepherds are negative figures. Both the good and the evil shepherds come from the

\textsuperscript{521} Called Mekhenti-en-irty, meaning “he who has no eyes”.
\textsuperscript{522} Pócs, \textit{Fairies and Witches}, p. 23.
Other World. Each group, however, carries different combination of attributes and meanings. The good blind shepherds come from the Other World to help the humans against the *nezhit*. The evil disabled shepherds come from the Other World to help the illness against the human.

Although the otherworldly origin and affiliation may have some positive connotations, the negative aspects are more prominent in Bulgarian folklore\(^5\). In this sense, the charm against the *nezhit* is rather special. It represents blindness as manifestation of the supernatural, which is good and positive. The narrative from the Bulgarian charm is very interesting, but somehow compressed or incomplete. The comparison and contrast with other texts emphasize its uniqueness.

On the other hand, the supernatural disability of the shepherds can also be interpreted in terms of power levels. Maybe the *nezhit* is so strong and dangerous that it can only be defeated by supernatural figures, whose blindness give them bigger supernatural power in the framework of impossiblia. In this critical situation, the power of the shepherds is more important than their potential sinister nature.

**5.3.3. The sisters**

In their role as positive, yet ambiguous agents, the blind shepherds from the Bulgarian charm have a peculiar relation to a special group of supernatural handicapped helpers – the Graeae from the Greek mythology. The Graeae are three sisters, the daughters of Phorcys and Ceto. They had grey hair from their birth, and only had one eye and one tooth, which they borrowed from one another. In the classical Greek myth, the hero Perseus stole their eye and their tooth, and then return them in exchange for information about Medusa. In some Classical Greek sources, the Graeae have the figures

of swans. The Graeae (being members of the family of Phorcys) were interpreted as marine divinities, and personifications of the white foam seen on the waves of the sea.\textsuperscript{524}

While the Graeae are similar to the shepherds in their physical disability, as a water-related female trio they are connected to other figures in Bulgarian verbal magic. The three supernatural women, who know a lot and help in solving a problem, lead us to another Bulgarian charm. There, we can see the three sisters in the fiery lake, helping against water retention. The charm is from a fourteenth century manuscript, part of a group of three charms against water retention. In the manuscript, the three charms are written together, one immediately following the other. The texts look as following:\textsuperscript{525}:

\textit{Prayer against water retention in horse and humans. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Three angels stand on the bank of the river Jordan and hold copper intestines. One ties, the other unties, the third one prays to God, saying: “Holy holy holy God Sabbaoth! Heaven and earth is full with his glory!” \textit{Prayer for the same thing. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. I went out in a field of fire and I found a lake of flames. Into it, three sisters were sitting and holding three bowls full with crayfish intestines. The oldest one was tying, the middle one was untying, the youngest one was praying to God: “Lord, let the water pass through this man (the person’s name) in the name of the Father.” \textit{Third [prayer]. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Write on the front right leg Tigris, on the left rear leg Physon, on the front left leg Euphrates, on the left rear leg [sic!] Gyon. To go all over the earth. In the name of the Father and the Son. Read each of them four times. Soon it will be relieved.}

The first and the third charms are rather typical for the medieval Bulgarian verbal magic. Both the \textit{historiola} about the three angels and the instruction about the four rivers


\textsuperscript{525} The manuscript is the famous Zaykovski Book of Occasional Prayers (Зайковски требник, NBKM № 960, fourteenth century), fol. 47v. Stoyanov, \textit{Catalogue}, p. 114. See no. 22 and no. 23 in the Catalogue. The highlight in bold is mine.
is found often in the sources. However, the story in the middle is unique for the Bulgarian material, as this is the only verbal charm, employing the *historiola* about the three sisters.

The three sisters charm contains a number of typical magical elements. The locations “field of fire” and “lake of flame” shape the mythical environment. The supernatural figures are sitting in the middle of their magical place, thus manifesting their otherworldly nature. Symbolically, the number three is very significant too, especially when it refers to a trinity of supernatural beings. The crayfish intestines function as a tool for imitative magic. However, most of all, the narrative is centered at the helpful supernatural female trio.

The motif of three women (often sisters or other relatives), who have supernatural powers and prophetic knowledge is widespread. A few parallels are the above-mentioned Graeae and the Moirai in the Greek mythology; the Parcae and the Camenae\(^{526}\) in the ancient Roman religion; the Norns and the Valkyries in the Norse mythology; the Latvian trio Laima, Kārta and Dēkla; the Italian Fate; the Morrígan trio in the Irish mythology; the three witches or weird sisters from the early modern western European literature and imagination\(^{527}\).

All of these figures have certain common features: they are women; often three in number; genetically related (usually sisters); divine or semi-divine; with chthonic origin, nature and features; with supernatural powers; wise and knowledgeable; seers and prophets; closely connected with human life, fate, birth and death. In the Slavic context, similar figures appear in the face of the *Narechnitsi* (наречници), *Orisnitsi* (орисници)

\(^{526}\) The Camenae were Roman prophetic deities and goddesses of childbirth, wells and fountains. They were four sisters, called Carmenta, Egeria, Antevorta and Postvorta.

and Sudzhenitsy (судженци). They are three fairy sisters, who come to the newborn child and foretell the child’s destiny. The fairies from the Balkan folklore also can appear in the role of helpful supernatural female trio\textsuperscript{528}.

Thus, the above-presented Bulgarian text comes as a part of a rich tradition. It has direct parallels in the medieval charm-type \textit{Tres virgines} or \textit{Tres sorores} (Three virgins or Three sisters). In this type of charm, three virgins and/or sisters accomplish three actions, and the third one brings the healing/the solution\textsuperscript{529}. In different variants, they can be replaced by three angels, three saints, three flowers, etc.\textsuperscript{530} Two such charms are given by Marcellus Empiricus. The first one is against heart pain:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Tres virgines in medio mari mensam marmoream positam habebant, duae torquebant et una retorquebat; quomodo hoc numquam factum est, sic numquam sciat illa Gaia Seia corci dolorem.}\textsuperscript{531}
\end{quote}

The second charm of the same type is against stomach pain. Its imagery is closer to the Bulgarian example:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Stabat arbor in medio mare et ibi pendebat situla plena interstinionum humanorum, tres virgines circumibant, duae alligabant, una revolvebat.}\textsuperscript{532}
\end{quote}

A variant of the charm appears also in \textit{Medicina Plinii}, a fourth century Latin medical manuscript\textsuperscript{533}:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Tres sorores ambulabant, una volbebat, alia cernabat, tertia soluebat.}
\end{quote}

The Bulgarian charm is very close to the two charms, given by Marcellus Empiricus. In the Latin text, the mythical location is “in medio mari”, in the Bulgarian text the magical spaces are “field of fire” and “lake of flames”. In both cases, the

\textsuperscript{528} Pócs, \textit{Fairies and Witches}, passim.
\textsuperscript{529} Bozoky, \textit{Charmes et prières apotropaïques}, p. 48.
\textsuperscript{530} Ibidem.
\textsuperscript{531} Marcellus Empiricus \textit{De Medicamentis}, XXI, 3. The \textit{tres virgines} charm follows immediately after the above-quoted charm with the shepherds.
\textsuperscript{532} Marcellus Empiricus, \textit{De Medicamentis}, XXVIII, 74.
\textsuperscript{533} Bozóky, \textit{Charmes et prières apotropaïques}, p. 93-94.
paraphernalia consists of intestines. In both cases, the sisters are tying and untying. In the Bulgarian charm, the third sister is praying (performing verbal magic) and this particular action is the one that helps and heals.

The sister’s help also against hemorrhage in a thirteenth century French medical manuscript, were the text is as follows:\(^{534}\):

_Sainte Marie aloit par voie, le fiz Deu portoit, trois serours samanz trova, l’une avoit a non Resta, li alter Cesta, et li tierce Stupa; plais Deu le tout poisans sainte Marie ke de ces plais sainc n’isent._

In this French variant, the helping sisters have names, derived from the Latin verbs with the meaning “to stop”. The same verbs are generally often encountered in blood-staunching charms.\(^{535}\) In this fashion, they appear in a French text from a fifteenth-century English manuscript\(^{536}\):

_Ive et Eve e saynte Suene furent seorures. Ceo dist Ive: “scuche”; ceo dist Eve: “estupe”; ceo dist seynt Suene: “meis nen isse gute”._

In the later times, the female trio appears also in a text in the eighteenth century _Romanusbüchlein_, published by Spamer. The German charm is from the Dreifrauensegen-type:

_Vor die Geschwulst._

_Es gingen 3 reine Jungfrauen, sie wollten eine Geschwulst und Krankheit beschauen, die eine sprach: Es ist Heisch, die andere sprach: Es ist nicht, die dritte sprach: Ist es dann nicht, so kommt unser lieber Herr Jesu Christ, im Namen der heiligen Dreifastigkeit gesprochen._

_Against Swellings._

"Three pure virgins went out on a journey, to inspect a swelling and sickness. The first one said: It is hoarse. The second said: It is not. The

---

\(^{534}\) Bozóky, _Charmes et prières apotropaïques_, p. 94.

\(^{535}\) Ibidem.

\(^{536}\) Ibidem.
third said: If it is not, then will our Lord Jesus Christ come." Spoken in the name of the Holy Trinity.

Finally, the Bulgarian text has a very exact Hungarian parallel:

_Uram Jézus, segíts meg!_
_Orbán vize mellett_
_Három szűz lány vala,_
_Egyik ódi,_
_Másik köti,_
_A harmadik hugyát (szarát) eregeti_
_Ennek a lónak._

_Lord Jesus, help!_
_Next to the water of Orbán_
_Three virgins stand_
_One unties,_
_The other ties,_
_The third one [says]: May urine (excrement) [go out] of this horse._

In the context of so many historical parallels, it is indeed surprising that the three sisters narrative appears only once in the Bulgarian material. On the other hand, in the light of the obvious non-canonical style and character of the charm, it is interesting and remarkable that the text infiltrated into a fourteenth-century clerical book. The _historiola_ and its supernatural protagonists and locations are most probably pre-Christian and much older than the Christian Trinitarian formulae, added in the beginning and the end. Still, the three sisters made it successfully into the _требник_. In my opinion, this is probably because they were taken for and understood as a variant of the three angels from the previous charm. The physical arrangement of the charms suggest that they were regarded as a functional unit. This is very probable, if the instruction “Read each of them four time” applies not only for the names of the four rivers, but for all the three charms too. The story of the three sisters actually looks almost like a fairytale. In this respect, the

---

537 Pócs, “Sors, bábák, boszorkányok”, p. 79.
three sisters charm is very similar to the charm with the blind shepherds. Each of these two texts is a *hapax legomenon* in the sources and emphatically non-canonical.

Actually, the three sisters from the Bulgarian charm are to some degree related to a number of the above-presented supernatural figures. Clearly, in their function of helpers and healers, they are similar to the blind shepherds. In their syncretic and ancient origin, they are also similar to St. Sisinnius. However, the three sisters are somehow related to the *nezhit* and the *veshtitsa* too. They have a certain connection with water and this specific space hints to an aquatic origin and chthonic nature, typical for a number of evil illness-perpetrating demons, including the *nezhit*, the *veshtitsa* and the *tresavitsi*. Thus, the *tres sorores* have roots in the long tradition of supernatural female chthonic figures.

Sometimes they can be evil and can do harm, other times they can be good and can bring help and healing. Even when they are with most positive nature and behavior, such female figures still demonstrate a dark side, a reminder for their primordial chaotic essence\(^{538}\). The helping old woman easily turns into a childbirth demon, harming the humans\(^{539}\). The benevolent helping *tres sorores* are only a step away from becoming the three demonic sisters, the three witches, or the three child-stealing demons. This can be seen in the wide-spread motive of the three demonic night-witches, discussing to hurt/to kill or to cure/to spare the human victim\(^{540}\). This also reminds of the pre-Islamic demonic

\(^{538}\) Indeed, in a fourteenth-fifteenth century Croatian variant of the list of names, the *veshtitsa* is called Ursica, which is probably a variant of the Bulgarian *orisnitsa* (орисница), who decides the fate (орис) of the newborn. Actually, the *veshtitsa* is in a way an *orisnitsa* turned upside-down: she comes to the newborn, not to foretell the baby’s future and life, but to destroy it.

\(^{539}\) Pócs, “Sors, bábák, boszorkányok”, p. 86.

\(^{540}\) Ibidem, p. 88-89.
child-harming female trio Qarīna (meaning “sister”), Sibyan (meaning, “mother of sons”) and Tabi’a (meaning “follower”), expelled by Sulayman.\textsuperscript{541}

This ambiguity is very typical for the fairies from the Slavic and Balkan folklore.\textsuperscript{542} They can damage, destroy, hurt and kill, but also can protect, build, help and cure. The positive and beneficial conduct of the fairies can be obtained via different methods, which most often include bribing or direct coercion and coercion. It is usual for such supernatural figures to help the humans, but only if they are pleased by a gift or forced by special circumstances and special actions. Like the Graeae in the Greek mythology, who have to be compelled to provide useful information.

Often, the human (the charmer) has to perform certain actions (to be silent, to make certain gestures, to be brave at scary circumstances, etc.) and to fulfil certain conditions (to be without belt or pectoral cross, to have loose hair, to ware certain clothes or to be naked, to fast, etc.), in order to make the fairies to do something. For example, this is very typical for Russian folklore and magic\textsuperscript{543}. Possibly, the entrance in the field of fire, stated by the Bulgarian charmer, is a fulfillment of such a necessary condition. Thus, she or he have the right to ask for the help of the three sisters. This is hypothetical, because the Bulgarian charm has a very short and concentrated narrative, and not all the details are available or clear. It is difficult to say if the three supernatural sisters help because they are good, or because they are obliged or forced to do so.

\textsuperscript{542} Pócs, \textit{Fairies and Witches}, passim.
\textsuperscript{543} Ryan, \textit{The Bathhouse}, passim.
5. 4. Good vs. Evil

The status of being good or being evil is clear, but it is not the only dimension of the supernatural figures. They can be ambiguous (like the three sister and the blind shepherds), yet benevolent and effective helpers. This is the dimension of the “narrating power”. As David Frankfurter puts it, this term carries a double meaning. “First, when one “narrates” or utters a spell, the words uttered draw power into the world and towards (or against) an object in the world. This is perhaps the fundamental principle of magical or ritual speech.”\(^{544}\) Not only the charmer, uttering the charm, uses and exercises the “narrating power”. It is encoded in the structure of the charms and it is employed by the supernatural figures too. Some of these figures are in the role of verbal charmers inside the *historiola*.

