

BOOK REVIEW

A BOOK ABOUT BULGARIAN INCANTATIONS

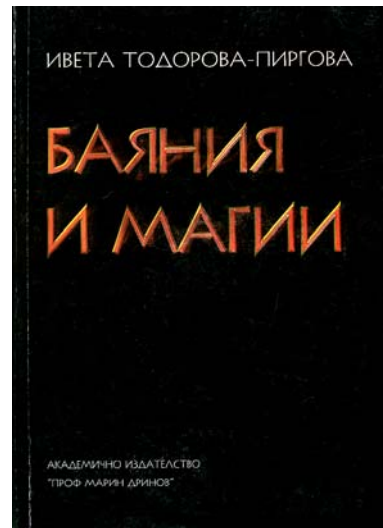
Iveta Todorova-Pirgova. *Баяния и магии* [Incantations and Magic]. Marin Drinov Academic Publishing House. Sofia 2003. 559 pp. In Bulgarian, summary in English.

In 2003, the Institute of Folklore in Bulgaria edited a more than five hundred pages long monograph on Bulgarian incantations, which summarises the decades of scholarly work of Iveta Todorova-Pirgova with this material. In terms of the theme and structure, the publication resembles the series of studies of Slavonic incantations – motif catalogues, anthologies and monographs – by the “Indrik” Publishers in Moscow, specialised to publishing quality fiction and academic monographs. To mention a few examples published in this series: *Incantations in the 15th–19th-Century Russian Manuscripts: History, Symbols, Poetics* by A. L. Toporkov (2005); the collection *Incantation Text. Genesis and Structure* (2005), *Czech Incantations* (2004), *Incantations Recorded in 1970–1990 in Polesje* (2003), as well as the comparative motif index of Slavonic incantations by V. L. Kliaus.

Other publishing houses have also published collections and anthologies, including new anthologies containing field material recorded or written down in the second half of the 20th century. The latter fact points to the continuity of the use of narrative lore in many regions. Together with the new editions of the late 19th- and early 20th-century traditional studies (e.g., manuscripts of L. Maikov and N. Poznanski), these publications constitute a monumental corpus of texts, motifs and data of Slavonic narrative lore.

The publishing of type registers and extensive monographs on one of the earliest and most complicated genres of lore, bordering on oral and written lore, in fact, never discontinued throughout the past century, even though it was less popular in the middle of the century than in the beginning and end. The reason behind the diminishing popularity was definitely the slower accumulation of newer data and a shift in perspectives. Nevertheless, together with the 20th-century text anthologies and studies of the North- and Central-European peoples and the source materials of ancient culture areas, the Slavonic material provides opportunities for posing new hypotheses and making in-depth generalisations.

For quite some time now, Iveta Todorova-Pirgova has been investigating the institution of folk doctors and psychics, an inseparable part in the study of incantations. The manuscript which was written (in 1993), ten years before its publication, consists



of incantations recorded by the author during her 15 years of fieldwork, also of archive materials, and texts from the collections of other folklorists. The material of the second half of the 20th century is remarkably rich, and systematised according to illnesses and magical ritual practices.

In the monograph, the author presents the categorisation of magical healing rituals and practices accompanying incantations, their regional characteristics, and the introduction of the function, semantics and significance of rituals. A special emphasis is laid on the space, time, participants, forms of communication, activities, and objects associated with magical rituals. All these factors help to present an accurate overview of folk healing practices and the area of use of incantations, since the author has approached the collected text material and ritual practices without speculation and forced self-reflection. Also, the detailed analysis of the accompanying rituals and practices is far more thorough in this monograph than it has been in previous scholarly publications on incantations.

The second part of the book includes the source material – namely, 1,000 incantations with descriptions of the accompanying rituals (some of these are lengthier narrations of patients), which have been selected to provide a better representation of different areas, phenomena, and differences in the Christian and Muslim religious tradition. Certainly, the academic publication includes indices of types of illnesses, plants, magical practices, and dialectal words.

In this form, Iveta Todorova-Pirgova's monograph is a fine study of a folklore genre, and, hopefully, her monograph on Bulgarian folk healers will be as enjoyable and thorough as the one discussed here.

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