

Past and Present  
Lithuanian Polyphonic  
Sutartinės Songs



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By

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Translated by Vijolė Arbas

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## PREFACE

UNESCO inscribed *Sutartinės* on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2010. Even so, people know little about this distinctive tradition, which is thriving in a tiny corner of the world – in northeastern Lithuania.

What are *sutartinės*? It has been said, “They [*sutartinės*] had originated from *laumės* or [dim.] *laumaitės* [transl. note: initially the Goddess of Birth and Earth in Eastern Baltic mythology].<sup>1</sup> Later, under Christianity, people referred to *laumės* only as witches. So, girls who liked singing *sutartinės* had to wait long years to marry, because young men would be afraid they may be witches.”

Mykolas Biržiška, the writer of this tale, documented what local folk had told him early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet, this story raises many questions. Why were *laumės*, the singers of *sutartinė* polyphonic hymns, among the oldest goddesses of heaven and earth in Lithuania? Do interrelationships with *laumės* offer sufficient evidence of the uniqueness of *sutartinės*? As per legends, *laumės* are generally found in waters, rivers and water wells. They also tend to rearrange the terrain, piling up earth into huge hillforts. Besides, it seems, *laumės* also sing *sutartinė* hymns.

What makes *sutartinės* special? How far into the past do their roots extend? *Sutartinės* continue to express hymns, even today. Their odd resonance leaves listeners awestruck, arousing varied reactions. The music instantly enraptures some, leaving them spellbound. Others find it overly coarse, monotonous and incomprehensible or even completely foreign.

Little wonder then that *sutartinės* evoke very different emotional reactions among various people today. Even long ago, reactions were also controversial. Chroniclers and researchers of local traditions between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, e.g., Maciej Strykowski and Theodor Lepner et al., had likened Lithuanians singing (bellowing or screeching) this style of music to “howling wolves”. One can only wonder; how else is it possible to describe *sutartinės*, which are grounded on intervals of the second? Even earlier, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Elias Salomon, a French monk and music theoretician, had also likened polyphonic dissonance from Lombardy to

---

<sup>1</sup> *Laumės* and *laumaitės* are two forms of the same name in the plural – the latter is a diminutive.

“<...> *qui ululant ad modum luporum* ‘<...> howling wolves’” in his work published in *Scientia artis musicae* (1274). People who actually sang *sutartinės* considered these hymns to be “terribly beautiful” akin to the “tooting of swans,” “garbling of cranes”, “clanging of bells” or the like. In contrast, a tendency developed in village communities early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to poke fun at *sutartinės* and mock their singers as little more than “cackling hens”.

It has been difficult to determine why or exactly when one attitude or another formed about *sutartinės* and how viewpoints shifted. It has been equally as difficult to trace the stages of development of various early forms of polyphonic music. The best that can be said regards the lack of data encumbering the formation of a chronological organization pertinent to the entire environment of *sutartinės*’ existence. Such restoration is incredibly difficult to organize. Thus, it is likely impossible to arrive at an “objective” historical period to grasp the depths of the *sutartinės*. Besides, a historical period is not of key importance here. Comprehension of a time when folk music was encompassing and impacting *sutartinės* music, along with its cyclical period, is far more significant. Such is the foundation over which this music flows.

Reconstructions of *sutartinės* are possible to cover the entire system of a certain kind of musical thought encompassing vocal as well as instrumental polyphonic music. Such a reconstruction of polyphonic music with a prevalence of seconds out of fragments scattered over centuries reminds us of research conducted by the semiotician Algirdas Julius Greimas. Greimas believes that the study of Lithuanian mythology must be in the field of cultural archeology. The aim would involve reconstruction of the whole out of “all the pieces of mythological fragments, scattered shards and loose scraps”. A desire to reveal the meaning of *sutartinės* as a key manifestation of our culture must involve a reconstruction of these songs in their entirety. That is precisely my intent – to carry on the work of earlier researchers like Adolfas Sabaliauskas, Aukusti Robert Niemi, Zenonas Slaviūnas, Stasys Paliulis and Jadvyga Čiurlionytė. The intention is to supplement perceptions of notable Lithuanian and foreign ethnomusicologists with data from ethnology, archeology, linguistics and other areas in the sciences and scholarship. The effort aims to form a field of semantics to regenerate a certain cultural environment that is suitable for such a reconstruction, rather than to replicate any specific historical period.

From the very start of my work with *sutartinės*, both singing and studying them, I have chosen to view these hymns in a complex manner by harmonizing the practical and the theoretical. I have been investigating *sutartinės* since 1981, as well as heading a group of *sutartinė* singers named

*Trys keturiose* “Three by Four”. The merger of these two fields has revealed nuances involved in singing these hymns by qualifying them, by grasping their essence. Such a combination of experiences proves useful for analyzing certain problematic issues.

Self-reflection has an important role in this book, which has permitted me to examine *sutartinės* and summarize my own practical experience in parallel. Concurrently, I can take a critical look at my viewpoint and grasp the contribution it adds to *sutartinė* research as well as to the dissemination of *sutartinės* as part of the vitality of national traditions.

The use of hermeneutic observation is to resolve those same, “eternal” issues relating to *sutartinės*. It provides a methodological key for mapping ideas and interpreting them, i.e., for newly understanding and interpreting *sutartinės* as poetic/musical texts within their ritualistic, cultural, social or other context.

Naturally, many ideas stated in this book are hypothetical, based on my interpretative observations. Some could be verified and confirmed or rejected by virtue of more detailed investigations by specialists in other fields. Meanwhile, certain assumptions may simply remain as unresolved riddles.

