

Saša B. Djordjević

Faculty of Philology

University of Belgrade

Some Types of Introductory Formulas in Greek Kleptic (Heroic) Epic

Abstract: Certain types of introductory formulas typical of kleptic epic songs are synthetically demonstrated and analyzed. The introduction outlines the historical development of this category of folk songs, based on occasionally opposing views of literary historians and scholars concerned with the study of Greek folklore. The analysis, performed on a selected corpus of Greek kleptic epic songs, reveals basic structural principles that the anonymous folk singer abided by whilst composing these songs.

Keywords: formula, kleptic folk song, model, structure, Greek revolution

Introductory remarks

Greek epic folk poetry, also known under the term κλέφτικα τραγούδια (haiduk/heroic songs) in Greek folk literature, is quite similar to the epic poetry of other Balkan peoples in scope and character. Greek heroic songs, apart from being somewhat shorter than both Serbian and Romanian songs (as noticed early on by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić), are thematically varied, whilst being conceptually highly concise and comprehensive. Regardless of the fact that there are certain points of contact between them and the Homeric verse, the historical development of Greek epic folk songs took a relatively different course from the Serbian style.¹ The reason for this might reside in the fact that the Serbian songs needed to elaborate the storyline from all angles and to supply all elements so as to provide a background of the event narrated by the singer in order to hold the attention of the audience, enhance the intensity of the action and boost the effect of the plot. In this regard it can be said that the story in Serbian folk poetry flows with utter ease, gradually leading to a culmination. Attention to every detail of the sujet, that is the effort not to leave out a single element, possibly even to repeat it for the sake of convincingness, is the main property of Serbian epic poetry. Unlike Greek and Albanian heroic folk poetries, the Serbian epic is the source of some excellent songs of a balladic character (Suvajdžić 2008: 307).

¹ According to Kapsomenos (1996: 27), “a strong lyrical charge is often felt in Greek heroic songs”.

The historical development of Serbian folk epic was continuous and strongly marked by three historical events, carved deeply in the collective memory of the Serbian people: they took place in 1371 (The Battle on the river Maritza), in 1389 (The First Battle of Kosovo) and in 1459 (the fall of Smederevo), and were denoted as the “decline” or “fall of the Serbian empire” in epic songs. Unlike the first recordings of Greek heroic poetry, published in the 1810s owing to the zeal of the French philologist, critic and historian Claude Charles Fauriel² (1772–1844), the first recording of a *bugarštica* in Serbian was made as early as the fifteenth century (cf. Pantić 1977).

The fact that Greek folk epic was at its peak in recent history, i.e. in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, is particularly emphasized by some Greek researchers and scholars of Greek folk poetry, by Alexis Politis among others. According to Alexis Politis (1973: 29–31), Greek “haiduk (klephtic) songs first emerged in Roumelia in the early and mid-eighteenth century and these are primarily of the *armatolic* type”. Unlike him, Nicholas Politis (1983: 49) is of the opinion that Greek epic poetry gained real momentum only after the Greek haiduks began a relatively well-organized fight against Ali Pasha of Yannina, the Ottoman official of Albanian origin (Alb. Ali Pashë Tepelena /Janina/, c. 1740–1822) who rebelled against the Sublime Porte in Epirus. According to the data we have been able to acquire, the true apogee of Greek folk epic may be traced only after the outbreak of the Greek uprising in 1821, when haiduk historical figures and their brave accomplishments were widely sung about in folk songs. That is the reason why Greek folk epic, which is as popular nowadays in modern Greek society³ as ever, is regarded as the living folk memory of the (not that remote) national past strongly supporting Greek national consciousness and sense of belonging to the Greek nation.

Some other students of Greek folk poetry consider the emergence of haiduk songs to be much earlier than the historical epochs mentioned above. Thus, for example, Aravantinos (1996: 32–33) suggests that the first songs of *armatoles* appeared at the very beginning, or perhaps middle, of the sixteenth century, whilst the historian Vakalopoulos (1996: 267–269) is of the opinion that the beginnings of the new Greek heroic epic go back much further, to the era of the Byzantine Empire, and relates them to the area

² This two-volume collection of modern Greek folk poetry (*Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne*) was published bilingually in Greek and French in Paris in 1824–25.

³ Many folk heroic songs are performed with instrumental accompaniment at celebrations and festivities in today’s Greece. Modern Greek composers of worldwide renown, such as Mikis Theodorakis, Manos Hatzidakis etc., have composed music for folk poems.

where *armatoles* had been active, continuing their armed activities in the territories conquered by the Ottomans after the fall of Constantinople in 1453: in the former case they were common looters, whilst in the latter they became fighters against the conquerors. Historian Sarris (1999: 301–302) holds a similar view in that he considers the *armatoles* as a well-known social institution in the Byzantine Empire, as prominent defenders of crop fields and properties who became well-organized and turned to serving the people as spies of the Ottomans, and whose accomplishments and fighting were later sung about. However, whilst relying on historical facts, Alexis Politis (1973: 16) quite precisely emphasizes that “the institution of *armatoles* emerged while the society was under Turkish rule (*τουρκοκρατία*) and thus was not a remnant of the Byzantine military organization”.

