



BIN ZHANG

Nandzingo universitetas, Kinija
Nanjing University, China

VIRŠ SLĒNIO SKRENDANTIS DRAKONAS: M. K. ČIURLIONIO ŽALČIO SONATOS APTARIMAS

The Flying Dragon Over the Valley:
Discussion on M. K. Čiurlionis' *Sonata of the Serpent*

SUMMARY

The article delves into the multifaceted cultural and mythological aspects of snake veneration in both Lithuanian and Chinese contexts. It explores the historical interplay between these ancient civilizations and examines the practical implications of Lithuanian artist M. K. Čiurlionis' work, particularly his „Sonata of the Serpent,” within the framework of contemporary globalization. The commonality of snake culture, its role as a mediator between Heaven and Earth, and its association with the feminine are analyzed across these cultures. The article also considers the aesthetic and oriental influences in Čiurlionis' artistic expression, suggesting a deeper connection between Lithuanian and Eastern traditions.

SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje gilinamasi į daugialypius kultūrinius ir mitologinius gyvatės garbinimo aspektus Lietuvos ir Kinijos kontekste. Tyrinėjama istorinė šių senųjų civilizacijų sąveika ir praktinė lietuvių menininko M. K. Čiurlionio kūrybos, ypač jo *Žalčio sonatos*, reikšmė šiuolaikinės globalizacijos kontekste. Analizuojamas gyvatės kultūros bendrumas, jos, kaip tarpininkės tarp Dangaus ir Žemės, vaidmuo ir ryšys su moteriškumu šiose kultūrose. Straipsnyje taip pat aptariamos estetinės bei rytietiškos įtakos Čiurlionio meninėje raiškoje, suponuojančios gilesnį lietuvių ir Rytų tradicijų ryšį.

The year 1908 was significantly important in the life and career of Mikalojus Konstantinas Čiurlionis. During this period, he was deeply enamored with his fiancée Sofia Kymantaitė, as they prepared for their upcoming wedding on

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: gyvatė, žaltys, lietuviškas folkloras, kinų mitologija, Čiurlionis, *Žalčio sonata*.

KEY WORDS: snake, serpent, Lithuanian folklore, Chinese mythology, Čiurlionis, *Sonata of the Serpent*.

New Year's Day. Concurrently, Čiurlionis produced several drawings and paintings inspired by native Lithuanian cultural legends: the postcard drawings for the opera *Jūratė* and four paintings known as *Sonata of the Serpent* series. Notably, in the year 2022 there was an international symposium dedicated to *Sonata of the Serpent* that took place in his hometown of Druskininkai. This event reignited fervent interest in the legend of Žilvinas' serpent and its connection to Lithuanian snake culture, captivating Eastern audiences once again.

While we acknowledge that we are not professional researchers or field in-

vestigators of Lithuanian culture, our aim is to delve into the analysis and appreciation of Čiurlionis and his *Sonata of the Serpent* from the perspective of comparative culture and mythology. Our focus lies in exploring the similarities and differences in the origin, transformation, and evolution of snake veneration within Lithuanian and Chinese contexts. Furthermore, we intend to explore the historical interplay that existed among the ancient civilizations of Eurasia and to discern the practical implications of Čiurlionis' work within the framework of contemporary globalization.

COMMONALITY OF SNAKE CULTURE UNDER A POLYTHEISTIC WORSHIP SYSTEM

Anthropological research has revealed that snake worship was widespread during the matriarchal periods of the Mesolithic and Neolithic Ages, constituting one of the most enduring forms of animal veneration in the annals of the history of religion (Gimbutas and Joseph 1991). Be it within Chinese or Lithuanian contexts, the serpent deity occupies a pivotal role in the myths of various Eurasian nations.

While the serpent in the Christian Garden of Eden is often associated with malevolence due to its role in deceiving Eve into consuming the forbidden fruit, both China and Lithuania exhibit a comparably benign and strikingly similar disposition towards snakes. Regions inhabited by snakes tend to be relatively devoid of rats and other pestilent small creatures, thus safeguarding essential food supplies crucial for human survival. In both Chinese

and Lithuanian cultures, a fundamental ethos of reverence and care towards domesticated snakes is prevalent.