At his encounter with the *nezhit*, Jesus Christ starts a dialogue, asking the illness-perpetrator a direct question (“Where are you going?”). This is followed by a direct answer (“I am going into the human head, in order to bemuse the brain, to break the teeth and the jaws...”, or “I am going into the human’s head, to suck his brain, to break his bones, to blind his eyes.”) With this open statement, the *nezhit* draws evil power against the humans. The aim is to bring a negative effect (an illness). Based on this “confession”, Jesus Christ reacts and sends the illness away (“Go back into the forest and enter the deer’s head and the ram’s head, because they can bear everything and still survive. And stay there until the end of Heaven and Earth.”) By verbal means, with this direct expulsion formula, Jesus draws good power towards the human world and against the *nezhit*. The aim is to prevent and to cure. In order to exercise control over the evil,

---

\(^{544}\) Frankfurter, “Narrating Power”, p. 457. There, the author also points out that „Scholars like Stanley Tambiah have developed its utility for the study of magic by connecting the idea of verbal power to the notion of the so-called *illocution*, or efficacious statement, in Speech Acts theory.”
Jesus Christ only uses words. As he is a positive supernatural figure with immense power, no other procedures or physical actions are necessary; the verbal “narrating power” is enough to stop the nezhit.

Related process happens in the story about St. Sisinnius. He is standing in the stone tower on the Red Sea coast, when the tresavitsi emerge out of the sea storm. They speak first, declaring, “We are the tresavitsi – the daughters of Tsar Herod”. The saint asks them “Cursed devils, why did you come here?” The direct answer follows “We who came here to torment the human race. We are going to hold and tie down and torture the one who is resisting us.” The “cursed devils” draw negative power against the human world, and more specifically against the humans, who are righteous people and good Christians. Based on this declaration, St. Sisinnius reacts and asks the Lord for help. The four evangelists and two angels, sent from Heaven, start beating the tresavitsi with iron sticks. When the fevers pray for mercy and reveal the magical power of their names, St. Sisinnius asks about their “devilish names” and here follows the list.

While the charm against the nezhit is a simple scene, an encounter between Jesus Christ and the illness, the charm against the fevers contains an entire set of characters. There are the evil antagonists the tresavitis, the good protagonist St. Sisinnius, and the angels and the evangelists as good heavenly helpers, sent form above. The story evolves according to a scheme: appearance of the evil – statement of evil intentions – request for a supernatural help – supernatural help in action – list of names. De facto, here saint Sisinnius is as powerful and skillful verbal charmer in a charming session. He operates with the “narrating power” according to the circumstances, and directs it for the sake of human healing and benefit. At the appearance of the fevers, the saint intervenes and starts
a dialogue (asks the tresavitsi about their intentions), then prays to the Lord for help, and finally reaches the goal – the list of names, which is an instrument for controlling the tresavitsi. St. Sisinnius does not have any physical contact with the fevers, the contact is only verbal. Actually, he is not at all endangered by them; he acts for the sake of the ill humans. Through the dialogue, St. Sisinnius provides the humans with the lists of names, hence with a weapon against the illness.

In the charms against the veshtitsa, the dialogue and the verbal communication is central too. The evil figure speaks openly “The veshtitsa said: “I eradicate a fruit tree, I dry female beauty, I defeat female malice, I approach and enter into the human’s place as a hen, as a dove, as a snake…, etc.” The employment of “narrating power” is explicitly stated (“The veshtitsa said…”) She does not do anything else, but speaking. All her evil power is in her words. Archangel Michael manages to counteract this via direct order: “Tell me your names!” As a result of the order (which may be preceded by physical violence on the side of the Archangel), the veshtitsa presents the list of her names. The magically charged names are enlisted out loud by the evil veshtitsa, so that the good Archangel Michael (and the humans) can control her. The names as words of power are narrated by the negative figure, but in order to bring a positive effect for the humans. The names are part of the veshtitsa’s character and essence (“I am a veshtitsa and I enter the house as a snake…”), then they are also a part of the historiola.

In his fight against the veshtitsa, Archangel Michael may employ the “narrating power” in combination with physical means – he fetters the veshtitsa and beats her with iron stick, thus he forces her to tell her names and to swear that she will not harm the humans. In a way, Archangel Michael is in the role of both charmer and a warrior. He
employs the “narrating power” through verbal means and directs the positive effect towards the human world. At the same time, he enforces the control over the evil through the physical violence. The Archangel, however, does not ask for supernatural heavenly help, because he himself is the supernatural heavenly helper.

In contrast to these predominantly verbal interactions, the blind shepherds do not say a single word. They do not use “narrating power” themselves; they only intervene and fight with the nezhit by physical means (“They chased him without feet, caught him without hands, tied him without a rope, burned him without fire, killed him without a knife, and ate him without mouths”). Yet, the blind shepherds are part of the “narrating power” of the charmer, who tells the historiola. Preserved and told as a narrative, the successful intervention and the victory of the shepherds draw positive power towards the humans.

In the dialogue, the “narrating power” operates by the means of direct verbal contact and direct speech. Jesus Christ, St. Sisinnius and Archangel Michael react directly to a direct threat. Their intervention is possible and successful in the context of the encounter and the verbal communication.

In the snakebite charms, the evil snake does not speak at all. In the case of the tresavitsi and the veshtitsa, the lists of names come as a product of the dialogue. In the charms against the snake, the names come as an outside definition of the snake’s evil nature. Apostle Paul received the list (as part of an entire charm) from Archangel Michael, who is the positive supernatural helper, coming in a dream and providing verbal magical instrument. Paul acts as charmer is a charming session, he narrates a historiola inside the historiola. In his dream, he received a charm inside the charm, including the
list of the names and the titles of the snake. The list is actually a very long expulsion-extermination formula: “I conjure you, sixty-five and a half kind of beasts, which creep on the ground, in the name of the Lord, creator of heaven, earth and sea... Snake born from a basilisk, tetrachalin snake, dodekachalin snake, lagodroma snake, snake with twelve heads, snake like fire, snake like raven, snake climbing on oaks, snake like an arrow...you cannot live anymore!” The snakebite charm has a story inside the story-structure. The charm starts with instructions, these instructions contain a mini-reference to a biblical narrative (“Let Moses rise complete on the standard of healing.”), followed by a first-person narrative of Apostle Paul, which contains his experience with snakebite and his dream, inside which Archangel Michael comes and provides a charm, which is an expulsion formula, containing the list of names of the snake.

In the list of names, the “narrating power” operates by the means of definition and description. The fuller and the more elaborated, the better and the more effective. In the examples above, the enumeration of the names is a central element. In the charms against the tresavitsi and the veshtitsa, this element comes because of the dialogue. For the veshtitsa, the list of names is an aggressive statement of self-definition and self-description of her power. In the snakebite charms, the list is the inner part of the story inside the story-structure. For the snake, the list of names is a direct expulsion-extermination formula and definition of the power of the charmer (Apostle Paul).

The “narrating power” is strongly manifested in the impossibilia too. Some of them are actually rather “feasible” or “realistic”. Jesus Christ send the nezhit away into the forest and into a deserted place, into the head of a ram and a deer. In the charm against rabies, St. John meets iron soldiers and rabid wolves, which is not so impossible
either. In one of the protection charms, “The apostles Peter and Paul are summoned to curse the mora and the veshtista and the Devil and all the envious and unclean spirits. In the evening and at midnight, when no dogs are barking and no roosters are singing...“. These spatial and temporal details are symbolically significant, but not beyond the possible human reality. The shepherds, however, operate in much more “fantastic” settings and by much more “fantastic” means. They see without eyes, chase without feet, etc. The highest degree of “fantastic” is reached in the water detention charm. There human (the charmer) goes out in a field of fire and finds a lake of flames. In this “impossible” lake, the three supernatural sisters, who are trying, untying and saying words of power.

In the impossibilia, the “narrating power” operates by the means of fantastic and impossible in various degrees. The more impossible and unbelievable, the better and the stronger. The impossible conditions and elements are magically important, as they give means to control the evil. At the same time, the impossibilia are from the narrative point of view and stylistically important, as they make the historiola vivid, dynamic and fascinating, similar to an adventurous fairytale. In terms both of meaning and form, the impossibilia produce strong effect, which has significant magical and narrative impact.

Being texts, the historiolae (and actually the verbal charms as a whole) possess what Frankfurter defines as “an additional sense to “narrating power”: a “power” intrinsic to any narrative, any story, uttered in a ritual context, and the idea that the mere recounting of certain stories situates or directs their “narrative” power into this world.”\(^\text{545}\) Loaded with sacred information, the historiolae tell about previous victories of the good supernatural beings over the evil ones. Thus, they legitimize and validate the effect of the

charm in the present. They guarantee that in the evil powers will be successfully defeated and expelled now, as this happened in the past. Essentially, the *historiolae* are power narratives – “per formative transmissions of power from a mythic realm articulated in narrative to the human present.”

The *historiolae* promise a complex ritual solution for the crisis and a complete restoration of health and wellbeing. To use the terminology of Bell, each charm is a redefinition of the cosmological order “in response to new challenges and new formulations of human needs.” Each charm is a promise for permanent victory, each ratification formula claims to fix the final “clinching”, so that the evil will not be back. Yet, the evil always returns. The charms do not solve the problem, but give „a resolution without ever defining one”. They define and narrate the problem is new terms, and thus postponing the crisis. „There is no point of arrival but a constant invocation of new terms to continue the validation and coherence of the older terms.” Thus, each charms is a constant narrational combat zone of the positive and negative supernatural figures.

The pattern is a good supernatural power to fight against each evil supernatural power. The evil ones have the power to attack, destroy, hurt, damage, kill, etc. The good ones have the power to protect, cure, build, repair, revive, etc. Most of all, the good ones have the power to help against the evil ones, to counteract them and to defeat them. The victory of the positive over the negative is fundamental. The essence goes down to Archangel Michael/St. Sisinnius/the blind shepherds winning against the devil/the veshtitsa/the nezhit, and not vice versa.

---

548 Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, p. 120.
549 Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, p. 106.
As these are Bulgarian verbal charms, there is the question about the presence and the influence of the Bogomil dualistic doctrine and ideas. The Bogomilism and its dualism definitely left traces in Bulgarian popular religion, and especially in the folklore\textsuperscript{551}. The south and east Slavic magic folklore contain a rich variety of beliefs and practices, some of them preserving many archaic features\textsuperscript{552}. From the late ninth century onwards, this folklore tradition adopted and assimilated the Byzantine magical and divination-knowledge. This led to the formation of symbiosis between the Bogomil dualistic beliefs and practices, and the traditional pre-Christan beliefs and practices. This symbiosis is very typical for the Balkans in particular. After the disappearance of the Balkan Bogomils, the Balkan folklore remains as the keeper of the ancient dualistic beliefs and legends.\textsuperscript{553} The imprint of the obscure dualistic tradition, found in the south Slavic and Balkan folklore is de facto one of the few remnants of the once powerful heretic movement\textsuperscript{554}.

The Bulgarian verbal charms are a sphere, where Bogomil dualism had a significant and deep impact\textsuperscript{555}. The constant direct combat between the good and the evil can be clearly interpreted in Bogomil dualistic terms. These dynamic scenes and impressive stories are inherited from the dualistic Bogomil apocryphal mythology, with

\textsuperscript{551} There is a vast literature on this topic. Generally on Bogomilism and its impact on spirituality and popular beliefs, see Obolensky, \textit{The Bogomils}, and Димитър Ангелов, \textit{Богомилството в България} (The Bogomilism in Bulgaria), (Sofia: Наука и изкуство, 1980). Specifically on the traces of Bogomil dualism in the Balkan folklore, see Yuri Stoyanov, \textit{The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), especially the chapter “Heresy and Magic – East and West”, pp. 232-249. I used both the American and the Bulgarian edition of the book, which is Юри Стоянов, \textit{Другият бог. Дуалистичните религии от Античността до катарската ерес} (Sofia: Кралица Маб, 2006).

\textsuperscript{552} Yuri Stoyanov, \textit{The Other God}, p. 316.

\textsuperscript{553} Yuri Stoyanov, \textit{The Other God}, p. 338.

\textsuperscript{554} Obolensky, \textit{The Bogomils}, passim, Yuri Stoyanov, \textit{The Other God}, p. 340.

\textsuperscript{555} Yuri Stoyanov, \textit{The Other God}, 315.
its plasticity, and vivid and bright imagery\textsuperscript{556}. As form and content, many of the charms are actually heretic apocryphal narratives. For example, the encounters and the dialogues between Jesus Christ and the \textit{nezhit}, and between Archangel Michael and the \textit{veshitsa} have clear parallels in the apocryphal arguments between God and the Devil. The snakebite charms, where the snake is repeatedly named as the most evil creature, fits perfectly into the Bogomil legends about the seductive Satan, appearing to Eve as a snake.

From a broader mythological perspective, the dualism or the duality manifested in the Bulgarian charms can be interpreted in relation to an archaic, dual cosmogonical system\textsuperscript{557}. In this system, the dualism is between the supernatural and the human, between Our World and the Other World. The emphasized spatial and temporal dichotomy and the strict separation between the humans (the living) and the supernatural (the dead) play central role. The “sacred boundaries complex” is a pivotal cosmological concept\textsuperscript{558}. In this archaic dual cosmogonical system, both the good and the evil, the destructive and the creative supernatural powers are primarily located on the other side,

\textsuperscript{556} Yuri Stoyanov, \textit{The Other God}, 344. The author points out that this plasticity and vividness of the dualistic mythology is among the strongest points of the Bogomil and Cathar propaganda, together with the asceticism.

\textsuperscript{557} Pócs, \textit{Fairies and Witches}, p. 19.

\textsuperscript{558} Ibidem, Stark, \textit{Peasants, Pilgrims and Sacred Promises}, p. 128, where the terms “sacred boundaries complex” and “sacred centres complex” are explained: “Christianizing the wilderness did not alter the main structure of categories in Karelian ritual thought nor affect the “otherworldly” status of the nature spirits. This is because, in the cultural thought underlying the rituals, the most salient distinction still lay between this world and the other side (forest, wilderness). In the ritual communication carried out within the \textit{sacred boundaries complex}, Christianity was not a \textit{category} used to classify or organize the relations between this world and the other side, but was rather an \textit{attribute} to forge strategic and situation-specific equivalences between two spheres plotted as opposites. In other words, the ‘boundary’ in the sacred boundaries complex did not lie between the realms of Christian versus non-Christian (=pagan/evil), but between the human world and the ‘other side’ (wilderness, abode of the dead). In this context, Christianity could be an attribute of all sentient beings capable of agency, communication, and moral conscience, whether supernatural or human. In the rituals taking place in the \textit{sacred boundaries complex}, there were no participants who were expressly ‘un-Christian’ or evil supernatural beings, and no category which would oppose and therefore define ‘Christian’ as closer to purity, more central.” This distinction is emphasized elsewhere: “within the \textit{sacred centres complex}, which served the function of dividing the world into more or less purely Christian spheres and persons.”
in the supernatural realm of the Other World. This side, Our World, is the human realm, where the human life and the human everyday needs and issues are located.