As regards their nature, Greek epic songs are not ballads. Being very short and rhymed forms, they may rather be described as direct and authentic “accounts” from the field, into which the singer embedded objectification of both time and space, and of the main character. An overwhelming majority of these songs are devoted to a *klepht* (κλέφτης, *haiduk*)⁴ or *klephtopoula* (female *haiduk*, κλεφτοπούλα) and to *armatoloi/martoloi* (αρματολός/μαρτολός)⁵. The raids by *haiduks* forced the Ottomans to build military fortifications along the roads so as to defend travellers and caravans as efficiently as possible. Since not even that was always enough, they resorted to a different tactic: they gave certain privileges to the population living in the vicinity of any major road; in return for being exempted from various duties, liable to a negligible tax and granted the right to carry and use arms, these Christian soldiers in Turkish service had to ensure safe passage of people and goods, to serve *agas* and *beys* unconditionally and to positively influence the common people. In other words, Ottoman authorities hoped to prevent any mass convergence of the male population to *haiduks* and to coax the Christian population. Thus, *armatoles* appeared massively on the historical stage of the eighteenth-century Balkans. However, it soon became clear that this was not a good solution for the Ottomans, since *armatoles* came to control large areas from which they attacked or pursued Turks (and

⁴ The basic meaning of this word, “thief”, “stealer”, became euphemistic during the Greek struggle for national liberation against the Ottoman Empire, thus denoting a fighter for national freedom and social justice (Stojanović 1984: 34).

⁵ The meaning would be “armed men” (Vasić 1967: 19). According to Fauriel (1824 I: xliii), *armatoles* were “a kind of militia made up exclusively of Greeks for the purpose of maintaining public order and protecting people from arbitrary larceny and violence”. In all probability, unlike the Greek case, there remain among the Serbs “a small number of these [*martolose*] songs in older records (Erlangen Manuscript, No. 83). According to some assumptions, this epic had considerably contributed to the popularity of *Kraljević Marko*” (Pešić & Milošević-Djordjević 1984: 153).

converts to Islam later on). Historically speaking, the importance of the *armatoles* suddenly plunged in the late eighteenth century when *klephts* became the main harbingers of the spirit of freedom and when the *klepht* became an idealized symbol of fearlessness and heroic bravery in resisting Turkish rule.

For the reasons given above, students of Greek folk literature have divided the *klephtic* songs into two types:

1) those describing historical figures and important moments of their lives, and

2) those narrating their free life in the mountains.

In addition to the two aforementioned fixed terms, the Greeks have another one: *klephtarmatol* (κλεφταρμάτολος), used for a Greek *armatole* turned *klepht*. Unlike all other Balkan peoples, the Greeks do not have a generally accepted term for *haiduks*; hence solely the first one specified here – *klepht* – is considered as such. Generally speaking, both *haiduks* and *armatoles* formed scattered armed units among all the Balkan peoples. These groups had never been under centralised command and they acted independently within their respective areas, *armatoliki* (αρματολίκι).⁶ Their activities were well known to foreign travellers, reporters and their governments counting on them to spread their influence and political interest amongst the Balkan peoples. In this way and acting as something of a national army, both *haiduks* and *armatoles* played an important role in instigating the peoples in the Balkans to rise up and rebel against the Ottomans.

Unlike the Serbian heroic songs, which abound in fantastic elements, hyperbolas and allegories, the Greek ones “contain fewer elements of a romantic nature and embellishment” (Stojanović 1984: 186). Also, it was not unusual for *klephts*, particularly for *haiduk* leaders, to sing songs of their own feats after a battle, which implicitly means that any exaggeration, overstatement or attribution of more importance to oneself in comparison to other heroes would have been collectively sanctioned in various manners. It is thus possible to understand why Greek heroic songs are so concise and devoid of any additional poetic elements. They were above all poetic creations the main task of which was to depict events (i.e. the most important moments of fights) in a truthful and credible manner, or to put together sto-

⁶ *Armatolikia* could have been found only in the areas of Greece with high brigandage rates, or in Greek regions that were difficult for Ottoman authorities to govern due to the inaccessible terrain, such as the Agrafa mountains in Thessaly, where the first *armatoliki* was established in the mid-fifteenth century. An *armatoliki* was commanded by a captain (καπετάνιος), very often a former *klepht* captain hired by the governing Ottoman pasha to fight, or at least contain, local brigand groups. In most cases, the captain would have gained a level of notoriety as a *klepht* to force the Ottomans to grant him the amnesty and privilege that came with an *armatoliki*.

ries of direct participants in as objective manner as possible and to transmit them further. In a way, this contradicts the claim of the English historian of contemporary Greek literature R. Beaton (1980: 111) that “kleptic songs are not a precise manifestation of lives and regards of the klephts as they were, but as they wanted them to be”, hence they represent the collective imaginary.⁷

