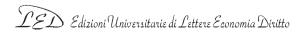# The Language of Magic

Edited by Eleonora Cianci and Nicholas Wolf

IL SEGNO E LE LETTERE

Collana del Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Moderne dell'Università degli Studi 'G. d'Annunzio'

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In copertina
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WORDS AS GESTURES: ALLUSIONS TO THE CHRISTIAN ICONOGRAPHY IN EAST-SLAVIC CHARMS AND MAGIC FORMULAS

Liudmila V. Fadeyeva [1]

ABSTRACT

Christian icons (i.e., sacred pictures and sculptures) are usually considered as one of the most important sources of knowledge and concepts of Christianity in folk culture. This attitude is based on the role of the church building and its decorations as "The Bible for the illiterate". In these terms the sacred space of a church can be characterized as a place where an image and a word are combined in steady formulas that could be very useful for folklore compositions, e.g., charms, when they need to apply Christian personages and plots connected with them. In this article the attention will be drawn to the charms and the magic formulas based on gestures of saints that are well known from the most common icons such as the Virgin who is taking water from the well or spinning/reading the book during the Annunciation by the Angel Gabriel, the Virgin in prayer who is covering people with her veil/cloak ("The Protecting Veil" of the Theotokos as a popular variant in Russian iconography of this feast), the bathing of the infant Jesus by midwife Salome, the beheading of John the Baptist, etc. The aim of this research is to show that charms have a special code of Christian visual forms that can be regarded as allusions to Christian iconography.

Keywords: Christian imagery in charms; icons; performatives; pictorial language; ready-made poetic formulas.

There is no doubt that our cultural memory is full of different visual impressions. They continue to remain with us always and everywhere, because "every man carries his culture and much of his social reality about with him wherever he goes"[2]. The visual images that have been stored in our memory can be evoked by all sorts of situations in which we find ourselves. Sometimes, when we regard it as a useful thing, we are able to turn them into words. The resulting verbal formula can be applied as a preexisting solution that helps us to express our communicative intentions. It seems to be quite appropriate and effective in the folklore, with its *aesthetics of identity* and its tendency to return to something in your memory and repeat it in the most convenient way[3]. The ready-made formulas in the traditional type of poetics refer to the authority of the proto-situation or the proto-text which are of real semantic value in this context, so they help to achieve the desired result in certain circumstances of communication.

In this article we are going to trace how this works in magical texts. In order to consider the imagery language of spells and charms, we must take into account the specifics of their poetics as a ritual genre that means a genre of a dynamic inner content that needs equally dynamic and operative imagery. Therefore, the consideration of visual texts that suggest apt vivid metaphors for magical formulas should be started with the acknowledgement of their potential to perform all you need with an active subject (character) who acts, operates, or does/makes something within a developing situation.

1. The role of gestures in visual and verbal texts

An artist who depicts an image with paint on a board or canvas, or creates a sculpture working in wood or stone, usually deals with a static form. He has to "stop" for us what is happening in time. He turns the dynamics into statics. However, he embodies an action (= motion), proceeding as a process, in a *gesture* that represents this action (= motion). That is why he stops a fleeting moment at the most significant point, which can be regarded as the quintessence of the event.

The study of spatial and temporal patterns of the deployment of action in the works of fine art – paintings, sculptures, bas-reliefs, frescos – is cur-

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[2] Firth 1957, 27.
[3] Лотман 1992, 244.

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rently attractive for many researchers. The combination of quiescent states, poses, and positions with movements, processes, and actions proceeding in time draws their attention from the point of view of techniques and methods of realization as well as the content transmitted through them. In this regard, we can refer to a few comments on the particular gesture – *the head canting*. Its role and semantics were considered in a recently published study on body language as one of the semiotic codes of speech communication [4]. This consideration was a response to the conclusions of psychologists from the University of Bologna who had examined the head canting in painting [5].