Within Lithuanian cultural beliefs, the snake assumes multifaceted roles, serving as the emissary of the sun goddess Saulė, often embodies the goddess of Earth Žemyna, and even the deity of the netherworld Vėlinas. The snake stands as the custodian of family well-being and symbolizes fertility, capable of bestowing bountiful harvests and prosperity upon humanity. Moreover, the narratives depict instances of snakes engaging in matrimony with humans, exemplified by the legend of Žilvinas, and procreating alongside them. Evidence of this reverence is substantiated by the discovery of clay sculptures depicting the king of grass snakes within the first half of the 15th century (Andriuškevičius 2002). Remarkably, the 1538



Figure 1. Temple of Snake King, Nanping, Fujian Province, China



Figure 2. Temple of Snake King, Georgetown, Malaysia

map “Olaus Magnus’ Carta Marina” portrays the snake on the Lithuanian coat of arms, emblemizing the Lithuanian state for a significant period.

Similar to Lithuania, Chinese individuals, particularly those residing in the southern rice paddies, held the snakes in high esteem, often calling them “little dragons”. Traditional Chinese rural abodes, known for their chill and dampness, frequently harbor snakes. However, these serpentine residents are viewed as auspicious omens. This reverence is reflected in the cultural norm of

not harming domestic snakes. Should one experience apprehension towards these creatures, the preferred approach involves utilizing fragrances and repellents to coax the snake away, rather than resorting to direct harm.

In regions spanning southern China, Malaysia, Vietnam, and other areas influenced by Chinese cultural practices, the snake assumes the mantle of a protective deity safeguarding families or locales. Evidently, numerous snake temples have been erected across these territories for devotional purposes.

SNAKES AND WATER

Snakes often inhabit aquatic environments, leading to their frequent association with water deities. Within cultural symbolism, snakes are commonly linked to femininity, aligning with concepts of women, the moon, and water. In the Lithuanian narrative, Žilvinas, the prince of grass snakes, emerges as a sea-dwelling god. His serpentine subjects, after enduring deceit from geese, sheep, and cows, ultimately employ the threat of floods and droughts to compel the return of Eglė through marriage.

Among Native American Indians, a belief in a winged serpent with horned attributes symbolizing rain fertility for the land was entrenched (Golan 2008). Within Chinese cultural paradigms, the snake is affiliated with *yin* energy, while the dragon corresponds to *yang* energy, constituting the only animal pair within the zodiac of the twelve animals. Operating as a unified force, the snake and the dragon reign as the rulers of mountains and oceans, governing wind and rain. The *Classic of Mountains and Seas* 山海经,

an early Chinese geographical work, documented an extensive history of snake veneration in the country's prehistoric eras. Throughout the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*¹, the serpent god motif recurs an impressive 92 times. Predominant visual depictions can be categorized into four archetypes: the snake god, the deity of grass snakes, the human-headed serpent body, and the avian-headed snake god. Many Chinese snake deities bear a resemblance to their Indian counterparts, often portrayed as winged serpents. Their appearances closely intertwine with the themes of floods and droughts, exemplified by renowned figures like Fei Wei 肥遗 and Hua She 化蛇 in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*.

The mountain appears to have a knife-like cut. It has a rectangular shape on all sides. The mountain's elevation exceeds five thousand feet and it spans ten miles in all directions. The mountain is uninhabited by animals. Within the mountains, there exists a snake species known as Fei Wei. They possess two pairs of wings and six feet. When sighted, Fei Wei snakes serve as an omen for an approaching drought.

On Yang Mountain there are many stones, but no grass or trees. It is from here that

the Yang River originates and flows to the north into the Yishui River. There are many Hua-she snakes in the Yang River, with human faces, doglike bodies, bird-like wings, and snakelike movements. The sound of the snake's cry is "Bihoo! Bihoo!". If someone sees them, it means that the river is going to flood.

