

### Jews and Greek Folk Songs

Koumanoudi, Angelique Marie

Veröffentlichungsversion / Published Version

Zeitschriftenartikel / journal article

**Empfohlene Zitierung / Suggested Citation:**

Koumanoudi, A. M. (2013). Jews and Greek Folk Songs. *Südosteuropäische Hefte*, 2(1), 19-27. <https://nbn-resolving.org/urn:nbn:de:0168-ssoar-360852>

**Nutzungsbedingungen:**

Dieser Text wird unter einer CC BY-NC-SA Lizenz (Namensnennung-Nicht-kommerziell-Weitergabe unter gleichen Bedingungen) zur Verfügung gestellt. Nähere Auskünfte zu den CC-Lizenzen finden Sie hier: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/deed.de>

**Terms of use:**

This document is made available under a CC BY-NC-SA Licence (Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike). For more information see: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0>

Angelique Marie Koumanoudi  
**Jews and Greek Folk Songs**

**Abstract**

*This article presents various negative stereotypes of the Jewish people that appear in Greek folk songs and examines the attitudes of scholars as well when dealing with this particular subject.*

*Η μοίρα μου μού τό'γραψε, κι ο Θιος μού καταρρίσθη,  
Να σ'αγαπώ πουλάκι μου, και νά'σαι απ'άλλη πίστη  
(It was written in my destiny and I lay under God's curse  
To love you my little bird, though you're from another faith)*

Since the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Greek folk songs became an object of interest, most scholars, Greeks and non-Greeks, regarded them as an important source of information on the transmission of Greek culture from one generation to another. Underlying the rise of such interest was (and still is) the idea of identifying those elements that illustrated, first and foremost, the unbroken continuity of Greek culture from antiquity to the modern era.

Indeed, keeping records of those precious oral testimonies and use them as reference became with time a common practice not only among folklorists but also among artists, poets, writers and, in a more extensive way, among the intellectuals of Greece, especially when seeking evidence for the authenticity and ancestry of some particular characteristic, belief or custom.

Still, until today there has been only a superficial attempt to examine and discuss anti-Jewish content found in some of them. As a matter of fact, to our knowledge there is only one exception that can be singled out, which is the unpublished doctoral thesis of an Israeli of Greek origin, Iakov Sibbi, submitted in 1983 at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> This shouldn't come totally as a surprise, because in Greece the interest, at an academic level at least, for Jewish related subjects is relatively recent and the bibliography generally concerns history and at a much lesser extent literature and popular culture.

Therefore, with this article I would like to suggest an overview of Greek folk songs where references to Jews are accompanied by negative attributes and to outline some of the popular prejudices concerning people of Jewish background.

**Prejudices based on religious and ethnic animosity**

One of the first scholars to show interest in Greek folk songs was Claude Fauriel (1772-1844), an eminent French philhellene, who in 1824, at the beginning of the Greek War of Independence against the Ottomans, published in Paris the first ever collection of Greek folk songs called *Chants populaires de la Grèce Moderne*. In this collection we find only one song

---

<sup>1</sup> Simbi, Iakov (1983): *To Archetypou tou Evraiou stin Elliniki Laiki paradosi*. [The Archetype of the Jew in the Greek Folk Tradition]. Jerusalem: doctorate thesis for The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, unpublished.

related to Jews, on which the scholar comments in the preceding explanatory paragraph that it's a song illustrating „the strong belief in supernatural animalistic forces and in the power of magic” among the Greek peasantry in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The song's title is „The Jewish Girl and the Partridge”:

*“A pregnant Jewish girl was reaping. / From time to time she reaped and at times was in pain. / She lay on the straw, and gave birth to a golden son. / Then she put him in her apron and went to dump him in a ditch. / A partridge met her on the way, and told her: / ‘- You bitch, you lawless woman, you Jewish sinner, / Myself, I have eighteen chicks, and I struggle to feed them. / And you, who has one golden son, you want to throw him away in the ditch!’”<sup>2</sup>*

Significantly, Fauriel remarks here that “it's a kind of a didactic tale, full of charm and delicacy”, while at the same time making no comment on the fact that the Jewish Girl gave birth to a child (out of wedlock and, most probably, of parents of incompatible social or religious backgrounds) who would have no place in society.