The semiotics and anthropology of religion investigate the gestures of saints as a part of spiritual communication. Massimo Leone, for example, researches cults of saints of early modern Catholicism whose canonization took place in 1622 as "the most formidable communication media" [6] and first of all as visual media ("they are proposed as models of spiritual perfection not only through words, but through images as well" [7]). The scientist pays attention to the historical context of their representations, "but also to their syntax (how were they constructed?), their semantics (what did they mean?), and, above all, their pragmatics (how were these representations persuasive?)" [8]. These are the same interests as demonstrated by Russian researchers of Western Christian visual art [9].

Ethnologists and philosophical anthropologists also work on the problem of gestures. In particular, Ya.V. Chesnov was interested in a gesture as a cultural result and a generalization of symbolic meanings that had accumulated over centuries in different ethnic traditions. In the article "Existences: The Gesture", the object of his study was the figure of Moses as created by Michelangelo [10]. From the point of view of the anthropological approach, everything in this image is significant: the fact that Moses is sitting on the throne, his gesture of grasping the end of the beard with fingers, and horns on his head. The researcher evaluates the gestures of the prophet as existential because they are not so much the result of the specific biblical episodes as the cultural memory of civilization.

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[4] Крейдлин и др. 2020, 303-307.

[5] Costa - Menzani - Ricci Bitti 2001.

[6] Leone 2010, 1.

[7] Leone 2010, 5.

[8] Leone 2010, 16.

[9] Федосов 2020.

[10] I mean the famous sculpture in the church San Pietro in Vincoli in Rome (Чеснов 2009).

Art researchers have addressed the problem of a gesture most consistently, since the difficulties of translating from the language of plastics into the language of words in the analysis of the works of fine art were an inevitable reality for them [11]. Hence their need to find an adequate mechanism for describing visual texts, and the introduction of the concepts of "gesture" or "psychological gesture" into circulation [12], and the thought that "in all canonical arts – ancient Egyptian, ancient Greek", there is "its own complex of psychological gestures, more or less constant, stable, reflecting the essence of the religious interpretation of the universe" [13].

As we need to make absolutely clear the role of a gesture as the culmination of the event in its pictorial embodiment, it might be a good idea to remember an episode from the hagiography of St. Francis of Assisi. It was described in the famous book by G.K. Chesterton in such a way:

> It is said that when St. Francis staged in his own simple fashion a Nativity Play of Bethlehem, with kings and angels in the stiff and gay medieval garments and the golden wigs that stood for haloes, a miracle was wrought full of the Franciscan glory. The Holy Child was a wooden doll or bambino, and it was said that he embraced it and that the image came to life in his arms. [14]

In the depiction of a Christian writer of the twentieth century, the story of the celebration of Christmas in Greccio, as we see, goes straight to the moment when a wooden figurine of the baby Christ comes to life in St. Francis's hands ("[...] he embraced it and [...] the image came to life in his arms"). This gesture was evaluated by the narrator as the main action and the main miracle of the event, which started the tradition of the presence in each Christian church of a wooden figurine of the Divine Infant in a crib during the Christmas period. But this episode was embodied in the same way by Giotto di Bondone and his disciples at the end of the thirteenth century in the famous fresco from the life cycle of the saint in the Upper Church of St. Francis in Assisi. As we see, the painter and the writer coincide in the gesture of St. Francis, who bent over the crib and embraced swaddled baby Jesus. And the baby gazed intently, like an adult, into the face of the holy man.

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[11] Here I rely on the recently published manuscript of a lecture that had been found in the private archive of N.A. Dmitrieva (1917-2003). According to the people who were close to her, the problem of translating visual images into words had occupied her for many years. See Дмитриева 2020, 370.

[12] Дмитриева 2020, 372.

[13] Дмитриева 2020, 374.

[14] Chesterton 1923, 183.

In this regard, we need to take into consideration the concept of a *gesture* in the meaning of indicating any actions or deeds. (In Latin *gestus* combined the ideas of a static way of presenting oneself – position, posture – and the dynamic, fluid way – gesticulation, movement.) The gesture is visual because it is a fact of physical being that is accessible for perception from the outside. Therefore, it becomes an important element of the semiotic system of the visual arts. The gesture works as a substitute for action, movement and also as a substitute for the inner intentions of the depicted person.