This is my second English-language book on *sutartinės*. As in the first book, I will present and describe in detail all the different styles of *sutartinė* hymn-singing, since I believe this book could be the first acquaintance with these hymns for many readers. There is also a brief introduction on the history of collecting and investigating *sutartinės* along with pertinent problematic matters. Additionally, the field of research on *sutartinės* has expanded considerably. I have reviewed my earlier research on this topic in a new light for this new book. I have rethought and adjusted certain ideas, which I had previously examined.

I hope this book will not only introduce readers to this heritage of traditional music that is unique to Lithuania, but that it will become a certain “key” for opening the door to the spiritual world of Lithuanians and their mentality.





## INTRODUCTORY COMMENTS

The word *sutartinė* derives from the verb *sutarti*, to ‘agree/attune’ with another person. The very name of these types of polyphonic songs – *sutartinės* – connotes the necessity of agreement and the need for voices to be in tune with each other. In all likelihood, only small groups sing *sutartinės* due to the requirement for intent listening and interactive agreement. This is in contrast to the performances of many other kinds of traditional Lithuanian songs that are performed by large groups of people. *Sutartinės* were generally sung by two, three or four women. The number of singers determines the basic categorization of types of this music – *dvejinės* ‘twosomes’, *trejinės* ‘threesomes’ and *keturinės* ‘foursomes’. (Comprehensive discussions of these types appear later.) Despite the number of performers or varied performance styles, only two voices always resound in *sutartinės*. Thus, a simple and succinct description of the essence of *sutartinė* music can be the resonance of two independent melodies at any one time. Generally, part of one melody resounds at one level (say, by pitch or key) and the other – at another level. Weaving in and out of each other, melodies generate the characteristic polytonal sound of *sutartinės*. The sound is, at times, rather sharp, because, often, second intervals form between voices. The sound can perhaps be somewhat refractory; though, at other times, lively pulsations and playfulness might fill out the sound:

I Kų ger - vi - nas, dau - tū - to,

II dau - tū - to, dau - tū - to.

Ex. 1

An intertwining of two independent melodies can be closely likened to the process of weaving cloth. In weaving, the heddle appears to dive as it threads one yarn through another, rising to the surface and, then again, hiding from view. This exchange of threads yields a fabric with a variegated pattern. Similarly, melodies weave a fabric of *sutartinės* music that different voices carry forth. From time to time, extreme notes of one melody or another resound, thus, giving an impression of weaving in variegated timbres.<sup>2</sup>

The similarity of *sutartinės* to woven cloth, becomes even more apparent, when, instead of writing musical notes on the usual staff, squares on graph paper are filled out in a pattern.<sup>3</sup> These markings of the numerous repetitions of a *sutartinės* melody, exactly as they occur during a performance, and the application of the mirror image principal of symmetry in this system of writing, generate a geometric pattern. Such patterns are very similar to the ones found in traditional Lithuanian sashes, bedspreads, tablecloths, towels and other types of woven fabrics.

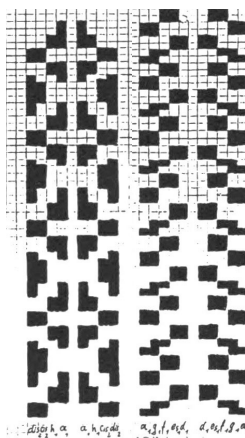


Fig. 1

<sup>2</sup> That intertwining *sutartinės* melodies reminds us of the weaving process is an observation that disturbed my peace of mind for a long time. The thought about such an interaction between singing *sutartinės* and a weaving (braiding) process slowly unraveled into making a musical video titled *Lino laikas* 'Linen Times'. Its concert presentation appeared in 2006. Its DVD was issued with the same name in 2008. Linen symbolism appears throughout this project, just as it does by weavings and woven patterns, as well as by a *sutartinės* song lamenting the "suffering of the flax plants".

<sup>3</sup> The Lithuanian composer Dainius Valionis (Valionis 1997) developed this graphic method for recording notes.

A *sutartinė* melody relevant to its meaningful text is a *rinkinys/rinkimas*, a ‘collection’, from the verb *rinkti* ‘collect/gather’, i.e., to put together or to compose a text.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, the accompanying refrain, which is also known as *priedainis* ‘alongside the song’, is also referred to as *pritarinys* ‘an accompaniment’:

Text (Main Collected Text)

Refrain (Accompaniment)

Ex. 2

The singer performing the main part of the *sutartinės* text, i.e., the one leading the song, is called the *rinkėja* ‘collector’, whereas the singer repeating the refrain is called the *pritareja* ‘accompanist’, *giedotoja* ‘hymn-singer/chanter’<sup>5</sup> or the like. At times, *sutartinės* themselves are referred to as ‘collections’, e.g., at times, people might say, “Now we’ll sing a collection.”

Thus, *sutartinės rinkimas*, ‘collecting’ (a term singers use), corresponds with the terminology related to the weaving process. *Rinkinys* ‘collection’ is, for one, the meaningful text part of the *sutartinės*, e.g., “*Rinkinį kaip išmisliji ir rink* ‘Go collect [a text] as best as you can conjure’”. It also means a patterned woven cloth or a print, e.g., *Ji gražių rinkinių beturinti* ‘She’s got a fine print’, a setup for weaving a pattern into a collection of cloth. The traditional concept of a collection involves patterning, i.e., collecting weavings like sashes and other cloths or simply the technology of collected patterns – *rinkinys* is also defined as ‘a select woven pattern’.<sup>6</sup> It’s also worthwhile to recall *mestos*, ‘warped’ [in weaving], for describing *sutartinės*, e.g., “Them *keturinės* hymns ain’t poor;

<sup>4</sup> An effort to reveal the many meanings of the word *rinkimas* ‘collection’ comes later.

<sup>5</sup> *Giedotoja* or its synonym *giesmininkė* not only indicates performers of the refrains but includes all singers, or more precisely, hymn-singers of all *sutartinė* parts.