However, if we read the second volume of a later edition, which includes all the unpublished material that Fauriel collected, we can find eight songs with Jewish references, in various contexts. Some refer to impossible marriages between Greeks and Jews for religious reasons. One song mentions Jews beating up and robbing a poor Greek boy,<sup>3</sup> while others refer to Jesus' betrayal and crucifixion.<sup>4</sup> In another song, the reference to the Jews is made through Judas' figure, as a means to insult Varnakiotis, a controversial freedom fighter who lived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and had been accused by some of treason.<sup>5</sup> There is even a lovers' song saying: “I'm telling you I love you, and you don't believe me; / why do you want to make me suffer, as the Jews did to Jesus.”<sup>6</sup> The fact that all these songs are not included in the first edition, might suggest something about Fauriel's editorial criteria, mainly focusing on songs that correspond to his own perception of what renders best the Greek people to his

<sup>2</sup> “Μια Εβραιοπούλα θέριζε, και ήτο βαρεμένη / ώρες ώρες εθέριζε, κι ώρες εκουλοπόννα, / και στο δεμάτ'ακούμπησε, χρυσόν υιόν τον κάμνει, / και στην ποδιάν τον έβαλε, να πά'τον ρεματίσει. / Μια πέρδικα την απαντά, μια πέρδικα της λέγει / -Μωρή σκύλα, μωρ'άνομη, Εβραία μαγαρισμένη, / εγώ'χω δεκαοχτώ πουλιά, και πάσχω να τα θρέψω, / κι εσ'έχεις τον χρυσόν υιόν, και πας τον ρεματίσει!” Fauriel, Claude (1824/1999): *Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia [Greek Folk Songs]*, tomos A, ekdosi tou 1824-1825, epim. Al. Politis. Irakleia: Panepistimiakes ekdoseis Kritis, p. 349-350. In another version, at the end of the song, the Jewish girl repents and returns home, saying to her son that if some day he meets a partridge, he should know she is his real mother, and that she, herself, is only his godmother. Cf. (1962): *Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia [Greek Folk Songs]*. Athina: Akadimia Athinon, p. 448-449. The absence of this last part in Fauriel's anthology is not surprising since folk songs were orally transmitted and changed forms from one region to another. So most probably Fauriel never heard this version.

<sup>3</sup> “Στο δρόμο τ'απανταχούνε οι σκύλοι Γεγουδαίοι. / Σαν πιάνουσι και δέννου τον και παίρνουν του τ'αλεύρι” (translation: On the way the dogs the Jews meet him / They catch him, they beat him up and take his flour). (1999): *Dimotika Tragoudia: I Syllogi tou Fauriel. Anekdotia keimena [Folk Songs. Fauriel's Collection. Unpublished texts]*. Irakleio: Panepistimiakes ekdoseis Kritis, p. 29.

<sup>4</sup> “Χριστέ μου πώς τ'άπομεινες τα θλιβερά μαρτούρια; / οπού σε μαρτουρέψανε οι άνομοι Εβραίοι; / οι άνομοι και τα σκυλιά και τα μαγαρισμένα. / Σαν κλέφτην τον αρπάξανε, κι εις τον χαλκιά τον πάνε” (translation: Jesus how did you endure the dreadful torments? / that the lawless Jews inflicted upon you? / the lawless and the dogs and the cursed. / As if he was a thief, they caught him to execute him). *Ibid*, p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> “Τους άφηκε και πέρασαν σκύλος ο Βαρνακιώτης, / οπού'ταν Τούρκος-Χριστιανός, Ιούδας και προδότης.” (translation: He let them go through, the dog Varnakiotis, / who was a Turk-Christian, Judas and a traitor). *Ibid*, p. 73.

<sup>6</sup> “Εγώ λέγω σου σ'αγαπώ, κι εσύ δεν το πιστεύεις / Σαν τους Εβραίους τον Χριστόν θέλεις να με παιδεύεις” (translation: I am telling you I love you and you don't believe me / Like the Jews did to Jesus you want to torture me). *Ibid*, p. 78.

readers, but also, indicating as well a possible embarrassment regarding songs that express openly hostility to Jews.