Most prominently, this can be traced in Christian iconography. By virtue of its canonical character, it deals with a limited set of gestures that often becomes good recognizable symbols: "Avoiding the variety of individual 'naturalistic' poses and gestures, keeping only those determined by the canon", the icon, "on the other hand, mastered the secret of their spiritual prototypes and created plastic (figural) formulas incomparable in their semantic fullness"[15]. In this sense, the "motherly gesture"[16] of the Virgin Mary, keeping and in the same moment embracing her child, which exists in a great number of variants of her iconography, is the most recognizable gesture in the history of art – and of Christian art first of all. Moreover, it is recognizable regardless of the painting style, because the archetype is the most important thing in this example (no matter what skeptical judgments would be expressed by apologists of rules and pure forms of certain religious iconographic manner).

According to the ideas of the theorists of Christian art, "an icon is a visible evidence of both the descent of God towards man and the striving of man towards God"[17]. So the main place on an icon is given to a person who is standing in front of God: "The internal order of the person depicted on the icon is reflected in his movements: the saints do not gesticulate – they stand in front of God, perform a religious rite, and their every movement and the position of their body have a sacred, hieratic character"[18].

That is why the gesture on the icon is not just "passionless". It is extremely schematic, simplified to the level of a sign. Consider, for example, a gesture of adoration – that is, a figure in prayer, raising its arms with open palms. Since ancient times, this gesture has meant an appeal to

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[15] Дмитриева 2020, 373.

[16] This term was offered by Ya.V. Chesnov (here I can refer only to my oral conversations with the late scientist).

[17] Успенский 1997, 226.

[18] Успенский 1997, 219.

God with a prayer and has been a gesture that "shows openness to the high will"[19]. In Christianity, this gesture is most vividly embodied in the image of the Oranta – one of the main types of iconography of the Theotokos, who is standing in front of God in a protecting prayer. But in this context, the gesture also received an additional semantic connotation – "this is already the gesture of protection and preservation ('Нерушимая стена' / 'Unbreakable Wall')"[20].

A gesture on the icon has never been random, because it involved "reading" and recognizing by a worshipper. This concerns not only the images of saints in prayer, but also narrative icons, which tell a plot and are based on the events of the Bible or hagiographic legends. And in this sense, L.A. Uspensky was right when he wrote that "icony [...] is not limited to the plot, to *what* is depicted [...] icony consists mainly in *how* this plot is depicted"[21].

Reflecting on a semiotic continuum that is growing "avalanche-like" due to the emergence of complex and derived signs, N.B. Mechkovskaya notes: "A gesture may cause a picture and/or a word; on a basis of a verbal story, a concentrated, condensed meaning can form and then it can give birth to the content of a new drawing (static visual sign), or ritual gesture to a new verbal sign (metaphor, idiom, symbol, etc.), which further leads to the formation of new complex signs of different physical nature and different purposes [...]"[22]. Obviously, the gesture that was found or traditionally repeated by the master, in our case the icon painter, can be read as a productive opportunity to be reproduced within the verbal text. Having retained its internal, implied connection with the proto-text, i.e., the original source, and its initially inherent sacred meaning (which is essential for the text from which the participant of the ritual expects help), the gesture might become a productive basis for the magic formula and contribute to the development of a certain theme in the charms with the specific functional aims.

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[19] Дмитриева 2020, 373.
[20] Дмитриева 2020, 373.
[21] Успенский 1997, 201.
[22] Мечковская 2008, 176.

2. About a gesture in terms of the pragmatics of charms

Charms are *words* that are regarded as *actions* or *deeds*[23]. This is the basis for their functional structure and functional semantics that results in the choice of motifs and acting subjects (= personalities). However, it should be noted that this remark characterizes the folklore poetics in general. As it was highlighted in the thesaurus "The Slavic Antiquities", in folklore "objects, characters, and other substantives receive by themselves mythological interpretation only through predicates, i.e., primarily through the actions typical of them or directed at them, since it is the actions that are accompanied by motivations that open up the 'deep' meaning attributed by the folk consciousness to various facts of reality"[24].

