For a Corpus of Vlach Romanian Charms. Current Situation and Perspectives

Annemarie SORESCU-MARINKOVIĆ*

Keywords: *charms*; *corpus*; *Vlach*; *Romanian*; *Eastern Serbia*

1. Sanda Golopenția and the study of Romanian charms

Scholars generally agree that charms are some of the most archaic and fascinating elements of oral and literate traditional culture, which have aroused the scholars' interest from a very early date. It is generally agreed that in Europe the great period of charms scholarship dates roughly from 1860 to 1960 (Roper 2004: 1). In the Romanian-speaking provinces, collecting and publishing charms was pioneered by Dimitrie Cantemir, Prince of Moldavia and prolific man of letters, as early as the beginning of the 18th century, in his famous *Descriptio Moldaviae*, which was however published much later. The interest in the study of verbal magic greatly developed at the end of the 19th and in the first decades of the 20th century, when several collections of texts from different regions of Romania were compiled and edited. Therefore, in 1880 a collection of charms from Dobrogea was published (Burada /1880/1962), and six years later another one from Moldova (Marian /1886/1996). They were followed, in the beginning of the 20th century, by a shorter collection of charms from Banat (Hodoș 1912), and a much longer one, of almost 400 pages, from Maramureș (Bârlea 1924). Shortly after that, the first attempt to compile a general typology of Romanian charms was published (Gorovei 1931), then a comparative approach to the Romanian medical folklore (Candrea 1944) and research on magic in the Apuseni Mountains (Pavelescu 1945).

Charm collecting continued in the second half of the 20th century (see the rich collection of 391 charms recorded between 1970 and 1980 in Moldova, in Cireş, Berdan 1982), but this period's importance lies in that it is the "golden age" of Romanian scholar research on charms. This is when the study of the genre greatly developed, with folklorists paying a special attention to this aspect of magical practice. The 1970s were particularly productive in this sense, as the most important studies and typologies have been published within these few years (Pop 1970, Muşlea, Bîrlea 1970, Caracostea, Bîrlea 1971, Rosetti 1975, Vrabie 1978 etc.), based on the entire corpus of Romanian charms.

* Institute for Balkan Studies, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (annemarie.sorescu@bi.sanu.ac.rs).

„Philologica Jassyensia", an XVI, nr. 1 (31), 2020, p. 237–251

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

However, only a few of the above-mentioned researchers showed such a continuous and long-lasting commitment to the specific study of charms and charming like Sanda Golopenția. It must also be stressed that Golopenția's scholarship on Romanian charms is by no means marginal or accidental in her vast area of research, but constant and substantial, spanning over a period of more than 30 years.

Her work on charms was prompted by the urge to recover the work of her mother, ethnologist Ștefania Cristescu. Thus, in 1984 she edits and publishes in the USA the collection of Romanian charms from Cornova, a village belonging to Romania between the two world wars, today in the Republic of Moldova (Cristescu 1984), followed, almost two decades later, by the Romanian edition of the book (Cristescu 2003). Between the two volumes, Golopenția published a substantial and important study on the love charms in Cornova (Golopenția 1996).

In 1987, at Brown University, Golopenția developed the Magic Love Poetry Database, which initially consisted of 119 Romanian love charms. As a result of her work on the database, the volume *Desire Machines. A Romanian Love Charms Database* was published in Bucharest a decade later (Golopenția 1998). The work, a pioneer in its field, offered the love charm texts in the original Romanian and in the parallel English translation, with copious notes and arranged by *scenarios*, which cover a wide range of the convolutions of love: charms for beauty and love, for ameliorating hatred, for turning hatred into kindness, for ensuring marriage and submission etc. The introductory discussion recreates for the reader the Romanian rural world in which love charms were still functioning at the moment, explaining its realities, internal forces and logic. Central to this work is the comparison of folklore and electronic culture. The parallel between these apparently so different domains serves to emphasize the degree of formalism and abstraction involved in what might appear to many to be an eminently isolated, exotic and naïve superstition. Love charms are imagined to be *desire machines* in which hardware (magic objects, magic substances, magic plants, etc.) combines with software (magic formulas, prestidigitation) to serve a strictly defined purpose.

Starting from the same collection of love charms, the Romanian Love Charms database and website were established in 2004, with Golopenția responsible for the contents (Romanian Love Charms Database). The initial database was expanded and the charm corpus enlarged with approximately 150 supplementary texts, added during 2004 and 2005. The plan was to gradually incorporate similar material from other Romance languages, so it would become a Romance Love Charms database.

This is also the period when Golopenția published the fundamental study *Towards a Typology of Romanian Love Charms* (2004), in which she discussed the difficulties of typologizing which arise from the nature of the charm scenarios, the specificity of the respondents and the great dependence of charms on the context of performance. She proposed therefore *a pragmatic typology of charm scenarios* which was to be continued and refined, later on, by adding a typology of magic techniques. Since the proposed typology takes into account both the techniques and the formulas, it is not based on textual motifs alone and does not therefore have the syntactic nature of the typologies devised for folktales, legends or lyrics.

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

Three years later, *Limba descântecelor românești* ('The language of Romanian charms') is published in Bucharest (Golopenția 2007). The pragmatic approach is dominant in this volume:

> We are operating with a pragmatic domain (charming), emphasizing the charms (narrowly understood as *formulas*), but situated in relation to the totality of the magic gestures and speech acts, role combinations and the purpose of the charmers and charmees (*ibidem*: 34).