In the numerous folk songs collections and anthologies that have been published until today, commentators who give a reliable explanation and proceed to a documented presentation of the subject of antisemitism in these songs are scarce; as for instance in the Academy of Athens' collection of 1962, from which one may learn about the segregation of Jews and the consequent limited possibilities for inter-communal relations.<sup>7</sup> In the first volume, in the chapter "*National Life*," several variations on the subject of the impossible matrimony between Greek Orthodox and Jews are given. These songs are employing in fact wedding song patterns, describing nuptial customs but in an impossible context; it is rare however that lovers decide to convert in order to marry. Still, as expected, it is the women in most cases<sup>8</sup> who will be the ones to convert and pay the price:

*"One holiday, a Sunday / I went for a walk in the Jewish quarter. / I see a Jewish girl, who was alone / and who was undressing to wash her hair. / The bitch was undressing and undoing her buttons one by one / and she was shining, as the sun shines, from beauty. / Her comb was made of silver, her mug from gold / and the fountain of marble with a golden eagle. / Before I could address her and talk to her / she says to me: 'Welcome to the one I love'. / 'Do you want', the young man replied, 'Jewish girl, to become a Christian / to wash your hair on Saturday, and change clothes on Sunday / and receive Communion on Easter, on Resurrection Day?' / 'Let me ask my mother and when she replies / I'll come, young man, to give you the response. / Mother, there is a young Greek and he is begging me / to convert to the good faith / to wash my hair on Saturday, to change on Sunday / and to receive Communion on Easter, on Resurrection Day'. / 'Better that I see you, my daughter, under a Turk's sword / Than to hear again the words you just said. / Girl, aren't you sorry for your two brothers / and me the poor one, to leave us in such sorrow?' / 'Mother, I don't feel sorry for my two brothers / And you, I shall leave you in deep sorrow'."*<sup>9</sup>

Underlying the determination with which the Jewish mother opposes her daughter's conversion to Christianity in order to marry, anyone can easily perceive the long lasting religious antagonism between the people of those two Millets. In some other versions the suitor is even taken away and is beaten up by the Jewish girl's family.<sup>10</sup>

The Jewish girl of this song is presented negatively in more than one way. Obviously she is light-headed and doesn't hesitate to put her family through this ordeal just for her own

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia, Akadimia Athinon, p. 460.

<sup>8</sup> For instance: "Christodoulos ki Evraioyola". In: Petropoulos, Dimitris (1958): Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia [Greek Folk Songs]. Athina: Vasiki Vivliothiki, tomos A, p. 145; Paralogi 38 – Evraia thelei Christiano, Paralogi 92 etc.

<sup>9</sup> "Μια σκόλη μιαν ημέρα πού'τονε Κυριακή / πάγω να σιργιανίσω κάτω στην Οβριακή / Βρίσκω μιαν Οβριοπούλα κι ήτονε μονάχη / και γδύνετον η σκόλα, να πάη να λουστή. / Εγδύνετον η σκόλα κι έβγανε τα κομπιά / κι έγεγγε ως φέγγει ο ήλιος απού την ομορφιά / Το χτέν'ήτ'ασημένιο, το τάσιν τη χρουσό / κι η γούρνα μαρμαρένια με τον χρυσόν αιτό. / Πριχού να τη μιλήσω και δίχως να τη πω / μου λέει μένα κείνη: - Καλώς τον αγαπώ! / - Σα θέλεις, Οβριοπούλα, να γένης Χριστιανή, / να λούγεσαι Σάββατο, ν'αλλάσης Κυριακή / και να μεταλαβαίνης το Πάσχα, τη Λαμπρή. / Α, να το πω τη μάννας μ'κι εκείνη ό,τι μου πη, / ετότες, παλληκάρι, σου διδ'απλογή. / -Μάννα μου, 'να Ρωμάκι και με παρακαλεί / για να μεταγυρίσω στην πίστη την καλή, / να λούγωμαι Σαββάτο, ν'αλλάσσω Κυριακή / και να μεταλαβαίνω το Πάσχα, τη Λαμπρή. / - Κάλλιο να σε ιδώ, κόρη, στου Τούρκου το σπαθί / παρά το λόγ'απού'πες να τότε ξαναπής. / Κόρη, δεν τα λυπάσαι τ'αδέρφια σου τα δυό / κι εμένα την καημένη ν'αφήσης σε καημό; / - Μάννα, δεν τα λυπούμαι τ'αδέρφια μου τα δυό / κι εσένα θα σ'αφήσω εισέ βαρύ καημό." In: Petropoulos, Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia, tomos A, "Christianos ki Evraioyola", Paralogi 40, p. 139.

