

REVIEWS

Адоньева, С.Б., и А.В. Степанов (ред.). *Магические практики севернорусских деревень: заговоры, обереги, лечебные ритуалы. Записки конца XX – начала XXI в.* [Adonyeva, S.B., and A.V. Stepanov, (eds.). *Magical Practices of Northern Russian Villages: Charms, Amulets, Healing Rituals. Records of the late 20th-early 21st century*]. 2 т. (Т. 1. Архангельская коллекция. Т. 2. Вологодская коллекция). СПб.: Пропповский центр, 2020. Notes. Bibliography. Glossary. Index. Vol. 1 584 pp. Vol. 2 513 pp. Maps. ISBN: 978-5-6044326-0-0.

A book detailing magical practices in the villages of the Russian North obviously benefits anthropologists, ethnographers, and folklorists. Any Russophone reader interested in folk magic from a scholarly or practical point of view; linguists studying regional discourse; historians; readers or scholars of literature interested in village culture as depicted in fiction—all these readers will enjoy and learn from the rich store of primary material in these two volumes, largely *zagovory* [charms] and incantations but also their contexts and other materials.

This scholarly collection with detailed apparatus includes records from expeditions ranging from the 1970s to the 2010s by students and scholars from Leningrad/St. Petersburg State University. Many reports go into fine detail, noting all participants in a conversation. The name, date of birth, and home village of every informant is conveniently given at the bottom of the relevant page. The “North” of the title is northwest Russia; most informants, though not all, are women, with birthdates as early as 1900—an impressive stretch of experience. The second volume ends with a glossary of dialect and other unusual words.

In her substantial introduction, Adonyeva describes how scholars’ opinions about *zagovory* have changed over time, necessitating changes in their methods and approaches and adaptation of concepts and tools from other fields. Soviet and now Russian medicine have followed the positivist tradition, considering magical practices part of folklore rather than part of medicine. Adonyeva outlines the evolution of methodologies of collection and reviews the literature on changing understandings of folk medicine (listing Russian and some Western sources). She notes that magical and other traditional practices are kept not for old times’ sake, but because they are observed to be useful (based on observation of experience rather than on scientific experiment). Besides awareness of the unity of physical and mental/spiritual elements, a proper relationship to time is essential for healing:

Здоровье и недуг определены умением человека быть чутким ко времени, его циклам и ритмам. Надо знать, как себя вести в то или иное время, различать его качество, ибо время «переходчиво», как сказала одна из наших деревенских собеседниц

[Health and ailments are defined by a person's ability to be sensitive to time, its cycles and rhythms. You have to know how to behave at this or that time, to distinguish its quality, for time is "transitory," as one village woman who spoke to us said] (19).

Healing practices also change and evolve while retaining certain features:

Заговаривать от тоски нужно над проточной водой, у реки, как объясняла мне одна из моих собеседниц, но в городе «ты можешь и над батареей», в ней тоже вода течет

[You have to say the words to ease *toska* [longing] over running water, by a river, one of my female interlocutors explained to me, but in town "you can do it over a radiator," in which water flows too] (25).

Rather than grouping magical practices by the malaise or issue they address, each volume of the book is divided by smaller geographical region (for example: the Kirillov region around the Sheksna River), with entries put in order from earlier expeditions (working with handwritten notebooks) to more recent ones who made more detailed audio recordings. Each part includes three sections, based on the concepts of maintaining the norm [*podderzhanie normy*], shift [*sviz*], and conflict [*konflikt*]. First is magical etiquette: how to behave when entering a forest or bathhouse, addressing the forest or bathhouse spirit or calling on Mary the Mother of God to lead one safely out, etc. (As others have observed, beliefs that encourage respect for the natural world and fear of looting natural resources bring many societal and environmental benefits.) The lengthier second sections give amulets/talismans, protective prayers, and transitional rituals, organized by the kinds of ailment or situation addressed; these often include bits of dialogue between the collectors, who ask questions, and village residents who answer or elaborate. Some of the ailments will be familiar to anyone who knows Russian (*sglaz* and *porcha*—evil eye and "spoiling"), while others may be unfamiliar to city dwellers. The *zagovory* tend to be brief, though some run to multiple pages. When an audiofile showed tellers speaking rhythmically with pauses, these lines are arranged like poems. They may be followed by instructions ("run your ring finger over the sore place"). Anyone who knows Russian *zagovory* will see familiar features: framing words; calling on certain saints; invocation of sympathetic magic (e.g., saying that since a dead person's teeth do not hurt, the person with the toothache should not have sore teeth either). Third and last in each geographical part are healing practices, including rituals for particular occasions and *zagovory*. The texts have been minimally edited and reflect oral language with repetitions, interjections ("ums"), and non-standard forms—interesting for students of Russian regional speech or discourse pragmatics. In many cases, especially with more recent records, the entries include written commentary from the collectors and compilers; some of these include comparisons with materials collected earlier, especially interesting when they are from nineteenth-century

collections. Some were copied from handwritten notebooks, a few of which are completely reproduced at the end of volume II. Texts are individually numbered, and easy to find later.

Just one example (in my hasty translation) (I, 69):

To avoid bodily tiredness during reaping

47. As the first sheaf was reaped, people said these words for their backs, took three ears of grain and added:

“As these ears lean down,
So too let God’s servant Marya
Bend and bow her back.
At no time, at no moment,
Neither morning, nor evening time,
Let it ever hurt.”

For any scholarly or practical purpose, this book is a splendidly varied, informative and responsibly compiled contribution to the literature on Russian village traditions.

Sibelan Forrester
Swarthmore College
Swarthmore, Pennsylvania, USA
sforres1@swarthmore.edu