

MICHAIL TARELKA

Center for Belarusian Culture, Language
and Literature Researches of the National Academy
of Sciences of Belarus

Fields of research: Oriental and Slavic Studies.

SERGEJUS TEMČINAS

Institute of Lithuanian Language

Fields of research: Slavic and Baltic studies.

LITHUANIAN INCANTATION IN ARABIC SCRIPT FROM A TATAR MANUSCRIPT

Lietuviškas užkalbėjimas, užrašytas arabiškais
rašmenimis totorių rankraštyje

ANNOTATION

The article presents the first ever known Lithuanian manuscript text written in Arabic script by Tatars of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The text was recently identified in a *chamail* written in late 19th–early 20th century and now kept in a private collection in Minsk. The manuscript was previously in use in the town(s) of Pastavy and perhaps Myadzyel in Belarus, in close vicinity of the Lithuanian border. The Lithuanian text is a short incantation against snake bites. The authors publish it in Latin transliteration (along with a photo of the corresponding manuscript fragment) and propose its interpretation based on textually similar Lithuanian folklore incantations against snake bites. The Lithuanian incantation known from the unique Tatar manuscript must have originated more or less in the same region of eastern Lithuania/western Belarus (somewhere between the settlements of Dysna, Tverečius, Mielagėnai, Adutiškis in Lithuania, and Pastavy in Belarus) where, in all probability, it was later written down by Tatars using the Arabic script.

KEYWORDS: Lithuanian Tatars, manuscripts, Lithuanian language, folklore, incantations.

ESMINIAI ŽODŽIAI: Lietuvos totoriai, rankraščiai, lietuvių kalba, tautosaka, užkalbėjimai.

ANOTACIJA

Šiame straipsnyje aptariamas pirmasis žinomas arabiškais rašmenimis užrašytas tekstas. Jį užrašė Lietuvos Didžiosios Kunigaikštystės totoriai. Neseniai tekstas buvo aptiktas XIX a. pabaigos – XX a. pradžios chamaile, šiuo metu saugomame privačioje kolekcijoje Minske. Rankraštis anksčiau buvo naudojamas Pastovio arba Medilo miestų regione Baltarusijoje, esančiuose visai netoli Lietuvos sienos. Lietuviškas tekstas – tai trumpas užkalbėjimas nuo gyvatės įgėlimo. Autoriai tekstą užrašė lotyniškais rašmenimis (kartu pateikdami atitinkamą rankraščio fragmento kopiją) bei pasiūlė jo interpretaciją, paremtą panašiais lietuvių liaudies užkalbėjimais. Lietuviškas užkalbėjimas totoriškame rankraštyje greičiausiai bus kilęs iš beveik to paties Lietuvos rytų ir Baltarusijos vakarų regiono (maždaug tarp Dysnos, Tverėčiaus, Mielagėnų, Adučiškio gyvenviečių Lietuvoje ir Pastovio gyvenvietės Baltarusijoje), kur vėliau jį ir užrašė totoriai, naudodami arabiškus rašmenis.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The manuscript heritage created by Tatars of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania (nowadays Belarus, Lithuania, and the eastern Polish region of Podlasze) has been object of scholarly research since the 19th century. Nevertheless, these studies are still in their initial stage, since researchers continuously find new and new manuscripts. By now, more than 300 Tatar manuscripts written in late 16th–early 21st centuries are known to be kept in certain state libraries and museums of Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Great Britain, Germany, Ukraine, Latvia, as well as in numerous private collections in Belarus, Poland and Lithuania.

The Tatar manuscript tradition is multilingual and contains texts in Slavic (Belarusian, Polish and, in some late manuscripts, Russian), Arabic and some Turkic languages, all these (including Slavic texts) being written in Arabic characters. Since many Tatar manuscripts still remain totally unknown to the scholars, it is quite possible that some future discoveries reveal texts written in other languages, such as Persian, Ukrainian or Lithuanian.

