

THREE GREEK FOLK BALLADS IN THEIR BALKAN CONTEXT

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This paper analyses three Greek oral ballads in their Balkan connections, "The Ballad of the Dead Brother", "The Ballad of the Bridge of Arta", and "The Ballad of the Returning Husband", in their wider geographical context, giving emphasis to the examination of the regional versions and discussing the extended international bibliography about these traditional songs. One of the main goals of the paper is to enhance the comparative perspective of modern Greek studies in the framework of Balkan studies, as many phenomena of the traditional and modern Greek culture, folk and "high" culture, can be understood properly only in a wider geographical perspective, due to the fact that significant parts of this culture are interconnected with nearly all south-east European countries.

It may be considered an astonishing fact that the folk culture and oral literature of the countries of South-East Europe, expressed in so many different languages, have a quite coherent profile and are linked together by a series of similar topics in folk songs as well as in oral narratives (Puchner 2016). As oral literature had an important impact on the written literature during the centuries after the fall of Byzantium, the texts of the "high" national literatures are thematically connected in a very similar way (Puchner 2015). This web of interlingual contexts is a significant factor which has to be seriously taken into account when dealing with Modern Greek folklore; the necessity of a comparative dimension of analysis is evident for nearly all manifestations of Greek folk culture and oral literature, due to the mobility of the population even in Byzantine times and the intensive historical and cultural contacts of the peoples of the region under Ottoman rule.

In this article I shall try to exemplify this sort of transnational and translingual connectedness of Greek folklore by means of three examples, located in the thematic area of ballad singing. This loosely defined category of narrative folk songs¹ is very rich in the Balkan region. Unfortunately, this study cannot deal with the singing process, music, situational contexts and sociological functions of the songs, but is restricted to the texts and

1. For the problem of defining ballads as a separate category of narrative folk songs see Brednich (1977), Seemann *et al.* (1967), Seemann (1973) etc.

their content; this choice is not based on a specific methodological argument but on the fact that most of the published variants or hand-written versions in folklore archives or song collections lack notation of the music. On the other hand, emphasis is placed on an exhaustive bibliography of variants of texts and studies in the different Balkan languages, which is difficult and time-consuming to collect but essential to take into consideration in order to document the dissemination and the variability of a song. In some cases this bibliography is quite extensive.

EXAMPLE 1: THE BALLAD OF THE DEAD BROTHER

This ballad is well known in the romantic literary version of the author of the adventures of Baron Münchhausen, Gottfried August Bürger, entitled "Lenore" (1773). It is sung mostly as a wedding song from southern Greece up to eastern Hungary, and can be documented in Greek, South Slavic, Albanian, Romanian, and Hungarian versions² (for the Greek-Bulgarian versions there exist some special studies: Bojadžieva 1980, Burkhart 1971, 1981, Dinekov 1971). The macabre story about the resurrection of the dead brother, to fulfil the vow he made to his mother to bring back his sister who had married far from home, attracted the interest of researchers even in the 19th century (Šišmanov 1896, 1898, Schischmanov 1894, Dieterich 1902: 147-50, Siupiur 1968, Topalov 2012). This legend of a revenant (Impelizzeri 1944, Burkhart 1989: 65-108) provoked different theories of origin (Spyridakēs 1944-5): from the myth of Demeter and Persephone or Adonis (Spyridakēs 1972: 196 ff.) to Christian lives of saints (Vlachogiannēs 1944, Lavagnini 1953) and the English ballad of "The Suffolk Miracle" (Mētsakēs 1982: 11 ff.). The variability of the sequence of motifs is rather restricted; significant deviations can be located only in Hungarian, Serbian and Romanian versions. However, the shortening of the story depends also on the concrete situation of singing (paradigms in Burkhart 1989: 187 ff.). For the Greek versions there exists also a special bibliography (Krikos 1975).

