

### 3RD ALL-RUSSIAN CONGRESS OF FOLKLORISTS IN MOSCOW

The 3rd All-Russian Congress of Folklorists took place on February 3–7, 2014, in Voronovo, Russia, about 40 kilometres from Moscow. The congress was organised by the State Republican Centre of Russian Folklore (see: <http://folkcentr.ru/>), founded in 1990 at the Russian Ministry of Culture. The centre mainly focuses on scientific research, folklore-related collection and preservation, teaching, promotion and publication of materials about the traditional cultural phenomena of the peoples of Russia. The centre also issues different publications, including a popular science journal *Zhivaia Starina* (Living Ancientry) and science journal *Traditsionnaia Kultura* (Traditional Culture). Main responsibility for the organisation of the congress was taken by Anatoli Kargin, director of the centre, and Varvara Dobrovol'skaya, head of the Department of Folklore and Ethnography.

The congress that takes place every fourth year (the first one in 2006, the second one in 2010) has become a unique event in Russian folkloristics, assembling specialists from Russian academic institutes, research centres, and corresponding chairs of higher educational institutions, as well as, typically of Russia, leaders of creative groups and ensembles, educationalists and specialists in methodology. The number of participants has been increasing over the years, and this year there were 650 delegates from all over Russia, as well as from outside the Russian Federation, e.g., Italy, Poland, Ukraine, Belorussia, Azerbaijan, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia.

The range of topics in this science forum significant in the promotion of Russian folklore studies is extremely extensive. The year 2014 is officially proclaimed the year of culture in the Russian Federation, which adds weight to all cultural events. The congress of folklorists was also culturally weighty, featuring 31 sections and 483 presentations.

The opening speeches from the organisers and representatives of the Ministry of Culture highlighted the main objectives of the folklore forum: to strengthen scientific contacts between the former republics of the Soviet Union, diminish the gap between theoreticians and practicians, introduce work in this sphere of science, and enable exchange of experience and inspiration. The necessity of bringing the world of science and the Ministry of Culture closer to each other was emphasised and concrete priorities were highlighted, such as better financing of expeditions and material collection, facilitation of work in the archives by means of information technology equipment, and focusing on publication activities and youth forums.

Participation in the congress is also important for Estonian folklorists, as it enables us to keep in touch with the newest research trends in Russian folklore, introduce our own work in a big forum, and develop cooperation with colleagues from neighbouring countries. It is well known that after Estonia regained independence, Estonian folklorists have carried out cooperation projects mainly with scientists from the European Union and western researchers, and therefore English has become the main working language. However, it is important to learn about the research topics and viewpoints of our big neighbour, and to find out what the opportunities are for cooperation with the researchers from the countries whose socio-political recent past is quite similar to ours. Also, it is important to keep abreast of recent special literature in Russian.

Academic work at the congress was organised in parallel sections and round table discussions, which dealt with extremely different phenomena, topics and viewpoints.



*A round table discussion dedicated to chain letters was held during the congress. In the front row Mare Kõiva (on the left) and Piret Voolaid. Photo by Kalle Voolaid 2014.*

As it was nearly impossible to get a detailed overview of this extensive congress, the author participated mainly in the sections dedicated to modern folklore. On the first working day of the congress, Alexander Panchenko (St. Petersburg) and Daria Radchenko (Moscow) moderated round table discussions dedicated to chain letters, a widely spread phenomenon in modern folklore. Alexander Panchenko characterised the tradition of chain letters and their varied forms and ways of circulation by means of modern meme theories. Daniel W. Van Arsdale from the United States spoke about the origin of the “Send-a-Dime” chain letter launched by a mysterious Jane Doe in Denver, US, in 1935, at the time of the Great Depression. Daria Radchenko in her presentation highlighted the collectivity aspect of chain letters. Mare Kõiva and Piret Voolaid, senior researchers of the Estonian Literary Museum, both of whom have formerly been engaged in the topic, also gave presentations at the round table. Mare Kõiva spoke about more than a hundred years old chain letter tradition, its modern forms of manifestation and use of terminology in Estonia; Piret Voolaid highlighted the possibility of analysing, by way of folklore material, early teens’ value and identity expressions. As a result of the forum, an international working group dedicated to chain folklore is due to be organised.

Modern folklore section on February 5 and 6 featured fascinating and novel treatments. Bulgarian folklorist Ekaterina Anastasova compared Estonian and Bulgarian identities, by analysing ethnic heritage cultures under UNESCO protection, enquiring about the line between culture studies and folkloric tourism. Tatiana Dianova (Moscow) in her presentation focused on the elements of Russian national symbolism, beginning from the Firebird and the three bogatyrs to those used at Sochi Olympic Games.

Dionizjusz Czubala's (Poland) paper (read by his wife Galina Kutyrivova-Czubala) analysed the conspiracy stories that emerged as an aftermath of the plane crash, in which the President of Poland was killed in Smolensk in April 2010. The hearsays that spread in this highly emotional situation introduced highly different theories, including political conspiracies.

Natalia Efimova in her presentation answered questions about how folklore disseminated in the well-known Russian social network VKontakte (vk.com) refers to the main values in youth culture and which of these values stand in the foreground.

Anna Sokolova (Moscow) presented, with excellent examples, memorial sites that emerged spontaneously after the plane crash on September 7, 2011, in which the whole Yaroslavl hockey team was killed, focusing on the phenomenon more generally, and specifically on the texts that the mourners used at the memorial sites. Kalle Voolaid, Research Secretary of the Estonian Sports Museum, spoke about Georg Lurich, a legendary Estonian strongman, as a heroic prototype of folk tales, focusing on the narratives that have been passed on until today.

Natalia Urvantseva (Petrozavodsk) discussed the stereotypical image and influence of Lenin in children's folklore of the 1920s, for instance, in games (after Lenin's death in 1924, children played Lenin's funeral and other games related to him).

Albert Baiburin (St. Petersburg) delivered a paper on the etymology and folkloric developments of the expression "101th kilometre". This term was unofficially widely used in the former Soviet Union and meant that certain groups of people (mainly the politically repressed and criminals) were not allowed to live nearer than 100 kilometres from Moscow, Leningrad (now St. Petersburg), the capitals of union republics and closed towns. Olga Frolova (Moscow) focused, in her paper on humour, on abstract anecdotes, weighing their nature and characters in them.

Konstantin Shumov's (Perm) presentation highlighted the anthropology of death, memorial websites for pets and their naïve and sentimental poetry. He also discussed the naïve-mythological conception related to the death of a pet, and naïve art through which people who mourn their pets express their feelings.

In conclusion it could be said that in the section of modern folklore interdisciplinary and especially sociological approaches contributed to the analysis of many topics. It is understandable as contemporary material, which can be collected together with presentational situations and contextual environments, is much easier for the researcher to interpret in socio-cultural contexts and functions than, for instance, archival texts that are over a hundred years old.

The evenings were filled with a wide range of cultural events to be selected from. A festival of folkloric films took place within the framework of the congress, and several workshops (traditional handicraft, choreography, etc.) were organised. Every evening representatives of different institutions introduced their most recent publications, the majority of which were bulky academic volumes of folklore texts from different regions. A collection of articles dealing with general issues in folklore theory and topical problems of folklore was published specially for the congress.

A detailed programme of the 3rd All-Russian Congress of Folklorists can be found at <http://folkcentr.ru/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/3-конгресс.pdf>. Unfortunately, the organisers failed to publish the abstracts for the event; yet, articles written on the basis of the presentations are planned to be published in special collections.

Piret Voolaid