The very existence of certain Tatar manuscript texts written in Lithuanian using the Arabic script seems to be quite plausible, since in the 16–17th centuries the Lithuanian-Belarusian ethnic border went more south- and eastward from where it is now. In the 14–16th centuries, the eastern borders of the ethnically and linguistically Lithuanian lands not only went approximately by the nowadays Belarusian settlements of Grodno, Shchuchyn, Navahrudak, Valozhyn, Smarhon', Pastavy, Braslaw and Druya with numerous Lithuanian settlements eastward, but also some Slavic settlements westwards from this line (Гайчас 1988; Zinkevičius 1993: 31–39; Gaučas 2004: 8–20). It means that a great deal of the Tatar settlements had to

exist in predominantly Lithuanian or at least mixed Lithuanian-Belarusian ethnic and linguistic environments.

The memorial addressed by a Jesuit provincial of Lithuania to its general Claudius Aquaviva in 1611 explicitly stated that the local Muslim population could speak Polish, Russian (in fact, Ruthenian) and Lithuanian (Lebedys 1976: 217).

Tatar manuscripts are different in their contents and practical use: there are copies of the Quran, *tafsirs*¹, *kitab*², *chamails*³ etc. Some *chamails* contain incantations which usually consist of an instruction and a proper apotropaic text. The instruction is normally written in Slavic (Belarusian, Polish or, rarely, Russian), but the apotropaic text is very often in Arabic which was and still is the sacral language of Islam. This can be a quotation from the Quran or a Muslim religious formula. Sometimes the apotropaic text can be in Turkic or Slavic⁴; sometimes it can be a set of Arabic characters with no clear meaning or just an abracadabra. Some abracadabra texts resemble Arabic (are Pseudo-Arabic) or even Latin (are Pseudo-Latin). One incantation against snake (viper or grass-snake)⁵ bites drew our attention, since it seemed and really turned out to be written in Lithuanian.

LITHUANIAN INCANTATION IN ARABIC SCRIPT AND ITS FOLKLORE PARALLELS

The text is written on page 37b in a *chamail*, now kept in a private collection in Minsk. The manuscript with no cover consists of 44 folios of 175 × 110 mm. Unfortunately, there is no colophon in the manuscript. Its paper does not contain any watermark, but it does contain a stamp with the image of an eagle and the following text: Кн[язя] Паске[вич] '(produced by) the Prince Paskievich' (fol. 5a etc.). Therefore, it cannot pre-date 1872 – the year when the paper mill belonged to the prince Paskievich started functioning in the town of Dobrush (now in Belarus). The man-

¹ From the Arabic تفسير [tafsīr] 'comment'. It consists of the text of the Quran in Arabic with a comment or translation in other (Turkic, Polish, Belarusian) language.

² From the Arabic كتاب [kitāb] 'book'. It is a collection of comments on some fragments of the Quran, didactic stories etc. in Belarusian or Polish language.

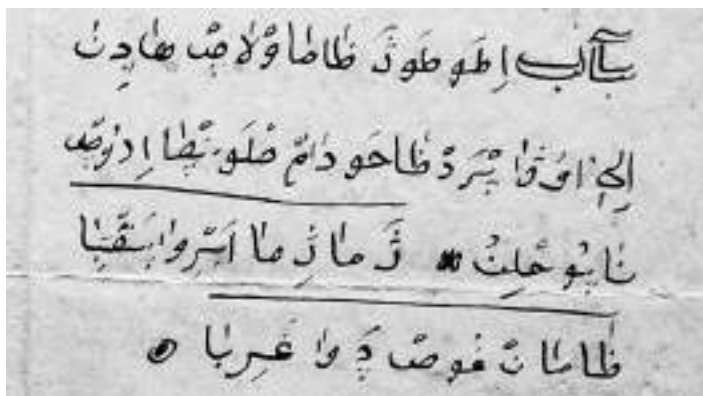
³ From the Arabic حمائل [ḥamā'il] 'amulets'. It is a collection of prayers, mostly in Arabic, with certain comments in Belarusian or Polish, accompanied by calendar, astrological and other texts.

⁴ For examples of Tatar manuscript incantations in Slavic see (Сынкова 2012).

⁵ Grass-snake is obviously thought to be venomous, like a viper. It is worth mentioning that every venomous snake can be called grass-snake, and every grass-snake can be called just snake in the Lithuanian folklore and spoken tradition (Dundulienė 2005: 13).

uscript, written in late 19th–early 20th century, was later in use in the town(s) of Pastavy and perhaps Myadzyel, in close vicinity of the Lithuanian border.