The acts referred to in the charms go beyond the framework of interhuman communication, as the magical agent can address, and receive response from, any animate or inanimate being, real or imaginary. Golopenția therefore proposes the term *acts of magic speech* (or *illocutionary acts* of magic speech). The volume also emphasizes the engraving of the female subject into the discourse of Romanian charms: the unmarked magic agent is female, the exceptional figures mentioned in charms are female (the Holy Virgin, the Holy Wednesday, the Holy Friday, the Sisters of the Sun, etc.), the charms illustrate quintessential female acts (e.g. childbirth) as models of magical action etc.

Golopenția published two more articles in Romanian, one on love charming and storytelling (Golopenția 2011) and another one on the plants used in love charms (Golopenția 2012), before releasing her most recent book on love charming, *Adusul pe sus. Descântatul de dragoste* ('Bringing men through the air. Love charming'), in 2018. The book brings together seven articles published between 1996 and 2012, which have not so far been part of a whole dedicated specifically to Romanian love charms and charming, but represented indirect approaches of a semiotic, informational, ethnologic or sociological nature.

2. Vlach Romanians, magic and charm collecting

The Vlach Romanians[1] are the majority population in around 170 rural settlements of Eastern Serbia, spread along the Mlava, Morava, Pek and Timok rivers, near the state border with Romania and Bulgaria. This region of Serbia has been characterized, since ancient times, by a continuous change of ethnic structure. However, its current ethnic composition is mainly due to ethno-historical, political and economic factors of the 18th and 19th centuries. This is also the period when the Vlach Romanian community formed, by successive migrations from North of the Danube (Weigand 1900). These spontaneous, unplanned dislocations of population took place partly during the Phanariot epoch, when entire villages fled over the Danube in search of a better life and free land (Djordjević 1906), though the persistence in the area of an autochthonous layer of Romanized population has also been presented as a hypothesis. The Vlach Romanians have been considered a natural extension of the Romanian element North of the Danube (Vâlsan 1912).

According to the last 2011 population census in Serbia, Vlach Romanian is spoken today by 43,095 people who declared *vlaški* as their mother tongue (Census

[1]Also known in English as the Vlachs of the Timok Valley, Vlachs of Eastern Serbia or Timok Vlachs, in Romanian as *români din Timoc*, *români timoceni*, *vlahi*, in Serbian as *Vlasi* (*severoistočne Srbije*), and in their native variety as *rumâń*.

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

2011). Yet, members of the community estimate the number of speakers to be around 200,000. The language spoken by this population is an archaic, non-standardized variety of Romanian, with a great share of neologisms from contact with the Serbian language, which the speakers call *rumînĭașće* or *rumînĭeșțe*. Almost all community members are bilingual. The Vlach Romanians do not have a tradition of literacy in their native variety, which they have only recently started using in writing (Huțanu, Sorescu-Marinković 2018).

The Vlach Romanian community of Eastern Serbia has evolved for generations at the border of two distinct cultures, Romanian and Serbian. Here, elements belonging to the Romanian traditional culture, long vanished within the borders of Romania, were preserved, like in a natural ethnographic reserve, while others evolved in directions unknown to the regions of Romania (Hedeșan 1998, 2000, Sorescu-Marinković 2012). The system of Romanian beliefs, customs, ritual practices, texts and formulas encountered here is highly archaic and conservative, but bears the unmistakable mark of cultural synchretism characteristic to this border region (Sorescu-Marinković 2019: 274).

Folklorists, ethnologists and anthropologists have repeatedly pointed to the archaicity and similarity of the Vlach Romanian folklore with that of other ethnographic regions of Romania, mainly of Banat and Oltenia. This also holds true for charms. Romanian linguist Emil Petrovici, following his 1937 field trip in the village of Ždrelo in Eastern Serbia, to collect material for the *Romanian Linguistic Atlas*, wrote:

> Charms seem to be as abundant as in Almăj. Here also almost every woman can charm. It goes without saying that there are women who made charming their job; they are called *fărmăcătuare* ('sorcerers'), who make *vrăjuri* ('incantations') (Petrovici 1942: 63).

Serbian researchers have also observed the much bigger propensity of Vlach Romanians towards charming than that of the surrounding Serbian population:

> Charming is more widespread among the Vlachs than among the Serbs. In Bobovo, Troponje, Jezero and Subotica many people are asking for the help of old women skilled in charming. It is the same with the other Vlachs in Eastern Serbia (Bošković Matić 1966: 183).

For the Vlach Romanians, charms and incantations are hardly a taboo topics and the magic performance is widespread, unlike the Serbian environment, which is, generally speaking, more reluctant. Even if a wide repertoire of charms and magical practices is the sole attribute of specialized, expert interlocutors, most of them women, almost every member of the community has in their personal repertoire several charms – against the evil eye, snakes and the like. Researchers have pointed to the partial de-tabooing of this magical practice even in the Serbian villages of Eastern Serbia (Djordjević 2008: 392).

In Serbia and even wider in the ex-Yugoslav space, any mention of Eastern Serbia inevitably brings up 'Vlach magic' (Srb. *vlaška magija*), greatly feared and admired by the superstitious folk. What has always been linked to the folklore of Vlach Romanians and still attracts large numbers of visitors to the region is the mystery and fame of the local sorcerers and of the 'Vlach magic', which has in time become a real cultural brand of the community:

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

> The Vlach population respects pagan customs and believes in so-called 'black' and 'white' magic. (…) Believing in magic is characteristic for people living in this area, but also attracts people from different parts of Serbia and Europe who come to visit the local women who are popularly believed to possess a 'shamanistic talent' (Ivkov-Džigurski, Babić et alii 2012: 62).

