

**Vitalii Shchepans'kyi. *Kistka shamana: Narys z istorii rann'omodernoho slov"ians'koho ezoteryzmu*** [*The Shaman's Bone: Sketch of the History of Early Modern Slavic Esotericism*]. Introduction by Mykhailo Iakubovych, Vydavets' Oleh Zen', 2016. 160 pp. Illustrations. Appendices. Bibliography. Cloth.

**T**his book discusses a type of magic practice that involves fortune-telling with the help of a sheep's shoulder blade. This divination method is called scapulimancy. At the centre of Vitalii Shchepans'kyi's exploration is the Old-Ukrainian work *Knyha ot Petra Iehyptianyna* (*The Book of Peter the Egyptian* [short title]). This work is a part of the so-called Vilna (Vilnius) Codex, which in its main part is the oldest Slavic translation of the pseudoaristotelian medieval text *Secretum Secretorum* (*The Secret of Secrets*), which was well known in Europe. This Slavic translation of *Secretum Secretorum* is called *Arystotelevi vrata* (*Aristotle's Gates*). The work *Knyha ot Petra Iehyptianyna* describes how to tell the future—for example, how to foresee one's death or the outcome of a battle—by reading the signs on a specially prepared sheep's shoulder blade. Shchepans'kyi does not agree with the scholars who argue that the work *Arystotelevi vrata* was translated from Hebrew. He finds that the text is not homogeneous and that most of it has Greek origins (he includes the work *Knyha ot Petra Iehyptianyna*); but there are also some Hebraisms. The texts of the Persian alchemist and philosopher Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi and the Jewish philosopher and physician Maimonides form the basis of the work *Arystotelevi vrata*. The work *Knyha ot Petra Iehyptianyna* is also known as *Lopatochnyk* (*The Shoulder Blade Book*), and according to Shchepans'kyi, it is a free translation of the work *Peri omoplatoskopias* (*On Scapulimancy*), which was written by the Byzantine Greek monk Michael Psellos (75-77, 81). He also claims that this translation was made in Kyiv (86), but we find no argument in his book that would prove this statement.

Shchepans'kyi, prior to his discussion of the work *Knyha ot Petra Iehyptianyna*, outlines the history of the scholarship relating to magic. Because his book is a pioneering one in Ukraine in this area of study, he has chosen to try to first prove the legitimacy of the topic in scholarship. In the first chapter, "Nauka pro taiemne" ("The Science of the Occult" [5-7]), he argues that esotericism can be the subject of academic research. He notes that it became an independent area of study in Europe between the 1950s and 1970s. Alchemy, astrology, magic, and other kinds of occult sciences have been studied as cultural phenomena, but it is often important for scholars to find the inner logic of these systems. Of course, scholars try to find this logic not in order to practice magic but in order to gain a thorough understanding of the subject matter. The first generation of such scholars include the well-

known figures Mircea Eliade, Gershom Scholem, and Henry Corbin. If these names are not familiar to readers, then it should be noted that the famous Italian novelist and philosopher Umberto Eco was also interested in the subject matter of the occult.

The chapter “Stan naukovoho vyvchennia fenomenu mahii” (“The Current State of Scholarship on the Phenomenon of Magic” [8-25]) shows that the academic research of magic has its own history. Established scholars such as Edward Burnett Tylor, James George Frazer, and Émile Durkheim focused on the correlation between magic, religion, and science. Shchepans'kyi introduces three theories of magic—approaches that are evolutionary, or intellectual; sociological; and emotional, or functional. It should be noted that the author in many places here simply retells the theories of Dutch scholar Wouter Hanegraaff; this scholar is the subject of a separate subchapter in the book (see 20-25). Frankly, it is hard to understand from Shchepans'kyi's text whether Hanegraaff's theories should be considered to fall under one of the aforementioned theoretical approaches or whether Hanegraaff's theories represent a new approach. It is not clear from the book whether Hanegraaff sees religion as a part of magic or magic as a part of religion (see 22-23). The use of terminology is not very accurate in this chapter; the review of the historiography is overly general here as well. This seems to be somewhat of a weak platform for a book with such an ambitious objective.