Thus, the dualism or the duality in the Bulgarian verbal charms can be interpreted beyond the dichotomy Christian vs. non-Christian. Instead, these charms can be placed in the context of ritual relationships between humans and supernatural beings “which were based on reciprocity and a shared moral orientation.” In this context, Jesus Christ, St. Sisinnius, Archangel Michael, Apostle Paul, the blind shepherds, the three sisters, etc. live in the same realm as the nezhit, the veshtitsa, the tresavitsi, the devil, the venomous snake, the illnesses, etc. These positive figures, however, intervene in the side of the humans and act for the humans’ benefit, health, success, etc. If any distinction between Christian and non-Christian was ever made, it is of little relevance, when it comes to the positive supernatural figures. The tres sorores in the lake of flames are nowhere to be seen in canonical Christian narratives. They, however, cure water detention, and that is what counts. There is no saint Sisinnius in the official church hagiography and calendar. He, however, heals fever and protects against evil spirits, and that is the most important fact about him.

There is a similar situation in today’s Vepsian charming practice, which is living and active, with a thick net of charms and a manifold variety of topics (healing, love, “black magic”). It also has a living tradition in addressing supernatural beings and forces. Its main point is to draw the line between Our World and the Other World, and to safeguard. The main difference is not between Christian and non-Christian, but between human and non-human. The Others are the forest, the realm of death, and even the monasteries. Christianity is an attribute, not a concept, and can be used for both good and bad. I am thankful to Madis Arukask for the discussion on the Vepsian verbal magic.

Stark, Peasants, Pilgrims and Sacred Promises, p.13. The book by Laura Stark is about Orthodox Karelians in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It is relevant here, because it provides a comprehensive analysis of a pre-industrial culture, which has many similarities with the early modern Bulgarian culture.

In Orthodox Karelia, the wilderness is regarded Christian. Due to “the primacy of the human/wilderness boundary within religious ritual”, the Christian-derived sacred agents are figures from the wilderness, sharing roles and functions with forest and water spirits. See Stark, Peasants, Pilgrims and Sacred Promises, p. 126.
In some charms, Good vs. Evil is a static binary opposition, identical with the categories Christian vs. non-Christian, or more exactly, anti-Christian. For example, this is the case with the protection charm from Niketa’s book of prayers:

Go away, cursed Satan from all the corners of the temple and from this place, where the servant of God Niketa is bowing down and sleeping and praying to the angels. They are standing in front of the gates, at the Eleon Mountain and holding swords of flames. They are chasing away all the evil and the evil power and deceit. And the apostles Peter and Paul are summoned to curse the mora and the veshtista and the Devil and all the envious and unclean spirits. In the evening and at midnight, when no dogs are barking and no roosters are singing, then you, cursed Satan, shall do no harm to Niketa, but go to your ugliness, I curse you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, now and forever. Amen.

The angels, the apostles Peter and Paul and the Holy Trinity are the good positive supernatural figures, clearly Christian by nature. Satan, the mora, the veshtitsa, the devil and the unclean spirits are the evil negative figures, clearly anti-Christian. Together with the battle against the evil, the good supernatural figures also guard the fixed sacred border. This motif can be seen across traditions, like for example in the Mesopotamian apotropaic formula for protection:

Shamash (is) before me,
Sin (is) behind (me),
Nergal (is) at (my) right hand,
Ninib (is) at my left hand.

Or in the Latin apotropaic formula from fourteenth century: Protege me domine a dextris et a sinistris, ante et retro, intus et superius. According to a German charm, if a
The soldier wants to be unharmed in battle, he has to secure the sacred border. The soldier has to hold a coin in his hand and say the following protective formula\textsuperscript{565}:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Herr Gott Vater über mir,} \\
\textit{Herr Gott Sohn vor mir,} \\
\textit{Herr Gott Heiliger Geist hinter mir, etc.}
\end{quote}

In other charms, the categories are hazier. The antagonism Good vs. Evil is present, but it is dubious if the identity of the good figures is clearly Christian. This is the case with the pseudo saint Sisinnius. At best, the blind shepherds are only loosely related to biblical imagery, while the three sisters are obviously out of place among the Christian characters and notions.

For the Bulgarian charms, it is unknown if the contemporary people did any distinction of this kind. From parallels from more recent times, we see that “what people needed were agents with whom they could negotiate the boundaries of ‘this world’ versus the ‘other world’, ‘this world’ being the sphere of an ordered cultural universe, while the other world was the sphere to which ritual specialists relegated any ‘dirt’ which did not fit into the symbolic Order.”\textsuperscript{566} This is true not only for Orthodox Karelia in nineteenth century. It is also valid for Bulgarian rural folklore from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which is characterized by a deep syncretism between Christian, pre-Christian and Muslim traditions. The Muslim elements in particular are clearly recognized as such. Yet, positive supernatural figures are summoned from across traditions and religions. With their help, the humans can establish the sacred boundary and can place themselves within Our World, while the evil, the “dirt” and the chaos remain in the Other World.

\textsuperscript{566} Stark, \textit{Peasants, Pilgrims and Sacred Promises}, p. 65.
6. In Our World – human processes

The sacred boundary between the Other World and Our World is strongly marked and secured, yet crossable. As we saw so far, the frontier can be crossed (and is crossed) from the supernatural side. However, it can be crossed from the direction of Our World too\textsuperscript{567}. Together with the supernatural side, the complex of verbal magic can be seen from the human side, where “the point of departure is the person with all their human qualities as seen in everyday life”\textsuperscript{568}.

For example, this happens in the following charm for curing a wounded horse:

*Find a dry bone from a horse, cast a spell with it and then return it back to the place where you took it from. Draw a line with the bone and say the following:*

*In the Name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost a certain person (say the name) was walking, neighing and crying. The Mother of the Lord, the healer saints Cosmas and Damian, and Cyprian, Panteleymon, Manuel, Savel, Ismail and Roman met him and asked: What is wrong with you (say the name), so that you are neighing and crying? I am crying, because a thorn hit my good horse and now the wound is festering. The holy healers told him: Turn back, you (say the name), go to the God’s servant (say the name), let him take a dry bone and to give the illness to the dry bone, the dry bone to give the illness to the earth, the earth – to the grass, the grass – to the dew, the dew – to the sun, the sun – to the wind. And let the illness dissipate, may it have neither a top up, nor roots down. Say three times: Let us stand with fear!*\textsuperscript{569}

This text is a typical encounter charm with a dialogue, where Virgin Mary and a group of saints provide the supernatural help. The usual *historiola* tells about the familiar

\textsuperscript{567} “Real people in complicated situations find themselves in need of concepts for divine agents who promote rapid generation of inferences and predictions rather than abstract reflection. Because of this, the popularly-defined sacred is characterized by expansion, fluidity and plurality, as well as a close, personal, and unmediated interaction with the supernatural and divine. Researchers have explored the tendency within popular or folk religion for the sacred symbols and personalities of Christianity to become less unitary, universal and abstract, and more fragmented, individualized, localized and concrete, in other words, rendered more intimate and ‘everyday’ than the Church is often comfortable with.” Stark, *Peasants, Pilgrims and Sacred Promises*, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{568} Ilomäki, “Finnish Snake Charms”, p. 47.

\textsuperscript{569} Added folio from the seventeenth century, in a Служебник from the fifteenth century, Plovdiv, National Library, № 79. See Tsonev, *Catalogue Plovdiv*, p. 49 and № 25 in the catalogue below.
transmission, where the affliction is passed from one object to another, until its complete annihilation. The part with the technical instructions is rather typical too, and it will be discussed below.

The unusual element here is the behaviour and the role of the owner of the horse. In a way, he or she “becomes a horse”, then crosses the sacred boundary and enters the Other World. There, the owner physically performs and demonstrates the pain of the animal, thus asks for supernatural help and receives it.

This motif of the historiola is very specific and very peculiar. So far, I have not found a parallel in another verbal charm, Bulgarian or foreign. One medieval South Italian text against wolves (written in Greek letters) shows some similarity. In the Italian text, Santu Silvestru is herding his livestock, but the animals are attacked by a wild beast from the forest. Santu Silvestru is standing in the middle of the road, crying and shedding tears. Jesu Christu and la virgi Maria pass by and ask him why he is crying. The saint explains that a wild beast from the forest attacked, killed and devoured his domestic animals. Christ and Virgin Mary ask Sylvester why he did not tie down the wild beast. The saint answered that he did not know how to do this, and it was getting dark too. Then the text becomes unclear, but it seems to tell that the wolf is very strong under the moonlight and that the net will not manage to constrain him. Finally, at the end the text states that the lupine danger can be averted by summoning of the names Christ and Virgin Mary, and by saying Pater Noster and Ave Maria prayers.

As it has the same encounter narrative, dialogue and animal-related problem, this Italian charm provides some reference point. It is possible that the Bulgarian text used it a

---

570 Pradel, Gebete, pp. 26-27.
template, replacing the attacked livestock with the wounded horse, and the forest attacker with a thorn. However, there is no trace from the imitation of the suffering of horse.

The Bulgarian motif of the neighing human may possibly be related to the horse/horseman winter demons from the Balkan popular beliefs. Inhabiting the underworld, these demons visit the human world in the winter and bring chaos in people’s homes and injuries in people’s bodies. They can appear as horses, horsemen or centaurs or strange deformed humans with certain equine attributes. The winter demons also carry away the souls of the dead. Although these being are clearly connected to death and destruction, the sacrifices offered to them, include healing curative magical rites.

Another possibility is that this element of the narrative is simply a description of imitative magic. If so, then the charm was probably a part of a curative rite, where the charmer was re-enacting the historiola and neighing like a horse.

Besides the curious animal transformation, this charm shows how verbal magic was used by a real person in a complicated situation. It is a dynamic narrative about a crisis and its solution. Human and supernatural “individuals are involved in real-time problem solving”, in order to cure an ill horse. The supernatural figures intervene from their special otherworldly position. They cross the boundary, armed with their special supernatural powers, and this equipment is effective enough. The humans, however, need

---

571 For example, “the horses of St. Theodore”, the Romanian sântoaderi and the Serbian todorci and todorovci. See Pócs, Fairies and Witches, pp. 22-27, and especially p. 25. It is worth nothing that the Orthodox St. Theodore is the protector of the horses. In some charms, St. Sisinnius (The Horseman) has a brother called Theodor.
572 Ibidem.
573 “Within Orthodox Karelian folk religion, categories of divine figures and key ritual concepts were often hazy. Ritual concepts and designations could have multiple meanings, and the sacred agents described in the texts were often only vaguely identified, or appear to have been ‘fusions’ of two different categories of sacred agents. This was not due to ignorance or confusion among uneducated Karelians so much as the fact that among the ordinary people, the sacred was kept relevant and practical for everyday needs in ‘this world’ (making a living, preserving one’s health, keeping out of harm’s way).” Stark, Peasants, Pilgrims and Sacred Promises, p. 63.
574 Stark, Peasants, Pilgrims and Sacred Promises, p. 31.
additional technical guidance and information, in order to perform the rite successfully. Besides the *historiola*, the charm contain such technical instructions.

6. 1. Ritual performance

The technical guidance is in this practical part of the charm’s text, which contains instructions and technical information about the charming procedure. It tells about the performance and the actions of the rite (what to do), and about the paraphernalia, the settings, the human actors and the proxemics (who, when, where and how to do it, and what equipment to use).

The verbal charms are almost the only primary source on the paraphernalia, used in medieval and early modern Bulgarian magical practice. However, some contemporary sermons also contain pieces of such information and provide a bit broader context. For example, an eighteenth century collection of instructive texts for pious Christian life contains two sermons against magical practitioners\(^\text{575}\). One of the texts (fol. 62v-73v) is about the encounter between apostle Peter and Simon Magus. The more interesting is the other text (fol. 48r-62v), entitled *Sermon about the samovili, the brodnitsi, the magicians and the charmers*.\(^\text{576}\) The beginning of the text is as follows:

\[
\text{The samovili, the brodnitsi and the charmers are all disciples of the Antichrist. These people, who visit them, are bowing to the Enemy and the Enemy enlists them as his people. From all the sins, there is no bigger and graver sin. This sin is very serious sin for God. You stupid woman, seduced by the Enemy, when God commanded and God’s angels came to take away the man’s soul, can you, whore, resist to the will of God with your charms, so that the soul not to depart from the body? What help can be given through a piece of rope, a charcoal, a piece of blue cloth, a knife with black handle, a herb, a piece of wood from willow tree and many other devilish devices? How they can help the ill person?}
\]

\(^{575}\) Tsonev, *Catalogue*, vol. I, p. 313. The highlight in bold is mine.  
\(^{576}\) The *samovili* and the *brodnitsi* are supernatural female beings. It seems that here the terms are used for female practitioners of magic.
The same charming equipment (charcoal, a piece of blue cloth, black knife, herb, a piece of wood from willow tree) is mentioned again in a similar sermon against magicians from the nineteenth-century manuscript. As it is shown below, the same type of instrumentarium (knife, rope and various plants) is used in the verbal charms and the charming rites. The presence of this magical paraphernalia in both sermons and charms can be a mere literary stereotype or. However, the practical orientation of charms suggests some actual ritual application of the objects.