Charms are texts with ritual roots. What is more, they are often accompanied by ritual acts in the present magic practice. So their semantic structure is very sensitive to the gesture if it is considered as a directional action, suitable to achieve a certain functional purpose. A personality is important for charms as a performer of a certain gesture. A saint depicted on an icon may be mentioned in charms precisely because the proper gesture and the attribute (the item) connected with it are its typical characteristics. In this case, the whole situation, captured on the icon, is perceived as a precedent. And the gesture of the personage is also a reference to this precedent – the sacred text and/or the sacred image[25].

When noticed on the icon, the gesture becomes the basis of a plot (= a motif) in charms and under certain circumstances can become a ritual gesture. It means that from words a gesture goes into actions accompanying

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[23] This correlates with the John L. Austin's arguments about a "performative utterance" (words and texts), when "the issuing of the utterance is the performing of the action" (Austin 1962, 6). It should be mentioned that in the Russian translation, Austin's book was called *The Word as the Action* (Остин 1986), although its original title was *How To Do Things with Words*.

[24] Толстые 1995, 12.

[25] It is quite appropriate to mention here the kanon of the Eastern Orthodox Church devoted to the transferring the Acheiropoieta image of the Our Lord Jesus Christ, because in some sense it seems to support this tradition. Since the history of the Not-Made-by-Hand icon of the Savior (Спас Нерукотворный, Святой Убрус or The Mandylion of Edessa) is connected with the healing of illness – the cure of the Edesian king Abgar – there is the statement in the seventh ode of the kanon, created to glorify this icon: "Изображением исцеляеши нашу болезнь" ("Through the image You heal our sickness"). In this way the special status of the icon (and what is depicted on it) is declared in Christianity. In the folk ritual practice, the idea of healing with icons is being developed. For more details, see Фадеева 2019, 130-131.

these words. However, the gesture can be numerously rethought, adapting to the requirements of the context (that is, the situation in which the charms are used) and acquiring the necessary functional orientation. Let's look through a few cases which are worth discussing as the classic examples of "remembering" in charms the gesture known in folk tradition from the icon.

2.1.

We start with the gesture of a midwife, bathing and washing a baby, in birth charms and in charms for a healthy baby:

> Бабушка Соломоньюшка Христа парила да и нам парку оставила. Господи благослови. […] Бабушка Соломоньюшка парила и правила, у Бога милости просила. […]

> Granny Solomonyushka steam-bathed Christ and left us some nice little steam. God bless us. [...] Granny Solomonyushka steam-bathed and corrected the baby's body, asked God for mercy. [...] [26]

> Не я тебя парю, не я тебя мою – парит тебя, моет бабушка Салманида, которая истинного Иисуса Христа повивала и на белые руки принимала.

> It's not me who is steam-bathing you, who is washing you – it's granny Salmanida who swaddled the genuine Jesus Christ and got him by her white hands, who is steam-bathing you, is washing you. [27]

The magic formulas accompanying the preventive washing of a newborn baby in order to relieve it of all kinds of diseases often mention the midwife Solomonia/Solomiya/Solomonida [28]. It is known that the idea of a midwife bathing the infant Christ goes back to the icons of the nativity of Christ (see *Fig. 1*). At the same time, the motif of bathing the baby in some variants takes place in all the episodes of the Nativity on icons that describe the scenes of childhood of Mother of God, John the Baptist, Nicholas the Wonderworker, etc.

As the researchers of Christian iconography assumed, this motif came in the icons of the Nativity of Christ not only through the Gospel of James, but first of all through the ancient images of birth scenes in marble bar-reliefs, where two women bathing the newborn baby were usually pre-

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[26] Vyatka province; Майков 1994, 31 (N. 51).
[27] Russian villages of Tatarstan; Аникин 1998, 44 (N. 71).
[28] For more information about the midwife Salome and her functions in Russian (and in some East-Slavic) charms, see Юдин 2011; Фадеева 2019, 152-196.

sented[29]. Therefore, this episode was traditional for sculptors and painters and had a purely grassroots, household character – even on icons.