It is worth pointing to an important fact here: although Greek folk poetry does not involve heroic epic to the extent comparable with Serbian poetry, this most certainly does not diminish the importance of modern Greek epic, since regardless of characteristics and internal properties of a people’s epic “the subject of any epic must be represented as a comprehensively branched event pertaining to the entire life of both a nation and an era” (Hegel 1970/III: 448). While being close and having (had) mainly the same historical fate, the approaches of the Serbian and Greek peoples to developing and nurturing epic poetry, in particular haiduk poetry, are considerably different. Both peoples waged a series of wars against foreign conquerors during the middle ages, but they also fought against each other,⁸ thus impacting the nurturing and strengthening of epics. Yet, the so-called acritic songs (ακριτικά τραγούδια, “songs of the frontier warriors”) developed

⁷ It seems that Beaton is quite right. In a psychological sense, epic plays an important role with smaller peoples – to encourage the national-collective spirit and morale and to strengthen the sense of social, religious and national unity from within. It is typical of epic, if observed as a well-developed cult of ancestors, to sing about heroes and their heroic deeds with a substantial amount of hyperbola and embellishment, which was supposed to contribute to building a distinctive collective sublime character of a national warrior-hero during the intensive struggle of the Serbs and Greeks against the Ottomans. By means of epic idealization this character became a personification of the anti-Turkish fighter and is only celebrated as such. If we take a closer look at the heroes, we shall see that they are mainly haiduks-highlanders (mountaineers) already living a “free life” and being far less inclined to make compromises with the Turkish authorities than the urban population.

⁸ It is quite interesting that neither in Greek nor in Serbian heroic poetry the wars between Serbs and Byzantine Greeks are much sung about or even mentioned. In Serbian epic, however, there is a character, a certain Manojlo Grčić, whom the Serbian historian Ilarion Ruvarac (1832–1905) assumed to have been an echo of the Byzantine emperor Manuel Komnenos (r. 1143–1180), who was at war with the Serbian ruler Stefan Nemanja on more than one occasion. According to Maretić (1966: 166), “this idea of Ruvarac can certainly not be proved, but it is worthy of being mentioned in absence of a better one”. What may be an exception in Greek epic are two songs bearing the same title: *Son of Servogiannis* (Του Σερβογιάννη ο γιος). One is composed of only one quatrain, and the other is a Cretan mantinada (μαντινάδα) which is somewhat more elaborate (eleven lines) in narrative terms (Digenes Akritas appears in it, whom Servogiannis’ son asks for his daughter’s hand in marriage).

to the extent quite similar to Serbian with regard to the scope of the epic itself, but they belong to a specific kind of heroic epic, although classified as historical songs (they were first recorded in the ninth/tenth century). Since they describe the actual fights of the acrites (ακρίτες)⁹ against the Saracens on the eastern borders of the Byzantine Empire,¹⁰ they had originated before klephts and armatoles appeared and before the Ottoman Turks penetrated the Balkan Peninsula.

Corpus

The following collections have been used as the corpus of the Greek haiduk (klephtic) songs:

Sofoklis Dimitrakopoulos, *Ιστορία και δημοτικό τραγούδι* (325–1945), Athens: Παρουσία, 1993.

Giorgos Ioannou, *Τα δημοτικά μας τραγούδια (εκλογή-εισαγωγή-σχόλια Γιώργου Ιωάννου)*, Athens: Ερμής, 1977.

Theodoros A. Nimas, *Δημοτικά τραγούδια της Θεσσαλίας: ακριτικά-παραλογές-ιστορικά-κλέφτικα*, Thessaloniki: Αδελφοί Κυριακίδης, 1981.

Nikolaos G. Politis, *Δημοτικά τραγούδια (εκλογαί από τα τραγούδια του ελληνικού λαού)*. Athens: Διόνυσος, 1975.

Claude Fauriel, *Ελληνικά δημοτικά τραγούδια*, Irakleio: Πανεπιστημιακές Εκδόσεις Κρήτης, 1999.

Antologija novogrčkog narodnog pesništva, ed. Miodrag Stojanović, Belgrade: SKZ, 1991 (in Cyrillic).

1 Introductory formulas of klephtic songs

Particular attention has been paid here to a number of selected formulaic beginnings of Greek epic folk songs. It is considered in the literature that “by the nature of things their main function has to be to set the scene for the unfolding of future events, that is, to define the place as the starting point of an action – as the subject of the narrative” (Detelić 1996: 40). In this

⁹ In Greek heroic songs a counterpart of the figure of Marko Kraljević, the main representative of (South Slavic) epic songs, is not a historical figure: Vassilios Digenes Akritas (Βασίλειος Διγενής Ακρίτας), described in the *Epic of Digenes Akritas* (Έπος του Διγενή Ακρίτη). So far six manuscript versions have been found – the oldest recorded ones (Escorial and Grottaferrata manuscripts) dating from the tenth–eleventh centuries – and are considered the earliest beginnings of Greek literature in the vernacular (Politis 1978: 28).