From my source material, 54 charms contain such technical information and instructions. Most often, the instructions refer to the technical equipment to be used in the charming procedure. The following objects are specifically mentioned in the instructions:

- dry bone from a horse (the charm for wound on a horse’s leg)\(^{578}\)
- wine (the charm against rabies)\(^{579}\)
- bread (charms against rabies and against toothache)\(^{580}\)
- knife (charms against rabies and charms for staunching blood)\(^{581}\)
- hemp rope (the charm against sudden pain)\(^{582}\)
- sticks from pumpkin plant (the charm for protection of the bees)\(^{583}\)
- sticks from vine (the same bee charm)
- sticks from wattle fence (the same bee charm)
- stones (the same bee charm)
- incense (the same bee charm)
- (new) cup or bowl (snakebite charms)
- water (charms against snakebite and water detention)
- the nails or the hooves of the ill human or horse (water detention charms)
- paper (charms against hale and the nezhit, and for blood-staunching)
- lead (charms against the nezhit). In the manuscript where the twelve charms against the nezhit are preserved together, the last text is followed by the instruction “Write this prayer on lead.” This sentence is written in a new separate paragraph. Clearly, it is related to the last charm, which tells about transmission of the nezhit from Adam to Eve, from Eve to the lead, etc. However, it is not excluded that the instruction is maybe applicable to other texts against the nezhit from the same group.

In the majority of the cases, the instructions about the rite are usually rather short, kept to the minimum. Most often, they refer to writing, with the phrase: “Write these
words on...” and may come before or after the letters, the words, or the text that have to be inscribed on the material support. This instruction is usual for the charms against water retention, against rabies, against snakebite, against the nezhit, for birth giving and for staunching blood. Here is a typical example from a charm for blood staunching:\footnote{Tребник, sixteenth century, Savina monastery, sine №, Kačanovskij, “Apokrifne molitve”, pp. 155-156. For comparison, see no. 35 in the Catalogue.}:

For blood flowing from the nose or the mouth. [twenty-three Cyrillic letters follow] Write these words and put them on the person, whose blood is flowing. If you do not believe, write these words on a knife and stab any animal and there will be no blood.

The material support may vary. The charms for staunching blood operate mainly with knives, but there is a case, when paper is needed. The charms against snakebite require a cup or a bowl. The charms against rabies use bread. The charms against water retention instruction to write on the nails of the affected human or animal. The charms against the nezhit and for birth giving require paper and lead.

In a charm against water retention, the names of the four biblical rivers have to be written on the four legs of the animal. In another charm for the same purpose, the names of the biblical rivers have to written on the nails or the hooves of the ill person or animal. In a charm for staunching blood, twenty-three Cyrillic letters have to be written down and placed on the wound. The charm offers a control procedure: “If you do not believe, write these letters on a knife and stab any animal, there will be no blood.” This test, identically phrased, appears often in blood staunching charms.

Another important ritual action is to pronounce or to read aloud some words or an entire text over water or over the ill person’s head. This instruction appears in charms against water detention, toothache, snakebite and fever. The charm against thunder and
lightning is meant to be read aloud, when stormy clouds appear in the sky. The charm for a good journey is also supposed to be read aloud before departure. The text against water retention instructs:

*The priest to read this [charm] three times over clean water, and at every reading to make the sign of the cross over the water, and then the ill person to drink the water."

There are several charms, which contain instructions in more details, or refer to a more peculiar procedure. As we saw already above, in the charm for curing the wound on a horse’s leg the procedure goes as following:

*Find a dry bone from a horse, cast a spell with it and then return it back to the place where you took it from. Draw a line with the bone and say the following: [here comes the charm itself, followed at the end by an instruction about the conclusive formula] Say three times: Let us stand with fear!*

The central element here is the animal bone, and this is the only case in the source material of using this particular equipment. In Slavic and Balkan magical traditions and beliefs, the animal bones are often employed in divination and prognostication. In verbal magic, the bone can be associated with fractures, injuries and traumas of limbs, and therefore used in charms for curing or preventing such ailments. A famous example is the Second Merseburg Charm, containing the curative formula “bone to bone, blood to blood, joint to joint as they are glued.” The Bone to Bone charm type has Slavic

591 The Bulgarian verb used here is “обаявам”, which means “to charm, to cast/to say a spell, to make a magical gesture with/over an object”.
592 One of the medieval Slavic prohibited prognostication books is called лопаточник, and instructs how to predict, using the scapula (лопатка) of a sheep. The bone is placed above fire and the divination is made based on the changes in the bone’s colour. See [Adelina Angusheva-Tihanova] Аделина Ангушева-Тиханова, Гадателните книги в старобългарската литература (The Prognostication Books in Old Bulgarian Literature), (Sofia: Време, 1996).
593 This formula also gives the name of the Bone to Bone charm type.
parallels, most of which simply follow the German model, without instructions about the rite. However, one of the Belorussian texts implies that the charm was accompanied by some ritual action:

*At first time, at God’s hour I will pray to God, I will bow to the Virgin. Jesus Christ rode across the golden bridge. His donkey made a step and sprained its foot. Jesus Christ is standing and crying. The Virgin comes up to him and says: — Oh, my beloved son. Why are you crying? — I was riding across the golden bridge. And my donkey has sprained its foot. Do not cry, my son, I made it as if it was at birth. I put his bone to bone, tendon to tendon, blood to blood. Help me, God, I asked God for help.*

It is possible that the phrase “I put his bone to bone” refers to an actual ritual gesture: to bring physically the two broken bones together, or maybe to touch the injury ritually with a bone. Such an imitative magical act is completely logical, and the rite can be seen as a re-enactment of the most important curative gesture from the *historiola*.

In my understanding, the Bulgarian text is in a way related of the *Bone to Bone* charm type. Clearly, there are differences: the charm is for a festering wound, not for broken leg; the formula *Bone to Bone* is missing; the plot of the *historiola* is different. However, there are also important common points: it is a charm for curing an injury on a horse; bone plays central role as a ritual tool; there is a full description of the accompanying rite, where the charming is done with the bone. From this perspective, I think that the Bulgarian charm can shed some light on the actual charming rite from the *Bone to Bone* type. Hypothetically, the instructions from the Bulgarian text are showing what could be the ritual magical actions of Odin/Virgin Mary/the charmer from the German and the Belarusian charms.

---

594 See Tatiana Agapkina, Vladimir Karpov and Andrey Toporkov, “The Slavic and German Versions of the Second Merseburg Charm”, *Incantatio* 3 (2013): 43-59. The article presents and analyses Belorussian parallels. I am thankful to Andrey Toporkov for the inspiring and informative discussion on these parallels.

595 Quoted from Agapkina, Karpov, Toporkov, “The Slavic and German Versions”, p. 53.
Another very detailed technical description of a rite is given in the fourteenth century charm against rabies:

*When someone is bitten, do this. Take wine, sour bread and your knife. Put the wine on the ground, take the bread in your hands and the knife in your right hand and say the following prayer to the Holy Mother of God: ... [here comes the prayer to be said; after that the rite continues] Read this prayer nine times in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, make the sign of the cross with the knife. If the bitten person is near, give him wine and bread. If he is far away, quickly pour out of the wine, and at midnight put the knife under a big stone and say the following prayer twice: ... [here comes the second prayer, where the body and the blood of Christ are pointed as a curative substance].*

In this case, the equipment consists of the wine, the bread and the knife. They are referred to in the narratives, where Saint John carries an iron weapon (an axe) and is advised to give to the bitten person “the body and the blood of the Lord”, which will bring the healing. The rite is actually a dramatization of the *historiola*. The charmer holds the bread and the knife and tells the story of Saint John, who went to cut trees, met rabid dogs and wolves, gets scared and received the cure (the wine and the bread). The charmer says the charms nine times, makes the sign of the cross with the knife, then re-enacts the historiola’s advice, i. e. give the bitten person wine and bread. If the patient is not present, the charmer pour out some wine, puts the knife under a stone at midnight and tells the other *historiola*, which is very similar to the first one.

The wine and the bread are clearly situated in the context of the biblical symbolism. However, they are ritually inseparable from the knife and the stone. The usage of a knife have parallels in South Italian curative charm (where the knife is used

---

in combination with herbs and potions) and in Byzantine exorcist charm\(^{598}\) where the knife is used to make the sign of the cross in water\(^{599}\). Back in time, the knife from the Bulgarian and Byzantine charms have parallels in a Babylonian text and rite, employing an axe of gold and a silver pruning-knife.\(^{600}\)

If all the equipment is taken together, the Bulgarian rite can be interpreted also as ritual offering to the supernatural powers: the placement of the wine on the ground, the libation, the placement of the knife under a stone, the specific temporal settings (midnight). At the same time, the rite may also re-enact the transmission of the venom/the illness from the afflicted person into the water and finally into the ground.

Another important piece of equipment is the new bowl. The snakebite charms require it and the three sisters use it to cure water retention. This has a clear parallel in a South Italian charm for successful fishing, containing two parts. First, there are ritual instructions (written in the vernacular):

\[
Pillia una scutella nova ed in kila di acqua dillu mari, e di kuistu psalmu supra la scutella, septi voti, psalmu 113 èn κκλ. e di poi cun ditta acqua sprezzia la riti e la varca, da poi di kusta orazioni supra la riti.
\]

This is followed by the orazioni, which is prayer for success in fishing (written in Greek), which summons the help of God and the cherubim\(^{601}\). The motif of the (new) bowl has a Mesopotamian parallels too. In a number of Babylonian charms, “a clean vessel of the gods” is the main equipment, together with “a clean reed, a long reed”\(^{602}\). The rite from the Babylonian charm is in a way illustrated by an incantation bowl from

---

\(^{598}\) Pradel, Gebete, pp. 33-34 and Vassiliev, Anecdota, p. 334.

\(^{599}\) Pradel, Gebete, pp. 130-131.


\(^{601}\) Pradel, Gebete, p. 17.

Nippur. In its center, there is a drawing of a man, holding up a tree branch in his hand. The rest of the bowl is covered with a Hebrew charm to be recited. 603

The magical employment of vessels is best illustrated by the Jewish incantation bowls (around 2000 in number), discovered during archeological excavation in the Middle East. Produced from the 6th to 8th century AD, they are usually inscribed in a spiral, beginning from the rim and moving toward the center. The texts are mostly in Aramaic languages. The bowls were buried face down and were meant to capture demons. They were commonly placed under the threshold, courtyards, in the corner of the homes of the recently deceased and in graveyards; in the same period, Christian incantation bowls (often written in Syriac) bowls are also found in Syria. The Babylonian texts, the Jewish and Syriac incantation bowls, the South Italian charm and the Bulgarian example demonstrate a continuity of the practice. Clearly, the charm, the bowl and the rite form a stable magical unit.

The bread and especially the host of the Eucharist is believed to have special magical properties. The use of the host for magical purposes (including writing charms on it) is prohibited by both the Western and the Eastern Christian cannon 604.

Another peculiar rite is described in the charm for protection of the bees 605. After the Trinitarian formula, the instruction goes:

*Take three sticks from pumpkin, three from vine, and three from wattle fence. With three stones on the door, fumigate three time with incense, in the month of March, on the first day. [The charm follows]*

While the charm is about the protection and preservation of the bees, the rite is focused on the purification. The purification is related to liminal space and time. It is

---

603 Thompson, *The Devils and Evil Spirits*, vol. I, p. XLIX.
604 Vassiliev, *Anecdota*, pp. LXIII-LXVII.
605 See № 26 in the catalogue.
performed on the border between two places and between two periods. The aim is to bless and to fertilize the new period for the bees. At the same time, the purification is done on the boundary, in order to secure the sacred border, to purify the bees and to protect them from evil, which may emerge at the point where one period/one space ends and another one begins. These considerations are visible in the rite’s structure, based on liminality: the spatial and the temporal settings like the fence (where the sticks are taken from), the door (where the stones and the incense are applied) and the first day of March (end of the winter and beginning the spring and revival of vegetation), are clearly liminal.

The connection to March 1 is very important. This is one of the pivotal and most significant dates in the Bulgarian popular beliefs. The first day of March is the day of Baba Marta and the martenitsa. It is primarily and closely related with good health, fertility, vegetation, spring and revival of nature. The martenitsa tradition has the one and only purpose to provide good health for humans, animals and plants for the whole year. This tradition is alive and very active today. In this respect, the bee charm is important, because it probably represent an authentic rite, as it was actually practiced.

The bee rite is based on the number three: three plants, three sticks from each plant, three stones, and triple fumigation. Magically, the number is very significant and powerful. The role of the particular plants (pumpkin, vive and wattle) is not so clear. It is possible that they are associated with the vegetative powers, or are used in the fumigation. Curative or disinfectant properties may be of significance too.

---

606 Old woman, personification of the month of March and of the approaching spring.
607 Apotropaic and health amulet, made out of red and white thread. It is put on humans, and on domestic animals and plants, then later, when the blossoming starts or the migrating birds star returning, the martenitsa is put on a blossoming tree.
While the role of the plants in the bee charm is obscure, other charms definitely employ certain plants as curative substances. This happens in charms against snakebite, for staunching blood and against rabies. The texts against snakebite instructs “When a snake bites somebody, take branches of green elder, put it on the wound, or on the hands, or on the legs. Apply often and say this prayer [here follows the historiola]. The charm for staunching blood requires leaves of ivy to be mixed with egg white and saphron, and then to be applied on the forehead of the ill person. The charm against rabies instructs to write certain words and letters on bread, then the charmer have to “take a knife and cut green burdock and give the bitten to eat it”.

The charms with instructions about preparation and employment of curative plants and substances are de facto medical recipes. These are the most practically organized texts. They provide full comprehensive curative service according to the scheme: a particular health problem is treated with particular magical words and rites, combined with particular curative plants, applied in a particular way, and with particular remedies, prepared according to particular recipes. These charms manage the crisis from two perspectives. On one hand, there is the verbal-magical and ritualistic approach; on the other hand, there is the pharmaceutical-medical technical operative method.

The two approaches can be compared with the help of the two snakebite charms. There is the text, which employs words of power with a plant (the green elder). It uses a narrative and a curative substance. It relies on both a magical rite and a medical-pharmaceutical procedure. The recipe, the words of power and the rite form a curative whole.
However, the snakebite can be treated purely magically and ritualistically. This is the above-quoted case with the charm with Apostle Paul, which instructs about the following procedure:

*If a snake bites somebody, he should do the following: to bring a new vessel, to make the sign of the cross in the vessel, saying the prayers about the Holy Cross, and to write this troparion around the cross [here follows the sentence about Moses from the Bible, then the procedure continues]*

*He must wash himself with holy water from a new moon, is he can find one. If not, he must find clean water, to wash the whole vessel and if the person bitten by snake is near, he must drink the water. If the bitten is not nearby, the curing person must drink the water.*

This text relies primarily on the power of the words and the power of the rite. The health problem is treated through a complex *historiola* and magic formulae. The curative unit consists of the magical words and the rite. The objects (new vessel and water) acquire healing and magical power, because they are placed and use in ritual context. They also have the task to re-establish the ritual message and guarantee that this message will be preserved and transmitted successfully.