*Figure 1. – Midwife Solomonia and a maid with baby Christ. A fragment of the icon
"The Nativity of Jesus Christ", first quarter of 15th century, Moscow.
Image courtesy of The State Tretyakov Gallery, Russia.*

However, Russian charms did not just respond to a specific fragment of the icons of the nativity of Christ. They expanded the range of actions performed by the midwife Solomonia, attributing to her the ability not only to help women in labor and delivery, and to wash and steam a new-born baby in the steam bath, but also to nurse him, to heal his illnesses by spells, to chew baby's ruptures, as well as unlocking labor and milk and locking (= stopping) blood. This means that the theme was developed, although it didn't go far beyond the scope of obstetrics and treatment of children.

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[29] Покровский 2001, 142.

2.2.

The spinning of (purple) threads by the Virgin Mary is another well-known example of an icon gesture that becomes very useful in charms. It originates from the icons of the Annunciation by the Archangel Gabriel to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Magic formulas based on so called "annunciation spinning" have been repeatedly commented on by researchers[30]:

> […] Под восточной стороной лежит камень белатырь. На том белатыре камне сидит Мать Пресвятая Богородица. У ней пряшенька золотая и веретёшечко. Сидит прядет, мотает. У меня, раба Божия Егора, кровь вынимает. […]

> […] The stone belatyr lies under the eastern side. The Most Holy Mother Theotokos sits on that stone. She has a golden distaff and a spindle. She sits spinning and skeining. She takes out the blood from me, God's servant Egor. […][31]

> Шла матушка Мария из города Асия, от города Иерусалима. Шла, шла она приустала, села приотдохнула. Пряла лен шелковый, шелковина оборвалась, у раба (имя) руда унялась.

> Mother Maria went from the city of Assia, to the city of Jerusalem. She walked along and felt tired; she sat down to have a rest. She was spinning silk flax, silk thread was ripped off, and the [God's] servant (the name) blood was staunched.[32]

The spinning motif that came on the icons from the Gospel of James depicts the Virgin Mary doing traditional women's work (see *Fig. 2*). But it receives a symbolic interpretation in the iconography of the Annunciation. It is accepted that the blood-red threads in the Virgin Mary's hands are a sign of spinning (= forming) a new life in her body. Charms simplify this content. Red threads look very similar to a flow of blood, therefore in magic formulas it is more convenient to associate them with sewing up wounds or tying of flowing blood. So in magic formulas used for stopping bleeding, the Mother of God is often depicted as sewing, not spinning.

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[30] In particular, Адоньева 1996; Фадеева 1997; Адоньева 2005; Фадеева 2005.
[31] Nizhny Novgorod region; Коровашко - Корепова 1997, 28 (N. 92).
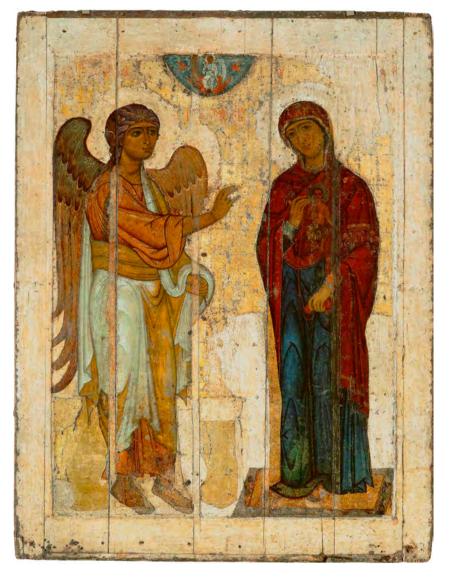[32] Saratov region; Булушева 1994, 52.

Figure 2. – "Ustyug Annunciation". 12th century, Novgorod.
Image courtesy of The State Tretyakov Gallery, Russia.

2.3.

