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Proverbs, Charms and Religious Folktales: A Dialogue of Genres

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ABSTRACT. The phenomenon of some short folklore genres being included in broader folktales is quite frequent. In this paper we examine the relationship between proverbs, a particular charm, and two religious folktales from older folkloristic sources, mainly from the first half of the 20th century, and contemporary online conversations in a Facebook group with the title *Κρητική διάλεκτος – νοτιολαλιά* (Cretan dialect – vernacular). In this group, participants ask questions about the meaning of words and phrases. In our case studies these phrases belong to broader traditional tales; in the discussion about their meaning, group members attempt to interpret them through a process of oral literary criticism. In doing so, they produce new variations of well-known traditional tales. From this examination, we aim to find how proverbs and charms function in the texts studied and how they adapt to new contexts.

KEYWORDS: genre, charms, proverbs, folktales, ATU, oral literary criticism.

Patarlės, užkalbėjimai ir religinės pasakos: žanrų dialogas

SANTRAUKA. Trumpųjų žanrų folkloras neretai įtraukiamas į ilgesnius kūrinis, pavyzdžiui, pasakas. Šiame straipsnyje nagrinėjame kelių patarlių, užkalbėjimo ir dviejų religinių pasakų sąveiką. Tyrimo duomenys pasitelkti iš senesnių folklorinių šaltinių (daugiausia iš XX a. pirmos pusės) ir šiuolaikinės interneto „Facebook“ pokalbių grupės *Κρητική διάλεκτος – νοτιολαλιά* (Kretos tarmė – vietos kalba). Šioje grupėje dalyviai aiškinasi įvairių žodžių ir frazių reikšmę. Mūsų nagrinėjamais atvejais aptariamiosios frazės priklauso ilgesnėms

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tradicinėms pasakoms. Diskusijoje apie frazių reikšmę grupės nariai bando jas interpretuoti pasitelkę žodinės kūrybos kritiką ir taip kuria naujas žinomų tradicinių pasakų versijas. Šiuo tyrimu siekiame išsiaiškinti, kaip patarlės ir užkalbėjimai funkcionuoja nagrinėjamuose tekstuose ir kaip jie pritaikomi prie naujų kontekstų.

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: žanras, užkalbėjimai, patarlės, pasakos, ATU, žodinės kūrybos kritika.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The interrelationship between folklore genres is an issue that has attracted attention in folklore studies because it reveals the thought and creativity of the folk (see for example Taylor 1931: 109–132; Loukatos 1965; Carnes 1988; Κονταξής 1998; Būgienė 2004; Mieder 2004: 142–144; Kaplanoglou 2013; Hrisztova–Gotthardt 2014; Katrinaki, Tserpes 2024).

In this paper we will attempt to highlight two such cases of interrelationships. More specifically, we will deal with two religious tales (ATU *767¹ and ATU 750C^{*2}): the first ends in a proverb and the second includes a charm from which a proverbial phrase has emerged. Both the proverbs and the charm have also been recorded independently, with no connection to the folk tales.

At the same time, we will be concerned with the contemporary reception of these texts (the proverbs and the charm) by bearers of folklore in the digital environment of social media, specifically Facebook (see footnote 7 for methodological and ethical considerations), to ascertain their contemporary functionality and their transformation to meet new communication needs.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Within the framework of folklore studies, the various approaches to genre³ are primarily concerned with the classification of folklore material. However, this fact though extremely useful, is not enough to reveal deeper connections between the genres themselves and the bearers of folklore who use them.

Northrop Frye gave one interesting approach to the concept of genre:

The purpose of criticism by genres is not as much to classify as to clarify [...] traditions and affinities, thereby bringing out a large number of literary relationships that would not be noticed as long as there were no context established for them (2000: 247–248).

1 See footnote 4.

2 See footnote 11.

3 See for example, Honko 1989.

From the above definition, it is worth noting the mention of “literary relationships”, which may relate to texts of different genres and to the concept of context since “genres give *names* to traditional attitudes and strategies, as they provide frames by which the interpretive process is begun” (Abrahams 2005: 52).