Natural atmospheric phenomena such as rainbows, lightning, and thunder, intricately linked to water vapor, have historically been envisaged as dragons, snakes, or even airborne serpents in the mythologies of early civilizations. The Chinese ideogram of rainbow "hong" 虹 encompasses the element of "snake (worm)" 蛇 (虫) and portrays a sprawling, colorful serpent within the heavens. Within Chinese mythos, the rainbow is attributed to the dragon's exhalation of cloud vapor. As a Daoist text *Lie Zi* 列子 elaborates, "The rainbow, clouds, mist, wind, and rain all stem from the accumulated *qi* of the heavens."

Notably, Australian Aboriginal mythology shares striking similarities with the Chinese legends, centered around a celestial rainbow snake whose body extends to form a bridge-like rainbow that traverses the entire sky (Golan 2008).

SNAKE AND THE FEMININE

Within Australian mythology, the rainbow snake is also attributed to controlling the menstruation of women, thereby highlighting an additional dimension of the connection within human snake culture: a prevalent association of snake deities with the female gender (Skinner 2001). Early human societies of

ten held female deities as symbols of fertility and creation. This intimate tie between snakes and women to some extent symbolizes the female as "the mother of Nature" (Alban 2003). Women in these societies undertook roles as protectors, gatherers, nurturers, and caretakers, often encountering snakes at riverbanks due to

their involvement in primitive gathering activities (Mandt 2000). This familiarity nurtured the notion of close communication between women and snakes.

Archaeological findings in northern Europe depict a multitude of serpentine motifs that appear to represent women (Mandt 2000). Additionally, serpent-shaped artifacts have been frequently unearthed in early female burials from the Shijia River Culture (2500-2000 BC) in southern China (Jinzhou Museum 2008).

Across various cultural mythological frameworks, a consistent thread emerges: the universal presence of a female serpent god embodying the essence of creation. This “mother serpent” assumes a pivotal role in early civilizational constructs. Examples include the ancient Egyptian cobra goddess Wadjet, the Hindu snake woman Naga Kanya, and the American Inca civilization’s ocean and fertility goddess, Mama Qucha. In Chinese mythology, Nuwa, a goddess characterized by a human head and a snake body, is credited with the creation of humanity. She took to the sky to mend the damage inflicted upon it by the gods’ warfare, thus safeguarding her creation.

Duality stands out as a defining attribute of snake deities across cultures. The amalgamation of the “snake-woman” archetype embodies notions of fertility, reproduction, and bestowal, yet also encapsulates the peril associated with snakes. Additionally, the biological traits of shedding and hibernation align with ancient civilizations’ perception of snakes as vessels of “life-death-regeneration” cycles. The female serpent god represents the convergence of creation and destruction,



Figure 3. Chinese Human Creator Nüwa and Fuxi

embodying both benevolence and malevolence. For instance, Ishtar, the Sumerian and Babylonian goddess of ancient Mesopotamia, wields creative and life-bestowing powers, while her counterpart, Ereshkigal, guides humanity through death into the underworld, ultimately leading to rebirth (Grobelaar 2020).

In the Lithuanian grass snake princess legend, Eglė, although a human being, exhibits pronounced dualistic traits. While she brings love to Žilvinas and

creates life, she also carries an element of inevitable death. Her curse ends human existence for her four offspring, but

creates eternal existence upon four trees, thus embodying both the facets of life and death.

THE SNAKE AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

An enduring and universal aspect of snake worship lies in their role as spiritual beings facilitating communication between human beings and gods. The fusion of snake-bird-man held widespread significance in early divine belief systems. Birds' flight was revered as a conduit for traversing between the mortal and divine realms, while snakes, akin to antennae, bestowed humans with psychic prowess and the ability to ascend spiritually. Notably, the ancient Aegean civilizations of Crete and Minoan showcased goddesses and sorceresses wielding two snakes as symbols of their mystical prowess.

China, too, boasts an abundance of documented accounts and archaeological evidence concerning the snake god. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* portrays numerous tribal shamans and priests brandishing two snakes in their hands, signifying their divine authority:

There is a mountain called Fufu with gold inside and sulfur mines underneath. The mountain has many mulberry and bamboo trees. There lived a mountain god named Yuer who had a human body and two snakes in her hands, and often appeared in the rivers and pits of the mountain, and when she went in and out, there was light all around her.