<sup>6</sup> Direct links with weaving are also perceived in the *krez* singing traditions of the Udmurt people of Russia, which singers refer to as “twelve-thread looped singing”. It is thought this name relates to a harmonious braiding of different vocal parts, reminding singers of a drawn woven piece or the actual weaving process itself (Нურიева [Nuriyeva] 2008: 238).

they're *mestos* 'warped/tossed together'". This is the same sort of description as referring to patterns in cloth.

The famed scholar and expert on Indo-European culture, Viacheslav Ivanov discovered that terms used by craft artisans are particularly characteristic of poetic speech. He finds, e.g., that *t(h)-ek(h)s* indicates to 'produce/braid/finish/mold/shape', which means the same as to 'pull a song together/compose', taken from the old word of India, *taks* 'pull a song together' (Гамкрелидзе & Иванов [Gamkrelidze & Ivanov] 1984: p. 704). It is well known that weaving is a metaphor in poetic language.<sup>7</sup> Lithuanian words include (1) *auda* as in *audimas/audeklas* (syn.) 'woven fabric' and (2) *auda* as in *giesmė* 'hymn'. Dainius Razauskas believes such words lead directly to poetic language (Razauskas 2015: p. 15). The same is true of *audoti* as in *dainuoti* 'sing' and (2) *audėti* as in *austi* 'weave' and (1) *audėti* as in *gausti* 'drone' (LKŽe). "The terminology relevant to *sutartinės*," states Razauskas, "clearly associates with archaic, ritualistic poetry."<sup>8</sup>

*Sutartinė* refrains are abundant in number and variety. It can be said, today, that *sutartinės* have incomprehensibly many refrains, all bearing unquestionable meaningfulness in the past. These refrains are akin to Sanskrit-type mantras. These mantras are believed to mean worshipping a syllable of God's name or expressing a sound associated with a respective deity. Actually, some *sutartinės* refrains appear to be grounded on a game involving different onomatopoeic words or interjections. Thus, it is hardly possible to recreate their semantics. Tatjana Jelizarenkova, a Rigveda expert, speaks similarly about word games. She states, "Due principally to a never-ending, ceaseless game of anagrams, a Rigveda text can no longer be unequivocally 'explained' or 'comprehended' but merely endlessly interpreted, one way or another" (Елизаренкова [Jelizarenkova] 1993: p. 7).

Indo-European poets are characteristic in the tradition of breaking up words, as Vladimir Toporov writes. It possibly disseminated onward while taking on evermore fanciful forms and even reaching Indo-Iranian, Greek, Celtic, Germanic and other traditions (Топоров [Toporov] 1987: p. 9). It is good to recall the canonized poetic means from early medieval times by filid and later by bards – the metathesis of syllables<sup>9</sup> and inversions of

<sup>7</sup> A deep link between weaving and poetry has been described many times (see Tonopov [Toporov] 1973; West 2007; Šimkus 2017; Razauskas 2015 et al.).

<sup>8</sup> My insights on an interrelationship between *sutartinės* and weaving (Račiūnaitė-Vyčiniene 2000a, 2001, 2002c et al.) were furthered by Debra Raver, who devoted an entire study to it (Raver 2014).

<sup>9</sup> An example of metathesis in Lithuanian would be *megztinis-mezginys* 'knit sweater-knit piece'.

words.<sup>10</sup> Attention may also turn to the palindrome, e.g., to run backward – a word, phrase or line of poetry that reads/sounds the same from left to right as from right to left, e.g., “madam”; or “Was it a car or a cat I saw?”.

One may believe that analogical laws on “divisions into parts”, “regrouping” or “reading backwards” could have existed in archaic, ritualistic music; thereby, in Lithuanian *sutartinės* as well. The best way for substantiating this thought is to recall the syncretism between poetry and music during olden times. Mantras were also recited or chanted in special ways, akin, in a way, to hymn-singing. Such manifestations exist in professional music as well – like retrograde<sup>11</sup> (also known as the “crab”) imitation,<sup>12</sup> characteristic of polyphonic music. An analogical principle, the retrograde (mirror reflection) principle, grounds numerous *sutartinė* musical pieces. Actually, it is usually *sutartinės* music being “read” backwards, i.e., its rhythm formulas [RFs hereafter], despite its text:

♪ ♪ ♪ | ♪ ♪ ♪ | ♪ ♪ ♪ || ♪ ♪ ♪ | ♪ ♪ ♪ | ♪ ♪ ♪ ||  
Do-bi-le, to-ta-ta to-ta-ta / do-bi-lël, ta-ta-to, ta-ta-to (LLIM 307)<sup>13</sup>

Nonetheless, the mirror principle has examples reflecting an entire *sutartinė* song with text and melody, e.g.:

♪ ♪ | ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ || ♪ ♪ ♪ ♪ | ♪ ♪ ||  
*Ly- lioj*, *se-se li-nų* / *se-se li-nų*, *ly-lioj* ‘sis - for li-nen’ (SIS 210a, b;  
212)<sup>14</sup>  
*Tū- toj*, *kų čia ve-ža* / *kų čia ve-ža*, *tū-toj* ‘what ya’ tot-ing’ (SIS 1290a)<sup>15</sup>

Many musicologists explain by complementary rhythm laws that, apparently, these do not provide a simple principle for composing *sutartinės* music. It has long been known that, since olden times, various holy or

<sup>10</sup> An inversion (in Latin, *inversio* ‘turning over’, ‘rebuilding’) linguistically is rebuilding words in poetry, a switch in their places, interrupting their usual order in a sentence and word use for stylistic considerations.

<sup>11</sup> Retrograde (in Latin, *retrogradus* ‘going backwards’) or a backwards movement (LME III: p. 209).