The next chapter, “Teorii, praktyky i vydy mantyk” (“Theories, Practices, and Forms of Divination” [26-34]), in a certain way continues the subject matter of the previous chapter, but it focuses only on divination. It offers some rational explanations for the phenomenon; the physiological theory of anticipation is one of them. Methods of divination are classified according to the materials used in divination: pyromancy, which uses fire; hydromancy, which uses water; aeromancy, which uses “aerial objects,” such as planets and stars, comets, or wind; and so on. Here, Shchepans'kyi does not claim to be original, and the text resembles a textbook or encyclopedic entry.

The next chapter, “Mahichni teksty pivdennykh ta skhidnykh slov'ian rann'omodernoï doby” (“The Magic Texts of the Southern and Eastern Slavs of the Early Modern Era” [35-49]), is a very good introduction to Shchepans'kyi's analysis of the work *Knyha ot Petra Iehyptianyna*. This chapter concentrates on the texts that were not allowed into the literary tradition of Orthodox Christianity. The author postulates that we have lists of such texts in manuscripts as *O knigakh istinnykh i lozhnykh* (*About Books True and Fallacious*) and *Indeks otrechennykh knig* (*The Index of Forbidden Books*), but nobody has tried to find these texts and there is no collection of preserved Slavic esoteric texts. Shchepans'kyi divides these kinds of texts into five groups: (a) amulet texts, invocations, charms, and apocryphal

prayers; (b) texts of divinatory magic; (c) herbals, which include elements of magical cures through herbs, and other texts of natural magic; (d) texts with astrological content; and (e) texts with alchemic content (38). The author asserts that all of these texts have Arabic, Jewish, Byzantine, or Western European origins. Only a few of them, especially the texts from the first group, were created by the Slavs themselves.

The next chapter, which is called “Skapulimantiia” (“Scapulimancy” [50-74]), describes the practice of scapulimancy in various regions and in different texts. Shchepans'kyi discusses fortune-telling by observation of a sheep's shoulder blade in China and Japan, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. He also focuses on the description of scapulimancy in Arabic and Latin texts. For an understanding of how deeply and thoroughly the author presents such an excursus, one need only note that the last subchapter, about Arabic and Latin texts, takes up only four and a half pages (see 70-74). The purpose of the whole chapter, as I understand, is to show that scapulimancy was rather widespread among different cultures.

It seems that all of the previous chapters are sort of an introduction to the final chapter, which is called “Davn'oukrains'ka 'Knyha vid Petra Iehyptianyina . . .’: Skapulimantiia u Slavia Orthodoxa” (“The Old-Ukrainian [Work] *The Book of Peter the Egyptian* . . .: Scapulimancy in Slavia Orthodoxa” [75-88]). This is the most original and interesting part of the book, although it only occupies fourteen pages (which means that all of the previous “introductory chapters” occupy five times more space than the fundamental chapter). The material of the chapter has been discussed at the beginning of this review.

The appendix section (93-152) increases the importance and academic value of this book. Here, the reader will find the text *Knyha znan' pro lopatku* (*The Book of Knowledge about the Shoulder Blade* [93-115]), a text that was originally in Arabic; the Ukrainian translation was made by Shchepans'kyi. The Latin version is included as an appendix (135-48). There is also a reprinted Russian translation of an old-Mongolian text; the translated text is called *Glubokomudraia chuga: Gadanie na baran'ei lopatke* (*The Chuga of Deep Wisdom: Divination from a Ram's Shoulder Blade* [116-22]). The appendix section also has three versions of the work *Knyha ot Petra Iehyptianyina*: a decoded Old Slavic text, a photocopy of the original text from the National Library of Belarus, and Shchepans'kyi's Ukrainian translation (123-34). One will also find Psellos's Greek work *Peri omoplastoskopias*, from a French edition entitled *Omoplastoscopique* (149-52).

The book under review leaves the reader with ambivalent feelings. One understands that Shchepans'kyi has done a great deal of work: he has not only studied scapulimancy among the Slavs but he has placed it within a wider cultural context. However, this was not done very skilfully, and two of

three parts of the main text of the book have no relation to the Slavs at all (in spite of the title of the book). The translations and original texts in this book will make it useful in future studies of the subject matter. It also bears repeating that the unusual nature of Shchepans'kyi's research makes this book remarkable. Thus, the book merits the attention of the academic community.

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