The interpretative process, however, cannot ignore the bearers of folklore who use various genres of folk discourse precisely because they find them useful in various circumstances, reminding us of Dan Ben-Amos’ famous definition of folklore as “artistic communication in small groups” (1971: 13). This resulted in

a gradual shift in attention to perspectives of individuals in concrete situations. This turned attention from continuity of ‘texts’ in transmission to confer value on variation and folklore as a living phenomenon in communities and social networks, effectively redefining the discipline (Frog, Kaski, Savolainen 2016: 24).

From the above quote, we consider the high importance of the terms “transmission”, “variation” and “folklore as a living phenomenon”. Multiple transmissions from the bearers of folklore lead inevitably to variation and at the same time demonstrate that folklore is a living phenomenon that is employed as a communication strategy to meet specific communication needs on specific occasions. That is why in contemporary folklore theory the genre is considered “an organizing principle for utterances, texts and expressions, that serves as a communicative and flexible framework guiding the production, reception and interpretation of discourse” (Savolainen 2016: 203).

This dimension seems to lead to a conception of genres more as patterns of expectation (Abrahams 2005: 53) whose conventions must be recognised each time for communication to be successful. At the same time, the emphasis on the bearers of folklore themselves is not only about how they use folklore of different genres but also how they evaluate and interpret them. But to do this they must first be able to recognise them (through their conventions since they are patterns of expectation) to express an opinion about them. This fact makes it a priority for folklorists not only to collect the texts, but also to collect interpretations of them, a tendency that the American folklorist Alan Dundes has called oral literary criticism (1966). This term is adopted here and applied to the analysis of the digital environment, as discussions in such contexts are typically characterised by spontaneity, variation, and collective interpretation of issues relating to “traditional” forms of folk culture, which in this way acquire a new mode of transmission and dissemination (Κατσαδῶρος 2013: 99).

Considering the above theoretical assumptions, we will attempt to present how the short forms of folklore fit into wider narratives and in particular religious tales.

Short forms can function in a variety of ways, complementing and commenting on the larger narrative, summarising it as a conclusion, a didactic summarising phrase, or even a joke. In some cases, short forms seem to be derived from a larger narrative that explains them, from which they can be extracted and used as metaphorical discourse, acquiring more meanings than the original, as well as different meanings (Kaplanoglou 2013).

In particular as mentioned above, we will examine two Greek religious folktales: The first ends in a proverb, which is also told autonomously, while the second one includes a charm, which can be performed to cure a disease without reference to the frame tale, and which can also be shortened and used as a proverbial phrase. The variations of these narratives come both from older archival sources (mainly from the first half of the 20th century) and from a modern social medium, a Facebook group. We shall consider the comments, evaluations and interpretations of users themselves, thus bringing together generic and oral literary criticism.

THE FOLKLORIC MATERIAL AND ITS ANALYSIS

1. *The tale of St. George's Omelette* (*Proposal for classification as ATU *767⁴*).

Our first reference text is a mainly humorous religious tale quite widespread in Greece. Here is a version from Rhodes Island:

St. George's Omelette

Once there was a little child who was playing with other little children, but when they fought, they all beat him. He was sad that he couldn't beat anyone. So, he goes to the monastery of St. George and says: "My Saint George, help me to beat a boy and I'll make you an omelette to bring to your monastery".

.....
4 This narrative has no counterpart in the international ATU catalogue. The theme of offering food to a religious figure is, however, the theme of type 767 (ATU 2004: 424), hence we propose that the Greek variants be classified as ecotypical variants of this type, as *767. A similar idiomatic phrase "it costs (costs) as much as St. Peter's scrambled eggs" (*košta (stoji) kao svetoga Petra kajgana*) exists in the South Slavic languages (Croatian, Serbian, Macedonian). Its meaning is the same as that of the Greek proverb. Barbara Kovačević [1], who studied the origin of the widely used phrase in Croatian, cites both the Greek legend of St. George's omelette and three South Slavic legends of different content, starring St. Peter and Christ, which mention how dearly Peter "paid" (metaphorically) for the omelette he ate, in an episode from the well-known cycle of narratives about Christ and St. Peter (Type ATU 774 and subtypes ATU 774A–774P, ATU: 429–433). We would like to thank Professor Davor Nikolić warmly for this information.