The narrative song is based on the institutional crisis of family, which is destroyed by an egocentric mother and her absurd curse on her only

2. For Greek variants and studies see Hellēnika Dēmotika Tragoudia (1962: 309-319), Baud-Bovy (1936: 168), Petropoulos (1958-9: I 360 f.), Politēs (1885), Psichari (1884), Ioannidou-Barbarigou (1980), etc. For the South-Slavic versions Wollner (1882), Schischmanov (1894), for the Albanian Çabej (1934), Hoerburger (1962), Lambertz (1922: 70-3), Arapi (1986: 5-11, 1996: 11-136), for the Romanian Vrabie (1957), for the Hungarian in Transylvania Antal (1977).

daughter that she should not marry far from home or at all; this definitely goes against the strategy of survival and the enhancement of fertility in every traditional community. This otherwise ideal family consists of nine brothers and one sister, as well as the mother; no father is mentioned. All the members of the family are against a marriage of the daughter far from home, except for the youngest one, Constantine, who approves this option. He swears to his mother that in the event of necessity he will bring his sister back. In just one year all nine brothers die. The lonely mother goes to the grave of the youngest one and calls on him to keep his promise. The dead brother departs and brings his sister back (Meraklēs 1966). On the way back, with both riding a horse, the birds comment on the unprecedented fact that a dead person accompanies a living one³, and Areti asks her brother several times why he looks so strange; his answers are always ambiguous. Reaching the house the dead man disappears into his grave, the daughter knocks on the door of the (“smokeless”) house; only after several efforts is the door opened, and mother and daughter fall down dead without any further explanation. The catastrophe of the entire family is complete.

Recent interpretations have underlined that the starting point of the destruction of the whole family is the curse of the mother, who tries to prevent the creation of a new family (in some variants she does not agree to marry her daughter at all); this action against the laws of life and the community activates a whole chain of catastrophic events, indicating several transgressions of borders: the oath of the youngest son, who fulfils his promise even after death,⁴ the marriage of the daughter abroad (there is no information about her new family, no question why she must return home or resistance to it), and the presence of the dead among the living: the return also brings death to the last survivors (daughter and mother). The analyses have given emphasis to the role of the birds, who only the dead brother can understand, as well as to the dialogic structure of the questions and answers during the ride home (return to death): the answers of the dead brother are ambiguous and delay the recognition process; tragic irony is created, because the listeners know better than the daughter that her brother is dead. The “smokeless” home is the realm of death: no recognition is needed any more; the return to the catastrophic mother,

3. For the role and function of the speaking birds see Politēs (1956).

4. This oath is obligatory for the dead person, otherwise he cannot be redeemed (Puchner 1996: 23 ff., Wopmann 1961).

who is the cause of the destruction, is an initiation to the other world. The journey back home was a journey to death.⁵

EXAMPLE 2: THE BALLAD OF THE BRIDGE OF ARTA

The ballad of the dead brother has often been dramatised in the different national literatures of the Balkans; however, even more often the ballad of the burying of a sacrifice under the foundations of difficult buildings or the walling-up of the wife of the *protomastoras* has been transposed into a theatrical work (in Romania 26 times, Reichert-Schenk 1994). The basic intellectual concept of the legend of the foundation sacrifice is rooted in a pre-animistic or animistic *Weltanschauung* (Schier 1977) and the anticipation of sacrifice as an act of *do-ut-des* which is done by the *homo necans* in order to get some benefit (Burkert 1983): a difficult building can only be erected successfully if the supernatural powers are appeased by a sacrifice, in order to tolerate the building and to give it stability (Sartori 1898, Boberg 1955). In the Christianised versions of this legend the sacrifice is transformed into a pact of the master builder with the devil, in order to complete successfully the erection of a new church. But this metaphysical barter is linked to another superstition as well: the belief in the animation of architectural structures; this soul-giving act is usually realised by violent death (in cosmogonic myths the creation of the world involves killing the ur-giant), the walling-up of a human being bestows on the building impregnability and indestructibility, life and permanence (Taloş 1981, Papa-michael-Koutroubas 1981, Brewster 1971, Köhler 1894). The social position of the sacrificed victims varies from the anonymous orphan and the virgin maid (the magical power of innocence) to the wife of the master builder (supreme value of the sacrifice).