<sup>12</sup> In English, it is called crab canon, backward canon or retrograde canon; in Latin, *canon cancrizans*; in Italian, *canone al rovescio* and in German, *Krebskanon* (LME III: p. 609).

<sup>13</sup> However, interjections mostly contain few actual words, e.g., *dobile* ‘clover’ and its dim., *dobilël* ‘dear clover’.

<sup>14</sup> The discernible words are *sese linų* ‘sis for linen’.

<sup>15</sup> Words following the interjection are *kų čia veža* ‘who’s taken riding’.

presumably holy (magical) scripts, e.g., curses, were written backwards. In one example, Egyptian hieroglyphics had been written not only from top to bottom but also from right to left as well as from left to right. Prophets also preferred writing in hieroglyphics (Neimantas 1998: p. 19). Runes<sup>16</sup> were also written variously: from right to left, from left to right and by boustrophedon.<sup>17</sup> Principles of composing the latter, incidentally, are also found in *sutartinė* music.

In the same way, *Rigveda* prophets thus select the most appropriate words for composing hymns (their holy language is considered a tool for creating the world); the *rinkėja* ‘collector’ of *sutartinės* participates in the cosmic creation of harmony by selecting/collecting the most appropriate words and RFs.

A language creator, a poet, is often compared to a weaver in *Rigveda*, where weaving in the mythological sphere is a means for converting chaos into cosmos. Gods take part in weaving, which is symbolically associated with sacrifice. “The sacrifice drawn out with threads on every side, stretched by a hundred sacred ministers and one; This do these Fathers weave who hitherward are come: They sit beside the warp and cry, ‘Weave forth; weave back’” (*Rig Veda* X, 130, 1).<sup>18</sup>

As seen, the principles of weaving, which are sacred, in this case, and holy language seem to be the same – *forth-back*.<sup>19</sup> In *sutartinės*, this is equivalent to singing RFs forth-back and, with several voices in accord, to an integral, woven musical fabric. Such a link is not likely to occur randomly.

Austėja, the assumed Goddess of Bees in Lithuanian mythology, appears before one’s eyes. She is considered a diligent weaver; her name derives from the root *austi* ‘weave (fabric)’, ‘run here and there’ or, in all

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<sup>16</sup> Runes are a “mystery” as well as “talking”. As Romualdas Neimantas tells it, runes are not only related to talking but also to the magical ability of talking (in Latvian, *runāt* ‘talk’ and *runā* ‘speech’; in German, *runen* to ‘chat/whisper’) (ibid.: p. 50).

<sup>17</sup> Boustrophedon (in Greek, *bustrophēdon* < *bus* – ox + *strephō* – turning) is a means of writing involving a switch in the direction of the lines. The first and the other odd numbered lines are written from right to left, whereas the second and other even numbered lines – from left to right; the forms of the letters are adapted to the direction of the writing (TŽŽ: p. 125).

<sup>18</sup> Transl. from

[https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The\\_Rig\\_Veda/Mandala\\_10/Hymn\\_130](https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Rig_Veda/Mandala_10/Hymn_130).

<sup>19</sup> Vytautas Tumėnas directs attention to how Lithuanians call weaving an intense and repetitive, “forth-back” movement. Thus, the word *austi* ‘weave’ not only references making cloth but also running hither and yon as well as to repeatedly thread or open/shut, e.g., doors or windows and the like (Tumėnas 1996: p. 38).

cases, references some repetitive movement.<sup>20</sup> It is also believed that the primary meaning inherent in the word *audėja* ‘(fem.) weaver’ or *audimas* ‘(act of) weaving’ associates not only with weaving fabric, but with molding a honeycomb. A riddle, e.g., goes like this: “‘lil sisters with no loom and no heddle fill up ‘lil holes.” Its answer is: “Bees molding a beehive.” Those ‘lil bees in *sutartinės* and other songs are usually pictured as building beehives while singing about a young sister who is alongside spinning or weaving. This means ‘lil bees perform a geometric activity – molding beehives and making perfect, six-cornered holes, which compare to the highest quality weaving. This corresponds with the ideas in the mythological sphere of converting a chaotic nature into an accurate and orderly cosmic creation.

It is believed that, once long ago, the activities of craftspeople (weavers, blacksmiths et al.), similar to those of poets and musicians, had a cosmological as well as utilitarian meaning (see “Eternal Issues Regarding *Sutartinės*”). Goddesses are often known to sing as they weave, e.g., in Greek and Roman myths.<sup>21</sup> Thus, this concept probably also associates the singing of Lithuanian *sutartinė* hymns (collecting texts) with the commonality of weaving and braiding terminology, which indicates the ancient origin of this manifestation. After all, even Lithuanian *sutartinės*, as per Biržiška, “<...> come from *laumės* or *laumaitės*”, i.e., goddesses who closely relate to spinning and weaving.

Toporov interprets the collecting of rosary beads, prayer and meditation as no less than a “means for uplifting a thread of thought”<sup>22</sup> to heaven; “different ways of uplifting are coded with similar elements”. There are, cf., the Hettite *išhamina* ‘rope’, ‘t h r e a d o f t h o u g h t’ and *išhamai* ‘s o n g’ by the *sāman* of ancient India (Топоров [Toporov] 1973a: p. 132). Thereby, associations of singing with a thread of thought, spinning, braiding

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<sup>20</sup> Algirdas Greimas believes the name *Austėja* derives from the repetitive, zigzagging movement made by a bee (Greimas 1979: p. 258).

<sup>21</sup> Weaving and hymn-singing constitute the domain of female deities in antiquity. There is a known mythological story about a weaving contest between Arachne and Athena and about Persephone, also known as Kore (from *Odyssey*), who is the guardian of all creation and a weaver in similar stories.