There goes the little kid again where they were fighting, grabs one kid, puts him down, grabs the other kid, puts him down, he beats them all. He goes straight to his mother, she makes him an omelette and takes it to St. George. He kissed his icon and left.

Two villagers went to worship, saw the omelette, and said, “St. George doesn’t eat the omelette, let us eat it and leave him money. They ate it, they left a penny, they couldn’t get out of the church, they couldn’t get through the door. They said: “Hey, my little George, you don’t think it’s enough money, we’ll give you more”. They try to go out, nothing. They give more and more. They put a lira, then St. George let them go and they left. When they came out, they made their cross and said, “My Saint George, you sell your omelette very expensive” (Παπαχριστοδούλου 1963/1964: 118).

The narrative has several variants. It talks about an oblation to St. George, an omelette, sometimes mentioning why the vow is taken and sometimes not. The tone of the above text is humorous.

In contrast, the following variant is more concise, and the style also differs from the first one:

They say a captain went to the chapel of St. George where he found an omelette. After eating it he wanted to leave but the Saint closed the door. The captain begged the Saint to open the door, but it remained closed, so he thought he had to pay. After paying a high price, he left. Since then, they say that the proverb has remained about expensive things, “that they are more expensive than St. George’s omelette” (FA 2272, p. 296).⁵

This second narrative functions differently from the first, more as information about the origins of the proverb and less (or almost not at all) as a narrative text aimed at provoking laughter.

This proverb is in each case linked to an incident that explains its origin. Nikolaos Politis quotes the variant “*Ακριβά ναι τ’ ἡ Γιωργιού τα σφουγγάτα*” (St. George’s omelette is expensive) and comments on the proverb as follows:

[...] the myth is mentioned by Damascene Stoudite (Homil. 14) concerning the life and miracles of St. George. It is a narrative about a miracle of the saint, performed in Paphlagonia. A child promised the saint an omelette and took it to the church. Four foreign merchants, entering the church to worship, ate the omelette; but by the miracle of the Saint, they were prevented from going out, until each of them gave a coin. “And they said, ‘Saint George, you sell your omelettes at a high price, and we will not buy

5 FA stands for Folklore Archive. Recorded by X. Σπανού, Island of Ikaria, 1955). The manuscript belongs to the Archive of the Hellenic Folklore Research Centre and is available digitally at: <https://repo.academyofathens.gr/archive/item/540674>.

from you again.” This miracle is attributed to the Virgin Mary in another folk belief of the region of Mani (mentioned by Carvanon; Πολίτης 1899: 419).

Based on the above, it could be argued that this expression belongs to the hybrid type of proverb fables (Λουκάτος 1972), where a broader story is condensed to such an extent that it becomes a proverb.⁶

The issue of the origin of this proverb has sparked discussions on social media, on a Facebook group called “Κρητική διάλεκτος – ντοπιολαλιά”⁷ (Cretan dialect – vernacular) [2]. Specifically, a group member asks: “‘The omelette of St. George is expensive’. What does this phrase mean?” Various answers are then given to clarify what the proverb means, for example “when someone pays more for something than it is worth”. The group members present different variants of the narrative, and in some of them, a humorous motif appears. Another humorous motif appears in the narrative written by the Facebook user, adapted to a livestock context: the person who eats the omelette is a shepherd, and holding his cane horizontally on his shoulders, he cannot of course pass through the door.

This motif leads another Facebook user to make a different association and give another version and a different proverb. He writes about a shepherd who went to church to ask for a favour (there is no mention of the omelette in this variant). The story ends with the shepherd in a fury at being unable to get out of the door, grabbing his cane, and starting to hit objects in the church. In the end with the cane in his hand (not on his shoulder) he manages to get out, saying as a conclusion: “φοβέρα θέλουν οι άγιοι για να θαυματουργούν” (Saints need intimidation to make a miracle), which alludes to the very popular, shorter saying “Κι ο Άγιος φοβέρα θέλει” (Even a saint needs intimidation).