In south-eastern Europe the difficult building is a mythical city or an impregnable fortress (the city as a cosmological *imago mundi*, the sacred centre of the axis of the universe), a fortified monastery (search for the holy place, monastery as an image of paradise, celestial Jerusalem), or a bridge (transgression of natural borders, *rite de passage*, initiation test, taming of the catastrophic power of nature) (Ranke 1979, Moser-Rath 1979). The global motif of the foundation sacrifice can be documented in ritual practice and in more sublimated forms as animal sacrifice (the cock

5. For an analysis of all Greek variants see Saunier (2007), for the motif of marriage with the dead and the journey of initiation see Xanthakou (1985).

at the laying of the foundations)⁶ or the walling-up of the shadow (Taloş 1969: 208 ff.). In the central and northern Balkans the architecture is usually a city, while in the middle and the southern regions it is a bridge (Pögl 1979). In the case of legends and songs on the foundation of cities (Cretu 1986: 127-44) the city named is usually the Albanian Skutari (Shkodër, Skodra, Skadar), Bulgarian Sliven (Strauss 1895: 407 f.), Hungarian Deva, or the Rumanian fortified monastery of Argeş; in the case of the bridge, the bridge of Arta in Epirus is predominant, but apart from different river names there is also mentioned the tiny thread-like bridge to the other world (της τρίχας το γεφύρι), which the souls of the dead have to cross (Dinzelbacher 1973, Puchner 2009: 153-164). Among the names for the master builder frequent are the Hungarian Kőműves Kelemen (master Clemens) and the Romanian Meşterul Manole.

For this folk ballad there exist some extensive studies, for one language or region, or comparative ones,⁷ but also religious and philosophical studies (Eliade 1943, 1982, Fochi 1987-8, Bădescu 1986) as well as collections of variants from Hungary (Ráduly 1979, Ág 1961, Jevszejev 1965), Transylvania (Mailand 1981, Almási 1978, Taloş 1962) and the former Danubian Principalities of Moldavia and Walachia (Taloş 1973, Caracostea 1942, Găzdaru 1932, 1952, Amzulescu 1964: III 7-58, Oisteanu 1984, Angheliescu 1984), from the Aromuns (Schladebach 1894), the Pomaks (Mët-sakēs 1982: 25 ff.), the Roma (Gilliat-Smith 1962, Penzer 1962), from Serbia (Krauss 1887), Bulgaria (Bojadžieva 1980), Slavo-Macedonia (Šapkaliska 1988, Kiteski 1985, Petrovski 1989), the Albanian-speaking regions (Sako 1966, 1967, 1969, 1984, Fetiu 1981, Mitko 1878, Kamsi 1987, Norris 1993: 61 f., Elsie 1994: 201-203), the Greek-speaking areas (also in Asia Minor, Megas 1971, 1976, Sansaridou-Hendricks 1991), and from the Sefardi-speaking population (Armistead & Silverman 1963). Other groups of studies deal with the ballad of foundation sacrifice in literature (Diplich 1976, Reichert-Schenk 1994, Beaton 1996, Schubert 2001, Ciompec 1979), in film (Dimitrescu-Buşulenga 1977), with questions of gender and power (only the wife or sister of the master builder is walled up, Mandel 1983),

6. For animal sacrifices in the Greek-speaking Balkans see Aikaterinidēs (1979), for south-eastern Europe in general Stahl (1976).

7. Megas (1971, 1976), Fochi (1970), Politēs (1904: 775, 1113, 1914: no 89), Baud-Bovy (1936: 168-74), Dieterich (1902: 150-2), Şăineanu (1896), Sainéan (1902), Arnaudov (1920), Skok (1929), Caraman (1932-3, 1934), Cocchiara (1950), Stefanović (1934-5), Vargyas (1960, 1967), Hadzisz (1960), Taloş (1969), Papadima (1962), Pop (1963), Vrabie (1966), Sako (1971) etc. See also a new overview in Oikonomidēs (1997).

with the interpretation of archaic rituals as *emmurement* (Dundes 1989, Popa 1978), with problems of structure and semantics (Parpulova 1983, 1984), with semiotics and mathematics (Radoi 1978), style and aesthetics (Renzi 1969: 75-86), with relations of folklore and religion in mediaeval times in South-East Europe (Parpulova-Gribble 1988), with moral questions (Zimmermann 1979), speculations on the existence of ethnostereotypes (e.g. Fanache 1979) etc. The special bibliography cannot be overlooked anymore, but eventually an exhaustive citation is not even necessary, because these studies are very uneven and different in scope, method and quality.