Among the first scholars to record and publish Vlach Romanian charms was Serbian ethnographer Tihomir Djordjević, in the beginning of the 20th century. In his travel notes *Kroz naše Rumune* (Among our Romanians), he includes a charm against the deceased transforming into a vampire (*moroi*), which he came across in the village of Valakonje. The charm is performed and uttered by three old women in the graveyard, on a Thursday, using hemp, a plough knife and the candle that was burning when the person died. The text of the charm was written in Cyrillic, with an accompanying approximate transliteration in Romanian (Djordjević 1906: 287):

Кнд ва порни	When the fire
Пржалу се пржуљаска,	Starts to burn down,
Лупу ку лупоње	The wolf with the she-wolf
Се л 'нтаљаска,	To meet
Ш' се затрјаска.	And to spread.
Да кнд ва фи	And when it is
Ће урса урсат,	Destined by fate
Ш' ће Домљезеу ласат,	And set by God
Са дука ла Марја,	To go to Mary,
Аколо је манкаре,	For there is food
Ш' баутуре,	And drink,
Ш' шећерија	And rest,
Да суфле ту	But your soul
Са фие ла раj!	Should be in heaven!

Emil Petrovici, publishing the results of his 1937 field trip to Ždrelo mentioned above, highlighted the central role played by the *dzidzokiu* charms (against the evil eye), and recorded six Vlach Romanian charms (*Dăscânćic dă dzidzokiu*, *Vrajă dă Muma Pădurii*, *Spurcatu*, *Buala dân Ieli*, *Dă pogan*, *Vrăji de dragoste*), which he published with a minimal context. The following one is a charm against the evil eye (Petrovici 1942: 70):

Nu udai copilu meu,	I did not water my child,
Numa udai rămńiturili.	But the disease.
Copilu meu lu ușurai,	I relieved my child,
Să udzască curat,	To stay clean,
Ca dî la Dumnedzău lăsat.	As given by God.

Romanian linguist Ioan Pătruț collected folklore material a few years later, in 1941, from the Vlach Romanian war prisoners in the Yugoslav army who had been delivered to the Romanian military authorities and were stationed in several villages near Timișoara. Among other folkloric texts, he also recorded 16 charms, most of them against diseases, snakes and the evil eye (only one love charm), and 14 separate contexts of various charms, without the accompanying magic formulas[2].

[2] As Golopenția noticed, charming in the Romanian-speaking areas is generally a feminine activity, so the short charms collected from the prisoners are probably part of everybody's repertoire, not secret knowledge.

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

The following one is a charm against the evil eye collected from a man from the village of Brežane (Pătruț 1942: 378):

A plecat un uom roșu,	A red man left
Dzin casă roșâie,	From a red house,
S-a dus la boi roșâi,	He went to red oxen
A prins în car roșu,	And harnessed them to a red cart.
S-a dus, a muls oi roșâi,	He went, milked red sheep
A-nk'egat lapće roșu.	And curdled red milk.
S-a strâns strâgoanśil'i	The she-vampires
Șî strâgonśi:	And he-vampires came together:
Toț gustară,	All tasted,
Toț crăpară!	All burst!
Să rămână Stancu luminat,	Shall Stancu stay shining
Ca stawa-n śeri!	Like the star in the sky!
Liac să-i fiie dzin gura mia	Shall he get cure from my mouth
Șî dzin mâna mia!	And from my hand!

More recently, researchers of Vlach Romanian origin with an interest in folklore collection also published a number of charms on several occasions. Slavoljub Gacović, in his 1986 study on charming and divination in Eastern Serbia, discusses topics like the time and place of the charming process, and proposes the following categorization of Vlach Romanian charms: 1) black magic (which inflicts harm on somebody), 2) white magic (which neutralizes black magic), 3) love charms (a combination of black and white magic), 4) charms for healing, and 5) charms for the success of somebody's actions (Gacović 1986: 88). Out of the ten lengthy and detailed charm texts and contexts Gacović presents, all from his native village, Halovo, seven are love charms (*đe dragosća*), part of which use 'white', part 'black magic' (in Golopenția's typology, positive and negative). The following charm, "for killing the chosen person with a knife" (Gacović 1986: 94), is an example of *negative pragmatic parallelism* (Golopenția 2004: 176), in which the physical act accomplished by the Charmer-Charmee is the 'signifier' and the specific distant effect is the 'signified':

Cuțît alamat și îm plăsălat,	Brassed and hilted knife,
nuće îm fig îm pamînt,	I do not stick you in the ground,
și će îm fig și će bat	But I stick you
îm inima lu *cutare*.	In *that man*'s heart.
Cu rînd și đe grabă	Immediately and without delay,
cu izdat și cu dalac	With disease and anthrax,
cu rînd fără l'ęac.	Without a cure.

In his 2002 volume on charming in the cult of the dead of the Vlach Romanians, Gacović presents a classification of this particular kind of charms, as well as a consistent collection of texts,

> with the help of which the sick person, namely the dying one, who is being initiated, or is already dead, is cleaned of impure forces, to be introduced into the other world (Gacović 2002: 8).