¹⁰ These are borderland areas of Asia Minor and the Middle East: Pontus, Cappadocia and Syria.

paper we subscribe to Parry and Lord's view that the formula is "a group of words regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea" (Lord 1971: 21). It can be stated that Greek folk epic consistently abides by the use of formulas, which contributes to the relative impression of increasing schematization. Having this in mind, we are of the opinion that it is necessary to emphasize that the place (position) of the epic formula, in particular within the Greek haiduk epic, constitutes a rather important factor of the composition of the epic song since "the position in the text is not a provisional determination for the epic formula, but rather an inevitable consequence of mutual determination of two relevant moments: the form it acquires and the function it serves" (Detelić 1996: 32). As we have previously emphasized, Greek heroic epic is highly condensed and concise both in terms of its sujet and in terms of its fabula, hence the resorting to formulas as (conditionally speaking) complete formative models can be considered a common procedure of poetic creation (although there naturally are certain derogations).

If we follow Parry-Lord's perspective, forms creating formulas are determined models (patterns), recognized at several levels, primarily the syntactical and that of sound (Lord 1971: 38, 56). Grigoris Sifakis (1992: 91-92) translates Parry-Lord's term as *χνάρι* (pattern) and supports the opinion that formulas are created by means of combining models.

Although initial formulas in Greek epic are mostly varied, there are certain affinities that can be noticed when they are employed. A total of five types of the most frequent initial formulas will be presented here.

1.1 Numerical formulas

As a rule, this formula begins with the ordinal number three (*τρία, τρεις*) in the first line or within the first two initial lines of a song. Numerical formulas usually appear in the form of a syntagma, such as *τρία σύννεφα* (three clouds), *τρία πλάτανα* (three plane-trees) etc. For instance:

| | |
|---|---|
| Τι είν' το κακό που γίνεται τούτο το καλοκαίρι; | What kind of evil is happening this summer? |
| <u>Τρία</u> χωριά μάς κλαίονται, <u>τρία</u> κεφαλοχώρια. | <u>Three</u> villages are crying, three vilayets. |
| (Του Ζαχαριά) | (Zacharias) |

| | |
|---|--|
| <u>Τριών</u> μερών περπατησιά να πάμε σε μια νύχτα, | <u>Three</u> day's walk let's make in one night, |
| να πάμε να πατήσουμε της Νικολούς τα σπίτια, | to enter those houses of Nikolou |
| πόχει τα άσπρα τα πολλά και τ' ασημένια πιάτα | full of silver and shiny plates. |
| (Το μάθημα του Νάνου) | (Lesson of Nanos) |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Τρία πλάτανα, τα τρία αράδα αράδα, κ' ένας πλάτανος παχύν ήσκιον σπόχει! Σ τα κλωνάρια του σπαθιά ναι κρεμασμένα, και `σ τη ρίζα του τουφέκια ακουμπισμένα, κι αποκάτω του ο Βαρλάμης ξαπλωμένος. (Του Βαρλάμη)</p> | <p>Three plane-trees, the three of them side by side, one of them such a huge shade does have! On each branch sharp sabres are hung against its trunk many guns are leant and beneath it Varlamis reclines. (Varlamis)</p> |
| <p>Τρία μεγάλα σύγνεφα `ς το Καρπενίσι πάνε, τό να φέρνει αστραπόβροντα, τ' άλλο χαλαζοβρόχια, το τρίτο το μαυρύτερο μαντάτα του Λιβίνη. (Του Λιβίνη)</p> | <p>Three huge clouds over Karpenisi are hanging, one of them brings thunder, the other one hailstorm, and the third, the blackest one, tidings of Livinis. (Livinis' last wish)</p> |
| <p>Τρία μπαϊράκια φαίνονται ποκάτω από το Σούλι. Το να ναι του Μουχτάρ πασά, τ' άλλο του Σελιχτάρη, το τρίτο το καλύτερο είναι του Μιτσομπόνου. (Σουλιωτικό)</p> | <p>Three banners raised from Souli could be seen. One is of Mouhtar Pasha, the other of Se- lihtar, the third one, the most beautiful, is of Mitsobonus. (Souliotiko)</p> |

In general, the number three with the Greeks is not merely a symbol of the divine in Christian theology (the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit), but it has evidently retained its archaic numerical meaning of a trinity. A trinity was particularly emphasized in Greek mythology – three brothers ruled all the known spaces – Zeus ruled the earth, Poseidon ruled the seas, and Hades ruled the underworld. According to the Pythagoreans, the number three, represented in the form of a triangle, constitutes the utmost perfection whilst permeating the starting point of all things known, a harmonic product of action of unity as opposed to duality. In this regard the number three (or a triad) is the relation of a true spiritual synthesis. Since it is also both the first odd number and indivisible except by itself, it was primarily regarded as a “male number”,¹¹ thus being attributed a special meaning of cosmic perfection by Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, since it expresses the beginning, the middle and the end. Unlike in Greek, in Serbian folk poetry regardless of the period (olden, middle or recent times), initial numerical formulas mainly contain the number *two* (e.g.: *dolećeše/polećeše dva vrana gavrana – two* black ravens flew in/flew away; *pošetala carica Milica ... s njome šeću dvije* mile kćeri – empress Milica went for a walk... *two* sweet daughters are walking alongside her; *pojezdiše do dva* pobratima preko krasna mesta Carigrada – *two* blood brothers rode together through the fair city of