Inside these two approaches, the special magical functions of the objects and the substances coexist together with their ordinary quotidian roles. There is a constant shift and the same objects can move in and out of ritual context, can be both ordinary and extraordinary, special. Inside the rite, the proportion changes too: the same objects can be central and of primary ritual significance, but can play a more peripheral or secondary role. In the snakebite charm with the green elder, the emphasis is on the plant and the recipe. The plant in the center of the rite, the words are not used without it. The verbal

---

609 Тodorova-Pirgova, Баяния и магия, p. 64.
charm can be seen as an accompaniment of the physical application of the herbal curative substance. In the snakebite charm with Apostle Paul, the narrative and words play the central role. The vessel and the water are the material support for the words, the physical transmitter for the ritual message.

As providers of specific instructions and practical guidance, the charms belong to the specialized technical literature, which is usually called with the well-defined and widely accepted German term Fachliteratur. Widely spread in the Middle Ages, it covered for instance the Septem Artes Liberales, Artes Magicae, various crafts, human and veterinarian medicine, hunting and fishing, agriculture, fighting, cooking, pharmaceuticals, alcohol making, playing games, cheating, etc. Fachliteratur included books on conjuration of demons, divination and prognostication, necromancy, astrology, preparation of amulets and talismans, etc. The medical and cooking recipes (for preparing food, drinks, household substances and remedies, but for magical curative, love or poisonous potions) are typical examples.

---

611 The Fachliteratur is a non-fiction technical literature, which records, preserves and transmits information about experience of various kinds – theoretical and practical know-how (usually essential one) in a certain field. The Fachliteratur provides practical guidance needed for successful completion of an activity: the theoretical knowledge, the instructions and advices, the practical experience and skills, the reference information and data. Handbooks, manuals, guides, “how-to-do-it” books, instruction books, specialized reference books, technical literature belong to the Fachliteratur. The term (or its Bulgarian equivalent специална техническа литература) has never been used in connection with the Bulgarian verbal charms. However, it aptly describes the technical information and instructions found in the charms.


613 Haage and Wegner, Deutsche Fachliteratur, pp. 266-82. For example, the Merseburg charms are among the first texts in every research book on practical magic, but at the same time, they are the first ones listed in scholarly pieces on Fachliteratur. See Haage and Wegner, Deutsche Fachliteratur, pp. 295-7.

As demonstrated above, the “false prayers” are associated with “the stupid village priests”, and can be found in their books\(^{615}\). Indeed, the charms are found in devotional religious manuscripts, whose initial official canonical purpose is very practical: to be the professional handbooks for the Christian priests and to guide them in their liturgical and spiritual activities. Canonical of not, the charms additionally enrich this specialized technical literature in terms of practical ritual guidance. In medieval and early modern Bulgaria, no treatises of high ritual magic survived – neither original compositions, nor Old Church Slavonic translations of Byzantine examples\(^{616}\). Therefore, the manuscripts containing an alloy of canonical prayers, verbal charms and recipes, are what comes the closest to a set of written magical equipment.

6. 2. Amulets in action

From the technical information, it becomes clear that writing plays an important role in the charming rite. Consequently, the paper and the lead pay role of special paraphernalia. They are not simply daily life objects, used in ritual context. The paper and the lead are the material support for making amulets. The closer parallels can be seen in a South Italian example, where the εὐχή (actually a rather lengthy text) has to be written on ὄστρακον. A Byzantine charm against breast-pain also instructs: “Write the following and hang it on the chest”\(^{617}\).

\(^{615}\) Similarly to the two medieval Russian chronicles quoted above, the Bulgarian Pogodinov Index of prohibited books (fourteenth century) states that a priest, who takes “false books” in church, must be excommunicated and the books must be burnt. However, according to the marginalia, there is a number of liturgical manuscripts, which belonged to lay people. See below the subchapter on practitioners.

\(^{616}\) Yuri Stoyanov, The Other God, p. 315. For comparison, Egypt in the Late Antiquity and Early Middle Ages is “a world where ritual dominated the resolution of most crises in life” and handbooks with spells were highly valued. Despite the diversity of the Coptic spells, “it is more challenging to look at these spells as a group, which is the way their user regarded them. It is clear that they make up a single practitioner’s portfolio.” See Meyer and Smith, Ancient Christian Magic, pp. 259 and 275.

\(^{617}\) Vassiliev, Anecdota, p. 334.
Form all the Bulgarian charms, only six texts contain explicit instructions to be written on paper. Due to the fragile nature of the material support, no such charm survived as it was used, i.e. written on a piece of paper. Meanwhile, three charms contain explicit instructions to be written on lead. These are a charm against destructive hard rain and two charms against the *nezhit*. One of the charms against the *nezhit* comes from manuscript, dated fifteenth and sixteenth century. The other charm against the *nezhit* comes is in a manuscript, dated seventeenth century. None of these two texts survived on a piece on lead. We have the charms and the instructions about the amulets, but no actual amulets (on paper or lead) with these two charms reached our time.

However, as we already saw above, there is another charm against the *nezhit*, coming from a seventeenth century manuscript\(^\text{618}\), which is as follows:

*Jesus came down from the Seventh heaven, from his home, met the nezhit and asked it: “Where are you going?” And the nezhit answered: “I am going into the human head, in order to bemuse the brain, to break the teeth and the jaws, to deafen the ears, to blind the eyes, to distort the mouth, to block up the nose, so there will be headache day and night.”* And Jesus said to the nezhit: “Go back into the forest and enter the deer’s head and the ram’s head, because they can bear everything and still survive. And stay there until the end of Heaven and Earth. And be afraid of the Lord, who is sitting on the cherubim throne, until He comes to judge the entire universe and you too, rabid nezhit, who are the source of every infirmity. I am conjuring you, nezhit! Go away from the God’s servant (say the name) in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.”

This text has three parallels, inscribed on amulets from earlier times. This is the charm from the tenth century amulet from the village of Odǔrtsi, Varna region\(^\text{619}\):

*Dear Lord Christ, win! The nezhit was coming from the Red Sea and met Jesus. And Jesus asked him: “Where are you going?” He answered: “I am going to the human, to drink his brain, to shed his blood, to break his*
bones”. Then Jesus said: “I conjure you, nezhit! Do not go to the human, but go to a deserted place...find the deer...enter their heads. Drink their brain, shed their blood, break their bones and tear their joints, because they can stand any illness. Go there and do not come back!” Now and forever, until the Judgment Day, prepared for him. Be afraid of the Lord, sitting on the cherubim throne, everything visible and invisible is afraid of him. Fear mostly the Lord, the glory belongs to him forever. Amen!

Then, there is the charm against the nezhit from an amulet (tenth-eleventh century, from Păcuiul lui Soare, today’s Romania)\(^{620}\).

And when Jesus came down from the seventh heaven...and while walking, he met the nezhit, and told him: Where are you going, nezhit? The nezhit replied: I am going into the human head, to drink the brain, I am going into the bones, to destroy them, to blind the eyes, to deafen the ears. And Jesus told him: Go back in the forest and into the deer’s head and into the ram’s head, because the deer and the ram are patient, here and now and forever. Amen.

Finally, there is the charm against the nezhit from eleventh-twelfth century\(^{621}\). It is on an amulet, found in a medieval grave near the town of Kûrdjzali, Southern Bulgaria.

Although the text is partially corrupted, it is clear that this is the same charm:

---

Jesus Christ was coming from the seventh heaven from...
... the evil spirit was coming from the Red Sea...
Jesus met is next to his home and asked it: “Where are you going, brother?” And the evil spirit said: “I am coming here in the human head to suck
The brain out, to dry the eyelids, to cover the backs, to deafen the ears, to blind the eyes, to twist the mouths and to block the noses... illnesses of the head day and night.” And Jesus told it: “O, brother, ...
you evil spirit, go to the mountain and enter the deer’s head and...
because you all tolerated and all suffered. There
you stay and wait until the sky and the earth end. Be afraid of God, who sit on the cherubim throne, until the Lord come to give justice in the universe. And you, rabid spirit, lord of every infirmity, I conjure you, ...
you, evil spirit, go away form God.” Dear Lord. Heaven and earth.

---

\(^{620}\) See no. 2 in the Catalogue.

\(^{621}\) See no. 3 in the Catalogue.
102 years. Now and forever, and for eternity. Amen.

The charms against the nezhit are part of a verbal-amulet apotropaic system, which has the following hypothetical model: certain verbal charms against the nezhit are in circulation in Bulgaria in the period from tenth to seventeenth century. The charms are accompanied by an instruction to be written on lead. The instructions were followed, and the pieces of lead inscribed with the charms were used as apotropaic amulets. In seventeenth century, the charms were also written down in manuscripts, together with the instruction about the lead. For the period before seventeenth century, there is no data if the circulation was only oral and amuletic or the charms were also kept in written form for reference purposes.

Similar process can be observed in the case of protection against the veshtitsa. There is a number of charms against the veshtitsa, where the list of names occupies a central position. These charms were discussed in details above. The most characteristic example, coming from the seventeenth century, is the following:

The witch said: “I uproot a fruit tree, I tie female beauty, I defeat female malice. I am coming closer and I shall enter the human dwelling as a hen, as a she-dove, as a snake. I strangle the beautiful children and that is why they call me „murderer”. When the true word of God was born, I went there to deceive it. Archangel Michael found me and fettered me, and I swore and said: “I swear in the throne of the Supreme and in the supreme powers that I shall not lie to you and I shall tell you the truth. If a human can copy in writing my name, I shall not enter the home of the servant of God.” And Archangel Michael said: “Tell me your names!” “First name: Mora. Second name: Veshtitsa. Third name: Vizusa. Fourth name: Makarila. Fifth name: Siyana. Sixth name: Evgelusa. Seventh name: Navridulia. Eighth name: Living Fire. Ninth name: Pladnitsa (Midday One). Tenth name: Drowner/Strangler of children. Eleventh name: Thief the milk of the newborn. Twelfth name: Devil Deceiver.”

The witch told Archistrategos Michael: “Let me go and I shall swear: wherever they pronounce these names, no devil will ever enter. Amen.
Neither to the sleeping one, nor to the eating ones, nor in midnight, nor at noon, today, ever and forever, through the ages. Amen.”

This text has a parallel in a charm against the veshtitsa from the tenth century. It survived on an amulet, excavated near the city of Varna, Eastern Bulgaria. Although the amulet is not in a perfect condition and parts of the text are corrupted, it is clear that this is the same text:

The veshtitsa was saying: “I eradicate a fruit tree, I dry female beauty, I defeat female malice, I approach and enter into the human’s place as a hen, as a dove, as a snake...” And Archangel Michael said: “Tell me your clan!” 1st name mora, 2nd veshtitsa, 3rd vizusa, 4th makarila, 5th siyana, 6th evgelsua, 7th navradulia, 8th living fire, 9th midday one, 10th strangler of children ...

The charms against the veshtitsa too seem to be part of a verbal-amuletic apotropaic system. Its hypothetical model is the following: certain charms against the veshtitsa are in circulation in Bulgaria in the period tenth-nineteenth century. The list of the veshtitsa’s names is the central and most important element of the charm. In the tenth century, this type of charm was inscribed on a piece of lead and used as an apotropaic amulet. In seventeenth century, the same type of charm was preserved in manuscripts. The texts from the manuscript mention or instruct that the names of the veshtitsa have to be not only remembered and uttered, but also written down and carried as protection.

The charms against the nezhit and the veshtitsa clearly demonstrate continuity of practice and probably of tradition too. Continuity or at least some possible

---

624 See no. 11 in the Catalogue.
625 As Ralph Merrifield puts it, religious and magical beliefs “may change from generation to generation; what remains constant is the ritual itself – the proper thing to do in certain circumstances, and
corresponding motives can be found for three other amulets, although they do not have parallels from manuscripts. The amulet with the charm against the devil could fit very well for instance among the apotropaic texts from the seventeenth century book of hours or book of occasional prayers from Sofia. The amulet charm also corresponds in tone to the St. Sisinnius and Archangel Michael charms against *vehsti̱sa*, *mora*, evil spirits, etc. It could be connected with the Niketa’s book of occasional prayers, among its emphatically apotropaic text against evil supernatural powers.

The same is valid for the amulet with protection charm. With its simple iconography and bilingual verbal content, this is one of the shortest charms, and also one of the most concentrated apotropaic biblical *historiola*.

Side A (Old Church Slavonic): *The cross was raised, Christ was crucified. Christ was resurrected, the man was forgiven.*

Side B (Greek): *Christ was born, Christ the unburried one, Christ the unburied one.*

Hypothetically, such amulet and such text could be worn by any of the users of the charms from seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century. A medieval and early modern priest could make such an amulet (or at least provide the verbal charm for it) for a member of his congregation. On one hand, the bilingual inscription suggests a certain level of literacy. On the other hand, the Greek text is de facto corrupted. Instead of a reference to Christ’s resurrection or divine power, the amulet repeats the same phrase something that is might be unsafe to neglect.” See Merrifield, *The Archeology of Ritual and Magic* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1987), p. 115.

See no. 17 in the Catalogue.

---

201
twice. A fuller of more “correct” version can be seen for instance in a South Italian Greek example, where the formula goes\textsuperscript{627}:

\[ + \ \chi r i s t o s \ \dot{e} g e n \n \dot{e} \eta + \ \epsilon \kappa \alpha \theta \varepsilon n + \ + \ \chi r i s t o s \ \dot{e} z e n \dot{e} \sigma \tau \eta + \ \chi r i s t o s \ \sigma o \tau \rho \iota \iota \iota \ \gamma \varepsilon \zeta \o \varepsilon \nu e n + \ + \ \chi r i s t o s \ \dot{e} \gamma \n \eta \tau \alpha + \ + \ \chi r i s t o s \ \beta a \sigma i \lambda e \iota e i + \]

Another South Italian verbal charm (written in Greek) contains the same formula, (written in the vernacular)\textsuperscript{628}:

\[ \ldots \ \epsilon i \zeta \ \tau o \ \delta \nu \sigma \mu a \ \chi \ddot{e} \ f u \ \eta \nu a t u \ e \ f u \ \beta a t t i z z a t u \ e \ f u \ c r u c i f i c a t u \ e \ r i s u r s i t a t u \ e \ f u \ \text{suttirratu}\ldots \]

It is very possible that the mistake in the Greek text on the Bulgarian amulet comes from a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the magical significance of the number of the phrases and of the numbers themselves. To some degree, this inscription is similar to the water retention charm, containing two Agripas, instead of three. In both cases, it is difficult to say with certainty if the Bulgarian charm are damaged/corrupted or consciously modified.