The lengthy texts are accompanied by exhaustive comments on the context of charming, as well as parallels with the Serbian and Romanian folklore and traditional culture. The spelling used for rendering the Vlach Romanian variety is much closer

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

to the modern conventions in comparison with the previous publication. The author also mentions that the audio, video and photographic material on which the book is based is available in his private archive.

Ethnologist Paun Durlić is another researcher of Vlach Romanian origin with a constant interest in collecting charms. In one of his first studies on this topic, he notices that collecting charms is one of the most difficult task of researchers interested in folk creations, because of the secret nature of charming. Consequently, as the author puts it in his poetic style,

> he who records charms is like a hunter who tries to catch birds barehanded – the slightest rustle and they will fly away to the sky (Durlić 1987: 105).

Durlić goes on explaining that such a researcher must, above all, possess one essential personal trait: sincere respect for his interlocutors. Out of the 13 charms from the region of Gornji Poreč he presents in this study, five are love charms, like the one below (Durlić 1987: 112):

Ну мътур паје, ну мътур гунуаје,	I'm not sweeping straw or dirt,
нума мътур туаће фурњикуцîљи,	But I'm sweeping all ants
шî туаће стрăљициîљи.	And all arrows.
Ку мътурă љи мътурај,	I swept them with the broom
дупа (кутаре) љи мînај.	And sent them to (name).
Писта јел виц да,	You'll find him,
сî мјел болђиц,înголђиц,	Stick him, pierce him,
ла миње с-л оправиц.	And send him to me.
С ну-ј да îн лок о ста,	He will not stand still,
ку њима ну ва ворби	He will talk to nobody
пăнă ла миње ну ва вењи.	Until he comes to me.

In *Vorbar*, the online encyclopaedia of Vlach Romanian culture, started in 2011 and still in progress, Durlić gives the definition of charmers (*đeskîntatuorĭ*):

> La rumîń ĭastă uamiń đeskîntatuorĭ, ama sînt măĭ mulće muĭerĭ đeskîntatuare, kî ală ĭe lukru muĭerĭesk đi kînd ĭe lumĭa și pomîntu (Among the Vlach Romanians there are also male sorcerers, but the female sorcerers outnumber them by far, as this has been a woman's job since time immemorial) (Durlić 2011).

The literary folklore section of the encyclopaedia comprises, among other creations and genres, 17 charms (*đeskîńćiśe*), of which five are love charms:

Kîrpă, kîrpuţă,	Scarf, little scarf,
Pi kuoș ći arunkaĭ,	I threw you on the chimney
Kokuoș ći fakuĭ,	And changed you into a rooster,
Ku ărpiļi đi oţăl,	With wings of steel
Șî ku ćuoku đi fîer.	And iron beak.
Kînd pista skrisa-mĭa vi da,	When you find my destined one,
Ku ćuoku s-o ćokńeșć,	Knock him with your beak,
Ku ărpiļi să-l prîsńeșć,	Thrash him with your wings,
Ku gĭarîļi sî mĭe-l zgîrîĭ.	Scratch him with your claws.
Đin suomn să-l pumeńeșć,	Wake him up from his dream,
La mińe să-l opravĭeșć.	Send him to me.
În vis să-l visăḑ,	To see him in my dream
A ĭevi să-l kunuosk.	And recognize him in reality.

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

Like in Gacović's case, one notices the evolution of Vlach Romanian spelling used by Durlić. His latest publication, the substantial collection of Vlach Romanian folk creation entitled *Vlach Romanians in the sunset. Stories from Poreč, Gornji Pek and neighboring areas*, also comprises 25 charms (Durlić 2020: 167–207). Out of them, 10 are love charms, among which: *đi skrisă, đi dragusta, đi ljegat barbacî, đi đizljegat barbacî*. The one below is *đi ljegat barbacî* (for tying men) (*idem*: 182):

Ij ljegaj la (Janku) kapu,	I tied (Janku's) head,
Ij ljegaj vînjilji,	I tied his veins,
Ij ljegaj sînźilji,	I tied his blood,
Ij ljegaj minćilji,	I tied his mind,
Ij ljegaj gîndurlji,	I tied his thoughts,
Ij ljegaj mînjilji,	I tied his hands,
Ij ljegaj piśuarilji,	I tied his legs,
Ij ljegaj pućarja tuată,	I tied his whole power,
Ku alta njimik să nu pouată!	Not to be able to do anything with another (woman)!
La (Janku) luvaj minća întrjagă	I took (Janku's) whole mind
Ku alta să nu măj ajbe trjabă,	Not to care for another,
Să kaće numa la minje,	To look only to me,
Să-j ardă injima pănă nu vinje!	To feel his heart burning until he arrives!

In the last 20 years, the research team of the Institute for Balkan Studies in Belgrade have conducted systematic field research in the Vlach Romanian communities of Eastern Serbia, with the aim of documenting the linguistic variety and traditional customs. The field research started in 1999 and was oriented

> towards collecting as rich as possible linguistic material to fill a big gap: there were solid dialectological studies on the situation of the Romanian varieties in Banat, while the linguistic data about the Vlach varieties (and the folklore in these varieties) was very scarce. The ethnographic material, collected on the field during almost one century, was in Serbian (Sikimić 2012: 178).