The main part of these studies is dedicated to the question of chronological priority of regional and linguistic variants, the age and the area of origin of the song; as could be expected, no consensus could be achieved on these problems.⁸ Although the universality of the motif of the founda-

8. Even Dieterich (1902) differentiates between a northern and a southern group of texts and observes, that the sentimental motif of the baby, which should be nursed by the walled-up wife of the master builder, is disseminated only in the Slavic group of the ballad. Schladebach (1894) is of the opinion that the Aromunic-Serbian variants are the oldest, contrary to Sarudy (1899), who gives priority to the Greek-Albanian versions. Şainéan (1902) thinks that because of the Ikaros-motif in the Rumanian variants, they should be considered the oldest ones. Arnaudov (1920) examines 57 Bulgarian and 14 Greek variants and locates the origin of the song in Epirus. Skok (1929) thinks that the ballad is of Aromunic origin. Stefanović (1934-5) provides a polygenetic model of origin. Caraman (1934) believes that the song is of Greek origin, Cocchiara (1950) considers the Greek and Rumanian versions to be the oldest, in opposite to the Serbocroatian versions, which seems to him extensions of the original sequence of motives – the most archaic versions can be found in the Greek variants. Contrary to these opinions Vargyas (1960 [1967]), in a systematic comparative study, defended the Hungarian origin of the song and underlined the diversity of the South-Slavic material; this theory is questioned by Megas in his book review in *Laografia* 18 (1959-61) 561-77 (Megas 1976: 137-153; at that time he had collected as many as 264 Greek variants of the song), but also by Dimitrios Hatzis in his Hungarian article (Hadzisz 1961), where the route of dissemination Hungary → Bulgaria → Greece is doubted because of the fact that in the Greek versions the building is in all cases a bridge, and bridges were mainly built from the 17th century on. Violent reactions to this theory came also from Rumania: Taloş (1962) publishes *colinda*-versions from Transylvania in an archaic short form (which can be interpreted as original forms or reduced infantile forms of *quête*-songs); Pop (1963) explains that the archetypical forms from southern Transylvania and Banat with only the sacrifice of wife or child have not been analysed; this should be considered the original form, although he favours a polygenetic origin of the song. With Vrabie (1966) the research is further intensified: he analyses 22 Greek, 42 Bulgarian, 5 Albanian, 5 Serbian and 55 Rumanian songs (of these songs 15 are Christmas-*colinde*), and he comes to the conclusion that the Greek versions have the most consistent sequence of motifs. Sako (1966) pleads in favour of the origin of the ballad in the Albanian version, which was published in 1878, about the foundation of the city Skodra (Skutari). Taloş (1973) provides further arguments against Vargyas: 35 of the 36 «Hungarian» variants of Var-

tion sacrifice increases the plausibility of a polygenetic origin, the high consistency of the sequence of motives points rather in the opposite direction: the possibility of dissemination through the builder guilds of Epirus, who constructed most of the elaborate houses all over the Ottoman Balkans and all the bridges over the dangerous rivers after the 17th century. Samuel Baud-Bovy argued in a letter to Vargyas that the construction of stone bridges in the narrow ravines of the Balkans was a by far more dangerous undertaking than the building of a fortress (letter of 26th August 1960, published in Megas 1976: 125 f.). The arguments used in this controversy about the priority of the national origin of the ballad are mostly the number of the published variants, the logical consistency of the sequence of motifs, and the archaic archetypal structure vs. sentimental or literary elaboration of the motives. After the systematic studies of Vargyas 1967, Megas 1976: 125-177 and Taloş 1989 (2001), who favour the Hungarian, Greek and Romanian origin of the ballad respectively, the problem of origin is based on firm ground as far as the material of text variants is concerned, although there is no consensus on the theories provided: Mircea Eliade localises the archaic motif of the foundation sacrifice in a pre-Indo-European stratum of Geto-Thracian cultural heritage in the Danube-Balkan-region (Eliade 1982: 198 ff.), whereas Megas underlines the fact that the variants of the song from Cappadocia in the central regions of Asia Minor can only be connected with Byzantine culture⁹.