<sup>10</sup> Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia, Akadimia Athinon, tomos A, Paralogi G'a, p. 462.

sake and for her own personal reasons, ignoring everyone else's feelings. Therefore the young Jewish girl is not a good bride. But even more, by choosing to follow her heart she is in fact betraying her own people; therefore she is twice treacherous: to her family and to her own people. Therefore, she, and any other girl that acts like her, must be considered as utterly devious.

In Iorgos Panagiotou's collection of folk songs, published in 1994 under the title *"Aren't We Greeks too?!..."* there is, among others, an abbreviated version of this story ending in the mother's threat, thus reaffirming her authority. In any case, Iorgos Panagiotou, apparently ignoring the Jewish condition, finds it somewhat difficult to categorize the song, as he explains: *"it's a peculiar one, not so much for its style than its plot, i.e. the fact that the girl doesn't automatically reject the young man's offer, shows that the narrator leaves room for an eventual conversion to Christianity"*.<sup>11</sup> On the other hand, Panagiotou observes that it is *"quite traditional within the boundaries of popular religious consciousness for a Christian to convince a member of another religion to embrace the Orthodox faith."*<sup>12</sup> It is worth noticing that the opposite is not discussed here, as if no Greek Orthodox would ever convert to another faith.

In addition to appearing in cases of marriage, conversions in Greek folk songs commonly occur in contexts of adversity as well. One type of story is that of a ship carrying Christians, Jews and sometimes Muslims too, either trapped in a storm or attacked (depending on the version):

*"Three monks from Crete, and three from Mount Athos / anchored in a deep port with their ship / which wasn't too small, or very big / thirty thousand feet, and with a thousand sailors on board.<sup>13</sup> / It had a Jewish trader, a Turkish captain. / They fly a Russian flag, with the cross at the top / and on its right they put up the icon of the Holy Mother. / And the sultan who from his palace saw them / orders his vizier to capture the armada. / The vizier calls them, the vizier orders them: / '- Boat, take down your sails! ship surrender!' / '- Do you think I'm a girl, to spread my hair, / to make a ladder for you to climb, and touch my breasts?' [was the answer] / The vizier empties [then] his cannon on the armada.<sup>14</sup> / The Turks implored their mosques, the Greeks prayed to their monasteries. / '- Implore bitchy Jew, the deceitful synagogue.' / '- I will get baptized, and I'll have Iannis for a name / I'll bring an ox-cart full of candles, and two carts of incense [the Jew replied]'."<sup>15</sup>*

In this song, the final episode is sealed with the Jew's conversion while the emphasis is put on the promptness with which this particular passenger renounces his faith. All other passengers keep their own faith; the Jew converts just to be saved. In other cases, once the

<sup>11</sup> Panagiotou, Giorgos (1994): "Den eimaste ki emeis Ellines?!..." ["Aren't we Greeks too?!..."]. Athina: Ekd. Eikostou Protou, p. 184-185.

<sup>12</sup> He concludes by saying that, from the musical perspective as well, this song is "quite peculiar, if not unique". Nothing is said, however, about the way the Jewish girl is depicted or about the song's racial implications.

<sup>13</sup> The element of exaggeration is common in Greek folk songs.

<sup>14</sup> The shift of the boat to an armada is due to the "collage" system on which the folk songs are based on.