The entire recorded material from Eastern Serbia, together with that from other regions and ethnic communities, is deposited in the digital archive of the Institute, DABI (Ilić, Đurić Milovanović 2013). Among hundreds of hours of recordings, the archive also contains a large collection of Vlach Romanian charms, recorded both from specialized, and ordinary interlocutors. Most of the texts are audio recorded, while a few, collected in the last years, are video recorded. More than 60 are transcribed, but unpublished and not accessible to the public, as DABI is not an open access archive.

Part of the charms were collected by Serbian linguist Biljana Sikimić, who was also the initiator of systematic research on the Vlach Romanian variety and folklore (Sikimić 1999, 2005). Following is a love charm collected by her in 1999, in the village of Kobišnica, intended to be said before going to bed by the girl who wants to see the destined one in her dream (DABI, unpublished):

Viţă, viţă, viţăşoaŕe,	Life, life, dear life,
Astăz iest'e vineŕea saŕe	Today is Friday night.

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

Đe cînd mă făcuşi	Ever since you made me,
Nici o grijă n-ai avut	You've had no worry,
D-acuş îţ dau o grija maŕe	But now I give you a big task:
Să umbli în lunc şî-n lat	To travel far and wide
Şi la noi în sat	And in our village,
Dacă-i đe la munće	If he's from the mountain,
Să-i pui punt'e	Put a bridge in front of him,
Dacă-i đe la maŕe	If he's from the sea,
Să-i pui caŕe	Put a path,
Dacă-i đe la noi đin sat	If he's from our village,
Să vińe la mińe la pat	To come to my bed
Ca cîńeĺu închinat	Like a loyal dog,
În vis să-l visesc	To dream of him in my dream
Şi la iava să-l cunosc.	And meet him in reality.

While collecting material for her doctoral thesis on the mythology of Vlach Romanians, Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković also recorded a significant number of charms, of which she only published fragments in the resulting volume (Sorescu-Marinković 2012: 97, 134). Most of them are unpublished, like the following one, collected in 2003, in the village of Podgorac, which is performed by the river or well, for beauty:

Bună zîua la fîntîna lu Iordan.	Good day at Jordan's well.
Mulţam taĺe.	Thank you.
N-am veńit să-ţ śer apă,	I didn't come to ask you for water,
Num-am veńit să mă speli.	But I came to you to wash me.
Đe pe cap să iei p'eĺe đ'e drag	Take devil skin from my head,
Đe pe ţîţ'e p'eĺe đ'e mîţă	From my breasts, cat skin,
Đe pe şeĺe p'eĺe đ'e [unintelligible]	From my back, [unintelligible] skin.
Doi ochişori, doi luśeaf'ori	Two eyes, two stars,
Două buzîşoaŕe, două făgureli đ'e mieŕe	Two lips, two honeycombs.
În piept soarli şî-n şăĺe luna	On my chest, the sun, on my back, the moon,
Să mă văz, să mă vighiŕez.	To be seen, to be beautiful.

Finally yet importantly, we must mention the activity of the commission Vanishing Languages and Cultural Heritage (VLACH), founded in 2016 in Vienna, as a special body of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. VLACH's main goal is to document and analyse the vanishing linguistic and cultural diversity throughout the world. Among other documented linguistic varieties, there is also Timok Romanian/Vlach. As part of the documentation material, several videos of Vlach Romanian charmers performing charms have also been uploaded on their youtube channel. The transcriptions of the charm texts are also available online, on their site (VLACH Love charm 2016):

…O kićíĭ pe Ána, o nîmestĭ́ĭ,	…I adorned and dressed Ana up,
pusắĭ la cap un bobíţ dă mac,	I put a poppy seed on her head,
la doĭ ok'işóŕ, doĭ la fiśaróŕ,	on her two eyes, two young men,
la dóa năŕ, dóa lumanăŕ,	two candles at her two nostrils,
la dóa buśiţă, dóa ružĭ́ţă,	two roses on the two cheeks,

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

la l'imbúța ĭeĭ crușáțăl ǵi sáre,
la buḍîșǫáră focorĭ ál ǵi ḿáre,
la țíță rumańíță, la bráță ĭárbă crĭáță,

la piśǫáre ĭárbă mǫál'e,
o pusắĭ în răsarít ǵi sǫáre în piśǫáre.
Să fíĭe a ǵe ástăț naínće,
ca lúna cînd ĭe pl'ínă,
ca albína astupínă…

on her little tongue, lumps of salt,
on her little lips, a honey fire,
on her breast, rosemary, on her arms, mint,
on her legs soft grass,
I put her up at the sunrise.
From today on she should be
like the full moon,
like the bee in the beehive…

3. For a corpus of Vlach Romanian charms

As we could see, collecting charms in Eastern Serbia has been going on with intermittence for over a century. Charm collecting was done by Serbian scholars, Romanian researchers and specialists or language enthusiasts from the community. It was both the result of planned linguistic research, ethnographic documentation, documentation of vanishing language varieties, folklore collection, and a side product of the above mentioned. In some cases, charms were collected from expert interlocutors, sorcerers whose fame surpassed the borders of the community, but in many other they came from ordinary members of the Vlach Romanian community. Even though texts recorded from this latter category were often shorter, incomplete or inaccurate, or missing the contextual information, they are proof of the fact that charms are not the exclusive attribute of charm experts, but a living genre in Eastern Serbia, some of them part of everybody's repertoire, men and women alike.