In all cases, traditional and modern, the proverbs function as a conclusion to the situation described, which has taken on a proverbial character that fits various

6 For an extensive bibliography for proverb fables, see Doulaveras, Alexiadis 2024: 577–592.

7 The posts on Facebook belonging to this specific public group are at the same time part of the public domain, since there are no restrictions from the group itself. However, a variety of ethical issues are raised regarding research, something that has long been discussed since the literature for this subject is quite extensive and still expanding (Woodfield 2017). In this paper the focus is on the content of the posts and not the users. This is why no personal data are provided (for example profile names, etc.). The relevant texts were posted during 2022 and 2023. The examples selected for the present study concern threads in which users explicitly ask about or comment on the meaning, use or origin of specific phrases and expressions related to the folktales examined here. The group’s name itself declares that it is interested in matters concerning language and specifically the Cretan dialect: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/111562482237326>. The observations presented here seem to be indicative of broader tendencies in contemporary folklore reception. The fact that we are dealing with a specific group interested in Cretan dialect could suggest that analogous research could be held with other groups of similar interests.

situations, as we can see from the related Facebook discussion about the proverb of St. George's omelette. The responses of the group members as to what the proverb means, which essentially include various stories about its origins, constitute a kind of oral literary criticism, as the bearers of tradition themselves free-associate (Dundes 1966: 512) with this folklore item by providing their own exegeses and interpretations.

At the same time, this fact is important for a synchronic approach to folklore as "It is a commonplace that each generation reinterprets anew its folklore" (ibid.: 516). This does not mean that the interpretation is always different or altered. It may be the same, as in our case, indicating a tendency towards stability, which is due precisely to the collectivity that governs the genres of folk discourse (Μερακλής 1988: 10).

2. *The story of the unwelcoming woman* (*Proposal for Classification as ATU 750C**).

The next case concerns different kinds of interweaving text and is a prose narrative that can be classified as a religious tale from the group of folk tales about Christ travelling in the world (ATU 750A – ATU 750D) which ends (concludes) with a healing spell.⁸ Here is a variant:

When Christ was travelling on earth, he arrived at a place by night. He asked a woman if she had a place for him to sleep. She refused. Christ left. On the road he met her husband. Christ asked the man if he had a place for him to sleep. "Gladly, we do", says the man. He takes Christ to his house. But his wife didn't want the stranger and got angry. She roasted meat and took it down from the fire, and roasted lentils so that she would not give him meat to eat. She didn't take care of him. She put three olives on his plate

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8 The most usual case of using charms is for healing diseases (Πασσαλής 2016: 80). We should take into account that a spell is a speech of power that is "performed in specific circumstances, which include, in addition to its utterance, the people who participate in it, the specific spatio-temporal conditions of their performance, the objects and the symbolic acts that are used, as well as the relationships that are established between these elements" (ibid.: 79). As far as the words used for 'spell' in Greek, according to Stewart: "There is not a generally accepted term for spells in Greek. In some areas they are called charms (*gitemata* (γητέματα), *giteies* (γητειές)), in others *xorkia* (ξόρκια). This latter term is a shortened form of *εξορκισμός* (*exorkismos*), the standard Church designation of prayers such as those of Basil the Great or John Chrysostomos" (1991: 222). For folkloristic research on healing charms, see: Karewsky-Halpern, Miles Foley 1978. The study of charms has also been developed systematically by the ISFNR, which has a committee dealing with the subject: [3].

and a piece of stale bread. Then she put down vines [twigs] as his bed and a stone for a headrest. At night, the housewife gets a pain in her belly. They took her to doctors, but no one could stop the pain. Then her husband goes and wakes up the stranger and says to him: “Come, and you may know some way to heal my wife”. Jesus then goes and says this charm:

“Three olives on a plate,
A slice of stale bread,
Twigs for a bed,
A stone headrest [pillow],
Get away gut ache!
And Jesus sends you away,
With his right hand”.⁹

And he makes the cross over her belly three times. So, her pain ceased, and the stranger was gone as he healed her. Since then, it is said that it is a sin to give stale bread to a beggar or a stranger who comes to your house (Βαρδάκης 1926: 244).¹⁰

This narrative, although not mentioned in the international catalogue of folktales, is known both in Greece and Portugal, and is interesting that it’s spread to other European countries should be investigated. In the Portuguese catalogue of tales, it bears the number ATU 750C (Cardigos, Correia, Marques 2006: 170; Cardigos, Correia 2015: 374–375).¹¹ In both Greece and Portugal, the religious tale contains an incantation. The story talks about an inhospitable, stingy woman who refuses to shelter Christ (or a monk or other person),¹² while her husband agrees to shelter him. When the woman is in pain at night, the only one who can heal her is Christ, who recites a charm.

