

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.

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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