In general, two macro-regions and types of the ballad can be distinguished: 1) a Hungarian-Romanian-South Slavic-Albanian zone in the

gyas come from Transylvania; Megas 1976 considers these short forms of the Rumanian *quête*-songs as reduced forms of a process of dissolution and provides the argument that only the Greek songs have exclusively a bridge as the difficult architectonic construction, where a very real danger of collapse is evident; the non-Hellenic versions treat the voluntary sacrifice of the wife of the master builder in a more human and sentimental way; he rejects the theory of polygenesis.

9. Megas (1976: 178 ff). His line of argumentation also includes the fact that the most archaic elements of the sacrifice, without any sentimentalism, can be found only in some Greek variants; he also points to the fact that he was able to collect more than all the other scholars: 333 Greek versions. Since the year 1842 45 variants had been recorded in Euboea and the Northern Sporades, 41 in the Peloponnese, 35 in Thrace, 31 in Cyprus, 27 in Pontus (Asia Minor), 20 in the Dodecanese, 18 in mainland Greece, Cappadocia and Lycaonia as well as Crete, 17 in the Ionian islands, in 16 Greek Macedonia, 12 in Epirus and the Cyclades, 9 in Thessaly etc. (Megas 1976: 62). This diagnosis of Greek origin was expressed before Megas by Arnaudov, Caraman and Cocchiara; Skok mentions Aromunian builder guilds. A recent Hungarian study (Tóth 2010) makes a connection between the walled-up soul and the Byzantine *στοιχειό* (local ghost, *genius loci*).

northern Balkan area, where the foundation of a city or the construction of the fortified monastery of Argeş dominates (or the fortified cities of Deva and Skodra; this type of song was published for the first time in 1852 by Vasile Alecsandri and the French translation met with a favourable reception all over Europe);¹⁰ and 2) a southern Balkan-Mediterranean-Hellenic-South Slavic-Aromunic zone, which stretches from the Ionian Sea to inner Asia minor and Cyprus (this type of song was published for the first time by Niccolò Tommaseo, recorded on the Ionian Islands in 1842; the Italian translation likewise met with a favourable reception all over Europe).¹¹

The ballad of the Arta bridge is sung as narrative song, but also as a lamentation or a *quête*-song (κάλανδα) of children in the midwinter period or on Easter Monday in memory of the dead souls (for the melodies see Hellēnika Dēmōtika Tragoudia 1968, 108-13). In the variants of the song in the northern Balkans, the Black Prince orders the rebuilding of the ruined walls of the monastery of Argeş (a shepherd shows him the location of the ruins) and threatens the nine builders and their master Manole with walling them up, because the construction repeatedly falls down every night. Manole has a prophetic dream that the fortification will gain stability only if the first wife or sister of the builders, coming in the morning to bring food to the men, will be immured in the building. The choice of destiny is the wife of Manole and she is walled up despite her supplications that she has to nurse her newborn child. The Black Prince asks the builders on the roof if they have finished their work and if they are able to build a more beautiful monastery than this, and after their positive answer he angrily orders them to demolish the ladders and scaffolds. The builders on the roof manufacture wings from the shingles, but only master Manole, diverted by the voice of his dying wife, falls from the steep roof to his death (Ikaros-motif) (Eliade 1982: 173-81).

The Hungarian variants about master Clemens and his twelve builders, who has to erect the fortification of the citadel of Deva, have no prophetic dream and leave the finding of the solution (walling-up of the first wife

10. Vasile Alecsandri, *Balade adunate și îndreptate*, Iași 1852 ("Mănăstirea Argeşului", *Poezii populare ale Românilor*, ed. Gh. Vrabie, Bucharest 1965, vol. I 250-60, vol. II 159-64 comments and variants), and his own translation in *Ballades et chants populaires de Roumanie*, Paris 1855, 143-58.