9 The text of the charm in Greek: *Μα τσι τρεις ελιές στο πιάτο / Μα τη τσουδισμένη φέτα, / Κληματένιο το κρεβάτι, / Πέτρα το προσκεφαλάδι, / Φύγε πόνο των αντέρω / Κι ο Χριστός σε παραδιώχνει / Με το δεξιό του χέρι.*

10 Variant from the island of Crete, informant Ελένη Κατάκη, 70 years old (in 1926), published in the review *Λαογραφία* 9.

11 In the ATU catalogue the content of type ATU 750C is summarised as follows: God punishes a bad woman. A man is kind to a beggar (God) but his wife is unkind. The beggar invites the man to him and shows him (among other things) that the woman has been turned into a cow (ATU 2004: 398). As we can see, the Greek tale we are studying does not fit this description exactly, therefore we suggest adding an asterisk to its classification number, as ATU 750C*).

12 Marianthi Kaplanoglou (Καπλάνογλου 2022: 358–360) observes that “the incarnation of Christ as a beggar in folk tales has two dimensions, one moral-symbolic/didactic and one social. The acute problem of poverty is reproduced in folk narratives, which also develop ‘the value system of obligations and rewards that linked the family-household with the wider community-public space’ [...]. Many stories popularised the Orthodox Christian saying: ‘The poor merciful man lends to God’”.

The charm has been recorded in several parts of Greece as a standalone, in different variations, without always being accompanied by the narrative of the unwelcoming woman. It is an incantation for the treatment of intestinal/abdominal pain or disease, but, in some cases, the text is incomplete and therefore incomprehensible without the previous text about the inhospitable woman, especially in environments and times when it is no longer in use (Πασσαλής 2016: 25). Unfortunately, we have no information on whether the people who perform the spell knew in each case the narrative of the woman, although it is probable. Here is an example:

Spell for Diarrhoea
 Good landlord
 Cunning housewife
 She cooked lard
 She gave lentils
 Twigs for mattresses
 Stone for a pillow
 Come out, you pain in the gut,
 Christ is chasing you
 With his right hand
 Black-gloved knife.
 Poor old man
 Three olives on a small plate
 Three slices of bread
 Twigs the mattresses,
 A stone for a pillow.¹³

The collector of the incantation also gives a clue about its performance: whoever says the incantation must say it three times while holding a palm branch. Then he quotes the story of Christ (ATU 750C*) as an explanation of the charm. That is, we observe the reverse course, the narrative functions as an explanation of an obscure healing charm rather than as an introductory story that concludes with it:¹⁴

13 The text of the charm in Greek: *Ξόρκι για το κόψιμο. Αγαθός ο νοικοκύρης, πονηρή η νοικοκυρά. Λάρδο εμαγέρευε, φάκον εφάνέρωσε. Κλήματα για στρώματα, πέτρα για προσκέφαλο. Έβγα πόνο απ' τ'αντέρι, ο Χριστός σε κυνηγάει με το δεξιό του χέρι. Μαυρομάνικο μαχαίρι. Ο φτωχός καλογυράκης, τρεις ελιές μες στο πιατάκι, τρεις φετούλες το ψωμάκι. Κλήματα τα στρώματά του, λίθος τα προσκέφαλά του* (Παγώνης 1910: 469; variation from the island of Cephalonia).

14 In this case we could claim that the narrative functions as metafolklore for the charm. The term metafolklore was coined by Dundes, who argues that: "One source of oral literary criticism comes from folklore itself rather than directly from the folk. There are a limited number of folkloristic commentaries on folklore. As there is a term 'metalanguage' to refer to linguistic statements about language, so we may suggest 'metafolklore' to refer to folkloristic statements about folklore" (1966: 509).

