

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published and unpublished collections.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.

Daniel Sävborg,  
University of Tartu