Although the spinning of purple threads by the Virgin Mary was most widespread among ancient Russian icon painters, the trace of the iconography of the Annunciation in charms is associated not only with it. In eastern Belarus and on the Russian-Belarusian borderland, we meet the motif *the Virgin Mary draws water from a river / spring and heals diseases with it*, which can be related to the type of the Annunciation at the well:

> Су стоцкаго су восходзимаго сонца процекала река быстрая, выходзила Маць Прячистая с усими собранными, черпала воду святою рукою, златым кубком, и промывала раба божаго (такого-то) нарождòнаго, хрищонаго из рук, из ног, два шершеня з рециваго серца, с косьцей, с мождей, с белаго бумажнаго цела и т.д. […]

> From the east, from the rising sun a fast river flowed; the Most Pure Mother went out with all gathered, She drew water with the holy hand, the golden goblet and washed the God's servant (the name) who was born, who was baptized – from the hands, from the legs, two hornets (?) from the fervent heart, from bones, from nerves, from white paper body, etc. […] [33]

> На мыри, на кыяни стыяў дуб с каринями; с-пад тога дуба бягит вадица кипучая и гримучая. Божия Матирь вадицу брала, на Сояньской гаре пасвищала, такога-то чиловека па галаве умывала.

> On the sea, on the ocean there was an oak with roots; boiling and raging water ran from this oak. The Mother of God took this water, blessed it on the Zion mountain and washed the head of so and so man. [34]

The type of the Annunciation near the well was not too popular in the Russian Christian iconography. It was more often found in book illustrations and in the murals inside the churches. However, we cannot completely exclude its influence on charms. Suffice it to recall that it is present on the frescoes of St. Sophia in Kiev (eleventh century), in the akathist compositions of the murals of the Virgin's Nativity Cathedral in Ferapontovo (sixteenth century) and the Assumption Cathedral of the Princess' convent in Vladimir (seventeenth century), as well as in the life cycles of the Virgin Mary in the border scenes of icons devoted to the holidays dedicated to her – first of all, the Nativity of the Virgin, the Annunciation, and the Assumption.

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[33] Mogilev province; Романов 1891, 148 (N. 36).
[34] Smolensk province; Добровольский 1891, 177 (N. 8).

2.4.

One more relevant gesture of the Mother of God in magic formulas, which probably relies on the variant of the iconography of the Annunciation, is *reading a book*:

> На море-океане лежит горячий камень. На нем сидит Божья Матерь, книга Евангелие читает, у раба имярек зубную боль выгоняет. Аминь.

> There is a hot stone on the sea-ocean. The Mother of God sits on it, she reads the Gospel-book and expels a toothache from the servant (say the name). Amen. [35]

> На море-океане, на острове Буяне стоит церковь соборная, соборная, бого-мольная. В этой церкви соборной, богомольной стоит Мать Пресвятая Богородица. Она книгу-Ивангелье читает, сама слезно плачет, отговаривает: от колдуна, от колдуницы, от виритника, от виритницы, от завистника, от ненавистника, от завистницы, от ненавистницы, от худого часу, от худого глазу. […]

> There is a church, a prayerful cathedral in the sea-ocean, on Buyan island. There is the Most Holy Mother of God in this church, in this prayerful cathedral. She reads the Gospel-book; she cries tearfully and breaks the spells of a sorcerer, a sorceress, a wizard, a witch, envious people, haters, from the evil hour, from the evil eye. […] [36]

The book is often presented at the icons of saints from the bishops' rank. The mention in charms of a saint bearing the Gospel possibly links with the traditions of the iconography of saints (and more than that – we must remember the figure of Jesus Christ holding the Gospel on the icons and in charms as well). However, as a gesture of Our Lady in charms it probably responds to an image, very popular in the Western tradition, but in Russia it appeared from the seventeenth century. This scene of Annunciation depicted the Virgin Mary with an open book in front of her or in her lap.

2.5.