<sup>22</sup> Tumėnas raises an assumption that a corresponding way of sacred thought could have accompanied the act of weaving: “Ideal weaving could have been a certain manner of meditation, a way to the enlightenment of the mind (even now women recommend weaving for relaxation). Moreover, a weaver had to have a corresponding attitude towards her woven cloth for it to have special, positive powers” (Tumėnas 1996: p. 36).

and weaving are most related, albeit archaic.<sup>23</sup> These seem to beg for a deeper look.

Hence, I would like to share the threads of my thoughts, woven by my acquaintance with older hymn-singers along with my own practical experiences and research over very many years.

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Today, *sutartinės* have disappeared from their traditional environment, which consists of the daily lives of villagers. Only truly miraculous fragments appear once in a while via singular hymn-singers, thereby providing opportunities to record them in writing. It has been incredibly difficult to deliberate issues regarding their past origins, ages and vitality. Yet, claiming that this group hymn-singing tradition, which once flourished in the past, has completely disappeared would be wrong. (Though, honestly, any thoughts about a natural continuation of this broken tradition – one generation passing it on by word of mouth to the next generation – had seemed unlikely even to me over ten years ago.) The current renaissance of *sutartinės* among folk music groups in towns continues this vital tradition and prompts looking anew at this original type of music, highlighting certain aspects that have previously gone unnoticed and noticing issues still unstudied or relevant today.

This book is an effort to find answers to the many questions that still remain a mystery. What meanings still lie hidden in the concept of *sutarimas* ‘agreement’? Why were the second intervals between voices considered a standard of beauty as late as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century? Why did *sutartinės* flourish only in a small area of Northeast Lithuania, or were they so limited? Why were they sung only by women and very rarely by men, or were they? Why were *sutartinė* hymn-singers considered witches? What could the common terminology of *sutartinė* hymn-singing and weaving

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<sup>23</sup> Certain young, modern Lithuanian composers consciously conduct a search for an interaction between music and weaving in their musical pieces. As per Egidija Medekšaitė in her work *Textile-2* (2007), this results in having sopranos, altos, tenors and basses focus their attention on a special, almost imperceptible pulsation. Yet, compositions like hers can also associate with *sutartinės*, as per Rūta Gaidamavičiūtė, who writes, “This is the complementarity of voices along with a folk-like uplifting of sounds, one over another, reminiscent of textile ornamentation.” In her opinion, this composition is notable at the level of ideas linking to a sphere of traditional expressions for women. “Additionally, its importance is not only in searching for deeper inspiration to ornament traditional patterns but also for a composer’s self-concept” (Gaidamavičiūtė 2010: pp. 253-254).



possibly mean? What links *sutartinės* with the polyphonic traditions of other nations? Why did *sutartinės* become a symbol of the Lithuanian ethnic and cultural identity? Why is there still a need to sing *sutartinės* today, when the cultural environment and people's mentalities have essentially changed?

Finally, what did a certain number of performers and their performance styles depend on? Women would braid those same melodies independently in twos, threes and fours and in two groups, or in some other way. Take a look at how differently one single *sutartinės* hymn can be sung, e.g., the different variants of poetic text versions for *Kas Ten Važiuoja* 'Who's Riding There':

a) two groups alternating

$\text{♩} = 60$

I

Kas ten va - žiuo - ja? Do - bi - le!

b) canon by two

$\text{♩} = 160$

I

1. Kas ti va - žiuo - ja, do - bi - le, do - bi - liu - ti,

II

1. Kas ti va - žiuo - ja,

do - bi - le, 2. Ke - liu ke - liuo - ja, do - bi - le.

do - bi - le, do - bi - liu - ti, do - bi - le.

c) diaphony

$\text{♩} = 76$

R

[C] Da-bi-lu - te - li, da-bi - le, da-gi-lu - te - li, da - gi - le.

T

(1) Kas ti va - žiuo - ja, da-bi - le, ke-la-liu dun - da, da - gi - le?

d) singing in unison as *ištisinės* ‘continual’ songs



Ex. 3 (a, b, c, d)

This is thus an invitation to dive slowly into the entire variety of these archaic polyphonic hymns, first by learning about the most distinguished *sutartinės* collectors and researchers and their contributions to *sutartinė* traditions.

The suggestion to the reader is to try to solve many *sutartinė* riddles along with this author. This involves searching for their analogies in the folk music of nearer or farther nations by raising complicated questions regarding genesis and ethnogenesis. The relationship between the uniqueness and universality of *sutartinės* may need reconsideration in light of a discussion on the forms and perspectives of their vitality in Lithuanian culture today.

I would be delighted to learn about any new thoughts that may arise, even if they contradict those presented here. The expectation is that this book will encourage new research on *sutartinės* in the context of traditional polyphony internationally.

Readers will learn about the metamorphoses in traditional *sutartinės* hymn-singing during the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Furthermore, they will become familiar with authentic *sutartinės* samples, which managed to get “captured” in writing during the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s final decades.

I extend my sincerest gratitude to my former teacher, the ethnomusicologist Laima Burkšaitienė, who encouraged my interest in *sutartinės* from the very first year of my studies. Along with singing, the mysterious topic of *sutartinės* had attracted me for ages. The songs demanded my constant attention, and I always returned to this music with new insights, deepening earlier observations and enriching them with new issues.

Special thanks are extended to to *sutartinės* singers of my group, *Trys keturiose* from different periods; to its former members – Austė Bareikytė-Nakienė, Ingrida Karbauskaitė and Aušra Navasaitytė-Žičkienė and its current members – Daina Norvaišytė, Eglė Sereičikienė, Rima Visackienė and Audronė Žilinskienė. Moreover, my heart cannot forget Gabrielė Širkaitė and Birutė Vilkauskienė, who now sing hymns from a bench in the spirit world.