The incantation is supplied with an instruction in Slavic: *bāb*⁶ *'i to tože zāmāwlāc hāzinā 'ilī 'ūzā pred zāhodām šloncā 'i dūc nā pūhlinu* ‘A chapter [starts] which is also to be spelled against a viper or grass-snake⁷ before the sunset and [you should] blow on the tumor’. What follows is a Lithuanian apotropaic text: *žemā žimā 'abriwā peķtibā zāmān gūš zewā ģeribā*. The Lithuanian text is singled out with a line above.



There is a quite similar Lithuanian incantation against snake bites:

<i>Žeme žemybe,</i>	‘Oh, earth, great earth,
<i>Dangaus gėrybe,</i>	Oh, sky’s goodness,
<i>Tava piktybį,</i>	your evilness,
<i>Tava piktybį</i>	your evilness
<i>Ažumuž Dieva galybę!</i>	will be destroyed by God’s might’
– <i>Ataduok gėrybę</i> –	– Give back the goodness –
<i>Žmogaus baltybę.</i>	the human whiteness [e.g. healthy color]

(Vaitkevičienė 2008: 217, nr 280; cf. also nr 279).

In the Tatar manuscript, basically the same text is presented in a shorter version lacking the lines 2 and 4, as well as the two concluding lines. Shorter texts of this kind are also known, cf.:

Žeme žemybė, tavo piktybė, mano Dievas duos man gerybę. Amen. ‘Oh, earth, great earth, your evilness, my God will give me [His] goodness. Amen’ (Vaitkevičienė 2008: 216, nr 277).

⁶ Arabic باب [bāb] ‘chapter’.

⁷ The preceding text in the manuscript is another incantation against snake bites (in Slavic).

The above folklore incantation is the closest (although not quite identical) parallel to the one found in the Tatar manuscript that we were able to identify.

TEXTUAL AND LINGUISTIC INTERPRETATION

These Lithuanian parallels allow the following interpretation of the Tatar Lithuanian incantation:

žemā žimā 'abriwā pektibā zāmān gūš zewā ġeribā

*Žeme žemybe, tavą piktybą ažumuž Dzieva geryba!

'Oh, earth, great earth, your evilness will be destroyed by God's might!'

The exact linguistic interpretation is impossible, since the Lithuanian incantation written in Arabic script does not allow the differentiation between the phonetically and semantically similar dialectal forms *piktybą* and *piktybę*, or even *gerybą*, *gėrybą*, *gerybę* and *gėrybę*. They all are equally possible in this context.

There are at least two major discrepancies between the actual text and its proposed interpretation:

1) *žimā 'abriwā* ≈ *žemybe, tavą* 'great earth, your';

2) *zāmān gūš* ≈ *ažumuš* '[he] will kill'.

They are difficult to explain. It is quite possible that they are merely a result of textual corruption occurred in the process of a certain (not necessarily very long) textual transmission. Nevertheless, the possibility of a different interpretation cannot be totally ruled out.

For instance, *žimā 'abriwā pektibā* might be alternatively understood as *žeme, per tava piktybę* 'Oh, earth, because of your evilness', cf. *per tavo piktybę* 'because of your evilness' in a textually similar Lithuanian incantation (Vaitkevičienė 2008: 216, nr 278). Alternatively, the reading *'abriwā* somehow resembles Lithuanian *bjaurybė* 'creep, toad' which is quite common in Lithuanian incantations against snake bites⁸, but more or less clear textual parallels to the text in question which would contain this lexeme are unknown in the Lithuanian tradition.

The reading *zāmān gūš* might be also understood as a corrupted sequence *man duos* '(he) will give me', cf. the following examples from two textually similar

⁸ There is an entire group of abstract nouns in *-ybė* frequently used in Lithuanian incantations: *žemybė* 'great earth', *gėrybė* 'goodness', *piktybė* 'evilness', *galybė* 'might', *baltybė* 'whiteness', *bjaurybė* 'creep, toad' etc. (cf. Завьялова 2006: 87).