<sup>15</sup> "[...] Είχε Οβριό πραγματευτή, Τούρκο καραβοκύρη. / Βάνουν μπαντιέρα ρουσικύ, με το σταυρό απάνω, / κι εις την δεξιά του την πλευρά βάνουν την Παναγιά. / Και ο βασιλιάς αγνάντευε από ψηλό σαράγι, / κι εις τον βεζίρη πρόσταξε να μπει μες στην αρμάδα. / Βεζίρης τους εφώνασε, βεζίρης τους προστάζει / '-Καράβι, μάνα τα πανιά, καράβι παραδόσου.' / '-Τιγάρις είμαι λυγερή, ν' απλώσω τα μαλλιά μου, / να φτιάσω σκάλα ν' ανεβείς, να πιάσεις τα βυζιά μου;' / Μια μπαταριά άδειασε απάνω στην αρμάδα. / Τάζονται Τούρκοι στα τζαμιά, Ρωμαίοι στα μοναστήρια, / τάξου κι εσύ σκυλο-Οβριέ στο δόλιο συναγώγι. / '-Εγώ θα ξαναβαπτισθώ, και Γιάννη να με πούνε, / να φέρω αμάξι απ' το κερι, και δυό αμαξιές λιβάνι.'" In: "Τρεις Καλόγεροι Κρητικοί...", Dimotika Tragoudia: I Syllogi tou Fauriel, p. 107.

trouble is over thanks to divine intervention, the Jewish passenger does not fulfill his promise and is punished, at times bringing on the death of everyone else on board too:

*“The sea calmed down, and the Jew reconsidered: / ‘- Where can I find now the cart for the candles and the cart for the incense / how can I carry in an ox-cart all the oil? / Be blessed saints, and let me be with my vow’ / A gust of wind came from the front, and one from the back / a gust from both sides, hurling him to the bottom of the sea.”<sup>16</sup>*

### **Prejudices based on political antagonisms**

The disparity between Greeks and Jews in the folk songs is reflected not only at the religious level but at the political level as well, as both Millets often competed for privileges from their Ottoman rulers. An example taken randomly concerns the widespread song of the “Murderess Mother” who kills her son because she is afraid he will denounce her infidelity to his father. The conclusion of the song marks the return of justice and order, with the father revengefully disposing of the murderess mother. Several versions of this song present the dead son speaking from his grave to a passerby saying to him: “if you are a Turk, eat me, if you are a Jew, utterly consume me.”<sup>17</sup>

In this last verse,<sup>18</sup> both the Jews and the Turks are considered equally as enemies, despite the fact that the Turks were the rulers whereas the Jews were their subjects – just as the Greeks were. In any case, even though the passerby is not in any way responsible for what had happened to the young Greek boy (now dead) the deep hatred is taken to the grave and to the life beyond – irreversibly like death itself.

However, most scholars fail to make any comment on this verse, except Dimitris Petropoulos who, ignoring the references to the Jews, mentions some women from ancient Greek mythology who were killing their own children and serving them as food. Ancient Greek mythology becomes a tool for interpretation and, at the same time, a means of reaffirming the idea of Greece’s cultural continuity.

Another example where Jews are represented as the enemies of the Greek orthodox Millet is the folk song on the execution of the Ecumenical Patriarch Grigorios V by the Ottoman authorities on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 1821. It is said that after three days Grigorios’ body was cut down and was handed to a Jewish mob and was dragged to the Golden Horn, for there had long been animosity between Greeks and Jews in the city. His corpse was finally picked up by the Greek crew of a Russian ship and taken to Odessa.<sup>19</sup>

But even though they were not responsible nor participated in the Patriarch’s execution, in the folk songs referring to the event of the Patriarch’s violent death, Jews (and at times Armenians too) are mentioned as siding with the Turks, and thus labeled as traitors and

---

<sup>16</sup> “Η θάλασσα ταπεινώσε τ’Οβριός εμετανόα: / ‘-Πού νά’βρω αμάξιν το τσερι τ’αμάξιν το λιβάνι, / με το βουβαλοτόμαρο να κουαλώ το λάϊ; / Εχετ’άιοι, τις χαρές σας τ’εγώ τα τάματά μου. / Σπιλάδα τού’ρτεν από μπρος, σπιλάδα τ’από πίσω, / σπιλάδα τ’αφτ’τα δυο πλευρά στο φούντος τον έριξε.” In: “Οβριός σε καράβι”, Petropoulos, *Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia*, tomos A’, Paralogi 47, p. 145.