¹¹ However, there are examples in Greek mythology of the number three as a “female number”, such as the three sisters Fates (Moirae) or the three-bodied goddess Hecate (goddess of the world, underworld and Moon). This may be easily assumed to be an older stratum of myth (belief) subsequently suppressed by the emergence of the new, Olympian gods.

Istanbul; vino piju *dva* dobra junaka u Sibirju gradu bijelome – *τῶο* good heroes are drinking wine in the white town of Sibiu; piju vino *dva* Jakšića mlada – Jakšić Mitar i Jakšić Bogdane – *τῶο* young Jakšićs are drinking wine – Jakšić Mitar and Jakšić Bogdan; *dva* su bora naporedo rasla, među njima tankovrha jela – *τῶο* pines grew side by side, between them a thin-pointed fir... etc.).

For both Greek and Serbian epics birds are particularly significant as ornitomorphous harbingers of important news. Unlike the “two black ravens” in Serbian heroic poetry, typical of Greek is the introductory formula τρία πουλάκια (“three birdies”). This nominal syntagma is regularly followed by the verb κάθομαι (“to sit /down”, “to be placed”) in the third person plural, indicative of present or imperfect tense. There is an idiomatic expression in modern Greek taken precisely from kleptic folk poetry – τρία πουλάκια κάθονται – and used predominantly ironically, since its meaning is “get one’s lines/wires crossed”, “be at cross purposes”, look at someone/somebody in a sheepish manner, “fall on deaf ears”, “not care/not give a damn”. Depending on the person it is directed to, it may also have a negative (insulting) connotation, especially if we do not know well the person we are talking to.¹² However, in epics this initial formula appears in an ossified form both in semantic and linguistic respects. In this manner all the morphological elements constitute the key initial formula in the first part of the political verse¹³ the song begins with. For instance:

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|---|--|
| <p><u>Τρία πουλάκια κάθονταν</u> ἑς τῆς Παναγίας τον πύργο, τα τρία ἀράδα νέκλαιαν, πικρά μοιρολογούσαν. (Του Γιώτη)</p> | <p><u>Three little birds perched</u> on the tower of the Virgin Mary, all three of them crying and bitterly lamenting. (Wounded Giotis)</p> |
| <p><u>Τρία πουλάκια κάθονται</u> ἠστη ράχη ἠστο λημέρι, το να τηράει τον Ἀρμυρό, τἄλλο κατα το Βάλτο, το τρίτο το καλύτερο μοιρολογάει και λέει. (Του Χρήστου Μηλιόνη)</p> | <p><u>Three little birds perched</u> on the roof of our camp, one was looking towards Armyro, the other one down to Valto, the third one, the most beautiful of them, lamenting started its saying. (Christo Mylionis)</p> |

¹² Influence of Serbian epic is observable in contemporary Serbian phraseology as well; e.g., the already fixed metaphorical expressions originating from epic, such as *Marko arrived too late to the Field of Kosovo* (meaning: it is too late to do something); *to fall like being mown down* or *to lie like sheaves* (meaning *fall one by one* and *lie like dead*) are, according to Djura Daničić (II, 1863), the examples best demonstrating the whole tragedy of death, a person’s weakness and incapability (both physical and psychological).

¹³ The political verse (πολιτικός στίχος) is a fixed Greek term for iambic decapentasyllabic verse which is the most common metre in folk songs. It is divided into two half lines with a caesura usually at the seventh or, less frequently, eight syllable.