Dashing about with these women (with some for over 35 years), I was able to grasp many secrets inherent in the *sutartinės* – concepts of time, acting in accord, musical innovation, articulation, drawing a dance and other ideas. This group is akin to a creative “laboratory”. There is agreement when it comes to trying out all innovations – various forgotten and untraditional styles of singing, reconstructed or re-edited melodies, alternative forms of *sutartinė* expressions including current projects with composers and musicians from Lithuania and from abroad, audiovisual projects and the like. *Trys keturišose* is incredibly important and precious in life. No matter how intensive it gets, I cannot imagine a life devoid of harmonious *sutartinės* hymn-singing.

Further thanks go to Dainius Razauskas, scholar of religions, writer and Lithuanian language expert. He has provided numerous consultations for this book on language, which helped to resolve complex issues on the origins of certain words in refrains. Additionally, he supported many cautiously presented insights and supplemented them. Moreover, I thank my husband, an expert in ethnoorganology, Evaldas Vyčinas, who offered information on musical instruments.

Sincere thanks go to the translator Vijolė Arbas. She has worked with me since my first book on *sutartinės* in English, back in 2002. Arbas incorporated the complicated terminology relevant to *sutartinės*, sensed and grasped the subtleties of their poetic language and provided a weighty contribution to the presentation of this phenomenon to readers worldwide. I am very grateful to the special editor Emilija Sakadolskis who worked assiduously with musical terminology and advised on other editorial issues.

# REVIEW OF *SUTARTINĖS* COLLECTIONS, PUBLICATIONS AND RESEARCH

## 1. A Study of 16<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century *Sutartinės* and their Citation Fragments

The first written references about *sutartinės* came rather late; these are generally associated with 16<sup>th</sup> century resources. The issuance of *Kronika* 'Chronicle' by Maciej Strykowski in 1582 proved to be of immense value in the historical research on *sutartinės*. **Strykowski** (1547 to after 1586) was born in Masuria of Northwest Poland. He was a traveler, ethnographer, chronicler and collector of folklore, also credited with publishing the first history of Lithuania. Strykowski's observations about Lithuanian songs and their performance styles have been especially useful. He describes songs containing refrains, which are suggestive of *sutartinės* in *Kronika*, e.g., his writing on Saint John's night [summer solstice]. He writes, "In the fields and in the streets, women and maidens hold hands and dance, singing mournfully, repeating, '*lado, lado, lado* [interj.], *didis musu Dewie* \*Great God of ours\*" (Strykowski 1582; I p. 146). These words instantly recall either interjections or onomatopoeia in the refrains of varied *sutartinės*, such as *laduto laduto*, *ladoto* or *lado lado tatato* and the like. An account of the Lithuanian Grand Duke Algirdas returning to Vilnius from a triumphant battle circa 1368-1372 also describes the singing of *lado lado*. "After Algirdas and his wife journeyed from Vitebsk to Vilnius, people came out to meet the duke and, as per Pagan customs, greeted him by clapping their hands and chanting, '*Lado! Lado!*'" (Strykowski 1582, II p. 13). Clapping is characteristic of certain *sutartinės* that integrate dance steps. No documentation, however, substantiates that such danced *sutartinės* sound the same, as those verbally described from olden times.

Additionally, the [assumed] interjection, *lado* (or its modifications), has long been used in playing with children by clapping hands and singing together: "*Lad lad ladytj ladytj – duos mamutė* 'mommy'll give you' – *cicytj, cicytj*" (LLD Vk 175) or "*Katu katu katutes* [baby talk about hand clapping], *ladu ladu ladutes*" (LLD Vk 187). Thus, *lado* could be an onomatopoeic sound accompanying clapping movements. That analogical interjections of sounds are also included in danceable *sutartinės* is an

assumption that is not rejected either. Even so, it is quite credible that this sound may have reflected some deeper meaning.

The mythologist Norbertas Vėlius believes that, “In olden times, the word *lado* in the refrains of Lithuanian *sutartinės* was not only meaningful but also, probably, had a sacral, mythological meaning. Therefore, the information provided by Strykowski and other 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> century chroniclers that Lado (or Ladona) had been a God (or Goddess) worshipped by Lithuanian, Russian and other neighboring nations was not pulled out of air” (Vėlius 1998: p. 26). Furthermore, a refrain of what seems to be interjections, *oi did lado*, recently caught the eye of Anatoliĭ Zhuravlev. He is one of the most distinguished mythologist-linguists in Russia today.<sup>24</sup> In his research about the origin of this refrain, Zhuravlev submits that words have roots in dialect of *lad-* in Ukrainian that relate to wedding songs (for the collection, see ECUY III: p. 180): *ladovini pisni* ‘songs engaged in *lada*-ing’, *laduvvati* ‘to *lada*- (verb)’, *ladkati* ‘*lada*-ing (verb form)’, *ladkanka* ‘a place of *lada* (noun)’ and *ladkal'nica* ‘a *lada* singer’ (Журавлев [Zhuravlev] 2016: p. 61). The scholar notices that, at times, repetitions of explosive consonants control the entire refrain like *diday-diday*, *didi-didi-duday* found in songs from areas of Russia’s Lake Omega (CPHF VIII: p. 53, op. cit.). The linguist also recalls that the scholar Yeleazar Meletinsky had also noticed that words from neighboring tribes, which sound like “indecipherable utterances” are often heard in songs from an “archaic, i.e., syncretic, mythopoeic stage” (Мелетинский [Meletinsky] 1994: p. 88). Meanwhile, this makes the search for foreign language resources on the *(oi)did(i)-lado* refrains of East Slavic songs quite justifiable. Therefore, as per Zhuravlev, it would be quite worthwhile to become familiar with the thoughts expressed by the scholar Vėlius regarding the refrains of Lithuanian *sutartinės*. He claims, in an article published posthumously (Велюс [Vėlius] 2000), that the work of the previous author had not been submitted “as a finished piece but as material urging research on this topic in the area of Balt-Slav relations” (ibid.: p. 189, note).<sup>25</sup> Thus the issue of this refrain’s origins has been left unresolved.