In spite of the large number of recorded texts, a corpus of Vlach Romanian charms is still to be compiled. The obstacles are obvious. On the one hand, the texts, when a transcription exists, are written using different spellings and even different alphabets. Some of the older texts, written in Cyrillic, are difficult to transliterate as to preserve the features of the variety, because sounds characteristic to Romanian are missing from the Cyrillic transcription. This is important in that folklore texts from this region might prove invaluable to dialectologists and language specialists, not only to folklorists and ethnologists. On the other hand, dedicated researchers, with a thorough knowledge of both Romanian and Serbian culture, who would plunge into this very diverse and uneven collection of texts and recordings, are still missing.

Even though Golopenția was not faced with such challenges, as the corpus she based her research on was rather homogeneous, her ideas and principles, some of which are more than three decades old, prove extremely useful in our case. First of all, she urged against the rejection of incomplete material, being aware that several factors influence the quality of these collections, among which: the intrinsic complexity of the practice, the interlocutor's linguistic abilities, the degree of empathy and intensity shown by the researcher in the discussion, spontaneous agreement or agreement built in the dialogue between the interlocutor and the researcher (Golopenția 1998, 2018). Inevitably, the collected data has a vague and fragmentary character: there are omissions in the text of the formulas, the indications for the extra-verbal performance are telegraphic or the moment of their

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

insertion is not specified – all these drawbacks may be due to the lack of motivation of the respondents to give a full version of the incantation in the absence of real beneficiary (Golopenția 2018). The shrinking nature of the corpus is thus due to the unusual, deeply artificial nature of the meetings between interlocutors and researchers, as well as to and relatively unconscious transmission in the traditional community (knowledge is "stolen" rather than taught). As the learning of the formulas depends on the context of enunciation, memorization becomes an effect of their oral, informal, traditional transmission.

Second, going a step further, most accurate results in typologizing the charms from an existing corpus are achieved with the help of a pragmatic typology of scenarios rather than formulas or techniques. As Golopenția explained, magic formulas are not autonomous texts:

> They are always *context bound* and must be recited at the same time as (or immediately before, or after) certain magic gestures, within settings and timings that are, if not clearly prescribed, at least vaguely internalised by all the charmers. Most often, formulas explicitly refer to, or implicitly hint at, the magic practices that are supposed to ensure and/or enhance their effect (Golopenția 2004: 146).

Golopenția proposes therefore to start with *a typology of charm scenarios* which can be continued and refined, later on, by adding to it a typology of magic techniques. Since such a typology must take into account both the techniques and the formulas, it cannot be based on textual motifs (or themes) alone and will therefore not have the syntactic (or syntactic and semantic) nature of the typologies devised for folktales, legends or lyrics:

> It will rather be *a pragmatic typology* in which, in order to neutralise the opposition between the speech acts that account for the formulas and the physical acts that are described in the techniques we will operate with *magic semiotic acts*. In a way that parallels and extends Austin's definition of the illocutionary speech acts, we will here define a magic semiotic act by the *conventional change* it is supposed to bring about, once it has been happily performed (Golopenția 2004: 147).

Third, Golopenția restricts her area of research to love charms selected mainly from the material collected in 1931 in the village of Cornova by her mother, ethnologist Ștefania Cristescu. Therefore, she crops a coherent corpus from the wide mass of Romanian charms, a corpus that allows her to operate with modern principles, methods and concepts and thus reach results (typologies) to which an undifferentiated approach would not have probably led. Golopenția writes:

> We believe that a relevant typology can only be obtained by limiting ourselves to a unique and coherent domain of magic intervention and to the roles, acts and interactions which define it. This is due to the pragmatic nature of our typology, which imposes the precise defining of a clearly delimited context (Golopenția 2007: 11).

The Vlach Romanian corpus of charms, though inevitably larger than the one from Cornova, might also prove to be a coherent system that would allow analysing and typologizing. The corpus may be further reduced by focusing on only one or

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

several villages from a certain region of Eastern Serbia. This could be easily done by cropping from a wider, digitized charm database.

Which brings us to the last, but probably the most important point: Golopenția's visionary work from more than three decades ago, when she developed the initial database of 119 Romanian love charms at Brown University. In a first phase, Golopenția digitized the texts and translations of these charms, together with metadata about their provenance, in order to typeset her book (Golopenția 1998). In the process, it became clear that if she added classification and keyword information as metadata to each charm, she could use available tools to sort and sift through the charms, which made analysis much easier. Later, using more modern technical tools, the process of entering charms and metadata was made easier, and a new interface for analysis was provided. In creating the site that hosts the database of Romanian love charms, two distinct types of access were developed: a restricted interface for editing and analysis, used primarily by Golopenția and her colleagues, and a public interface for the browsing and searching of the charms (Romanian Love Charms Database).

The same concept might be implemented for developing a database of Vlach Romanian charms, with the observation that the available tools today may create increased functionality and refined options. As many texts, mainly those from DABI, are already digitized, the work should be much easier. Apart from the older texts, the database would also contain video and audio recordings, with the accompanying transcription and translation. The public interface, which Golopenția planned for browsing and searching charms, could also be supplemented with the option of community members themselves introducing the charms from their own repertoires, a concept the online encyclopaedia of Vlach Romanian culture is also based on (Durlić 2011).

4. Instead of conclusion

Even though much of the national charm collecting at a European level took place in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, with Romania also forming a solid corpus by the middle of the 20th century, the Vlach Romanian charms of Eastern Serbia have attracted the attention of scholars relatively late. However, the sporadic and random collection of charms in the region, over more than a century, resulted in a highly heterogeneous collection of around 200 texts and scenarios. Dating from different periods, recorded on different mediums, written with different alphabets and spellings, collected by scholars from Romania, Serbia or elsewhere, the Vlach Romanian charms are a valuable addition to the corpus of Romanian, and Balkan verbal magic.