Lithuanian incantations: *mano Dievas duos man gerybį* ‘My God will give me [His] goodness’ and *Dievas duos man savo gerybę* ‘God will give me His goodness’ (Vaitkevičienė 2008: 216, nr 277 and 278). This interpretation creates a new problem, since it needs Nom. Sg. *Dievas*, and not Gen. Sg. *Dievo*, which is actually presented in the text (in its dialectal form **zewā**). Alternatively, one might hypothesize that here the Tatar Lithuanian incantation reads *man bus* ‘[it] will be [given] to me’, which needs the word *Dievas* ‘God’ in its Gen. Sg. form, exactly as it is in the text, but this sequence is not known from the textually similar Lithuanian incantations. In both cases, the initial segment **zā** of the sequence **zāmān gūš** remains unexplained.

In spite of these minor problems, the textual type of the Tatar Lithuanian incantation and its general sense are quite clear.

The Lithuanian incantations cited above as parallels to the one found in the Tatar manuscript have been recorded in Ignalina and Utena districts (the eastern part of Lithuania), in close vicinity of the settlement of Pastavy (Belarus) where the same Tatar manuscript has been functioning at least for some time.

In every case, the vowels [e] and [i], which are quite dissimilar in Lithuanian pronunciation, are both transcribed variously using the Arabic diacritic vocalization marks for [e] and [i], cf.: **žemā žimā** – **Žeme žemybe*; **peḳtibā** – **piktybq*. These may be minor results of textual corruption, caused by specifically Slavic (Belarusian) pronunciation with its vowel reduction (and neutralization) regularly occurring in the unstressed syllables. If really so, the corruption of this type must be secondary, made by a later Slavic-speaking copyist with insufficient or no practical knowledge of Lithuanian⁹. In this case, the text must have undergone a process of textual transmission.

The language of the Tatar Lithuanian incantation can be identified as a dialect, clearly different from the Lithuanian Standard. At least two dialectal features may be noted:

- a) Southern and Eastern Lithuanian palatalization of $t(v)'$, $d(v)'$ → $c(v)'$, $dz(v)'$ before the front vowels of *i*-type, e.g. the so called *dzūkavimas* (Zinkevičius 1966: 518, map nr 73), cf. **zewā** – **Dzieva* (not **Dieva*);
- b) Central and Northern Lithuanian unstressed Nom. Sg. ending *-a* of the masculine nouns in *-as*, corresponding to the Standard Nom. Sg. ending *-o* (Zinkevičius 1966: 477, map nr 32), cf. **zewā** – **Dzieva* (not **Dzievo*).

⁹ It is true that Tatar scribes did not normally encounter similar problems with the vocalization marks for [e] and [i] while writing or copying Slavic (Belarusian or Polish) texts in Arabic script, but this was due to their ability to control the text through its perfect understanding. The situation must have been quite different when they had to deal with a text in a language they could not easily understand.

It should be noted that the reading *pektibā* does not necessarily contain the same result of palatalization (**pekcibā*) which could be expected as a parallel to *zewā* – **Dzieva* (not **Dieva*). The Arabic character *Tā'* (ﺕ) which was used for the third consonant in *pektibā*, regularly reflects a palatalized [t'] (there is another character for velar [t]), but sometimes also the result of the sound change of [t'] → [c'] (Антонович 1968: 256, 258). Thus, it is not impossible that in *pektibā* the same Arabic character reflects [c'], e.g. the result of Lithuanian *dzūkavimas*.

The use of the Arabic character *Tā'* for [t'] and its substitute [c'] is typical for Belarusian texts in Arabic found in local Tatar manuscripts of the 17th century, can be sporadically found in the 18th century, and becomes extremely rare in the 19th century (Антонович 1968: 250–261). If we allow a parallel between the Belarusian and Lithuanian texts written in Arabic, it would be possible to date the hypothetic protograph of the Lithuanian incantation in Arabic (now known from a manuscript of the 19th century) back to the 17th century. In this case, the reading *zewā* – **Dzieva* may be better explained as a result of later orthographic modernization (if we agree that it is natural for a scribe to write using a systematic orthography which would consistently reflect Lithuanian *dzūkavimas*)¹⁰.