11. N. Tommaseo, *Canti popolari toscani, corsi, illirici, greci,...*, vol. 3, *Canti del popolo greco*, Venezia 1842, 178 ff. Other early records exist for Cyprus in 1850 (Manoussos 1850: II 21), mainland Greece (Iatridēs 1859: 28 ff.) Thrace in 1875 (Lüdeke 1943: 181 ff, 1964: no 110), Crete in 1876 (Jeannaraki 1876: 209 f.), Cappadocia in 1883 (translation in Garnett 1896: 71 ff.).

who brings lunch to the builders) unexplained, also integrating in the plot the newborn son of the master builder, who is orphaned and left crying all night, so that the repentant master builder cannot sleep (Balassa & Ortutay 1982: 569 f.).

In the southern Balkans-Mediterranean-Asia Minor versions the construction is in every case a bridge, built by 45 master builders and 62 apprentices: the redeeming suggestion is given by birds, the spirit of the river or a prophetic dream; the choice of the victim in several cases is not a matter of chance, but the wife of the master builder is selected immediately. He pretends that his wedding ring has fallen into the pier, and his wife climbs down to fetch it. There she is immured in the stones. The motif of the newborn child that has to be nursed and the Ikaros-motif are missing. Instead the dying woman utters a curse on the bridge: they were three sisters, the one was immured in the Danube bridge, the other in the Vardar bridge (with variations), and she, the third sister, is going to be immured in the Arta bridge; just as her heart is trembling, in the same way the bridge will tremble, and as her hair is falling, the passers-by will fall from the bridge. The master builder urges her to change this curse, because her brother, returning home from abroad, will have the same fate; so she changes the curse into a benediction: iron is her heart, the bridge will also be of iron¹².

The Aromunian versions are composed as a combination of the two basic types of the song; the introductory motifs are significantly elaborated: it is already seven years since the construction of the bridge started, undertaken by three brothers (under threat of being killed), till a bird gives the solution: the beautiful wife of the youngest brother should be walled up. The motif of the child is strongly elaborated and sentimentalised: the builders should leave the breasts of the immured wife free, so she could nurse little Constantine, otherwise he will die starving. The child-motif is

12. Hellēnika Dēmōtika Tragoudia (1962: 319-325). The motifs listed in the analysis of Megas (1976) are the following: I. introductory motifs (an order of the king, the number of masters and apprentices, the names, the threat of being killed, the lamentation), II. the announcement of the victim (by a bird, the ghost of the river or a *drake*, a voice from heaven, the thinking of the master builder), III. the selection of the victim by chance or by casting lots, IV. the invitation of the victim (by an apprentice, a boy, by a bird, by the master builder himself; the presentiment of the wife, several times the motif of the newborn child), V. the wedding-ring episode, VI. the immurement (sometimes the measurement of the shadow, the requests of the wife because of the child, negative answers of the master builder), VII. the fate of the three sisters, VIII. The curse and its cancellation, IX. instructions (child etc.) (Megas 1976: 21-23).

combined with the curse: the river should cry like the baby, the Arta bridge should tremble like her body, and just as her milk flows from the breasts, so must the river flow and every month be assuaged by a drowned man¹³.

Despite all the rationalisations and sentimentalisations, the supernatural transmission of the message to sacrifice the victim and the simulation of a specific reason for the wife of the master builder to go down to the foundations of the building, the basic concept of voluntary sacrifice is visible in many versions, analogous to the archaic anticipation of sacrifice; the motif of the three sisters in the Greek versions promotes this sort of painful human sacrifice to the level of a repetitive standard case, and the curse of the immured wife, transformed to a benediction, in the end accepts the animistic-archetypal worldview of animation: the trembling of the immured wife is transferred according to the laws of the magic of analogy to the bridge, and the heart of stone or iron is the guarantor of the stability of the building. The motif of the returning brother is just a secondary attempt at psychological explanation; the task and the meaning of the sacrifice is to hold together the construction.