They say that Christ wanted to know the benign judge of people. So, dressed as a beggar monk, he went to a farmer's house and asked for hospitality. The farmer welcomed him and asked his wife to put him in the cellar and give him a good supper based on what they would eat. He also told her to give him a mattress and a headrest, and he left. When the farmer returned, he asked about the monk and was very sorry because she had treated the beggar ruthlessly. Instead of giving him meat that she had cooked for her and her husband, she gave him lentils that she had cooked for the estate workers, and instead of giving him a mattress, she threw three bundles of vines at him and gave him a stone for a headrest. At night, the wife was seized with a terrible bellyache, as if she was going to die. So desperate was the farmer that he went down and asked the monk for help. He told him that she had nothing and that it would pass. He only asked him to bring him a saucer with a little bit of olive oil and a black-handled knife, and he went and crossed the woman's belly three times with the knife and said the above spell to her. After that, the monk revealed that he was not a beggar but Christ himself, and he advised her to be henceforth charitable and show mercy.¹⁵

In another variant¹⁶ it is said that the person reciting the spell should hold a black-sleeved knife, which means a knife with a black handle.¹⁷ Most modern variants of these charms date from the first decades of the 20th century, but, as Zellmann-Rohrer argues, there is a version from the 14th century that makes a brief and allusive use of the motif suggesting that it has pre-Christian origins.¹⁸

.....
15 The text in Greek: *Λέγουν πώς ο Χριστός ηθέλησε να γνωρίσει την αγαθήν γνώμην των ανθρώπων. Μετέβη λοιπόν ως επαίτης καλόγηρος εις μίαν οικίαν ενός κτηματογεωργού και εξήτησε φιλοξενίαν. Ο γεωργός τον εδέχθη ευγενώς και παρήγγειλεν εις την σύζυγόν του να τον βάλει εις το κατώγιον της οικίας και να του δώση καλόν φαγητόν, δηλ. από ό τι θα έτρωγον και να του δώση έν στρώμα και προσκέφαλο να κοιμηθεί. Όταν επέστρεψεν ο γεωργός ηρώτησε δια τον καλόγηρον και του εκακοφάνη πολύ πώς τον μετεχειρίσθη ασπλάχνως, δηλ. αντί να του δώσει κρέας που εμαγείρευε του έδωκε φακάς από εκείνας που εμαγείρουν διά την εργατίαν του κτήματος και αντί να του δώση στρώμα του έρριψε κάτω τρία δεμάτια κλήματα και πέτρα διά προσκέφαλον. Την νύκτα έπιασε φοβερόν κόψιμον την σύζυγόν του και επήγε να πεθάνη, εις τοιαύτην δε απελπισίαν ήλθε ώστε κατέβη και εξήτει γνώμην και βοήθειαν από τον καλόγερον. Ούτος δε του είπε δεν έχει τίποτε και θα της περάση μόνον να μου φέρης εις ένα πιατάκι του είπε με ολίγον λάδι και ένα μαυρομάνικο μαχαίρι· και επήγε έκαμε με το μαχαίρι το σημείον του σταυρού επί της γαστρος της και είπε την ανωτέρω επωδήν και μετά ταύτα εφανερώθη ότι δεν ήτο επαίτης αλλ' ο Χριστός και συνεβούλευσεν αυτήν εις το εξής να είναι φιλόανθρωπος και όχι άσπλαγχνος (Παγώνης 1910: 470).*

16 Recording from the town of Siteia in Crete, 1932–1933, by N. Anagnostakis [4].

17 The black-sleeved knife is an object often used in the performance of the charms. See for example, Πασσαλής 2016: 167. In general iron utensils, such as knives, are considered to give ironlike strength (Conrad 1987: 549).

18 And he continues: “The origin of this manuscript is uncertain, but it was once in the possession of Johannes Sambucus (1531–1584) and so brought to Vienna. It is a medical miscellany, including Dioscorides, Hippocrates, Paul of Aegina and Aetius of Amida, and was probably for the

According to the same researcher, the spell belongs to the category of narrative spells also including elements from the “Flight and pursuit type” of spells. In this type:

[...] the affliction is addressed and ordered to flee because some higher power is pursuing it. The type is the best represented in its tradition from antiquity into the medieval period in both East and West and indeed into the post-Byzantine period and modern Greece [...]. In antiquity, a range of sicknesses are threatened with the pursuit of divinities [...] The advent of Christianity brings Christ into the role of the pursuer (Zellmann-Rohrer 2016: 10).