Theoretically, one might hypothesize that the two phonetic features mentioned above were not primarily presented in the Lithuanian text in Arabic, but are merely a result of later modifications introduced by a Belarusian-speaking Tatar scribe, since there are quite similar phonetic phenomena of *tsekannie/dzekannie* and *akannie* in Belarusian. But there is no real need to postulate later modifications for the features which are perfectly adequate in a Lithuanian text (cf. the principle of Ockham's razor).

The phonetic isoglosses of the two dialect features explicitly reflected in the Tatar Lithuanian incantation overlap in a quite restricted area in the eastern part of Lithuania – between the settlements of Kaltanėnai, Mielagėnai, Tverečius, Dyna and Adutiškis (these are dispersed alongside the eastern segment of the border between the Lithuanian districts of Ignalina and Švenčionys), e.g. in close vicinity of the Belarusian settlement of Pastavy where the Tatar manuscript containing the Lithuanian incantation has been functioning for some time. It should be remembered that in 1920–1939, the ethnic Lithuanians around the Belarusian settlements of Pastavy, Hruzdaw, Kamai, Lyntupy and Zhukoini were at the level of around 10% of the entire local population (Zinkevičius 1993: 178–179).

¹⁰ This assumption is not obligatory, since even professional folklore recordings sometimes are inconsistent in transmitting *dzūkavimas*: cf., for example, the presence of parallel forms of *Dzievo* (twice) and *Dievo* (twice) in the same Lithuanian incantation recorded by V. Mansikka and A. Bielinis near Alytus in the southern part of Lithuania (Vaitkevičienė 2008: 454, nr 1057).

It is quite clear that the Lithuanian incantation in a manuscript *chamail* has been initially written in Arabic script in an area where Lithuanian incantations (and Lithuanian population as their immediate source) were available to local Tatars. It can be concluded that it must have originated more or less in the same region of eastern Lithuania/western Belarus where this Tatar manuscript was circulating. Although the exact place of origin of the manuscript remains unknown, this geographical coincidence make us think that it was probably the same region where the Lithuanian incantation was first written down by Tatars using the Arabic script (the hypothetical original of the 17th century) and where its extant copy of late 19th–early 20th century originated (and was later in use).

CROSS-CULTURAL CONTEXT

Incantations against snake bites often occur in *chamails*, but other manuscripts contain apotropaic texts in languages other than Lithuanian. The text published above is unique and known from a single manuscript (with no other copies to be compared with) which naturally makes its precise textual and linguistic interpretation quite difficult. Nevertheless, it presents an intriguing and previously unknown (although not quite unexpected) cultural phenomenon as a Lithuanian text written in Arabic script by Tatars of the former Grand Duchy of Lithuania.

The incantations against snake bites form the largest group of the Lithuanian folklore incantations¹¹ and also have a prominent place in the Belarusian folklore (Завьялова 2006: 161). This may be understood as a regional feature (with a probable Baltic substrate background in Belarusian) which is in sharp contrast to the Russian folklore where the incantations against snake bites are much less frequent (Завьялова 2000: 197). It is perhaps not a big surprise to find a Lithuanian incantation of exactly this kind in a Tatar manuscript.

The presence of the Lithuanian incantation in a Tatar manuscript does not necessarily indicate that the Tatar scribe who initially wrote down the text using the Arabic script was well versed in Lithuanian – he might have more or less mechanically transcribed a text pronounced for him by someone else.

It is a well-known fact that incantations were often seen more effective when uttered in a more or less “exotic” language and/or by a person with an “exotic” religious or cultural background. This may, for example, explain the presence of a few Karelian-Veps incantations (accompanied by Russian instructions and, thus,

¹¹ This very fact reflects the extremely important role which the snake played in the traditional Lithuanian believes (Dundulienė 2005).

designed for Russian readership) which were written together with numerous Russian incantations in the Olonets manuscript of the second quarter of the 17th century (Топорков 2010: 46–54, 286–310). Some Lithuanian charmers used to spell incantations in several languages – Lithuanian, Polish and Russian; rare incantations in Latin, Latvian and German are also known in the Lithuanian tradition (Vaitkevičienė 2008: 17–21, 53, 611–710).