EXAMPLE 3: THE BALLAD OF THE RETURNING HUSBAND

This type of song is widely disseminated in south-eastern Europe and originates in a whole complex of related oral narratives (ATU 974, Siuts 1962: 79), which are dispersed, split between heroic legends and satirical adultery anecdotes, all over Europe and seem to be of considerable antiquity: according to some theories this return story was integrated *a posteriori* in the *Odyssey* (Kakridēs 1956) and became, with the Homeric epos as starting point, the object of numerous literary elaborations (Holzapfel 1990, Seemann 1965, Spettstösser 1889, Ortiz 1931, Frenzel 1976: 329-41, 1988: 558-65). The reasons for the husband's absence vary from seasonal work abroad, pilgrimage or service in the army as a soldier to more temporary activities such as hunting; sometimes there is no information at all about the reason. In south-eastern Europe the motivation of seasonal and ambulant work is prevalent, as expressed in the separate category of songs on the absence of husband and sons from home, and on separation and emigration (τραγουδία της ξενιτιάς, *pečalbarski pesni*, Saunier 1983, Puchner 1985, 1996a, 2016: 77 f.). The main topic of the ballad exists in different versions: with or without the motif that the unexpected return of

13. At this point also we have the motif of the three sisters (Papahagi 1922: 67-73 "Puntea din Arta", translated in Megas 1976: 200-3).

the husband happens on the day of his wife's remarriage, with punishment of the adulteress or the bad mother-in-law etc. The essential point is in any case the recognition scene between husband and wife (at the fountain, in front of the home) with the help of the 'signs of the house' and the 'signs of the body', which only the husband could know (Liebrecht 1879: 167 ff., 186 ff., 212, Seemann 1951).

The ballad of the returning husband (Ο γυρισμός του ξενιτεμένου) is disseminated among the Romanians, Bulgarians, Albanians, Serbo-Croatians and Greeks, in secondary variants also in Hungary and among the ladino-speaking population.¹⁴ In some comparative studies (Pllana 1971, 1978) Homer's *Odyssey* is taken into account (Parks 1981, Çabej 1980, Jakoski 1979, Romaios 1952), while others have denied such a connection (Baud-Bovy 1936: 227-33); some versions combine the motif of return with adultery and retribution¹⁵, with the figure of the bad mother-in-law (Saunier 1979: 175-82, 2001: 94 ff., Beaton 1980: 127-35). The return motif can also be found in the Greek versions of "Little Constantine" (Μικροκωνσταντίνος), which is sometimes considered to belong to the Akritic songs and is sung among the Arbëreshë (Albanian minority in south Italy) and on Crete as a wedding song, as well as among the *anastenaria/nestinari* in historical Thrace and today in Greek Macedonia as panegyric song for Saint Constantine (Puchner 2009); in this song the bad mother-in-law, during the absence of her son, exiles her daughter-in-law from home to the high mountains, but she survives. The recognition scene with a ritualistic question-answer sequence is very close to the conventional type of the return ballad (Hellēnika Dēmotika Tragoudia 1962: 350 ff.). This *anagnorisis* has a dialogic structure and a quite dramatic quality. As a strategy of testing the fidelity of his wife the husband uses a conventional trick: he pretends that her husband has died in his arms and he has given the dying man a scarf and candle – she declares that she will return it to him; the

14. Fochi (1966, 1972, 1987-8), Lord (1982), Shala (1981), Jakoski (1983), Lambertz (1922: 67-69), Medenica (1934), Hellēnika Dēmotika Tragoudia (1962: 360-3), Spyridakēs (1972: 210-2), Romaios (1953), Vargyas (1983: II 486), Armistead & Silverman (1971: 301-18).

15. As in the Hungarian ballad of Barcsai, where the young son betrays to his father the affairs of his mother; the father returns immediately, finds the lover in a trunk and decapitates him; his wife is tarred and burnt (Balassa & Ortutay 1982: 573 f.). Here the long absence is transformed into a sudden and unexpected return. Adultery ballads, ending with the violent killing of the wife, are also known in Greece with different variations (Hellēnika Dēmotika Tragoudia 1962: 363-7). In a version of eastern Thrace (today Bulgaria) we encounter the horrible detail that the head of the decapitated wife is ground in the mill, so that the girls have red and white powder for cosmetics (*ibid.* 367).