The Vlach Romanian charms of Eastern Serbia are a living genre, offering themselves to enquiring and dedicated researchers. Their analysis would enable scholars to draw contrast and comparison with the Romanian material and stress the parallels that exist with other traditions. However, the real challenge, and opportunity, in the beginning of the 21st century is to finally take the pragmatic turn Sanda Golopenția predicted more than three decades ago, which is today greatly facilitated by the possibility to video record the charming process.

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

References

Bârlea 1924: Ion Bârlea, *Cântece poporane din Maramureș. Descântece, vrăji, farmece și desfaceri*, București, Editura Casei Școalelor.

Bošković Matić 1966: Milica Bošković Matić, *Običaji o rođenju*, in *Glasnik etnografskog muzeja u Beogradu* 28–29, p. 173–189.

Burada /1880/ 1962: Teodor T. Burada, *O călătorie în Dobrogea. Folclor dobrogean*, București, Tineretului.

Candrea 1944: Ion-Aurel Candrea, *Folclorul medical român comparat*. *Privire generală*. *Medicina magică* [București].

Caracostea, Bîrlea 1971: Dumitru Caracostea, Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Problemele tipologiei folclorice*, Bucureşti, Minerva.

Census 2011: 2011 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Serbia, https://pod2.stat.gov.rs/ObjavljenePublikacije/Popis2011/Nacionalna%20pripadnost-Ethnicity.pdf (accessed May 28, 2020).

Cireș, Berdan 1982: Lucia Cireș, Lucia Berdan, *Descântece din Moldova: Texte inedite*, Iași, Universitatea "Alexandru Ioan Cuza".

Cristescu 1984: Ștefania Cristescu, *Descântece din Cornova – Basarabia* (edited by Sanda Golopenția), Providence, Hiatus.

Cristescu 2003: Ștefania Cristescu, *Descântatul în Cornova – Basarabia* (edited by Sanda Golopenția), București, Paideia.

Djordjević 1906: Tihomir Djordjević, *Kroz naše Rumune. Putopisne beleške*, in *Srpski književni glasnik* XVI/1, p. 44–58; 126–136; 200–210; 282–290; 376–384; 526–532; 614–619; 692–698; 763–782.

Djordjević 2008: Smiljana Djordjević, *Magijski tekst bajanja: između verbalnog tabua i folklorizma*, in N. Ljubinković, S. Samardžija (eds.), *Srpsko usmeno stvaralaštvo*, Beograd, Institut za književnost i umetnost, p. 389–430.

Durlić 1987: Paun Es Durlić, *Basme iz Gornjeg Poreča,* in *Razvitak* 4–5, p. 105–118.

Durlić 2011: Paun Es Durlić, *Vorbari–Online lexicon of Vlach culture*, http://www.paundurlic.com/vlaski.recnik/ (accessed February 20, 2020).

Durlić 2020: Paun Es Durlić, *Rumînji în zovîrnjit đi suare. Povješć alu Rumînj đin Poreśa, Pjeku al đi Sus šî cînuturlji veśinje*, Majdanpek, Udruženje građana PEKUS.

Gacović 1986: Slavoljub Gacović, *O bajanju i vračanju u Vlaha istočne Srbije*, in *Razvitak* XXVI/3, p. 88–99.

Gacović 2002: Slavoljub Gacović, *Bajanje u kultu mrtvih kod Vlaha severoistočne Srbije*, Beograd, Čigoja.

Golopenția 1996: Sanda Golopenția, *Love Charms in Cornova, Bassarabia*, in Donald L. Dyer (ed.), *The History, Culture, Language and Contemporary Politics of the People of Moldova*, Columbia University Press, p. 145–205.

Golopenția 1998: Sanda Golopenția, *Desire Machines: a Romanian Love Charms Database*, Bucharest, Publishing House of the Romanian Cultural Foundation.

Golopenția 2004: Sanda Golopenția, *Towards a typology of Romanian love charms*, in Jonathan Roper (ed.), *Charms and Charming in Europe*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 145–187.

Golopenția 2007: Sanda Golopenția, *Limba descântecelor româneşti*, București, Editura Academiei Române.

Golopenția 2011: Sanda Golopenția, *Adusul pe sus – între descântat și povestit*, in *Anuarul Muzeului etnografic al Moldovei* XI, p. 137–172.