The amulet with thirteenth-fourteenth century charm for protection of the family and the household\textsuperscript{629}, and for the wellbeing of the livestock and the crops corresponds to the bee charm and the charm for wound on a horse. In my opinion, the amulet charm is also in the line like the charms against water detention in animals, and the charms against storm, bad weather and flood. These texts are related in the sense that they provide comprehensive and inclusive protection. They take care not only of a particular human,

\textsuperscript{628} Pradel, \textit{Gebete}, p. 32.
but also of a family, of domestic animals, of the crops. In a way, these charms are for protection of the entire household, the entire farm, the entire human world.

In the broader Slavic context, it is remarkable that in the Bulgarian charms against snakebite seem unrelated to an amulet tradition. The source material speaks about bowls and cups, but there is no reference to amulets, similar to the Russian zmeeviki, for instance. Clearly, the list of snake’s names and titles are supposed to be recited as a central part of the narrative, but nothing hints to the existence of an amulet with the titles and the names on it. Neither there is a hint to an amulet with the biblical reference about Moses.

In the context of Byzantine cultural influence, it is remarkable that the Bulgarian charms with St. Sisinnius are nor related to an amulet tradition. The story about this marvelous saint appears in manuscripts, but is not present on amulets, neither as a text nor as an image. The extant pieces of lead show only the variant of the narrative, where the evil veshtitsa is defeated by Archangel Michael.

6. 3. Practitioners

The figure of the charmer is something, on which the technical guidance provides very little amount of primary data. Obviously, a human practitioner is needed in order to do the charming, to perform the rite, to utter, read or write the charm and to do things with paraphernalia. On the other hand, the charms rarely say something about this practitioner. There is no information about sex, age, ethnicity, religion, social or marital status, occupation or level of literacy. Most often, the practitioner is either referred to as “you” (“ты”) via the pronoun or a verb in second person singular, or the instructions are
given through impersonal phrases like “to be written” (“да се напише”), “to be read” (“да се чете”), etc.

Although rare, there are cases in the source material, when there is some information (like given name, occupation and sex) about the author and the owner of the book, who potentially can be the user of the charms. The following manuscripts provide such information:

- **Драголов сборник № 651** from the thirteenth century, from the National Library in Belgrade. The manuscript was written by the Serbian priest Vasiliy Dragol. It was discovered in the year 1875, in Albania, in the family of an Eastern Orthodox priest, where it was kept for seventeen generations.

- **Зайковски требник № 960** from the fourteenth century, from the National Library in Sofia. On fol. 1r, there is note: “June 2nd, 1900, Toma Zaykov, merchant from the town of Vidin.” On fol. 1v-2r, there is note: “My father bought this book from Mount Athos, from a monk, it is very old.” On fol. 68v, a note says that the book belonged to the teacher Neno. On fol. 75r, the male name Tseko Zayko is written.

- **Псалтир № 6** from 1479, from the National Library in Sofia. On fol. 147v, there is a note in Italian:

  *Mi Simon di Sittniza, o schritto quisto libro in gloria di dio con la mia mà propria e fii chonfitto ai 1479 adj 29 di marzo, a sta maria chastamia à chorffo.*

  On fol. 82r, there is a note that the book property of Father Petka from the town of Prilep.

---

• Сборник № 308 from fifteenth and sixteenth century, from the National Library in Sofia. On fol. 33v, there is a note that the manuscript is written by Deacon Gregory. On fol. 130v, a note says that the book was property of Father Michael, followed by a note from later time, with the name Hristo Yoanovich.

• Псалтир № 464 from the seventeenth century, from the National Library in Sofia. On the back of the cover, there is a note, saying: “I, Father Yovan, wrote this.”

• Требник № 616 from the sixteenth century, from the National Library in Sofia. On fol. 78, there is a note from 26th of May 1836 that the book was property of Andon Chizmets.

• Часослов № 631 from the seventeenth century, from the National Library in Sofia. On fol.182 and fol. 184, there are notes that the book was a property of Stano Semkov and Velo.

• Часослов № 1391 from 1744, from the National Library in Sofia. Based on the handwriting and the paleography, the manuscript is attributed to Father Milko from the town of Kotel. On fol. 2r, there is a note from the year 1867, telling the family history of Dobri Radiov. He seems to be the owner of the book in later times.631

• Никетово молитвенич, № 646 from 1787 from the National Library in Sofia. The manuscript contains a large number of prayers and charms, which mention God’s servant Niketa.

631 Hrsitova, Catalogue, pp. 87-89.
• Лечебник № 799 from 1800, from the National Library in Sofia. On the first fol., there is a note: “Father Gregory, son of John, wrote this healer’s book.”

In all these cases, the information is actually only about the name of the person, who wrote and owned the book. There is only one manuscript, where the user of the charms is named explicitly as such. The book is the Никетово молитвениче (Niketa’s Book of Prayers) and this is Niketa, who seems to be the owner of the book. The manuscript is from the year 1787 and contains (among other texts) ten verbal charms. These are charms for all joints, charms against storm and wind charm against lightning and thunder, charm to kill you enemy, two charms against the devil, charm for protection, two charms for success in the court of law and a charm for a good journey. From these ten texts, eight are explicitly referring to “God’s servant Niketa”. In third person singular, he appears as a character in the narratives. One of the charms against the devil has a description of the ritual actions of Niketa. Apparently, he bows down, prays and sleeps in the church.

Based on the charms’ texts, we can draw some features from the portrait of the practitioner Niketa. He is male, Christian by faith, who knew Old Church Slavonic language and who could read. It seems that he owned the prayer book with words of power. His economic and financial status was probably good enough to allow him to acquire such a book, unless he received the manuscript as a gift, or stole it. If we take at face value the charm against the devil, it hints that Niketa might have had some kind of closer connections or relations with the clerical milieu or at least with a particular church. Such connection would provide him with constant access to the church building, in order

---

to perform the verbal magic (to pray and to sleep there). On the other hand, there is the possibility that Niketa was not a real person, but only a fictitious human character in the *historiolae* of the charms.

Based on the sources, this is the closest we can get to the image of a Bulgarian charmer from the period. There are a few other texts, which also give some hints about the charmer.

One such case is the above-quoted charm for curing a wound on a horse. According to the *historiola*, the owner of the animal has to imitate the equine behavior and to re-enact the horse’s pain. However, it is not clear if any person with an ill horse can or should do so, or the animal should be brought to a healer (for charming rite, including the utterance of the charm and possibly a dramatization) or to the priest (for reading the charm above the ill horse).

For comparison, the other equine-related charms (the ones against water detention) do not say anything about humans, imitating animal behavior and re-enacting the pain and the urinary problems of the horse. In the water detention charms, the instruction is usually to write letters or words on the hooves of the animal. It is not specified who should do the inscription: the owner of the horse or a charmer. The fact is that this person should have some reading and writing skills, even if only elementary ones. Hypothetically, the priest can write the water detention charm on the hooves of the horse. The priest is a very probable practitioner for two reasons. First, he knows to read and write, or at least a little bit. Second, the words to be inscribed are usually the names of the four biblical rivers, thus the charm and the charming rite are legitimate, decent and
Christian. Therefore, hypothetically there is no reason for an Eastern Orthodox Christian priest not to use the charm and inscribe the hooves of the horse with the biblical names.

The birth-giving charms are another peculiar case. It is possible that due to the physiological details and sex/gender specifics of the delivery, the charms for giving birth were only employed by women. These can be for instance the midwives or other female healers, or any woman, who assists the delivery. Maybe the birth-giving charms do not tell who the practitioner is, because it was self-understood that it is always a (healing) woman. However, it is also possible that the priest was called to read the charm above the delivering woman in the beginning of the birth. Thus, he may not be present at the actual act of delivery.

The priest was probably also called to read the charm in case of complications during delivery. Hypothetically, this would be an extremely critical situation, when all help available would be mobilized, regardless of gender-related taboos. This seems to be the case with a charm, entitled “Prayer for when a woman cannot deliver”.

Preserved in a seventeenth century book of occasional prayers, the text contains first a non-canonical biblical narrative about St. John curing a woman with intestine problems. Then comes the charm itself (“As the Lord and Holy Virgin Mary and St. John and St. Elizabeth are coming, the same way come out soon you too, young one, Lord’s servant John is calling you, in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost.”) At the end, there is the technical instruction: “Write this prayer and the woman to put it under her left breast”. In this case, it is possible that two practitioners do the charming. One practitioner would be for instance the priest, who reads the *historiolae* and possibly writes the

---

invocation formula on paper. The other practitioner would be the midwife or the female healer, who puts the inscribed paper on the woman’s body, but who may also utter the narratives and pronounce the invocation formula, as part of the charming rite.

In the source material, there are only two charms, which explicitly mention Christian Orthodox priest (свещеник). These are a charm against water detention⁶³⁵ and a charm against hale⁶³⁶. The first one, preserved in a book of hours from 1498, is one of the very few occasions, where the charming and the charmer are presented together. In the text, the historiola about the three angels on the bank of river Jordan is followed by the instruction: “The priest to read this three times above clean water and every time to make the sign of the cross above the water, and the ill person to drink the water.” In this case, it seems that there is only one charmer: the priest, who has the historiola in his book, reads it aloud above water, and performs the entire charming rite. This variant has a parallel in a South Italian charm against headache and illness (written in Greek), which is intended to be pronounced by the Christian Priest (ὁ παπᾶς) at the end of the liturgy⁶³⁷.

The other example, the charm against hale, is on a seventeenth century folio, added to a fifteenth century service book. The text instructs: on the first day of March, the names of the Holy 40 Martyrs to be written on paper, then “the priest to come with the procession and to place [the names of the martyrs] around vineyards and fields. Do not be afraid of hale! [the names of the martyrs follow]”. In this case, it seems that there are two practitioners. The charmer, the farmer, or the owner of the land is practitioner № 1. Hypothetically, on March 1, he or she writes down the names of the Holy Forty Martyrs

⁶³⁵ Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, p. 34. See no. 28 in the catalogue.
⁶³⁶ Tsonev, Catalogue Plovdiv, p. 49. See no. 29 in the catalogue.
⁶³⁷ Pradel, Gebete, pp. 35-36.
on a piece of paper, and then gives the paper to the priest. During the festal procession, the priest as practitioner № 2 places the inscribed holy names in the fields.

The last two examples present complete and logical charming systems. Schematically, these systems would look like this:

- There is a charmer, who is an Eastern Orthodox Christian priest. He has a specialized book, containing the verbal charm together with the technical instructions for the charming rite. When someone experiences water detention, he or she goes to the priest. The priest takes out the book and performs the charming rite: he reads aloud the charm above water makes the sign of the cross and gives the water to the ill person to drink it.

- There is a charmer, who has a specialized book with words of power, or an access to such book. The charmer writes down the charm on material support. Then this practitioner turns to the Eastern Orthodox Christian priest. During a legitimate Eastern Orthodox Christian religious ceremony (a procession), the priest plays the role of a charmer too. He places the inscribed charm in the vineyards and the fields.

These models are realistic and probable for three reasons. First, the charms are preserved in clerical liturgical books. Second, the priest is explicitly pointed out in the texts of the charms. Certainly, there is clerical presence and activity in the rite. Third, the narratives of both charms consist of biblical *historiolae* with biblical characters, acting in biblical settings and framed by Christian Trinitarian formulae. Although non-canonical, this textual and ritual complex is a legitimate and decent Christian procedure. At least looks like one, and this might be of bigger importance for the survival, the usage and the transmission of the charm.
These two charms against water retention and hale in a way support the chronicles, which mention the “stupid village priests” as main practitioners of verbal charming. These two charms are actual primary sources about members of the Christian clergy, practicing verbal charming.

The charms do not reveal any information on the gender aspect. Being Christian priests, the charmers were surely males. However, the above-quoted sermons connect the charming practice and its ritual paraphernalia explicitly with the female practitioners (обаялицы). This is a picture, similar to the female healers, represented on the fresco from the Rila Monastery. In my opinion, it would be odd and strange, if a Christian priest would use magical instrumentarium like dry bones, hemp ropes, knives, etc. To me, it seems more probable that these ritual objects were employed by lay people, especially in the agricultural charms. The character of the paraphernalia and the information from the sermons allows the possibility that at least some part of the charmers were lay women.

7. Outcome

At this stage, it is possible to outline certain patterns. First of all, the medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms and rites exhibit continuity. This is a continuity of aboriginal pre-Christian Slavic-Balkan motifs. This is also a continuity of pre-Christian and Christian imported motifs, transmitted mainly via the Byzantine influence. As a result, we can see high levels of syncretism. One good example is the nežhit, which recombines features of archetypal Mesopotamian illness-perpetrators with pre-Christian Slavic elemental forces, and functions in Christian South Slavic context.
The charms and the rites are characterized by inter-connectivity, inter-relativity and inter-changeability. This is especially valid at the structural level. Characters, motives and narratives are recombined for different purposes and occasions. For instance, Jesus Christ, Archangel Michael or the group of angels help not only against the nezhit, but also against the veshtitsa or against water retention. The veshtitsa can strangle newborn children, but can bring illness too, which is the sphere of the nezhit. Both the headache (the nezhit) and the snake venom can be transmitted from one thing to another, until they disappear completely. The charms are connected among each other. As it is seen in the analysis, it is de facto impossible to speak about a character, a motif or an issue, without considering or at least mentioning its connections with other characters, motifs and issues.

At the same time, the charms and the rites exhibit a number of peculiarities and irregularities. The blind shepherds, the three sisters, the historiola about the wounded horse and the invocation of the two (instead of three) Agripas are examples for this. These can be a result of mistakes, corruption or contamination of the texts. However, it is very probable that the unique elements in Bulgarian verbal magic may come as a result of adaptation and innovation, done only in South-Slavic context. Such innovation is de facto visible in figure of the well-adapted nezhit too.

Essentially, the verbal charms are power narratives. They function through the constant battle between the good and the evil supernatural figures. The positive agents always win, yet the negative ones always come back, and the historiola is repeated again and again. The verbal charms and rites promise a permanent solution of the problem, but actually do not provide it. Yet, they give the humans the necessary hope, mental support
and sense of power to do something in the face of the trouble. The medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms are used in and suited to human life and mentality. They are magic not in theory, but in action – a dynamic field, providing belief and opportunity to manage and eliminate the crisis. In a challenging environment of limited resources and knowledge, verbal charms give real or imaginary ability to go beyond the sacred boundary and to keep the search for supernatural solutions of the everyday problems.

The medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal magic is curative and apotropaic. In the extant sources, there is no love magic and aggressive magic. This situation might be due to the fact that the charms were mainly preserved in and transmitted through Christian religious books. There is a big probability that the main users of the charms were members of the Christian clergy, especially parish priests. In case of illness and malevolent supernatural assault, a Christian priest is canonically obliged and naturally expected to provide help via prayers, exorcisms, service, ritual, etc. Although non-canonical, the verbal charms were one more instrument for coping with the situation.

In its own turn, such occupational and social profile of the practitioners explains the particular predominance of these three themes. The health problems, the protection against evil and the uncertainties of a journey, of a law procedure or of the weather, constituted the most common concerns in the daily life of a medieval and early modern community. Hence, these were the three spheres, where the parish priest has to respond to challenges and to solve problems. Hence, it is natural for the members of the clergy to gather and accumulate tools (including verbal charms), which are believed to be effective and which can be used in fulfilling their priestly assignments and obligations. At this
stage, it is not possible to be completely certain about the users of the charms. Although the role of the clergymen seems to be very significant, it is very probable that verbal charming was practiced by lay people too.

It seems that the infiltration of non-canonical texts among the canonical contents was especially easy in the case of the тремници (the books of occasional prayers). These manuscripts were a priori designed as clerical manuals, meant to provide sacred texts and words of power for various expected and unexpected occasions in the daily life of a Christian. In a situation of insufficient or non-existing authoritative control, and facing harsh and demanding quotidian realities, it is natural that the curative and apotropaic charms made their way among the canonical texts and were integrally incorporated in the priests’ manuals and practices.

The verbal charms appear not only in the manuscripts, but also on amulets. Thus, the charms can be seen in usage. Taken together, the amulets and the manuscripts form an important complex. They demonstrate continuity in time: the same charms against the неzhit and against the veshitsa reappear in the period of almost eight centuries. What is even more important, there is continuity in practice. The amulets as objects apply and employ the written instructions from the manuscripts.

It seems that the verbal charms are part of crisis rites. The texts of the charms indeed contain some information, although scarce, about these rites. The picture is rather fragmentary, yet clear enough. The components of the crisis rite are:

- the verbal charm;
- the paraphernalia (bowls, knives, water, bread, etc.);
• the actions and the proxemics (reading or uttering the charm, making signs with the knife, fumigating, etc.);

• the temporal and spatial settings (before sunrise, on the first day of March, etc.);

• the amulets (made out of lead and inscribed with the charms, as the charms themselves instruct);

• the manuscripts, which are de facto manuals, providing reference and stock of charms

• the practitioners. Often, they are Christian priests (in the charms against water retention or against natural disasters). However, they can be laity people (in the charms for protection of the bees or against rabies)

The crisis rite is performed as a means of coping with a problem, most often an illness or other health issue. Thus, the crisis rite functions as a system of crisis management. In the light of the sources, it seems that the verbal charm plays a central role in this crisis management. The charm has magical power, but also carries technical information about the components and the performance of the rite.

The thesis has several methodological contributions. First of all, it brings and analyses together material, which so far has not been considered as a whole. The thesis clarifies the size and the scope of the existing editions of Bulgarian verbal charms and uses these editions as a corpus of Bulgarian verbal magic. For example, after the charms from amulets and charms from manuscripts were brought side by side, the continuity of practice was better clarified. The same is valid for the nezhit charms, where a whole mini-corpus was established.
Part of the material analyzed here was so far completely unknown and untouched by scholars. It turns that these unstudied texts contain some of the most interesting specimens, for instance the charm for curing a wounded horse, the water retention charm with the two Agripas, the blind shepherds and three sisters. Other, more explored items (like for instance the *veshtitsa*, the snake and St. Sisinnius) proved to have unknown aspects too.

The verbal charms are regarded as a way of acting and interacting. Considered not only as pieces of text, but also as pieces of action, they revealed a whole ritual system and its actors. Thus, the verbal charms become a valuable source on medieval and early modern popular religion and its practice, which are otherwise often unaccessible.

Finally, the medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms are precious resource for the research of today’s Bulgarian and Balkan popular supernatural beliefs and popular demonology. A study on modern time’s magical and religious phenomena may benefit and progress significantly, if the medieval material is taken into consideration as a reference point, both comparatively and contrastively. The analysis from this thesis is only one episode from the examination of verbal magic and popular religion. It is a starting point with potential to be continued and expanded in the direction of today’s supernatural beliefs and spirituality.

8. Catalogue

This catalogue contains the original texts of the medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal charms, which are discussed in the thesis. The original Old Church Slavonic (OCS) texts of the charms are scanned from the respective editions and
publications, as it is specified in each case. This way of presentation of the source material was chosen for two technical reasons: the editions are well made in terms of fonts and graphical layout, and it is practical and effective to make use of such a resource; all typos and other mistakes, which a retyping process would unavoidably produce, are thus avoided.

1. **Encounter historiola (charm against the nezhit)**

Amulet (lead lamella), 7.5 x 3.5 cm, dated tenth century. The amulet is excavated in the medieval fortress on the island of Păcuiul lui Soare (located in the Romanian part of the Danube, fifteen kilometers from the town of Silistra, northeastern Bulgaria). The fortress was Bulgarian and Byzantine, and existed between the eighth and fourteenth century. The original text of the charm is published in Popkonstantinov, “Молитва против нежит върху амулет от X век”, p. 124. According to Popkonstantinov, the amulet is kept in the Archeological Museum in Bucharest, Romania. For English translation, see above p. 198.

The text is partially damaged. However, it is clear that the text is the well-known *historiola* about the encounter between the *nezhit* and Jesus Christ. Here the story is rather compressed. The *nezhit* only lists three assignments, Christ expels it in the head of the deer and the ram, and the story ends with “Amen” and “Jesus Christ Wins” (in Greek). To this moment, this is the earliest known appearance of the *nezhit* in Bulgarian verbal magic.
2. Encounter *historiola* (charm against the *nezhit*)

Amulet (lead lamella), 5.7 x 4.25 cm, dated tenth-eleventh century, with a ring at one side, clearly designed to be hanged as a pendant. The amulet is excavated near the village of Odürtsi, northeastern Bulgaria. The original text of the charm is published in Doncheva and Popkonstantinov, “Апокрифна молитва от Х-XI век”, pp. 288-289. For English translation, see above p. 86.

The text is the same *historiola* about the encounter between the *nezhit* and Jesus Christ. This variant is longer and with more details.
3. Encounter *historiola* (charm against the *nezhit*)

Amulet (lead lamella) 12 x 7 x 0.1 cm, dated eleventh-twelfth century. Excavated in 2002, in a medieval grave near the town of Kürdzali, Southern Bulgaria. The original text of the charm and a modern Bulgarian translation is published in Garena and Iliev, “Новооткрит старобългарски надпис-заклинание”, pp. 152-153. For English translation, see above p. 189.
This is de facto the same variant of the charm as the one from the previous amulet above.

4. Corpus of charms (seven charms against the nezhit)

Требник, fourteenth century, sine № et loco. The original texts of the charms are published in Kačanovskij, “Apokrifne molitve”, pp. 153-154. For English translation, see above p. 86.

The author did not provide any additional information about the manuscript. If all the texts really come from the same book, and if the dating of this требник is genuine, then it is an important source about the nezhit. First, it contains variants of the same encounter historiola (and other types of anti-nezhit texts) from the fourteenth century. Thus, it fills a time-gap and adds information about the continuity. Second, it represents a
corpus, a collection of charms on the same topic, which is a rarity in medieval and early modern Bulgarian verbal magic.
222

CEU eTD Collection


5. Corpus of charms (twelve charms against the *nezhit*)

Требник, seventeenth century, Sofia, National Library, № 622, fol. 133v-136. The original texts of the charms are published edition in Tsonev, *Catalogue, vol. II*, pp. 132-135. For English translation, see above p. 87 and 150. This is largest extant collection of charms against the *nezhit*, preserved together in one manuscript. It includes the *historiola* about the blind shepherds.
Матрёнин прогласит нажитое.

Съезд съездъ дяла посвящает забота своего и сре́та нажитых и речь бьемъ слёзы: где нажитое нажитые? И речь бьемъ нажиты: бьемъ нажитое въ иподвижники имѣ́ти, здѣсь скрытныя, нѣкоторыя сложныя.

Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажитое явство выходитъ, уступая ближнему нажитамъ. Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажиты: бьемъ нажитые въ иподвижники имѣ́ти, здѣсь скрытныя, нѣкоторыя сложныя.

Матрёнин прогласит нажитое.

Нажитые нажиты и сре́та еретиковъ Гаврила и выросъ его: где нажитые, нажитые, и речь нажитъ и черниль нажиты.

Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажитое явствие выходитъ, уступая ближнему нажитамъ. Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажиты: бьемъ нажитые въ иподвижники имѣ́ти, здѣсь скрытныя, нѣкоторыя сложныя.

Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажитое явство выходитъ, уступая ближнему нажитамъ. Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажиты: бьемъ нажитые въ иподвижники имѣ́ти, здѣсь скрытныя, нѣкоторыя сложныя.

Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажитое явство выходитъ, уступая ближнему нажитамъ. Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажиты: бьемъ нажитые въ иподвижники имѣ́ти, здѣсь скрытныя, нѣкоторыя сложныя.

Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажитое явство выходитъ, уступая ближнему нажитамъ. Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажиты: бьемъ нажитые въ иподвижники имѣ́ти, здѣсь скрытныя, нѣкоторыя сложныя.

Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажитое явство выходитъ, уступая ближнему нажитамъ. Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажиты: бьемъ нажитые въ иподвижники имѣ́ти, здѣсь скрытныя, нѣкоторыя сложныя.

Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажитое явство выходитъ, уступая ближнему нажитамъ. Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажиты: бьемъ нажитые въ иподвижники имѣ́ти, здѣсь скрытныя, нѣкоторыя сложныя.

Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажитое явство выходитъ, уступая ближнему нажитамъ. Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажиты: бьемъ нажитые въ иподвижники имѣ́ти, здѣсь скрытныя, нѣкоторыя сложныя.

Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажитое явство выходитъ, уступая ближнему нажитамъ. Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажиты: бьемъ нажитые въ иподвижники имѣ́ти, здѣсь скрытныя, нѣкоторыя сложныя.

Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажитое явство выходитъ, уступая ближнему нажитамъ. Въ этотъ моментъ нажитыхъ нажиты: бьемъ нажитые въ иподвижники имѣ́ти, здѣсь скрытныя, нѣкоторыя сложныя.
6. Instruction to inscribe on lead (charm against the nezhit)

Сборник, fifteenth and sixteenth century, Sofia, National Library, № 308, fol. 116r. The original text of the charm is published edition in Tsonev, Catalogue, vol. I, pp. 252-253. For English translation, see above p. 87. This is the historiola about Jesus Christ, who put his hand on Adam’s head and cured him.

7. Transmission historiola (charm against the nezhit)

Часослов, 1498, Library of the Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem, LGUPI № 22, fol. 410. The original text of the charm and a modern Bulgarian translation is published in Ovcharov, “Some Little Known Apocryphal Prayers”, p. 82. For English translation, see above p. 87. This is a variant of the historiola about the transmission of the nezhit from Adam to Eve, etc.

8. Transmission historiola (charm against the nezhit)

Часослов, 1744, Sofia, National Library, № 1391. The original text of the charm is published in Hristova, Catalogue vol. V, p. 89. For English translation, see above p. 88.
This is a variant of the *historiola* about the transmission of the *nezhit* from Adam to Eve, etc.

- **Adamъ имаше нижитъ и придави го Ыви. Ыви го придави олєвъ. Олєвъ море, море пани, пани краю, краю песъкъ, песъкъ теве, теве росъ, росъ слънцъ. Како разида росъ (о) слънцъ, тако да са разида нижитъ Ы разида къмъ Драганъ въ ние оца и сина и стаго дха нина и присно въ нии венкомъ (!) аминъ.

9. Transmission *historiola* (charm against the *nezhit*)

Лечебник, 1800, Sofia, National Library, № 799, fol. 15v. The original text of the charm is published in Tsonev, *Catalogue, vol. II.*, p. 493. For English translation, see above pp. 87-88. This is a variant of the *historiola* about the transmission of the *nezhit* from Adam to Eve, etc.

За нижитъ когъ боли глави.

Ада имаше нижитъ и даде егъ Ыви, Ыви же даде егъ моръ, моръ же даде егъ волна, волна же даде егъ пъна, пъна же даде егъ краю-краю же даде егъ пешки, пешки же даде егъ трава, трава же даде егъ росъ росъ же даде егъ слънци, слънци же даде егъ вътрь. Развѣй вътрь; нижйтъ въ глави раба бъжитъ: имеркъ во имене оца и сина и стаго дха аминъ.

10. Transmission *historiola* (charm against snakebite)

Сборник, beginning of fourteenth century, Belgrade, National Library, № 632, fol. 111. The original text of the charm is published in Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитъ”, p. 69. The same type of transmission *historiola* is used, this time against snakebite. The text is partially corrupted, but the important lines 5-7 are readable. In
translation, they say: “The snake’s venom to go out from the heart and into the bones. From the bones into the flesh. From the flesh into the hair. From the hair into the soil”.

\[
\text{Мънтва - в‧‧‧\\ Оуроди дива ктры. (безумъ)\\ на ктры. Что творишь...\\ тъ бо кмог зараник. Изгоже\\ ёмъо ость нёя ё срцъ на\\ косты. Ё косты на меса. Ё мес\\ нъ на власы. Ё власъ на землю\\ ... ... ... Има ти всъда и нить.}
\]

11. List of names (charm against the veshtitsa)

Amulet (lead lamella), tenth century. Excavated near the city of Varna, Eastern Bulgaria. The original text of the charm is published in Popkonstantinov, “Оловен амулет с апокрифен текст”, p. 283. For English translation, see above p. 200.