same is repeated several times with different objects and actions, but at the point where the dead husband should have told his friend to kiss his wife instead of him and her answer is constantly the same (return of the kiss), the "stranger" prefers to declare his real identity. Now it is the turn of the wife to show mistrust and to examine the stranger: the recognition of the "signs of the home" (apple tree at the door, grape vine in the yard with sweet wine) does not convince her yet (as wine seller he could have seen them), but the knowledge of the "signs of body" on intimate corporal parts (birth mark on the breast, under the shoulder) does not leave any space for doubt as to the real identity of her husband (Politēs 1914: no 84, Tommaseo 1842: 148 f., Kind 1833, no 3). The dialogical test of the fidelity of his wife has a rather playful character: the kiss motif (and the answer of the wife that he should take the "borrowed" kiss from her like the scarf and the candle) enhances the suspicion that his wife has understood very well the testing play of her moral integrity and provokes the "stranger": the "unrecognised" husband withdraws immediately and quickly declares his identity and subsequently he is the victim of the testing of his own identity by questions from her side.

This play of *ερωταπόκρισις* is also used in the versions of the return of the husband on the day of his wife's remarriage; but in these cases the playful questioning about the "sign of the house" and the signs of intimate points of the body is more complex, because the object of recognition of the many times disguised husband (as beggar etc.) is often a ring, or alternatively the animals of the house recognise their returning master; in these cases the subsequent episode is follows the Homeric scheme: the expulsion of the wooers.

It has hopefully been demonstrated by these three examples of common Greek ballad narrative songs as well as by the numerous bibliography on each topic that in dealing with Greek folklore the comparative dimension is indispensable, and that the variants and versions of each song have to be positioned in the macro-regional framework of South-East European oral literature and examined and analysed independently of language and dialect, and beyond the borders of ethnic groups and national states, even beyond religious beliefs, in a common Balkan framework. As most of the ethnographic fieldwork and folklore research is traditionally organised along the ideological guidelines of nation states, and research methods, questions and problematics are influenced by more or less nationalistic state ideologies, this sort of comparativism in south-eastern Europe folk-

lore seems to be just in its early stages (Puchner 2016). There are only a few specialists and research institutions that are able to undertake such a task, and international cooperation is unavoidable and greatly needed. The same difficulties can be diagnosed for the comparative philology of high literatures in south-east Europe (Puchner 2015), where the research situation is even more complicated, because the aesthetic qualities of art works in the medium of language *a priori* cannot be compared between different languages. Nevertheless, the commensurability of contents, topics, motifs, thematic priorities, styles, ideas and ideologies, tendencies, ways of expression, vocabulary etc. guarantees an exciting insight in the uniqueness of Balkan literature in its historic development. Similar are the benefits for the comparative examination of oral literature and folklore, because in this field the significant degree of coherence of the folk culture in the Balkans is even more impressive. Modern Greek studies should seriously take into consideration this comparative aspect, as Greek was a sort of hegemonic language in the area and a special medium of dissemination, translation and oral transmission (Puchner 2011).

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Balkan ballads (also known as Balkan folk ballads) are the emotional, slow music styles of the Balkan region of Southeastern Europe. Balkan ballads, similar to other ballads, often deal with various themes related to love (unrequited love, love-sickness, romantic and intimate relationships) while using Balkan string instruments such as the Åargija, as well as the clarinet, trumpet, accordion, fiddle, guitar and bass guitar. Balkan ballads are distinct from traditional ballads by including a fusion of Ballad, short narrative folk song, whose distinctive style crystallized in Europe in the late Middle Ages and persists to the present day in communities where literacy, urban contacts, and mass media have little affected the habit of folk singing. The term ballad is also applied to any narrative composition suitable for singing. France, Denmark, Germany, Russia, Greece, and Spain, as well as England and Scotland, possess impressive ballad collections. At least one-third of the 300 extant English and Scottish ballads have counterparts in one or several of these continental balladries, particula The traditional folk ballad, sometimes called the Child (Child, Francis J) ballad in deference to Francis Child, the scholar who compiled the definitive English collection, is the standard kind of folk ballad in English and is the type of balladry that this section is mainly concerned with. But there are peripheral kinds of ballads that must also be noticed in order to give a survey of balladry.Å Child included many minstrel ballads in his collection on the ground that fragments of traditional balladry were embedded in them. The blatant style of minstrelsy marks these ballads off sharply from folk creations.