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BOOK REVIEW

A SUCCESSFUL AND FRUITFUL MODEL – A LITHUANIAN CHARMS COLLECTION AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE RESEARCH OF VERBAL MAGIC

(Review of the book Daiva Vaitkevičienė, ed., *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai: gydymo formulės / Lithuanian Verbal Healing Charms*, Vilnius: Lietuvių Literatūros ir Tautosakos Institutas, 2008, 919 pp., ISBN 978-9955-698-94-4)

It is an honour and joy for me to share my thoughts on the collection of Lithuanian charms made by Daiva Vaitkevičienė. The first time I heard of this work was at the conference *Charms, Charmers and Charming* in 2010 in Bucharest. Then in Tartu in 2011, I had the opportunity to read the volume and to use it during my own research on Bulgarian medieval and early modern charms.

The book has eight chapters: 'Foreword' (in Lithuanian), 'Lietuvių užkalbėjimai' (in Lithuanian), 'Lithuanian Verbal Charms' (in English), 'Gydomieji užkalbėjimai' (in Lithuanian), 'The Corpus of Lithuanian Charm-Types' (in English), five indexes (of charm-types, of illnesses and situations, of informants, of collectors and geographical, all in Lithuanian), a glossary (in Lithuanian), and a list of abbreviations. The chapters 'Lietuvių užkalbėjimai' and 'Lithuanian Verbal Charms' discuss theoretical, methodological and historical aspects of Lithuanian charms. The two parts 'Gydomieji užkalbėjimai' and 'The Corpus of Lithuanian Charm-Types' are subdivided in ten sub-chapters, according to narrative function: 'Separation and Connection', 'Expulsion', 'Transmission and Reciprocation', 'Purification', 'Destruction', 'Locomotion and Cessation', 'Designation', 'Manuscription', 'Redemption' and 'Canonic Prayers'. The Lithuanian 'Gydomieji užkalbėjimai' section also contains a sub-chapter with Polish charms and a sub-chapter with Russian charms. The book contains also thirty-two black-and-white photographs of informants, collectors, and manuscripts. The texts of the charms are accompanied by detailed additional information referring to explanations and directions of the performance, the primary sources of the charms, the name of its recorder, the age and dwelling place of the charmer, and information on its scholarly publication.

The volume has only one disadvantage, namely that not all of the charms in the collection are translated in English. This is indeed a pity, especially in the case of charm No 374 (recorded in 1939), addressing the new moon and the kingdom of Perkūnas. The editor herself points out the uniqueness and signifi-

cance of this charm, but the lack of English translation impedes access to such a precious piece of verbal magic. Therefore an English translation of this important text (and of all the other untranslated charms in the book) would make render collection even more valuable. Here I would like to thank to my Lithuanian colleague Lina Sokolovaitė, who was so kind as to help me in overcoming the language barrier.

Undoubtedly, *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai: gydymo formulės / Lithuanian Verbal Healing Charms* is a very important book in our field, both thematically and methodologically. It represents an excellent model, in terms of both content and its organization. The book is a proper extensive corpus, offering a significant amount of charms. In this way, the charms are not only exemplary, but also representative for a whole tradition, with all its special features and nuances. At the same time, *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai: gydymo formulės / Lithuanian Verbal Healing Charms* positions the Lithuanian tradition among the other traditions of charms and charming. Being a solid extensive corpus, the book thereby encourages the contextualization and the comparison between different traditions. It also provides starting point for an interdisciplinary research in the fields of philology, ethnography, folklore, anthropology and popular religion. And finally, the bilingual form of the book helps a much broader audience to access charms from a vernacular tradition and to appreciate its uniqueness.

In conclusion, the book of Daiva Vaitkevičienė is an important collection to be studied, a useful tool to be applied, and an excellent model to be followed.

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A NEW GENERATION STUDY ON LITHUANIAN INCANTATIONS

Vaitkevičienė, *Daiva* (ed.) 2008: *Lietuvių užkalbėjimai: Gydyimo formulės – Lithuanian Verbal Healing Charms*. Vilnius: Lietuvių Literatūros ir tautosakos institutas. 919 p.

