

## BOOK REVIEWS

James Alexander Kapaló, *Text, Context and Performance. Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice*. Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2011, 352 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-19799-2

An extremely interesting contribution and a welcome addition to the study of a whole range of practices, such as charms, apocryphal texts, healing practices, prayers and so on, James Alexander Kapaló's book *Text, Context and Performance. Gagauz Folk Religion in Discourse and Practice* is concerned with that portion of the Gagauz population which inhabits the southern region of the Republic of Moldova. Past scholarship has focused on the ethnic origins of this population and the tension between its Christian faith and Turkish linguistic identity. As the result of its author's extensive fieldwork in the Republic of Moldova from 2005 to 2007, this study approaches the problem of this central dichotomy in Gagauz identity through the prism of daily religious practices.

Kapaló's research, historical in its scope, spanning from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twenty first, is also ethnographic in its approach. It debates on and probes into the 'folk' or 'popular' religion as a *locus* of linguistic struggle between and betwixt academic, national, political, religious, or, according to the author, 'elite' discourses (macro-level) and everyday struggle for access to the divine realm through interventionist practices and in competitive fashion with clergy (micro-level) practices. Key-points of this approach include: a) 'texts' connected, on the one hand, with the scholarly, ecclesiastic and political discourses and their contribution to the construction of Gagauz national identity and popular religious consciousness and, on the other, with the liturgical/canonical and lay/apocryphal tradition of Gagauz, b) the context of above mentioned texts within their social, historical and political frame and c) the role of the performance of these texts in creating, institutionalising and transmitting lay religious practices.

Kapaló's book meets all the criteria of a thoughtfully organised, well-structured research both from an academic and methodological point of view. The first part of the book includes *Note on Transliteration, Names and Toponyms*, a very useful *Glossary of Frequently Used Terms and Abbreviations in Gagauz and Russian*, followed by lists of Illustrations and Maps. An extensive and analytical introductory chapter also provides all the necessary information concerning the geographical area, its historical and political contexts and the aims and key points of the relevant research.

Chapter one on *Folk Religion in Discourse and Practise* deals with the theoretical dimension of the performative nature of the 'folk religious field'. After

an overview of folk religion as a separate field of study, the author proceeds to focus on issues regarding the political and ecclesial history and context of the formation of the field in East and Central Europe. Various theoretical points in relation to terminology of folk religion are discussed and special attention is paid to the dichotomy between folk and 'pure' religion which is based on both contested emic and etic categories. Moreover, the author emphasizes the primary role of language in religious rituals, discursive practices and the institutionalisation of religious facts. Key terms, such as 'text', 'context' and 'performance' and their relationship to religious language are duly explained. The chapter concludes with an analytical outline of the methodological issues applied in his empirical study of the Gagauz.

The discussion on the context of the relation among Gagauz language, identity and religious practise continues in chapter two on *Historical Narrative and the Discourse on Origins* through an overview of the historical political and religious discourses and narratives in the last 200 years of Gagauz history. The chapter traces the role of immigration along with that of geographical, social, economic and administrative dislocations as determining factors in the formation of the Gagauz minority of southern Bessarabia during the Russian-Turkish war of 1768–1774 up to the end of the Second World War. It then proceeds to examine the role of Orthodox priest Mihail Çakir and his contribution to Gagauz religious life and to the national independence movement, concluding with further developments in the post-Çakir years and in the Post-Soviet Era. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the role of national political, clerical and scholarly approaches in the historical construction of Gagauz religious identity and popular consciousness also emphasising the crucial importance of the link between ethnic / national identity and religious identity and practice.

Chapter three traces the recent history of the Orthodox Church in Gagauzia by demonstrating how Orthodoxy, through the institutions of religious practices of the Church, Liturgy and the scriptures, becomes the principle expression of "Gagauz identity" in the early decades of the twentieth century. Starting with an analytical discussion on the interrelation of religious practices and language, Kapaló moves on to explain how a 'linguistic capital' was created for the Gagauz language through the introduction of this particular language into religious life by means of translating the canonical and liturgical texts into the local idiom. Moreover, the problem of "liturgical literacy", along with the political connections with the Russian and the Rumanian Church and State are analytically taken up. The remainder of this chapter is concerned with an exploration of the position of the *Gagauz Language, Liturgy and Scripture in the Post-Soviet Era*.

Chapter four examines the construction of Gagauz folk religion as a field of practice through an exploration of other alternative practices which have existed alongside the officially established expression of Christian worship of the Church and which have been vehemently rejected by the official church. These practises, based on non-canonical texts, consist of a set of privately translated collections in notebooks (*tetratkas*), known as *epistoliyas* into the Gagauz idiom. These texts, which emerged after Moldova's incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1944 due to a total absence of an official 'church' in most Gagauz communities, perform a number of functions in the Gagauz spiritual life (surrogate scripture on Sundays, healing and defensive rituals, protective talismans *etc.*). Based on this tradition, the author points out the crucial importance of Gagauz language 'texts' in terms of the authority and the establishment of lay institutions by highlighting the dual character of folk religion both as pure discourse and as a field of practice. Finally, it problematises once again emic/etic distinctions concerning official and folk religion and practises.