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<sup>24</sup> The article “*Oi did lado* and analogues” (Журавлев [Zhuravlev] 2016) details the issue of the mythical Slavic deity Lado. In truth, it isn’t entirely clear whether, on one hand, this is a Slavic deity (also known in Lithuania) or, on the other hand, whether such a deity even existed at all; this was possibly a creature of “office mythology”. This article examines the relation of the folk music’s sung refrain to other language parts including metonymy in more detail via a broad range of tradition parallels.

<sup>25</sup> The short Lithuanian refrains are very similar to those of the East Slavs. At times, these are so similar they seem akin to a transl. of the Lithuanian text, “*Lado, lado ir*

Zhuravlev concludes that there can be no future perspectives for studies on the origins of the *oũ dud-lado* type of refrains if they do not consider Baltic parallels (Журавлев [Zhuravlev] 2016: p. 61).

Still, Strykowski's work deserves another look. Researchers of singing traditions find his observations especially valuable regarding the singing of "one in front of another with mouths agape" during holidays celebrating the end of harvest (Strykowski 1582: pp. 85, 86). Apparently, *sutartinės* singers could have performed in this way. As per Slaviūnas, this *sutartinės* performance style was noted numerous times, possibly because they are sung so loudly – "with a full mouth". Apparently, "this outward singing expression was more noticeable" to Strykowski as well (Slaviūnas 1974: p. 32).

Fragments of two historical *sutartinės* that appear in the book *Chronicle* attracted attention, and many researchers interpreted them, e.g., Mykolas Biržiška, Ambraziejus Jonynas, Zenonas Slaviūnas et al.<sup>26</sup> Strykowski points out that one sings about the 1362 militaristic march of Gurdas Gentvilaitis, also known in Polish as Hurda Gynwiłowic, against the Knights of the Order of the Cross after their devastation of Kaunas Castle. He writes, "I am not as sorry for the castle as I am for the brave knights burning in the fire" (Strykowski 1582: p. 320).<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, the author adds, "Even today Lithuanians and Samogitians sing about a knight of the Giedraitis family who <...> complains, 'I am not as sorry for the castle as I am for the brave knights and boyars burning in the fire'" (Strykowski 1582: pp. 36-37). A 17<sup>th</sup> century historian, **Wojciech Alberto Kojałowicz**, also known as Vaitiekus Albertas Vijūkas-Kojelavičius, in Lithuanian, similarly repeats this quote about warriors killed in Kaunas Castle. He also talks about

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*mano* 'and my' *lado*" in the *Chronicles* by Strykowski with the text from the Oriolo area of Russia: "*Ah i 'and' lelio, lado moe* 'my [lado]'"'. In both cases, there is even a semantically weakened conjunction/particle "and" interjected in the appropriate place. Nonetheless, the direction of the "broadcasting" remains undefined, especially because any encounters with Russian texts of this type are very far from Lithuania, even considering earlier, broad areas of Balt settlements (Журавлев [Zhuravlev] 2016: p. 61).

<sup>26</sup> See Biržiška 1919: pp. 12-13; Biržiška 1920: pp. 7-9; Чюрлѣните [Čiurlionytė] 1966: p. 8; Jokimaitienė & Kazlauskienė 1980: pp. 144-145; Jonynas 1984: pp. 125-128; Ландсбергис [Landsbergis] 1992: p. 22; Sauka 1982: pp. 76-79; Slaviūnas 1958: p. 23; Slaviūnas 1959: pp. 6-8; Slaviūnas 1971: p. 29 et al.

<sup>27</sup> As Strykowski writes (1582 I: p. 320), "Three thousand defenders of the besieged castle died in its flames, whereas Vaidotas, the son of Kęstutis, along with 36 commanders were taken prisoner."

people, who even now sing sad hymns about death in the flaming castle (Koiałowicz 1650: pp. 329-330).<sup>28</sup>

The linguist Mykolas Miežinis recorded in writing a fragment of a variant of this song (akin to *sutartinės*) circa 1849 in East Lithuania near Zarasai. This is a *trejinės* with the assent sung as a round by three singers with a simultaneous refrain by a fourth voice (SIS 1207).

Parts I and II are sung in canon.

- <i>Ko tuje, kunigėli, Sudaičio</i>	Why do you, dear duke, <i>Sudaičio</i> [poss.] [transl. note: lit. about a knight named Sudaitis; the refrain is the same name in the possessive case.]
<i>Ilgai pamigėli? Sudaičio</i>	Sleep so long? <i>Sudaičio</i>
<i>Miegą bemigantem,</i>	Sleeps for those still asleep,
<i>Išpylė pilelę. [refrain repeats after each line] ...</i>	Who felled the fine castle. ...
<i>Katro tau, kunigėli ...</i>	Which do you, dear duke ...
<i>Daugiau pagailėja? ...</i>	Grieve for most? ...
- <i>Ne taip gaila man pilelės ...</i>	I grieve less for the fine castle ...
<i>Kaip man gaila karelių. ...</i>	Than I grieve for young soldiers. ...
<i>Aš pilelę supilsiu ...</i>	I'd fashion a fine castle ...

<sup>28</sup> Koiałowicz writes about the event in Latin, "*Tria millia delecti militis in praesidio fuerant, quorum indignam inter flammis flagrantis arcis morte, nune etiam vulgaribus naeniis populus decantat.*"

<i>Dvejais trejais meteliais.</i>	In two or three short years.
...	...
<i>O karelių nebužauginsiu</i>	But young soldiers I can't raise
...	...
<i>Nei dešimtis metelių.</i>	Not o'er ten years or more.
...	...