In early 20th century, before World War Two, a number of detailed and bulky in-depth studies on incantations, including a systematised corpus of texts, were published (F. Ohrt, K. Krohn, K. Straubergs). There were publications on incantations of the Netherlands, Romania, as well as representative studies with text samples of ancient Greek, Anglo-Saxon etc. traditions, not to mention the first typological indexes (V. J. Mansikka). Analyses concerning the typology of incantations were based on the wider pan-European comparison material and allowed to make generalisations about the innate characteristics of incantations. Many of the typologies and conceptions presented then are still valid – for example the ones on Russian incantations.

Undoubtedly, that proliferation of large incantation compendiums was carried by the same enthusiasm, vigour and passion which underlay the initiatives to compile national indexes of legends with the stated aim of then compiling a unified catalogue; or the projects to cartographically map religious and ethnographic phenomena, which turned out to be complicated tasks requiring enormous amount of work.

The 21st century saw the coming of a new generation of religion and incantation researchers. Daiva Vaitkevičienė's book was published on the crest of a new research wave.

It would be incorrect to say that research had stopped at a European or global scale or that no text publications were coming out at all. They were. In Russian, studies with innovative theoretical approaches and collections of source material were published. In English as well, significant studies were being published. However, incantations were shadowed by other genres. An enlivening of the research field is in part supported by the general spotlight on medieval sources and studies, the growing number of deciphered monuments of old cultures and in-depth analyses of their texts. Accordingly, the evolution of incantations, a genre thousands of years old, is now much better traceable, more likely to be correctly reconstructed than ever before, and we have actual documentation about its recent changes.

Daiva Vaitkevičienė's book is a bilingual academic publication, expanded from the CD published in 2005. The research history overview is presented both in Lithuanian and English. Otherwise, D. Vaitkevičienė's study is in many respects similar to E. Velmezova's publication of Czech incantations published

in Russia, where the monograph on Czech traditions is in Russian and only the text corpus is bilingual.

Lithuanian incantations are now accessible to those not fluent in Lithuanian, or Baltic languages in general. Still, only the so-called title texts have been translated into English, and plus some samples to demonstrate variability, not all texts. This presentation of only type title texts and some examples of subtypes is well in accordance with the wider academic tradition used even in monolingual publications which present very bulky text corpora. The book includes all texts from both earlier manuscripts as well as texts published in print. It is a pleasant surprise to see that the corpus includes incantations in Russian and Polish collected from the Lithuanian area, giving a good insight into the old generalisation that charmers spoke foreign languages and if necessary, also used incantations in foreign languages.

The monograph features a general theoretical framework and a typology of the texts based on their narrativity. Similar systems, inspired by V. Propp and other narrative researchers, have also been tried before, for example on Georgian and Russian incantations, but never on a text corpus of this magnitude. This analytic approach helps us comprehend structures that incantations are made up of, highlighting the more popular constructions. Vaitkevičienė differentiates 11 narrative functions: *separation, connection, expulsion, transmission, reciprocation, purification, destruction, locomotion, cessation, designation, redemption*. Other, separate categories contain written incantations and canonical prayers applied as incantations. The statistical supplements give a clear picture of how much are the different functions found in incantations. For example, only 8% of the texts are based on the function *separation*.

The monograph presents a detailed overview of terminology, hazy border areas between shepherd incantations and songs, incantations and prayers, incantations and divination formulae, etc. genres. The book describes the large-scale and productive collection work conducted after V. J. Mansikka's fieldwork collecting and the opportunities presented by continuation of collection work. The detailed overview of collection history also includes the history of publishing and research. For the international and interdisciplinary researcher, the parts that discuss examples of presentation, the structure of presentation, the normative system regulating the time, place and presentation manner, but also relations with neighbours' traditions and reciprocal loans, are invaluable. A bold claim is made for the pre-Christian origin of some formulae. The conclusion that incantations in Latin are very rare in Lithuanian tradition, and that the written tradition represents only a very recent segment of the whole, are most interesting to contemplate.