А. ГАЯГОЛЯЖЕВЪЩИЦА ДРЪГЪ ПЛОДО\\ КИТЕРИЧЕМЪХИНА ТЪЯРХИСТРЯТНИ\\ ГЪЩЕМИЕПОКЪАЛИМЕНЬСИЕН\\ Б. МОМЪТАНЪ. ПОСТИНИКЪХЪСЕМЪ\\ ИРЕЧЕМЪТЯКОМЪМАЛИНТИЪ\\ КЪСОКЪЖАВЪЩИЦАБОБЪКЪЛЪНЬ

12. List of names (charm against the veshtitsa)

13. List of names (Charm against the veshtitsa)

Clerical book, 1827, kept in a monastery in Montenegro, sine №. The original text of the charm is published in Kovačević, “Nekoliko prilog”, p. 283. For English translation, see above p. 111.
14. Protection against evil (charm against the Devil)

Amulet (lead lamella), dated tenth century. Excavated in 1998 in unknown location. The original text of the charm is published in Popkonstantinov, “Кирилица и глаголица срещу дявола”, pp. 69-70. The text has a number of missing and unclear. It is an apotropaic charm, summoning the help of God and the four Archangels Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael. For the discussion of the amulet, see above pp. 196-203.
15. Saint Sisinnius (charm against the Devil)


16. Saint Sisinnius (charm against the Devil)

Матва ст'го Сисийна Исідора й Симеона Й Осібора.

Во име б'да і ст'го д'ка нако б'сть вонь накоже ст'ги Сисий й Симеон Ісідоръ наке многий вьсьемъ оделеваше й асирняномъ й измителевомъ. Ектаже беще й землю аралвовской владою ст'ги на лохь и казве Сисийну ап'гъ гынъ і рёче емъ: иди ки кесеръ свое Мел'ентіи, ё роїда е синове і дивавъ вельцъ. Із'а маадо отроче имять і хожеть і него дивавъ хочеть оуветь идъ нь сътвори д'ча дивавъ і того прогоностъ і вьсемъ дивавъ. Тогда с'ги Сисий оустраій си иди ки кесеръ свое Мел'ентіи і ти беще сътвори алъ мраморъ і окувала го бо тьваде излинъ го одьбо і закова медами і введа бо бришо за 5 летъ і 5е отрочовий на слазви себь. Есль приблизи си с'ги Сисий къ слышъ и вьсемъ і бы' бяра великъ і з'ма і рёче ст'ги Сисийъ сестро монъ, Мел'ентіе. Із'аый ми да вьцьда понеше бяра вельца сущаетъ. І рече Мел'ентіа, не смее ти б'варъ братье мои понеже имать маадо отроче і боо се й дивавъ. І рече с'ги Сисийъ не бои се аль есмъ аозвецъ дивавъ того прогоностъ. Мел'ентіа саинъ га' его б'ше емъ слышъ. Тогда дивавъ сътвори се просего зрьло і приящъ се козъ больъ і вьк'е въ слышъ. Тогда б'сть въ подв'онохъ Мел'ентіа ассесавъ отроче свое (рече) о братье его жрьто і вькъ власъ велиемъ глыоцъ братье мои Сисий нако ти ревъ тако ми бъ. 

Тогда с'ги Сисийъ вьсёвъ на козъ свои накоже пламень дихавое врага гонецъ обрете врьбо б'жи (и рече) виде ли врага бежавъ отроче носецъ она бе видела і р'че не вьдехъ. Тогда с'ги Сисий прок'е на цвьетъ да нмашъ в плодъ да нмашъ. І паки обрете ямнина і рече виде ли врага бежавъ отроче носецъ она бе видела і рече не вьдехъ. Тогда с'ги Сисий прокл'е а ямнина, да си чъзъ на преснете а себь на прокл'еть ли ти коренъ та і връхъ. І паки обрете аворъ дрьво б'жи (і рече) вавъ, виде ли врага бежавъ отроче носецъ она бе видела і рече вьдехъ і р'че с'ги Сисий да си б'ше, навер, да си в'ярвавъ пламень да прозвежешь праведники на саче и грешники на покаяніе. 

І паки обрете масляна дръво б'ще заславо (рече) не виде ли врага бежава отроче носецъ она бе видела і рече вьдехъ пированъ се въ море о рибами мар'нина (і рече с'ги Сисий масляно, да си б'ше і ямнина і чъзъ на аселеваніе) 

Тогда с'ги Сисий сътвори масляна къ гу і прозвавъ в'дио въ море излече врага на суху і нак'чи его бити і мячити глуовъ да си ми дети сестры мои Мел'ентіа і а'хъ і рече ст'ги Сисий живъ г' бъ мой на иб'е і на земли не йма те пшеты, диваво, не им'меннъ из рыхъ моей доц'же няесть дети Мел'ентіа. 

І рече дивавъ нлащъ ти саль. І рече наклонъ ми лако матер'пое свое, же еси сисий малъ да аб близовомъ дети окупорийшане се дивавъ. 

Тогда с'ги Сисий, м'вть сътвори къ гу ъв'е окувала раба твоего дівъ да прославлю ть рабъ твої дивавъ да поращивать и б'ше малко матер'пое свое. Посрыма се дивавъ і оукровише се сиахъ его і наблюза 5 синове Мел'ентіа. 

І рече ст'ги Сисий живъ г' бъ мой на иб'е і на земли, не йма те пшеты диваво, не излежешь яр'никъ моей аще не класывъ се идеекъ м'вть моа цетье се име мои пом'енатъ мес, то не можеть пропать моа в'дца на дивавъ. 

Тогда дивавъ цьвестъ се Сисий, тако же вишнина і тако ми сиахъ иб'е и тако ми лизъ попове ниже пость непрестано на иб'е, идеекъ мес ном'е(изв'е) м'вть мой цетье се въ домъ раба б'дви а'хъ то і да не присваивать ни м'вра ни в'дца ни зать д'хъ 5 вена і до нена ажинъ.
17. Triple formulae (charm for general protection)

Amulet (lead lamella), tenth century. Excavated near the village of Pet Mogili, near the town of Shumen, northeastern Bulgaria. The original text of the charm is published in Popkonstantinov, “Оловна пластина”, p. 149. For English translation, see above p. 201.

18. Apotropaic charm for the entire household:

на страна Б

на страна Б
19. Crisis rite (charm against rabies)

Зайковски требник, fourteenth century, Sofia, National Library, № 960, fol. 45v.

The original text of the charm is published Stoyanov, *Catalogue vol. III*, p. 114. For English translation, see above p. 189.

(45v) мида ъ ва сена пса или ъ влка вѣса. ега наше а чиная, сица твори. вѣзами, вино и хвдека касъвь и ногь свои си. и ноставить вино наземни и хдека въ | ржлек и ногь въ ржкому деняха и ржкая. тристо и тро. того дн. и стымя врача и трп и кѣ впин та мятью синъ . ги кѣ гри а щие сты нынъ, къ стъла | горл. и нощаше стъла брадкицы. да окучу четъ стопо дркво. и сртъ | га вѣсени нен, и вѣсени влця и деєтъ нямоу гла ъ оца и сиа и стгъ дъ 

(46v) Бъ ние ъща и ёна и стгъ дъ: схъ малтъ не чятъ, н. цъ ножь нѣчки нинъ кѣтъ | ако и влинъ чиная тѣзъ. дан ъямоу вино и хдекъ. ако ли не далеко. а ты на | поскороу вино мыломъ поданъ. и ножь подложи на становни каминъ | ох полуначенъ. и стъ и стъ | рцъ. Бъ ние ъща и ёна и стгъ дъ ъ. поне сты | Гнанъ пктъ | нынъ козъ твятъ. и видъ воне жилъянъ, и вдъ вкъ стена. и охъ въ стъ, въ струяща, и въ вкъ гота. и ъя моу въ | и онъ въ стъ | изъ. и въ готца и въ тренци. нй кѣся кѣя тѣко и вѣкъ крѣлъ. и данъ чѣкъмъ дать идъ и да има и вѣкъ ство и до за- 

20: Triple formulae (charm against rabies)

Требник, fifteenth century, Rumanian Museum, № 1715, fol. 5. The original text of the charm is published in Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, p. 97. The text consists of unknown words, among which the names Jesus and Christ appear three times each.
21. Crisis rites (charm against rabies)

Требник, sixteenth century, Sofia, National Library, № 616, fol 10v. The original text of the charm is published in Tsonev, Catalogue, vol. II., pp. 123-124. For English translation, see above p. 75-76.
22. The helping sisters (charm against water retention in horses and humans)

Зайковски требник, fourteenth century, Sofia, National Library, № 960, fol. 47v,
The original text of the charm is published in Stoyanov, *Catalogue vol. III*, p. 114. For
English translation, see above p. 160-161.

(47v) Мява ѝ запора коня нан чъркко. | Еъ име ѷца и ёна и стего Аха. г. аггели | стожи ѝ въ поль шрдана афидяна чъркка имаме. Гедин вежъ а друъ гы ръшить. а тъети ѝ манъ и глять. стъ, стъ, стъ гъ. саваша испиъмъ | идъ и замила славы своъ: мъ в томоуже | Еъ име ѷца и ёна и стего Аха. изидъ | на поле шгъйно, и бръкъ то въдро | пламенно, и на него градъхъ. г. | сестъ ръжъ е. държеще. г. блъдъ раачъ чръкъ. старъ везаше. съпъна ръшаше. младъка е. мъжъ е. | разъръки ѝ проходъ воды чъркъ е. манъ рабъ ёжъ низъ име. въ име ѷца: — | г Еъ име ѷца и съа и стего Аха. пиши: на предъ нозъ десъон. тигъръ. на лъвъ задъ нозъ фисонъ. на предъ нозъ лъвъ. ефратъ. | на лъвъ задъ нозъ пишъ. | Объходъе въсъ земъ въ име. (48v) ѷца и съа и чъти къдо по а, крат. ѷпи.

23. The helping sisters (three charms against water detention in humans or horses)

Требник, sixteenth century, Sofia, National Library, № 616, fol 121. The original
text of the charm is published in Tsonev, *Catalogue, vol. II.,* pp. 123-124. The texts are
identical to those from the previous manuscript.
24. The two Agripas (charm against water retention)

Сборник, end of sixteenth century, Lvov, № 193. The original text of the charm is published in Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, p. 34. For English translation, see above p. 153.

25. Crisis rite (charm against a wound on horse’s leg)

Added folio, seventeenth century, in a Служебник, fifteenth century, Plovdiv, National Library, № 79. The original text of the charm is published in Tsonev Catalogue Plovdiv, p. 49. For English translation, see above p. 180.
26. Apotropaic rite on March 1st (charm against enchantment of the bees)


27. Apotropaic rite on March 1st (charm for general protection)

Требник, seventeenth century, Sofia, National Library, № 622, fol. 146. The original text of the charm is published in Tsonev, *Catalogue, vol. II.*, p. 137. Only the
beginning of the texts is preserved, it summons the holy trinity to protect the grapes. The
first line contains the instruction “to be said on the 1st of May in the middle of the

Молитва о гриже вина.  
В имя Отца и Сына и Святого Духа, бежи пожани з воды из моей вина 
гра. Ако некошь бежать да имать седь како я камь кой вьлява вода 
о камова вина. Бежи погани звера йз мой вино гра, ако некошь бежить 
да й — прокъева се поради изгубени листи.

28. Priest as charmer (charm against water retention)

Часослов, 1498, Jerusalem, Library of the Orthodox Patriarchate, LGOPI
№ 22, fol. 417v-418. The original text of the charm is published in Yatsimirskii, “К
истории ложных молитв”, p. 34. The ritual instructions are discussed in the subchapter
Ritual performance.

English translation:

Prayer. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. On the banks of 
Jordan, three angels. One ties, one unties, one says “Holy, holy, holy gingos angi God 
eftenie. Jesus Christ defeated the enemy.” The priest to read it three times above clean 
water, and to cross the water at every reading. And the ill person to drink the water.
29. Priest as charmer (charm against hale)


30. On the road (charm for a good journey)

Требник, sixteenth century, Kiev, Library of the Seminary, № 193, fol. 227-227v. For English translation, see above p. 78.
31. In the court

Требник, seventeenth century, Sofia, National Library, № 622, fol. 145-146. OCS edition in (Tsonev 1923, 136). For English translazioni, see above p. 79.

32. Niketa against the forces of nature (charm against storm and wind)

Никетово молитвенниче, 1787, Sofia, National Library, № 646, fol. 51v. For English translation, see above p. 122 and p. 178.
33. Niketa against the Devil

Niketovo molitveniche, 1787, Sofia, National Library, № 646, fol. 61. For English translation, see above p. 122 and p. 178.

34. Apostle Paul versus the snake (charm against snakebite)

Псалтир, 1479, Sofia, National Library, № 6, fol. 148r-149r. For English translation, see above p. 136.
244

35. Crisis rite (charm against water retention)

Часослов, 1498, Jerusalem, Library of the Orthodox Patriarchate, LGopi № 22, fol. 417v-418. For English translation, see above p. 187.
36. Charm against snakebite

Псалтир, thirteenth century, sine № et loco, fol. 263. OCS edition in Yatsimirskii, “К истории ложных молитв”, p. 64.

и́ць, Х. и нь кя

сарандарав. сарандарав марандарав марандарав рыхъ сетьсъа́съау  хааа ор-аты сетьдари сьалывъ: айль папэрахъсъ пэтръ саатасъ аспида брассъ касилиско дегенъ. Х.съ дерьги. аминъ, аминъ. аминъ.
9. Bibliography

The bibliography does not have a section on unpublished primary sources, because this study is based exclusively on published materials.

As it is explained in chapter 2. Sources (pages 36-42 above), the medieval and early Bulgarian verbal charms have not been published as a separate collection, but only as part of various scholarly works. In other words, there is no verbal charm edition or editions that can be listed as primary sources. That is why this bibliography does not have a section on published sources either.


Agapkina, Tat’iana and Andrei Toporkov. “Charm Indexes: Problems and Perspectives”.


Frankfurter, David. “Narrating Power: The Theory and Practice of the Magical Historiola in Ritual Spells”. In Marvin W. Meyer and Paul Mirecki, ed. Ancient Magic and


[Popkonstantinov, Kazimir] Попконстатинов, Казимир. “Молитва против нежит върху амулет от X век от Пъкуйул луй Соаре” (Prayer against the Nezhit on a


Stoyanov, Yuri. *The Other God: Dualist Religions from Antiquity to the Cathar Heresy.*


Tambiah, Stanley. *Culture, Thought and Social Action: an Anthropological Perspective.*


[Tihonravov, N.] Тихонравов, Н. *Памятники отреченной русской литературы*.

Timotin, Emanuela. “Ieșī, năjit, pricăjite… de la molitvele mincinoase le descântece.” 


[Tsonov, Benyo] Цонев, Беньо. Опис на ръкописите и старопечатните книги на Народната библиотека в София, том I (Catalogue and Description of the