| | |
|--|---|
| <p><u>Τρία πουλάκια κάθονται</u> ψηλά ` στη Βουνιχώρα, το να τηράει τη Λιάκουρα, και τ` άλλο την Κωστάρτσα, το τρίτο το καλύτερο ρωτάει τους διαβάτες. (Του Βλαχοθανάση)</p> | <p>Three little birds perched high on Vouno- hora, one was looking towards Liakoura, the other one to Kostartsa, the third one, the most beautiful one, asked the passers-by. (Vlachothanasis)</p> |
| <p><u>Τρία πουλάκια κάθονταν</u> στις Άρτας το γιοφύρι, τό να τηράει τα Γιάννινα, τ` άλλο κατα το Σούλι, το τρίτο, το καλύτερο, μοιρολογάει και λέει. (Ο θάνατος του Κίτσου Μποτσάρη)</p> | <p><u>Three little birds perched</u> on the bridge across the Arta, the first one was looking towards Giannina, the other one to Souli, the third, the most beautiful one, lamenting started its saying. (Death of Kitsou Mpotsari)</p> |
| <p><u>Τρία πουλάκια κάθονταν</u> ψηλά ` ς τη Χαλκουμάτα, το να τηράει τη Λιβαδιά και τ` άλλο το Ζιτούνι, το τρίτο το καλύτερο μοιρολογάει και λέει. (Του Διάκου)</p> | <p><u>Three little birds perched</u> high on Halkou- mata, the first one was looking towards Livadia, the other one to Zitouni, the third one, the best of them, lamenting started its saying. (Death of Athanassios Diakos)</p> |
| <p><u>Τρία πουλάκια απ` την</u> Πρέβεζα διαβήκανε ` σ την Πάργα, το να κυττάει την ξενιτιά, τ` άλλο τον Αη Γιαννάκη, το τρίτο το κατάμαυρο μοιρολογάει και λέει. (Της Πάργας)</p> | <p><u>Three birds</u> flew from Preveza to Parga, the first one looked towards foreign lands, the other one St. Job Whilst the third one, the blackest of them, started its lament. (Sorrow for Parga)</p> |

Typical of this initial formula is a 2+1 pattern reflected in the following:

a) unlike the two speaking ravens from Serbian songs, two of the three Greek birds are silent witnesses looking in specified directions, usually towards cities or areas;

b) the third bird is regularly portrayed in the superlative, usually as the most beautiful, the best or the saddest, and

c) only the third bird assumes the role of the narrator; that is, it is the only one that laments (cries, weeps, sobs) and mourns while spreading unfavourable news.

As the examples above demonstrate, this initial formula has a complex structure: whilst the first line functions as an exposition providing a basic introduction to the situation, the second line, on the other hand, assumes the role of a gradation, thus slowly increasing the dynamics of events by inducing identical actions, which as a rule are realized in opposite directions. Such a diametric geographic-spatial contrast constitutes a remnant of the ancient notion of the two ends of the world: the East of life (sunrise) and the West of life (sunset), and of two insurmountable opposites portrayed by

the Greek folk singer by the very dualism of the same action mirrored in the two birds gazing in opposite directions. Sufficient evidence for the fact that this actually is about the East-West relation resides in the following line taken from the aforementioned song:

| | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| το να τηράει τη <u>Λιάκουρα</u> , και τ' άλλο την | One looks towards Liakoura, the other |
| <u>Κωστάρτσα</u> | |

There is in Phocis a mount, Vardousia. One of its peaks and the settlement below is called Kostartsa (both presently called Dhikhorion, Διχώρι), whilst Liakoura is the name of the highest peak of mount Parnassus (2455 m). In geographical terms, Kostartsa is in the South-West, whilst Liakoura is in the South-East. The same is found in the following line:

| | |
|--|--|
| το να τηράει τη <u>Λιβαδιά</u> και τ' άλλο το <u>Ζιτούνι</u> | One looks towards Livadia, the other to- |
| | |

Livadia is the name of the settlement in Boeotia and Zitouni (modern-day Lamya, Λαμία) is the name of a place in the area of Phthiotis (Φθιώτιδα): whilst the former settlement is located in the North-West, the latter one is in the South-West.

At the same time, yet another numerical characteristic relating to the occurrence of the number two can be observed within this initial formula. The second line of this introductory formula is the best indicator that this number constitutes the symbol of contrast and conflict, wherein ambivalence and contraposition are clearly detected. Carrying a particular type of symbolism, birds have since ancient times been seen as messengers and harbingers as well as the personification of the sublime and divine. In Greek mythology stories of how some oracles came to be established are associated with birds. According to Herodotus, the famous oracle of Dodona in Epirus was established when two doves flew from Egyptian Thebes so that one of them would found the oracle of Amon in Libya and the other that of Zeus in Greece. Birds are also important for Delphi: Greek myth has it that Zeus had sent an eagle from either end of the world, and the two met exactly above the mountain Parnassus, just above Delphi. So the ruler of the world concluded that Delphi was the centre of the world and the navel thereof (ομφαλός του κόσμου).¹⁴ According to the widespread belief, the double-headed eagle (δικέφαλος αετός) was adopted as a symbol of imperial power and authority during the reign of the Byzantine emperor Isaac Komnenos (r. 1057–1059). Even though this is a borrowed symbol (from Eastern culture), in the Byzantine Empire of that time and even later on,

¹⁴ The navel is depicted as an egg-shaped stone and kept as a special relic in the very adyton of the temple of Apollo.

the double-headed eagle symbolically marked the empire overlooking the East and the West.¹⁵ This very dichotomy of the “view” is observed in the klephtic songs beginning with formulas containing the number three.

In addition to birds, other symbols (such as banners, plane-trees, clouds) may appear in a series of combinations containing the number three and are treated according to the same schematic principle.