The assent of the Part III refrain repeats continuously and concurrently:

<i>Sudaičio</i>	<i>Sudaičio</i>
<i>Sudaičiutėlė [dim.]</i>	<i>Sudaičiutėlė</i>

Due to the continuous refrain, this song and others like it fall into a group in the cycle known as *Sudaitis Sutartinės*. It is believed that *Sudaitis* is a proper name relevant to a specific historical event in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Overall, the writings of Strykowski not only provide valuable information about situations in which *sutartinės* were sung but also attest that they were sung everywhere during his time.

The chronicler **Alexander Guagnini** (1534–1614) includes valuable material on instrumental *sutartinės* in his work written in Latin, *Sarmatiae Europaeae Descriptio* ‘*Description of Sarmatian Europe*’,<sup>29</sup> published in 1578 in Cracow. Describing customs, work and daily life in 16<sup>th</sup> century Samogitia, Guagnini notes, “They [Samogitians] have rather long wooden horns (akin to trumpets) on which they play strange and dissonant melodies” (Guagnini 1578: p. 129).<sup>30</sup> Strykowski also mentions blowing these long horns at the harvest festival, referring to them as *Zieminiekas* (Strykowski 1582: pp. 85-86). The guess is that, in both cases, the discussion is about instrumental *sutartinės* (?) performances.

Another 16<sup>th</sup> century author, **Jonas Bretkūnas**, also known as Johannes Bretke (1536–1602), also describes trumpet playing and singing. He writes that Lithuanians would blow on wooden trumpets, while men and

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<sup>29</sup> It has been difficult to determine to date, how much of this *Chronicle* is original and how much is taken from other sources. Researchers of folk music have claimed that Strykowski had accused Guagnini of plagiarizing his authored works from the period 1570-1573 and publishing them in his own name (Jonynas 1984: 93, 104). Vyšniauskaitė believes that Gaugnini “must have considered the work to be his own, because he presented one copy of it to King Stephen Bator as a gift” (Vyšniauskaitė 1994: 49).

<sup>30</sup> Original in Latin, “*Tubas quoque ligneas onlongas habent, quas inflates, mirum quendam & dissonum cocentum edunt.*”



women "sang during the pauses".<sup>31</sup> Similar notations in the works of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century writers, Simonas Stanevičius and Simonas Daukantas, reinforce that this was probably an account of a *sutartinės* performance, which alternated between singing and trumpeting.

The ethnographer **Theodor Lepner** (1633–1691) wrote extensively about the simultaneous blowing of two wooden trumpets in his book *Der Preusche Littauer 'Prussian Lithuanian'*, which was issued in 1744, a half century after his death. He observes, "They have a very special kind of a *posaune* 'trumpet' or 'trombone', which they call a *truba* 'horn'. This is a hollow instrument, whittled from pine, with a circular opening widening at the end like a trombone. <...> The outside is tightly wound in birch bark, and this horn measures about 1.5 to 2 meters in length. Two men blow on such horns simultaneously producing a very loud sound" (Lepner 1744: p. 96). Long and cylindrical wooden trumpets in sets of two are used to play *sutartinės* – Lithuanians of the Northeastern *Aukštaitija* ethnographic region call these *daudytės*. *Daudytės* are typically much longer than other sets of horn-type instruments. Lepner quite accurately describes the length of these horns.



Fig. 2

However, the first specific references to *sutartinės*, i.e., the word corresponding to its current meaning, are only found in early 19<sup>th</sup> century literature. The attention paid to this unique song type closely relates to an upsurge of a romanticized, nationalistic spirit along with collecting authentic folk music.

<sup>31</sup> Citation in German from M. Prätorius, *Deliciae Prussicae*, IV, § 21 (manuscript circa 1698); *Archiv für slawische Philologie*, 1926, Vol. 40.

One very significant Lithuanian writer and folklorist **Simonas Stanevičius** (1799–1848) issued a collection of 30 song texts entitled *Dainos Žemaičių* ‘Samogitian Songs’<sup>32</sup> in 1829. A commentary of the last song reads, “This is a *sutartinės* song, which has recently gone out of fashion and has lost its purpose among Samogitians. Its relics have lingered in Lithuania. [Here Lithuania specifically means the Aukštaitija region.] Trumpets or those long, standing horns made of wood would be played along with these songs. The playing of such horns has also been called *sutartinės*, by the same name as the songs. Those horns are no longer recognizable but only remembered from the past” (Stanevičius 1954: pp. 126-127).<sup>33</sup> Stanevičius also explains the meaning of the *tadaryleli* refrain, “This and other equivalent sounds in *sutartinės* songs, which, at times, have no defined meaning, are expressed in the voices of the trumpet and pipe.” This comment is key to in-depth investigations of vocal and instrumental interactions in *sutartinės* music.

In 1833 a collection of 30 song melodies was issued under the title of *Pažymės Žemaitiškos Gaidos* ‘Notations of Samogitian Musical Notes’. In the commentary therein, an example of a song is included, named *Apyneli* ‘Hop Plant’, *Taduja* that F. Ivanavičius transcribed in Raseiniai, a small town in West Lithuania. Only the comment beneath the notes provides information about its polyphonic ring like a *sutartinės*. It reads [in Latin], “The first line solo; the second and third in two voices.”<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Originally published as S. Stanewicze, *Daynas Žemaycziu* ‘Samogitian Songs’, Wylniuje [Vilnius], 1829.

<sup>33</sup> There is some doubt regarding the naming of trumpets as *sutartinės*. No other later researcher or folklore collector ever made mention of such a name. The name had possibly been associated with trumpets due to their being played for some specific, vocal *sutartinės* song. There is no documentation of any special repertoire for *daudytės* woodwinds.

<sup>34</sup> Original citation: “*La premiere ligne Solo: la 2de et 3em a 2 Voix.*”