The gesture of *protection and cover*, which can also be qualified as one of the most important characteristics of the Mother of God in folklore, is widely known in Christian iconography. In the Russian tradition, it

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[35] Nizhny Novgorod region; Коровашко - Корепова 1997, 16 (N. 35).
[36] Oryol province; Попов 1903, 230 (N. 32).

is associated primarily with the iconography of the autumn Feast of the Intercession ("The Protecting Veil") of the Most Holy Theotokos, established in Russian church practice from the twelfth century. However, it must be admitted that the inner form of the word *покров* (*cover*) is so transparent, eloquent, and widely used in prayers that the question of the antecedence of the word and visual image seems very difficult in this case. We can see this gesture, for example, in healing charms – from the wildfire disease:

> Сама Пречистая Божия Мать за престолом стояла, своими пресвятыми пеленами запеченную крову болящей рабе (имя) закрывала, болезнь удаляла из крещеного тела, из пораженного. […]

> The Most Pure Mother of God stood behind the altar, she covered with her most holy veils the caked blood of the sick [God's] servant (the name) and removed the disease from the baptized body, from the afflicted body. [...] [37]

And it is present in the shepherd's protective charms:

> О Владычице, Царица Небесная, Пресвятая Богородица, Дево Мария! Закрой и защити своею нетленною ризою мене, раба Твоего (имярек), пастуха, и мое счетное стадо коровье, конное и овечье! […]

> Oh, Our Lady, the Queen of Heaven, the Most Holy Mother of God, the Virgin Mary! Cover and defend me, Thy servant (tell the name), the shepherd and my counted herd of cows, horses and sheep, with your undecayed raiment! [...] [38]

2.6.

The mention in charms of the martyrdom of St. John the Baptist, to be precise, of *his beheading*, connects with the hagiographic icons of the saint (see *Fig. 3*):

> Когда у Иоанна Крестителя снимали голову, то не было ни крови, ни руды и не слыхал никакой болести, ни костяной, ни жильной. Так и у раба Божия (имя и отчество) не было бы ни крови, ни руды, ни тоски, ни болезни во веки веков. Аминь

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[37] Kaluga region; Аникин 1998, 279 (N. 1763).
[38] Novgorod (?); Майков 1994, 118 (N. 285). L.N. Maikov noted the parallel texts in manuscripts from Arkhangelsk, Olonezk regions and from South Siberia (Майков 1994, 197).

When John the Baptist was beheaded, there was no blood and he did not feel any pain – neither in bones nor in veins. Similarly, the servant of God (name and patronym) would have neither blood, nor grief, nor disease unto ages of ages. Amen. [39]

It is interesting to note that the martyr's gesture – *под меч главу склонил* ("*he bowed the head under the sword*") – is used in epic genres of folklore, where it becomes one of the constant poetic formulas. See, in particular, some variants of the spiritual verse about Yegoriy (St. George) the Brave [40].
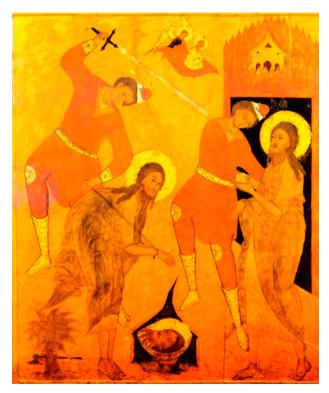

Figure 3. – The Beheading of St. John the Baptist. End of 17th century, Onezhsky district of Arkhangelsk region. Image courtesy of The State Museum's Union "The Art Culture of the Russian North", Arkhangelsk, Russia.

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[39] Vologda province; Попов 1903, 231 (N. 35). One more text from this place is nearly the same: Попов 1903, 246 (N. 132).

[40] Фадеева 2019, 107.

2.7.

Another motif connected with the hagiography of John the Baptist is *the death of the prophet Zechariah*, the father of St. John. In this episode, Zechariah did not reveal the place where his wife Elizabeth and their little son had taken refuge, so he was stabbed in the temple by the soldiers of Herod. According to *Erminia*, the Greek book of rules for icon-painting (1730-33), in which this episode is described in the cycle of martyrs' suffering, it must be depicted on the icons in the following way: "In the temple, under a shelter, a holy repast (the credence) is set. In front of it St. Zechariah, an old man with a long beard, in clothing of a Jewish priest, stands, raising his eyes and hands to heaven; a warrior, holding him by the hair that is on the crown of the head, impales his neck with a sword" [41]. This magical text for bleeding and wounds that refers to Zechariah's death as a precedent situation is a rare acquisition from the Russian North:

> Господи Иисусе, между раем и престолом есть убит святой Захарий, у того святого Захария не было ни раны, ни боли, ни крови, ни опухоли, ни отеколи, кости не болели, жилы не шипели, тело белое не скрипело. Также бы у рабы Божьей не было бы ни раны, ни боли, ни крови, ни опухоли, ни отеколи, кости не болели, жилы не шипели, тело белое не скрипело. Во веки веков. Аминь.

> My Lord Jesus, Saint Zechariah was killed between paradise and the altar; that Saint Zechariah had no wound, no pain, no blood, no swelling, no edema; bones didn't ache, veins didn't clench, the white body wasn't sore. Also the servant of God would have no wound, no pain, no blood, no swelling, no edema; bones wouldn't ache, veins wouldn't clench, the white body wouldn't be sore. Unto ages of ages. Amen. [42]

2.8.

St. George/Yegoriy riding on a horse and striking a dragon with a spear perhaps is one of the main symbols of Christianity, marking the victory of good over evil. Even the baby Christ in the Virgin Mary's lap can be depicted as striking a dragon with a spear (it is typical of the iconography of Western Christianity). V.J. Propp emphasized that St. George did not always appear on the icons as an armed horse rider. In the Byzantine and then

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[41] Дионисий Фурноаграфиот 1868, 207.
[42] Arkhangelsk region; Аникин 1998, 261 (N. 1629).

in the Russian tradition, icons depicting St. George as a warrior holding a weapon played a prominent role. These icons looked like full-length or half-length portraits[43]. However, the gesture of the holy rider who strikes a dragon going back to the medieval "George's Miracle about the Dragon" becomes the most famous and most repeated image over the course of time and charms are not an exception here. Compare this to the magic formulas against the bite of a snake:

> В чистом поле лежит горюч камень. Едет Егорий Победоносец на сером коне, горюч камень разбивает, змеино жало вынимает из раба Божьего (имярек). […]
>
> A hot stone lies in the open field. Egoriy the Victorious rides on a gray horse, smashes the hot stone, gets out the snake's sting from the servant of God (tell the name). [...] [44]

or against a pain that struck a man (for example, against the pain of ears):

> Егорий Храбрый едет на коне через огненну реку, копьем колет, шестом тычет. Из уш вон кочьму (?) выживает вон. Вон, кочьма, из раба Божьего. Слухи – в ухи, слухи – в ухи, слухи – в ухи.
>
> Egoriy the Brave rides on a horse across the river of fire, pricks with a spear, pokes with a pole. Drives out kochma (?) out of ears. Go out, kochma, from the servant of God. Hearing – in the ears, hearing – in the ears, hearing – in the ears. [45]

3. Conclusion

This short review seems to provide a sufficient base to raise the question of the semantic connections of the East Slavic charms, oral and written, with sacred images in the church. The reproduction of an icon gesture, recognized as a semantic element of an iconographic image, in magic formulas is not only a consequence of the charmer's (= the subject of a magical ritual) desire, who tries to find an action that will be appropriate and functional (= effective) in a certain situational context. The specific attitude to an icon as a shrine, capable of working miracles, and therefore to heal illnesses and protect from evil, plays here a significant role. Responding to the gesture

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[43] Пропп 1973.

[44] Nizhny Novgorod region; Коровашко - Корепова 1997, 31 (N. 110).

[45] Arkhangelsk region; Аникин 1998, 232 (N. 1386).

captured on the icon, the magic formula is a priory associated with the sphere of the sacred. Through the gesture of the saint, it appeals both to the event conveyed on the icon (if we are talking about the narrative iconography, associated with the recreation of the biblical plot), and to the ritual context of worship, where sacred texts, including visual ones, coexist. A reference to this experience of sacred is relevant for folklore magical practice and can be evaluated as one of the ways to enhance the effectiveness of the magic formula and the charms as a whole.

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