Line three of this introductory formula accounts for the climax of the introduction, resolution and therefore a transition to the essence to be told by the singer. In certain instances, such as the following:

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| <p><u>Τ</u>ρεις μέρες κάνουν πόλεμο, <u>τ</u>ρεις μέρες και <u>τ</u>ρεις νύχτες, χωρίς ψωμί, χωρίς νερό, χωρίς ύπνο στο μάτι. Χιόνι έτρωγαν, χιόνι έπιναν και τη φωτιά βαστούσαν. (Του Νικοτσάρα)</p> | <p><u>Three</u> days a fearless fight they fought, <u>three</u> days and <u>three</u> nights without bread, without water, without sleep. Snow they ate, snow they drank, no fire kept them warm. (Nikotsaras)</p> |
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The initial formula encompasses the entire first line, since it is completely marked by the number three, which plays an important role later on as regards both the metrical structure and the semantic level.

On the other hand, both forms of the initial formula containing the number three may be looked at as a three-member form of a gradation, which in fact is an important property of the structure of Greek folk songs. This is the so-called law or rule of three.¹⁶ In addition, figuring as a recurrence of the mystical tradition, the number three is often elevated to the level of the major structural factor in folk poetry.

1.2 *Invocations*

The nature of invocation itself is twofold: it may have the form of a rhetorical question or of direct speech. As a rule, there are no invocations of God or saints, typical of Serbian epic songs (almost regularly relating to the formula

¹⁵ During the reign of Basil II, the Byzantine Empire actually spread both in the East (present-day Iran) and in the West (south Italy, part of Sicily). However, even though the Empire was reduced to the territory of present-day Greece as early as 1081, just before Alexios I Komnenos acceded to the throne, the double-headed eagle remained an imperial symbol.

¹⁶ Konstantinos Romaios and Gregory Sifakis have presented equally important reflections on the function and importance of this rule. Romaios (1963: 143) claims that this three-part figure usually consists of nouns, and that the first two constituents are of the same intensity, whilst the third and most important is followed by an adjective. According to Sifakis (1988: 143–145, 201–208), this is a figure of three-part gradation (σχήμα της τριαδικής κλιμάκωσης), formed not only of words, but of entire parts of the complex sentence. Semantic gradation is performed concurrently with the gradation of form.

of miracle, e.g.: *Bože mili, čuda velikoga* – *Dear God, what a great marvel* and the like).

When it comes to invocations containing direct speech, they clearly indicate the personal lamenting of haiduks over their “bitter” (or “unfortunate”) fate. The absence of usual epic glorification reveals a less familiar character of the hero, since he is portrayed as a mere mortal, as one who suffers, feels and endures, hence this may be construed as one of the characteristics of Greek haiduk poetry. Unlike the Serbian invocation formulas, the Greek ones demonstrate rather solid connections with the thematic contents of the song – greeting, curse, lament – which means that the invocation formula is required to mark the speech (i.e. to emphasize the confession) of the hero. Therefore, the entire song demonstrates pronouncedly individualistic properties, starting from intonation and structure up to the impression of truthfulness and persuasiveness.

The invocation formula of a rhetorical question, as a figure of speech, is of lyric origin, since it implies the introduction of sequences of dialogue. In this manner Greek klephtic songs come closer to the balladic than to the pure epic form. From the perspective of the composition of the song, the rhetorical question must be followed by an answer, which functions like a specific type of a marked connector in the text: since it most frequently appears at the beginning of a klephtic song, the rhetorical question may be considered a specific introductory formula the essential task of which is to focus attention of the listener to the problem elaborated further on.

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| <p>Εχετα γεια, ψηλά βουνά και δροσερές βρυσούλες, και σεις Τσουμέρκα κι Αγραφα, παλληκαριών λημέρια. (Εχετε γεια)</p> | <p>Farewell to you, high mountains and cool springs, and to you, Tsoumerka and Agrafa, venues of fearless men. (Farewell)</p> |
| <p>Εγέρασα, μωρέ παιδιά, `ς τους κλέφτες καπετάνιος, τριάντα χρόνια αρματωλός, πενήντα χρόνια κλέφτης. (Του Κωσταντάρα)</p> | <p>I got old, my champs, among other chiefs, for thirty years an armatolos, fifty years a klepht. (Kostantaras)</p> |
| <p>Πού `σουν, περιστερούλα μου, τόσο καιρό που λείπεις; Πήγα να μάσω λάχανα με τ` άλλα κορίτσια, και οι κλέφτες μάς αγνάντευαν από ψηλά λημέρια. (Που `σουν, περιστετούλα μου)</p> | <p>Where have you been, my dove, for such a long time? With other maidens I went into the field and the klephts from their heights were looking down at us. (Where have you been, my dove?)</p> |

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| Κλαίνε τα <u>μαύρα</u> τα βουνά, παρηγοριά δεν έχουν. Δεν κλαίνε για το ψήλωμα, δεν κλαίνε για τα χιόνια, -η κλεφτουριά τ' αρνήθηκε και ροβολάει 'ς τους κάμπους. (Του Ανδρίτζου) | Black forests are crying, inconsolable they are. They are not crying for the heights or for snows, the klephts abandoned them, they went down to valleys. (Andritsos) |
| <u>Μαύρο</u> καράβ' αρμένιζ' 'ς τα μερη της Κασσάντρας. Μαύρα παννιά το σκέπαζαν και τ' ουρανού σημαία. (Του Γιάννη του Σταθά) ¹⁸ | Black ship was sailing to the Holy Moun- tain of Athos. Black sails veiled her and in the skies a flag appeared. (Giannis Stathas) |

1.5 Temporal formulas

This type of initial formulas most frequently appears in correlation pairs such as *νύχτα-φεγγάρι*, *αυγή-χαραυγή* (night-Moon, dawn-daybreak), and sometimes in the antonymic pair *νύχτα-αυγή* (night-dawn).