<sup>17</sup> “Αν εισαι Τούρκος, φάγε με, κι’Εβριός κατάλυσέ με.” *Ibid.*, p. 83.

<sup>18</sup> This is obviously irrelevant to the story’s plot as it doesn’t contribute to it in any way, but perhaps is alluding to the false accusation that Jews performed ritual murders of Christian youth around Easter.

<sup>19</sup> Clogg Richard (1992): *A concise History of Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 37.

infidels: “while he was in the church blessing the nation / the Janissaries<sup>20</sup> and the Jews burst in together.”<sup>21</sup> This particular type of folk song in fact borrows patterns from Easter songs, where the Romans are almost completely left out of events concerning Jesus’ crucifixion, letting the Jews take all the responsibility: “Today the sky is black, the day is black. / Today they have crucified the prince of all. / Today the lawless Jews decided, / the lawless and the dogs, the very damned.”<sup>22</sup>

In his folk songs anthology, Sofoklis Dimitracopoulos, another folklorist, makes no comment at all on the circumstances surrounding the hanging, nor does he say anything about the degree of involvement of the Jews and the Armenians in the case of the Patriarch’s death. In fact, he presents Grigorios as a national martyr, and in a long passage even praises his deeds. The allegations according to which Grigorios on several occasions actually denounced Greek insurgents (as rebels not only against the Ottoman authorities but also against God’s will), is presented in a rather ambiguous fashion: “he was a very wise leader, who knew very well about all the actions planned by the Filiki Etereia<sup>23</sup> on behalf of the liberation movement. Even though he was taking a risk of being misunderstood – as indeed he was – he did manage, as it turned out, to save his flock much suffering.”<sup>24</sup> The fact, that he had been elected three times, owing to the corruption and factionalism which characterized the upper echelons of the Orthodox hierarchy in those days,<sup>25</sup> is completely ignored as well. At the end of his critical comment prefacing this particular song, Dimitracopoulos advises the reader to reach his own conclusions on the historical facts by simply... reading the song, which obviously he regards as a reliable testimony. As he observes: “the song talks about Grigorios’ hanging and the reasons for it. It’s important to notice that from then on the people consider him a saint.”<sup>26</sup> And here is the song:

*“Who saw such clouds? Who has ever seen such a storm before, / like the one blowing over on East and West this year? / The Patriarch they hung, Grigorios the saint, / like a criminal, on the church’s door. / While he was in the church blessing the nation / the Janissaries and the Jews burst in together / - Come close master priest, and read the orders / which say we must hang you on the church’s door. / It wasn’t enough for you to sit on the throne comfortably, / you also wanted the City<sup>27</sup> to become Greek.”<sup>28</sup>*

<sup>20</sup> The Janissaries were Special Forces loyal to the Sultan and known for their cruelty.

<sup>21</sup> Dimitrakopoulos, Sofoklis (1998): *Istoria kai Dimotiko Tragoudi, 325-1945* [History and the Folk Song from 325 to 1945], Athina: Parousia, p. 188.

<sup>22</sup> “Θρήνος της Μεγάλης Παρασκευής» (The Lament of Holy Friday), Petropoulos, *Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia*, tomos A’, Paralogi 7, p. 18.

<sup>23</sup> Filiki Etaireia (The Friendly Society) was a secret organization involved in the Greek independency movement against the Ottomans.

<sup>24</sup> Dimitrakopoulos, *Istoria kai Dimotiko Tragoudi*, p. 188.

<sup>25</sup> Clogg, *History of Greece*, p. 37. See also Koliopoulos John S.; Veremis Thanos M. (ed.) (2004): *Greece. The Modern Sequel. From 1821 to the Present*. London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd., p. 143-144.

<sup>26</sup> Dimitrakopoulos, *Istoria kai Dimotiko Tragoudi*, p.188

<sup>27</sup> Constantinople.