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

Golopenția 2012: Sanda Golopenția, *Despre plante în descântatul de dragoste*, in *Anuarul Muzeului etnografic al Moldovei* XII, p. 143–172.
Golopenția 2018: Sanda Golopenția, *Adusul pe sus. Descântatul de dragoste*, București, Univers Enciclopedic Gold.
Gorovei1931: Artur Gorovei, *Descântecele românilor, Studiu de folklor*, Bucureşti, M. O. Imprimeria Naţională.
Hodoș 1912: Enea Hodoș, *Poezii poporale din Bănat* III *(Descântece)*, Sibiu, Editura Asociațiunii.
Huțanu, Sorescu-Marinković 2018: Monica Huțanu, Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, *Writing systems and linguistic identity of the Vlach community of Eastern Serbia*, in *Diacronia* 7, p. 1–14.
Ilić, Djurić Milovanović 2013: Marija Ilić, Aleksandra Djurić Milovanović, *Kome treba antropološka lingvistika u Srbiji danas? Primer kreiranja Digitalnog zvučnog arhiva Balkanološkog instituta SANU*, in *Etnološko-antropološke sveske* 10/21, p. 73–89.
Ivkov-Džigurski, Babić, Dragin, Košić, Blešić 2012: Anđelija Ivkov-Džigurski, Vedrana Babić, Aleksandra Dragin, Kristina Košić, Ivana Blešić, *The Mystery of Vlach Magic in the Rural Areas of 21st century Serbia*, in *Eastern European Countryside* 18(18), p. 61–83.
Marian /1886/1996: Simion Florea Marian, *Descântece poporane române. Vrăji, farmece și desfaceri*, București, CNI Coresi.
Muşlea, Bîrlea 1970: Ion Muşlea, Ovidiu Bîrlea, *Tipologia folclorului: din răspunsurile la chestionarele lui B.P. Hasdeu*, Bucureşti, Minerva.
Pavelescu 1945: Gheorghe Pavelescu, *Cercetări asupra magiei la românii din Munții Apuseni*, București, Institutul Social Român.
Pătruț 1942: Ioan Pătruț, *Folklor de la Românii din Sîrbia*, in *Anuarul arhivei de folklor* VI, p. 329–384.
Petrovici 1942: Emil Petrovici, *Note de folklor de la Românii din Valea Mlavei (Sîrbia)*, in *Anuarul arhivei de folklor* VI, p. 43–75.
Pop 1970: Mihai Pop, *Descîntecele*, in Al. Rosetti, Mihai Pop, I. Pervain (eds.), *Istoria literaturii române* I, Bucureşti, Editura Academiei, p. 53–63.
Roper 2004: Jonathan Roper (ed.), *Charms and Charming in Europe*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan.
Romanian Love Charms Database: http://cds.library.brown.edu/projects/romanianCharms/about.php (accessed May 19, 2020).
Rosetti 1975: Alexandru Rosetti, *Limba descântecelor româneşti*, București, Minerva.
Sikimić 1999: Biljana Sikimić, *Humorni aspekt srpsko-vlaške jezičke komunikacije*, in *Radovi simpozijuma: jugoslovenski Banat, kulturna i istorijska prošlost* 4, p. 112–118.
Sikimić 2005: Biljana Sikimić, *Tradicionalna vlaška kultura danas: Ursătoril'i*, in *Actele simpozionului „Banatul, trecut istoric şi cultural"*, Timişoara – Novi Sad – Reşiţa, p. 261–269.
Sikimić 2012: Biljana Sikimić, *Timski terenski rad Balkanološkog instituta SANU. Razvoj istraživačkih ciljeva i metoda*, in Milina Ivanović-Barišić (ed.), *Terenska istraživanja – poetika susreta*, Beograd, Etnografski institut SANU, p. 167–198.
Sorescu-Marinković 2012: Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, *Românii din Timoc astăzi. Ființe mitologice*, Cluj-Napoca, Argonaut.
Sorescu-Marinković 2019: Annemarie Sorescu-Marinković, *Between Collective and Personal Mythology: Oral Narratives about Moroi with the Vlachs of North-Eastern Serbia*, in Éva Pócs (ed.), *Body, Soul, Spirits and Supernatural Communication*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, p. 273–285.
Vâlsan 1912: George Vâlsan, *Românii din Serbia*, in *Anuarul de Geografie și Antropogeografie*, II (1911–1912).

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)

VLACH Love charm 2016: *Ǵescînć́ic ǵe dragostă*; performer: Marija Stepanović, camera/ interview: Thede Kahl, Andreea Pascaru; transcription: Thede Kahl, Andreea Pascaru, Sabrina Tomić, https://www.oeaw.ac.at/fileadmin/kommissionen/vanishinglanguages/Transcriptions/Timok_Romanian/timo1262RSV0002a_Love_Incantation_Timok_Vlach.pdf (accessed May 20, 2020).

Vrabie 1978: Gheorghe Vrabie, *Retorica folclorului (poezia)*, Bucureşti, Minerva.

Weigand 1900: Gustav Weigand, Die *rumänischen Dialekteder kleinen Walachei, Serbiens und Bulgariens*, in *Serbenter Jahresbericht des Institut fur Rumanisches Sprache* 7, p. 1–92.

Abstract

Starting from the role Sanda Golopenția played in establishing a digitized corpus of Romanian charms and in the advancement of scholarship on charms and charming, the author considers possible solutions for creating a corpus of Vlach Romanian charms. After an overview of Golopenția's activity, the author introduces the Vlach Romanian community of Eastern Serbia, focusing on their specific traditional culture, which has developed, in the last two centuries, at the intersection of two cultures, Romanian and Serbian. In the light of the fact that 'Vlach magic' is today a real cultural brand of the community, the paper further details on the charm collecting activity taking place in the region in the last hundred years. The recorded texts form a rather heterogeneous collection, transcribed using different orthographies and even alphabets, by Serbian or Romanian researchers. In spite of the relatively large number of existing texts, a corpus of Vlach Romanian charms is still to be compiled. The author stresses that this task could be fulfilled following Golopenția's ideas and principles, which, even if more than three decades old, prove extremely useful even today.

BDD-A31307 © 2020 Institutul de Filologie Română „A. Philippide"
Provided by Diacronia.ro for IP 216.73.217.31 (2026-11-27 06:12:42 UTC)