Such initial formulas may be looked at as an antithesis (or a kind of parallelism) appearing in two consecutive half lines. In this manner the so-called isometrics principle (*αρχή της ισομετρίας*), that is the stability of the structure, is confirmed in Greek folk songs. Since there is no other determination therein, these formulas might be considered major structural elements providing a direct induction to the situation itself, for instance:

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| Με γέλασε νη χαραυγή, τ' άστρι και το φεγγάρι, και βγήκα νύχτα `στα βουνά, ψηλά στα καρφοβούνια. Ακω τον άνεμο και ηγά, με τα βουνά μαλώνει. (Των Κολοκοτρωναίων) | I thought it was dawning, but I was fooled by the stars and the Moon That night I went to the mountain and climbed to its peak to listen to the mighty wind howling in the hills. (The Kolokotronoi) |
| Της νύχτας οι αρματολοί και της αυγής οι κλέφτες Ολονυχτίς κουρσεύανε και τις αυγές κοιμώνται. (Κλεφταρματολοί) | At night they are armatoles, at dawn they are klephts. The whole night they preyed upon, the dawn they slept away. (Klephtarmatoloi) |

¹⁸ The song describes an actual event: Giannis Stathas (Γιάννης Σταθάς), who took part in the naval battle of Mount Athos (19–29 June 1807) on the Russian side under the command of Admiral Dmitrii Seniavin in the Russian-Turkish war (1806–1807), disembarked with his group of elite armatoles on the island of Skiathos during a short truce, where they made seventy vessels in record time and purposefully painted them black. One of these vessels was named Black Ship (Μαύρο Καράβι).

| | |
|---|---|
| Αρματολοί της νύχτας και της αυγής οι κλέφτες, ολονυχτίς κουρσεύανε και την αυγή κοιμούνται. (Ατυχη κλέφτικη αγάπη) | At night they are armatoles, at dawn they are klephts. All night long they looted so they fell asleep at dawn (Unrequited klepht love) |
| Κοιμάται αστρί, κοιμάται αυγή, κοιμάται νιό φεγγάρι, κοιμάται η καπετάνισσα, νύφη του Κοντογιάννη μες στα χρυσά παπλώματα, μες στα χρυσά σεντόνια. (Του Κοντογιάννη) | The Morning Star is still sleeping and so is the young Moon together with them the fearless bride of Kontogiannis in her golden eiderdown and in golden sheets. (The Bride of Kontogiannis) |

The previously specified examples lead to the conclusion that the very space (location) where an action takes place implies the following: either it is in the open, outdoors, which is a lot more common, or less frequently, in a closed area. A thus demonstrated open space in initial formulas does not contain a negative connotation and, quite contrary to the opinion of Ivanov and Toporov (1965: 187–188; 190–191), it does not stretch between “strong epic places” – houses and forests, i.e. between the so-called positive and negative spatial positions (Detelić 1992: 128). Furthermore, as a rule, there is also an absence of the name and description of the place where the action takes place, but the concretization of the space (or an attempt at the exact localization thereof) is specified in the largest number of instances. This is always a forest or mountain, which is quite sufficient for the structure of the song, whilst being a rather wide determination in both abstract and geographical terms. In other words, the space remains largely undefined although being strictly defined by clearly set temporal opposites (such as night–dawn). In this manner the singer of tales has succeeded in effectively establishing a synthesis of the place, time and action in the song and in providing an illusion of a unified structure.

In lieu of a conclusion

In an effort to provide certain conclusive remarks on the introductory formulas presented herein, we would primarily point to the variety of patterns available to the singer whilst composing folk songs. Although using the already confirmed and verified models which often are epic patterns or the so-called epic rules of folk narration, whether there are one, two, three or more verses, their functionality concurrently proves the inventiveness of the folk singer of tales to change the rhythmicity of the verse by altering merely one constitutive element, as well as to enrich the image by means of a twist or parallelism and create the atmosphere of animism typical of kleptic

songs. In all probability, it seems on the basis of the selected examples presented herein that the number three actually plays a particularly important role in this category of Greek folk songs. The trinity of the structure itself is revealed in almost all examples whether through a progressive gradation, exception to the rules, repetition or antithesis, whilst the aforementioned introductory formulas constitute an indispensable part thereof.

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