There is a country called Wu Xian (the state of witches) in the north of Nuchou, where people carry a green snake in their

right hand and a red snake in their left hand. There is a mountain called Deng Bao Mountain, which is the entrance for the wizards to go through the sky and the Earth.



Figure 4. Snake Earrings of the Miao People



Figure 5. A snake earring god on a Warring Period weapon (475BC-221BC)

To the east of Nie'er Land is the land of Bo Fu, where humans are extremely large. The people who live there have a green snake in their right hand and a yellow snake in their left hand.

Within the realm of Chinese mythology and folklore, a recurring motif emerges: the god with a snake earring.



Figure 6. Bronze Divine Tree of Sanxingdui Culture (2500BC-1400BC), Chengdu, China

This depiction portrays a snake worn as an earring atop the head, symbolizing a distinct status and extraordinary capabilities. *The Classic of Mountains and Seas* references nine instances of gods or giants described as god with a snake earring. Contemporary folk ornaments and unearthed artifacts provide ample evi-

dence that this imagery of the snake as an adornment harkens back to ancient rituals and customs.

In this tradition, the dragon and snake tandem acts as a communication conduit bridging Heaven and Earth, as well as facilitating interactions between humans and deities. The presence of a jade ring featuring a snake or dragon serves as a testament to the possessor's capacity to commune with celestial entities (Ye 2016). Notably, the Sanxingdui 三星堆 archaeological site in Sichuan Province, southwestern China, yields a trove of bronzes that illuminated the

flourishing bird-snake-human worship among the Baiyue, Miao-Yao, and Dong-dai ethnic groups along the Yangtze River during prehistoric times.

Illustrated in Figure 13, the bronze sacred tree emblematic of *Sanxingdui* culture portrays a tableau of nine birds safeguarding the Fusuo sacred tree, enabling communication between serpent gods, humanity, and celestial beings. Archaeological evidence, both in Western and Eastern contexts, underscores the notion that mastery over snakes signifies the ability to establish communion with the divine (Li 2015).

DISCUSSIONS ON M.K. ČIURLIONIS' SONATA OF THE SERPENT

The widespread practice of serpent worship across Eurasia offers a comprehensive cultural backdrop for delving into Čiurlionis' *Sonata of the Serpent*. Notably, Čiurlionis displayed receptiveness towards deities and entities from the otherworld, particularly from Eastern realms. His visits to the Russian Hermitage and the Alexander III Museum exposed him to a diverse array of Eastern artifacts, sparking his fascination:

You know, what wondrous things there are here, it's scary! There are these old Assyrian bricks with these scary winged gods on them, but it seems to me that I know them perfectly well (I don't know where from) and that they are my gods. There are Egyptian sculptures, which I'm terribly fond of and which Zosie is very fond of, and Greek sculptures and all sorts of other things, and a lot of them. And the paintings! – You'll see. (Landsbergis 2011, 163–64)

In 1908, Čiurlionis engaged with Lithuanian ancient folk culture to craft a series of works grounded in Lithuanian cultural themes. This endeavor included his *Jūrate* opera in collaboration with Sofia, as well as the *Rūtos* series depicting thunder gods and the *Žalčio* series. These undertakings, clearly rooted in non-Catholic and ancient folk traditions, were perceived by Čiurlionis as genuinely Lithuanian cultural symbols. Concurrent with the contemporary revelation of linguistic parallels between Lithuanian and Indian Sanskrit languages, it's plausible that this inclination towards "imagining the East" within the national culture exerted a significant influence on Čiurlionis' distinct subject matter and artistic approach. The motivation behind *Sonata of the Serpent* emerges as Čiurlionis' homage to and embodiment of Lithuanian national traditions.

Among the four paintings of *Sonata of the Serpent*, the second *Andante* and the fourth *Finale* have particularly captured my attention. In both these pieces, sizeable serpents emerge from water's edge, ascending towards the skies and mountains. Notably, the second painting depicts a serpent soaring through the air, casting its gaze upon the figures on the mountain and the birds in the canyon. This imagery resonates strongly with the concept of the Teng Snake prevalent in ancient Chinese literature.