Another bipolar distinction associated with the field of folk religion and connected with political implications is the distinction between magic and religion, which is discussed in chapter five on *Healing and Divine Authority* through examining various healing practices in performance. In this chapter the author focuses on the context within which healings take place, and through the biographies and testimonies of Gagauz village healers (*ilacçi, okuyucu*) explores how the traditions of folk and official Church healing practice coexist as bases of authority and agency in the religious sphere. Based on an analysis of the emic categories and lay healing practices he problematises inadequate and misleading scholarly distinctions between the protagonists of religion and practitioners of magic focusing on the significance of language and direct communication with the divine in the construction of the institutions of the folk religious field.

The bipolar relationship between 'religious ritual' and 'magical practice' and the role of language and performance in transcending this distinction, is further taken up in Chapter six on *Healing, Text and Performance* through the exploration of the texts of healing practices themselves. The author highlights the role played by words revealed directly to healers and explains how, through performance, these words of such divine agents as God (*Allah*) or the Mother of God (*Panaiya*) operate to establish and maintain the legitimacy of the institution of healing in the community. Moreover, extremely interesting for the study of charms (*okumaklar*) is in this chapter is the examination of *modus operandi* of Gagauz healing 'texts', the pragmatic and semantic levels on which they function, and, finally, the relationship among healer, patient and the divine agent that they invoke.

In chapter seven on *Prayer as Social and Cosmological Performance*, which focuses on the Gagauz prayer life, the author discusses how emic categories function within the community and how modes of prayer are constructed in performance demonstrating that the propositional content and the function of canonical prayers do not necessarily determine their actual use. Following this, this chapter explores the tradition of *toast-prayer*, a culturally ubiquitous public practice with powerful symbolic significance. Examining this particular type of Gagauz prayer the author points out the role of public performance in maintenance of social and cosmological relations and realities and problematises, based on speech act theory, the etic categorisations and distinctions drawn between magical and religious acts in scholarly, ecclesial and political discourses.

Another form of prayer, quite different from toast-prayers, that of ‘archaic prayer’, private and ‘domestic’ in nature, textually ‘fixed’, and primarily performed by women, is discussed in the book’s final, eighth chapter, on *Archaic Folk Prayer amongst the Gagauz*. The author examines the construction of this genre of ‘apocryphal’ prayer, often referred to as ‘folk’ prayer, a characteristic example of which is *Panaiyanın duşu* (The Dream of the Mother of God), in bipolar terms between canon and apocrypha as well as between ‘folk’ and ‘official’ religion. Its textual motifs and formulae, context, transmission, reception and performance, along with the significance of the Gagauz idiom as the medium for the establishment of lay institutions, are also analytically explored. Etic distinctions, such as magic versus religion, prayer versus incantation, canon versus apocrypha and tensions between ‘mediated’ and ‘unmediated’ modes of intercourse with the divine are also discussed here as the author explores the formation of the genre in folklore scholarship, pointing out the significance of drawing distinctions between the discursive content and the contextual function of texts.

The concluding section is succeeded by three appendices of great interest, though without an English translation, on Gagauz Epistolias (app. 1), Gagauz Okumak and Exorcism Texts (app. 2), Archaic Prayers in the Gagauz Idiom (app. 3.). Of particular interest is the book’s bibliographical section, carefully organized into sub-sections, another token of the author’s meticulously well-researched work. The first section includes the *Primary Sources* (Private religious tetratkas and papers in the Gagauz idiom, Religious Pamphlets and Booklets, Archival material), the second the *Works by Archpriest Mihail Çakir (Ciachir)*, while the third includes a number of “Other Published Sources.” The book closes with an analytical, really useful and very-well organised index.

Finally, Kapalo’s book constitutes exemplary research in terms of the way in which the fieldworker approaches the folk religious field, mediating successfully

across various scholarly defined categories and the lived experience of practices within their performative context. With considerable depth of argument and interpretative strength, the author offers a fresh methodological and theoretical perspective on ‘folk religion’ arguing, on the one hand, for the maintenance of the term as a descriptive category with semantic loading and associations connected to the political and contested nature of the object of study, while focusing on and revealing on the other, how scholarly discourses on ‘folk religion’ guide the local fieldworker’s identification of what ‘folk’ religious practices are, thus actualising ‘folk religion’ in a given context. Last but not least, Kapaló’s book, which constitutes the first monograph in a Western European language on the religion, history and identity of this under-studied European people, opens up such fascinating material for an international audience, giving thus the opportunity for further comparative studies.

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T.A. Агапкина, А.Л. Топорков (ed.), *Восточнославянские Заговоры: Аннотированный Библиографический Указатель* (East Slavic Charms: Annotated Bibliographical Index), Moscow: Пробел, 2011, 170 pp. ISBN 978-5-98604-286-2

I am dealing here with an important and much-expected publication on verbal magic. With its clearly organized and comprehensive content, *Восточнославянские Заговоры: Аннотированный Библиографический Указатель* provides abundant information and makes significant scholarly contribution. A contribution that starts from the field of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian charms, but also concerns every study of charms, verbal magic and popular religion. From my own professional experience, I can confirm the importance of such indexes in the research of South Slavic charms traditions.

The book is divided in six parts. It starts with a preface (pp. 4–7), where the editors present the scope of the index and the dimensions of the material, included within it. The book refers to East Slavic charms from the period from 1830s up to 2010, and published in several types of printed sources: general specialized collections of magical folklore, collections of regional folklore, publications in newspapers and journals, proceedings from witchcraft trials, ancient healing books and manuscript miscellanies. These charms are texts either recorded by folklorists and folklore collectors from authentic practitioners and