It is interesting to note that a single incantation pronounced in Arabic has been recorded in Švenčionys (in the eastern part of Lithuania) by V. Mansikka in early 20th century: *A uzi-i bie-la-hi-i bez me-la-hi ra-cha-li-ra-chim* (Mansikka 1929: 27, note 1). This is a corrupted version of the famous Muslim formula *'a'ūzu billahi min aš-šajtāni-r-raġīm bismi-llahi-r-raġmāni-r-raġīm* 'I seek protection from Allah against the Devil; In the name of Allah, most merciful, most kind' which may be found in numerous attestations in *chamails* and, less often, *kitabs* (see, for example: Jankowski, Łapicz 2000: 110).

Unfortunately, V. Mansikka has not indicated whether he had heard the Arabic “incantation” from a Christian person, or from a local Tatar. The second variant is quite possible, since there was a Tatar community in Švenčionys at that time. There is a *mizar* (Muslim cemetery) in Švenčionys (Buinovska 2014: 11). At least one Tatar manuscript (Kitab of Aleksandr Chasenevich of 1868) is known to have been in use in the uyezd of Švenčionys in early 20th century (Мишкинене, Намавичюте, Покровская 2005: 62–64).

Nevertheless, the Arabic “incantation” recorded in Švenčionys is corrupted to the extent which is hardly compatible with its possible Tatar provenience, since any Tatar, regardless of his/her level of literacy and education, is expected to know at least the *basmala* (the words *bismi-llahi-r-raġmāni-r-raġīm* ‘In the name of Allah, most merciful, most kind’ which make the second part of the Arabic text under discussion) quite well as not to make mistakes similar to those presented in the sequence *bez me-la-hi ra-cha-li-ra-chim* in the “incantation” recorded by V. Mansikka. It seems more plausible that the text has been recorded from a Christian (Lithuanian- or Slavic-speaking) person who had learned the Arabic formula from a local Tatar. If it is really so, Švenčionys appears as one more area where a mutual Christian-Muslim exchange of real or conceptional incantations took place.

This is in close vicinity of the settlements of Dysna, Tverečius, Mielagėnai, Adutiškis in Lithuania, and Pastavy in Belarus where the Lithuanian incantation known from a Tatar manuscript first originated in Lithuanian milieu, then was transcribed using the Arabic script in a Tatar *chamail* and later was in use in the extant copy.

Our research has shown that the most likely region of the cross-cultural exchange of this type may be identified as eastern Lithuania/western Belarus. This

is a well-known Lithuanian-East Slavic contact zone relevant also for the folklore tradition of Lithuanian incantations (Vaitkevičienė 2008: 19).

The published above manuscript texts in Arabic script, both the Lithuanian incantation and its Slavic instruction, have been transliterated into Latin according to the rules which follow.

The table of transliteration for the letters of the Arabic alphabet (including additional letters created by Iranians and Turks) used in the Lithuanian incantation and its Slavic introduction

The letter	The sign of the transliteration	The letter	The sign of the transliteration
ا	'	ظ	ʒ
ب	b	غ	ġ
پ	p	ق	q
ت	t	ل	l
ح	ḥ	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ر	r	ه	h
ز	ž	و	w
ص	š	ي	j
ط	ṭ		

Transliteration for the additional letters used by Tatars in Slavic (Belarusian and Polish) texts

ѣ	3
ѥ	c
Transliteration for the diacritical signs of vowels	
<i>fatha</i>	e
<i>fatha + alif</i>	ā
<i>damma</i>	u
<i>damma + waw</i>	ū
<i>kasra</i>	i
<i>kasra + ya</i>	ī
<i>waw + fatha</i>	o

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Lietuviškas užkalbėjimas, užrašytas arabiškais rašmenimis totorių rankraštyje

SANTRAUKA

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МІХАІЛ ТАРЭЛКА

Мінск, 220047, вул. Лімская 21, кв. 95, Беларусь
tarelko_michael@yahoo.com

SERGEJUS TEMČINAS

Petro Vileišio g. 5, LT-10308 Vilnius, Lietuva
sergejus.temcinas@flf.vu.lt