<sup>28</sup> “Ποιος ειδε τέτοια συννεφιά, ποιος ειδε τέτοι’αντάρα, / που τού’το χρόνο πλάκωσεν Ανατολή και Δύση. / Τον Πατριάρχη κρέμασαν τον άγιο τον Γρηγόρη, / σαν να’τανε κατάδικος στις εκκλησιάς την πόρτα. / Εκεί που ελειτούργαε κ’ευλόγαε το Γένος, / πλακώνουν οι γιαντίσαροι και οι Οβριοί αντάμα. / ‘-Κόπασ’, αφέντη Δέσποτα, και δάβασ’τα φερμάνια, / που λεν να σε κρεμάσομε στις εκκλησιάς στην πόρτα. / Δε σ’άρεσε να κάθουσαι στο θρόνο θρονιασμένος, / μα θέλησες Ρωμαίικο την Πόλη να τη φκιάσεις.” In: Dimitrakopoulos, *Istoria kai Dimotiko Tragoudi*, p. 188.

## Prejudices based on sociocultural discrepancies

As expected, when religious and political division is so deep, any social interaction is influenced as well – to the point of finding anti-Jewish commentaries even in children’s songs. It is the case of some “Swallows’ Songs” performed in March for the arrival of spring. Children, particularly in the region of the Dodecanese islands, even today, go from door to door, teasing and menacing the housekeepers that they will bring confusion in their homes unless they give them a few eggs in exchange. Here is an excerpt of one of them:

*“You good lady, get up and / give five eggs / and five more, red. / I have a good teacher / and a mean supervisor. / If I’m late he beats me up, / and then he does it again. / Fleas and bugs! Out! / The Jews are calling you. / Suck up all their blood / until only the Holy Spirit remains. / And we, Christians / who are all humble, / let us enjoy the Holy Day / as much as our heart desires.”<sup>29</sup>*

Usually in folk songs anthologies this particular category of March songs is accompanied by observations about the ancient Greek origin of this tradition already known among children in antiquity. Yet here too there is no comment on the references to Jews by Petropoulos, the editor of the folk songs collection where this particular swallows’ song appears.<sup>30</sup>

A different children song – this time found in a collection published in 1990 by Stilpon Kiriakidis – says: *“Jew, despicable Jew, / where is the chicken you have stolen? / The Jew put it in his pants / and farted / and the chicken was titillated.”<sup>31</sup>* The commentator explains: *“many are the mocking children songs, which so nicely fit in with the teasing and playful nature of children.”<sup>32</sup>* And this is where analysis ends. No interpretation or particular remark is made by Stilpon Kiriakidis on the fact that it is a Jew that is being ridiculed. The task of interpreting negative stereotypes of this sort is simply left to his readers’ judgment.

If one was to describe the Jewish people based on the Greek folk songs, he would conclude that Jewish women are untrustworthy, treacherous, lawless and sinning even if they convert – not being thus good brides or mothers. Men are thieves. Fleas and bugs suck their blood. They collaborate with the Ottomans and don’t hesitate to even change their faith as long as they reap some benefit at the end. Moreover, since they are considered responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion, they are consequently considered traitors and sinners not only in a religious context but also in a social and political context too. Obviously, these folk songs don’t provide any true and reliable depiction of the Jewish people. They don’t really give any information about them at all. On the other hand, they say a lot about the anti-Jewish predisposition of those who created these songs as well of those who perpetuated them.

<sup>29</sup> “Σήκω, συ καλή κυρά, / δος μ’έμένα πέντ’αγά / κι άλλα πέντε κόκκινα. / Έχω δάσκαλο καλό / και πρωτόσκολο κακό. / Αν αργήσω, δέρνει μας. / Όξω ψύλλ, όξω κοριοι, / σας φωνάζουν οι Εβραιοι. / Φάτε, φάτ’όλο το αίμα / και ας πομένη τ’Άγιο Πνεύμα. / Και εμεις οι Χριστιανοι / που’μεθ’όλοι ταπεινοι, / θα χαρούμε τη Λαμπρά μας, / όπως θέλει η καρδιά μας.” In: Petropoulos, *Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia*, tomos B, p. 12; A. Passow, 229, CCCIV.