The Teng Snake, distinguished as a divine serpent, is explicitly identified in the *Shuowen Jiezi* (*Explaining and Analyzing Characters*) 说文解字 as 騰 Teng, a divine snake. Its distinction from ordinary snakes led to the creation of a unique character in ancient Chinese script. The Teng snake is renowned for its capacity to fly, with *Xunzi* 荀子 elucidating it as "the Teng snake flies without feet". During the Han Dynasty, Liu Xiang's *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and Huan Kuan's *Discussion on Salt and Iron* 盐铁论 both describe the Teng snake as "roaming in the mist", while the "real dragon rides in the clouds". This signifies that the Teng snake's flight does not necessitate wings; it effortlessly navigates through mountains and water enveloped in mist, while dragons soar higher in the sky and traverse clouds.

The distinct triad of stars adorning the Great Serpent in the paintings is noteworthy. In ancient Chinese astrology, the Dragon Serpent constitutes an independent constellation situated within the Xuanwu Chamber of the Northern Heaven among the Twenty-Eight Constella-

tions, governing 22 stars.² This astronomical alignment bears resemblance to the ancient Indian astrological system of Nakshatra, which divides the celestial expanse into 27 zones and displays remarkable correspondence with the Chinese constellation system (Roughton, Steele, and Walker 2004). Given Čiurlionis' affinity for theosophy and ancient Orientalism, it's conceivable that he explored the amalgamation of the Great Serpent and the stars to convey his comprehension of astrology and theology.

The second painting of *Andante* portrays the serpent bathed in the luminance of stars, and the entire scene unfolds with a deliberate slowness, as indicated by the term *andante*. Starlight gently disperses the clouds that enshroud the mountains. The serpent gracefully navigates the air, a majestic bird soars above the valley, and at the focal point, a human figure kneels in prayer. Although distinct in appearance, the serpent, the human, and the

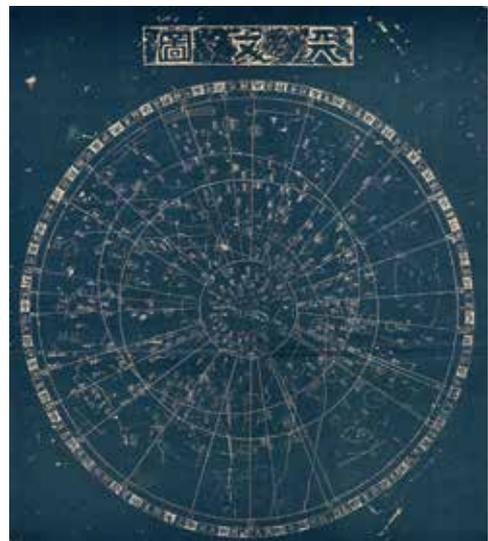


Figure 7. Ancient 28 constellations of the Song Dynasty preserved at the Suzhou Temple of Literature

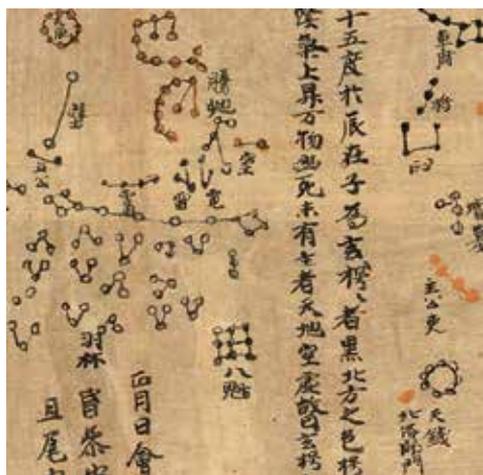


Figure 8. Star charts of the Teng Snake Stella Tang Dynasty preserved in the Mogao Caves at Dunhuang, British Library S.3326

bird are essentially facets of a unified entity, serving as various avatars of the divine within Čiurlionis' perspective. The radiance emanating from the three stars illuminates each of these subjects, which inherently unite into one whole. A subtle symmetry emerges with the serpent-bird-human trio along the picture's diagonal axis. This arrangement encapsulates the concept of divine harmony and unity, depicting the interface between Heaven and Earth, where God's incarnation coalesces.