We see that the spell and the tale have been quite well known in Greece for a long time. Interestingly this story reappears recently in a different environment, the digital one, in a discussion about it on social media among members of the online group mentioned before (on 21 June, 2023). Users, in response to a question whether they know the phrase “*λάγον εμαγέρευγε, φάκον εκατέβαζε*” (*lagon emageveve, fakon ekateveze*, meaning she cooked rabbit, she offered lentils), comment by quoting either the spell or the story with Christ, which may function as an explanation of the spell or could be said independently. They quote variations of the phrase, while one user states that he knows the story from a neighbor’s narration, giving a version with a different ending. In his version, Christ turns the meat of the pot into lentils to punish the lying, evil woman.

In the online discussion, a user adds another proverbial phrase: “*Καπαμάς στο τσούκαλο και γιαχνί στο τράπεζο*” (*karamas*¹⁹ on the *chukalo* and *yahni* on the table, meaning: meat in the pot, *yahni*²⁰ on table), informing us that “it used to be said when a person did not want to share good food with someone who came at his home without being invited”.

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use of a practicing physician: indeed the surviving pages are soiled from use. The incantation is a contemporary addition in a blank space. The relevant portion of the incantation runs, ‘Good is the master of the house, bad is the mistress. Leaves for the bed, a stone for the pillow’, and there is no mention of an old man whatsoever. Here this brief kernel is combined with other motifs in a fine illustration of Propp’s folkloric law of the transfer of components: these include the divided actions of three figures and the flight and pursuit motif, which cannot be discussed in detail here. Just possibly then we may have a distant reflex of the Graeco-Roman myth of Baucis and Philemon, in which a husband and wife are saved from a flood through their pious reception of the visiting Zeus and Hermes, in contrast to their contemporaries who violate the ancient codes of hospitality” (Zellmann-Rohrer 2016: 28). In the international catalogue this myth has been associated with the tales of Christ’s journey to earth (ATU, 750A, p. 397).

19 *Karamas* (καπαμάς) is a way of cooking with its main basis meat (mutton or veal) [5].

20 *Yahni* (γιαχνί) is a way of cooking mainly in steam based on onion, tomato sauce and olive oil. Meat and fish can also be cooked in this way [6]. However, in our case meat is excluded because *καπαμάς* (*karamas*) is mentioned. The phrase refers to something inferior compared to meat.

We note that the spell can either be framed and explained by the tale, or it can be condensed into a single sentence, which becomes autonomous and has a proverbial character, indicating the human vice of stinginess. This observation is significant, as it indicates the transformation of the genres of folk discourse, something that is highlighted by the abbreviation of the spell into a single phrase with a proverbial character. Borrowing the conventions and functions of other genres, in this specific case, means that sentences that were once part of broader narratives result in a more rhetorical character, which is a key characteristic of proverbial discourse.

CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, in both tales discussed (tale about St. George's omelette and the narrative of the unwelcoming woman), a phrase from the texts is detached and used as a proverb. Moreover, in the second case, a healing spell is incorporated into a traditional narrative from the cycle of folktales where Christ/God visits mortals, which can be classified as a Greek religious tale (ATU 750C*). That spell was also performed to heal bellyache without any reference to the story of the stingy woman. Then, a single phrase is detached, which sums up the moral lesson of the story, criticising stinginess and inhospitality.

In any case, the bearers of folklore consider these phrases as proverbs, using them in multiple contexts, as they serve various communicative needs. Therefore, folklorists should focus not only on collecting texts, but also on the interpretations of the texts that the bearers of that folklore give. These interpretations can change from era to era or remain stable. However, the interesting thing is that beyond the interpretations and the text itself, which may change, there is also the possibility for the text to be repositioned in another genre within folk discourse by the users themselves. Of course, this is not a conscious process but results from a change in the functionality and use of a text. Observing these processes is very useful, as it allows folklorists to bridge the gap between generic and oral literary criticism.

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