<sup>30</sup> As Pr. Minna Rosen (Haifa University) observed, this particular March song is relating to the torments of Jesus as well as to the Jewish Passover in which, according to the western and central European antisemitic doctrine, Matza bread is baked with Christian blood.

<sup>31</sup> “Οβριέ, σκυλλοβριέ, / πού’ν’η κόττα πόκλεψες; / στο βρακι την έβαλε / κι Οβριός τοιλιστηκε / η κόττα καρκαλιστηκε.” In: Kiriakidis, Stilpon P. (1990): *To Dimotiko Tragoudi. Synagogi Meleton* [The Folk Song. Collection of Studies]. Athina: Ermis, p. 37.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*



Even if nowadays the majority of scholars perceive them more as a relic of the past than reflecting a living tradition (simply because new folk songs are no longer produced), still folk songs are regarded in Greece as an authentic source of popular wisdom. They are regularly heard on the radio or in social gatherings and are performed not only by small folk music bands but also by well-known singers. At the same time folk songs collections – in which, as we saw, anti-Jewish attitudes are commented on in such a cursory manner – are accessible in public and school libraries all over the country.

Today, in the midst of deep economic depression, xenophobic and racist attitudes find a fertile ground. Old prejudices<sup>33</sup> and anti-Jewish sentiments resurface<sup>34</sup> and gain momentum once more. As this research on the Jews in Greek folk songs indicated, a more rational and educated approach of Greece's folk and popular culture altogether is needed. It is our belief that it will contribute positively to the ongoing public discussion about racism, antisemitism and fascistic indoctrination.

---

<sup>33</sup> See also Bowman Steve (1985): *The Jews of Byzantium 1204-1453*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press.

<sup>34</sup> On the famous touristic island of Hydra, for instance, the burning of Judas is publicly performed despite the fact that the Greek Orthodox Church has officially condemned it in 1918. URL: [http://wwwwhydramysoul.blogspot.co.il/2011/04/blog-post\\_25.html](http://wwwwhydramysoul.blogspot.co.il/2011/04/blog-post_25.html), last access: 27.08. 2013.

## Bibliography

- Bowman, Steve (1985): *The Jews of Byzantium 1204-1453*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press.
- Clogg, Richard (1992): *A Concise History of Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dimitrakopoulos, Sofoklis (1998): *Istoria kai Dimotiko Tragoudi, 325-1945* [History and the Folk Song from 325 to 1945], Athina: Parousia.
- (1999): *Dimotika Tragoudia: I Syllogi tou Fauriel. Anekdotia keimena* [Folk Songs. Fauriel's Collection. Unpublished texts]. Irakleio: Panepistimiakes ekdoseis Kritis.
- (1962): *Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia* [Greek Folk Songs]. Athina: Akadimia Athinon.
- Fauriel, Claude (1824/1999): *Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia* [Greek Folk Songs], tomos A, ekdosi tou 1824-1825, epim. Al. Politis. Irakleia: Panepistimiakes ekdoseis Kritis.
- Koliopoulos John S.; Veremis Thanos M. (ed.) (2004): *Greece. The Modern Sequel. From 1821 to the Present*. London: C. Hurst & Co..
- Kyriakidis, Stilpon P. (1990): *To Dimotiko Tragoudi. Synagogi Meleton* [The Folk Song. Collection of Studies]. Athina: Ermis.
- Panagiotou, Giorgos (1994): "Den eimaste ki emeis Ellines?!..." ["Aren't we Greeks too?!..."]. Athina: Ekd. Eikostou Protou.
- Passow, Arnold (1861): *Liebes- und Klagelieder des neugriechischen Volkes*.
- Petropoulos, Dimitris (1958): *Ellinika Dimotika Tragoudia* [Greek Folk Songs]. Athina: Vasiki Vivliothiki.
- Simbi, Iakov (1983): *To Archetypo tou Evraiou stin Elliniki Laiki paradosi*. [The Archetype of the Jew in the Greek Folk Tradition]. Jerusalem: doctorate thesis for The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, unpublished.