In the fourth painting, *Finale*, the three stars descend behind the mountains, transforming into halos, while the serpent, as it wends its way up the mountain, becomes infused with the radiance of divinity. Notably, the serpent's trajectory appears directed towards the human crown, ultimately leading into the expansive cavern at the mountain's base. Within this cavern lies an alternate realm, marked by clouds and trees, indicative of another world. The steps on the right side

of the composition can be interpreted as representing Heaven (parallel to the mountain's summit and the holy light), humanity (symbolized by the crown, akin to the castle), and the earthly domain (aligned with the cave at the bottom). The serpent, thus, emerges as the intermediary deity that fosters communication between these three distinct realms.

My interest in Sonata of the Serpent's portrayal of canyons and mountains is well-founded, considering Lithuania's predominantly flat terrain characterized by large lakes and extensive forests, with snakes primarily inhabiting areas near water bodies. The vast plains of Eastern Europe traditionally lack towering mountains and deep valleys. However, Čiurlionis dedicates a substantial portion of Sonata of the Serpent to mountainous and valley landscapes that contrast with his homeland's topography. Indeed, Čiurlionis' visit to Anapa in 1905 and his exploration of the Caucasus Mountains, where he documented photographs and sketched various scenes along the Anapa seashore, *Cliff by the Sea*, greatly impacted him. It's likely that these experiences contributed significantly to his artistic perspective, infusing his vision of mountains into *Sonata of the Serpent*. This amalgamation likely reflects his diverse sentiments associated with these landscapes.

Nonetheless, it's plausible that the depictions of mountains and canyons within *Sonata of the Sea* struck Čiurlionis as more than just geographical elements. These scenes might have resonated with him on a spiritual level, providing an expansive stage for the gods and facilitating a deeper connection with the di-



Figure 9. Andante



Figure 10. Finale



Figure 11. Chaodong Rock



Figure 12. Cave of the Flying Dragon

vine. The grandeur and majesty of mountains and canyons could have symbolized a heightened plane for divine interaction and contemplation, transcending the physical limitations of his native landscape.

It is interesting to note that Čiurlionis' work has been a very magical experience for me. Just this summer, I was traveling in the famous Enshi Grand Canyon in central China, it was afternoon, people in the car were sleepy, and I was about to fall asleep, when I suddenly saw a magnificent scene outside the car window.

The car was driving along a hundred meters deep ravine, opposite the ravine was a mountain terrace. At the edge of the

terrace were cliffs several hundred feet high, and the terrace had luxuriant trees, and also villages and towns and homes. It was as if I had suddenly entered the world of a Čiurlionis painting, as if I was the one standing on the edge of the cliff with a view of the terrace on the other side. If there had been a rainbow in the sky at that moment, I would have thought it was a snake or a dragon. At that moment, I felt that the world Čiurlionis wanted to express, was all around me.

What's more, Enshi is a karst landscape with countless caves under the high mountains, the largest of which is called Tenglong Cave. According to the local Tujia legend, this is the place where

a big snake lives, and the snake comes to shed its skin in this cave once every 500 years. The cave is more than 70 meters high and 60 kilometers long. We played inside for a whole day, the cave is so big that you need a car to explore it, there are theaters, stations, restaurants, just like the fourth finale painted at the foot of the mountain, and when you enter it, it is a completely different vast world.

Enshi is an autonomous region of the Tujia and Miao ethnic minorities in southern China, and the Tai-Kadai language ethnic group was known as the “Southern Barbarians” in ancient times, and the *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* defines these people as: “Southern Barbarians are snake worshippers”. Čiurlionis’ painting world is so similar to this area, it surprised me.

CONCLUSIONS

The veneration of serpents finds widespread presence in ancient human civilizations and occupies a significant locus within Lithuanian folk culture. Often endowed with dominion over water, the serpent deity embodies qualities of femininity and creation. This phenomenon is recurrent across multiple ancient human civilizations, encompassing Chinese mythology as well, where the divine serpent assumes an accessory role, facilitating communication between the realms of Heaven and Earth in diverse civilizations.