Every study is done within a framework. Daiva Vaitkevičienė's bulky study is in several respects unique in this regard. V. J. Mansikka's "Lithauische Zaubersprüche" (1928) presented a small portion of Lithuanian incantations to the international body of researchers. D. Vaitkevičienė's book widens the number of texts several dozen times over, making the unique cultural phenomenon with Catholic background better perceivable by way of her analyses, the systematic approach and bilingually presented texts. Hopefully, we will see more such new-generation publications.

Mare Kõiva
Estonian Literary Museum, Tartu

SNAKE BITE CHARMS FROM SWEDEN

Bengt af Klintberg and Ritwa Herjufsdotter, *Jungfru Maria gick i gräset: Trollformler mot ormbett*. Ellerströms: Stockholm 2010. 88 pp.

This little book is an extra product of Ritwa Herjufsdotter's doctoral thesis from 2008, *Jungfru Maria möter ormen: Om formlers tolkningar*. There she examined charms against snake bites, and in particular the large group among them with a connection with Virgin Mary.

This new book is somewhat different. It is not a scientific work, even if it opens with an informative but popular introduction written by Ritwa Herjufsdotter in collaboration with Bengt af Klintberg. But most of the book consists of 50 examples of such charms. The book is tastefully designed as a collection of poems. The 50 spells are presented as poems on one page each, and there are also 11 full page illustrations in colour by the artist Agneta Flock. The texts themselves are normalized to modern Swedish orthography. Each charm is followed by short information about the place and year of recording, and in many cases there are also explanations of old-fashioned or dialectal words. It is clear that it is primarily an edition for the general public. But the fact that both editors are academic scholars is clearly seen by a concluding appendix, in which all the charms are commented upon. This part gives full information about the source of the charm, and references to both

published and unpublished collections. In many cases supplementary information on the text is given, as well as references to scientific studies. This means that the book is nevertheless still useful to researchers.

The oldest charm in the collection is recorded in 1737 in connection with a lawsuit. Most of the recordings, however, are made by folklorists in the 19th and 20th centuries, one of them as late as in 1978.

The charms sometimes consist only of rhyming words, more or less nonsense, and of curses of the snake, but most of the charms in the book begin with a little story that creates a dramatic scene. Often it is Jesus and St. Peter who are out walking when the snake goes to attack, bites, but is defeated by the holy men. But in most cases, the Virgin Mary is the protagonist, whether in Jesus' company or alone. It is a very Swedish setting that is portrayed in the charms. The Biblical characters walk around among the birches, oaks and pines. Virgin Mary protects the farmer's cow by spanking her keys on the snake. Details from everyday peasant life of 19th century Sweden are amalgamated in a natural way with characters, events and elements from Biblical tradition. It is certainly this that has fascinated the publishers, and this combination has also inspired the naive pictures of the illustrator.

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ISNFR Committee on Charms, Charmers and
Charming

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the first issue of *Incantatio*. This peer-reviewed journal is the natural outcome of the recent upsurge in charms studies, as illustrated, for example, by the activities of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research's Committee on Charms, Charmers, and Charming (<http://www.isfnr.org>). It is intended that *Incantatio* will be a lively forum for charms studies from a wide variety of traditions and scholarly approaches rather in the manner that *Proverbium* fulfills this role in paremological studies. Some of the range we hope to cover will be indicated by the contents of this our first issue, where we have articles on both medieval and (near-)contemporary charms, both European and North American material, and both close readings and theoretical interventions. Alongside such articles, we intend to published reports of conferences (or conference sessions) and reviews of books which touch on charms, charmers and charming.

The general editor of *Incantatio* is Mare Kõiva (mare@folklore.ee), who is also editor of the *Electronic Journal of Folklore* (<http://www.folklore.ee/folklore>). In addition, each issue will have a guest editor. For this first issue this role is being played by Jonathan Roper. We look forward to informative and productive developments in charms studies appearing the pages of *Incantatio*.

Mare Kõiva and Jonathan Roper