In the year 1908, the decision by Čiurlionis to undertake a creative endeavor centered on the theme of Lithuanian culture, as a means to convey the ethos of national independence, naturally led him to embrace the distinctive milieu of Lithuanian snake culture. Within the tenets of traditional Lithuanian culture, the belief in gods and goddesses stands as a testament to the acknowledgment of diversity and uniqueness within the historical context of that epoch. As Čiurlionis sought to articulate the singular facets of Lithuanian culture,

his creative process – both consciously and unconsciously – infused an aura of distinctiveness and autonomy through the “otherworldly” thematic elements and modes of artistic expression. This deliberate emphasis serves to beckon subsequent generations of enthusiasts to contemplate the aesthetic dimensions of its orientality.

The aesthetic facet of orientality is further underscored, whether through deliberate or inadvertent means, via the incorporation of themes and techniques encapsulating the notion of another world. This design not only accentuates the autonomy and distinctiveness of the culture, but also prompts future admirers to actively engage in discerning its intrinsic orientality.

Antanas Andrijauskas, in his work “Čiurlionis - Music Painting and Modernism”, contends that Čiurlionis’ paintings are centered on the aesthetics of natural beauty and the boundlessness of space. They encompass the portrayal of emptiness and infinitude, while employing a bird’s-eye perspective that extends the visual narrative beyond the confines

of the frame. Concomitantly, calligraphic and decorative elements, symbolism, and understated color palettes are harnessed within his artworks. Moreover, the depiction of time, marked by sinuous lines and rhythmic movements, gives rise to an aesthetic characterized by “non finito” and “ineffability”, bearing affinity with the artistic ethos of Far Eastern traditions (Andrijauskas 2012).

It is posited that the manifestation of Orientalism within Čiurlionis’ oeuvre transcends mere surface aesthetics. This Oriental influence entails not only the impact of prevailing European trends of Orientalism and *Japonisme* on composition, line, and form in his works, but extends to the nuanced understanding and representation of Oriental “divinity”. The impact of *Japonisme* on Čiurlio-

nis’ compositional approach, lines, and forms parallels his conception and portrayal of the Eastern notion of “divinity”. This influence is imbricated within his artistic language.

While advancing Lithuanian ethnography, beyond the confines of indigenous folk cultural heritage, the Oriental imagery fostered by the remarkable phonetic correspondence between Lithuanian and Sanskrit could have exerted a certain sway on Čiurlionis. Evidently inclined to embrace these Oriental deities, his magnum opus, *Sonata of the Serpent*, finds its foundation in Lithuanian folk beliefs. Through a discourse that eschews Catholicism and potentially involves metaphorical “transcendent vision”, Čiurlionis adroitly delineates the divine realm within an Oriental landscape backdrop.

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Endnotes

¹ In ancient China, there was a saying that there were “Three Great Wonderful Books,” referring to the *I Ching*, the *Yellow Emperor’s Classic of Internal Medicine*, and the *Classic of Mountains and Rivers*. These three books, all of which originated in prehistoric times and have no authors, contain important information about early Chinese philosophy, medicine, and geography. The exact date of the creation of the *Classic of Mountains and Rivers* is not known, but it was written around the time between the Warring States Period and the beginning of the Han Dynasty (475 BC-8). Since then, due to Confucianism’s disbelief in ghosts and spirits, the *Classic of Mountains and Seas* has long been considered a fictional account of anecdotes and not taken seriously by the mainstream Chinese intellec-

tual class. It was not until the archaeological discoveries of the *Sanxingdui* Civilization in Sichuan in recent years, when many unearthed artifacts began to match the descriptions in the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, thus the scholarly community began to recognize the special significance of the *Classic of Mountains and Seas*, like Homer’s epic, for historiography.

² In ancient China, it was believed that the world of the Celestial Empire, like the government of mankind, was governed by officials set up by the central government, and that the Chamber of Departments was a region of the northern sky divided into eleven constellations, the largest of which was the Palace Guard, with 45 stars under its jurisdiction, followed by the Flying Serpent, with 22 stars under its jurisdiction.