Women and gender roles in Modern Greek folktales

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In this paper I shall present an ongoing research project on women and gender roles in Modern Greek folktales. The purpose of the project is to shed light on the depiction of women in Greek folktales, the role of women in the tale tradition, and the interrelation between tales and (local) society in terms of women and gender roles. This will be documented first through a detailed analysis of the local society of the island of Kos and its tales, with special reference to gender roles and the position of women, and secondly by applying the results of this analysis to a larger body of material from the entire Greek-speaking area. By way of introduction I shall present the background to the project together with an example of a female storyteller, who will be used as its point of departure.

I got the idea of viewing Greek folktales from a female angle while reading some of the radical feminists of the late seventies and early eighties and their analyses of the female role in fairy tales. Feminists such as Marcia Lieberman and Karen Rowe argued that fairy tales produce very stereotyped images of women.[1] The young woman of the fairy tale is beautiful and passive. She is waiting for "the first prince who happens down the highway ... to release her",[2] and her only aspiration is to get married. Female characters with power in the tales are either negative (when they are human) or not human (when they are positive), as, for example, the wicked stepmother or the fairy godmother. Furthermore, it was argued that traditionally fairy tales not only were a form of entertainment but also played an

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[1] M. K. Lieberman, "'Some day my prince will come': Female acculturation through the fairy tale", and K. E. Rowe, "Feminism and fairy tales". In: J. Zipes (ed.), *Don't bet on the prince* (Aldershot 1993), pp. 185-200 and 209-26 respectively.

[2] Rowe, op. cit., p. 217.

important role in the process of acculturation, and as such suggest that culture's very survival depends on a woman's acceptance of roles that relegate her to motherhood and domesticity.

It is not my intention here to enter into any lengthy discussion or rejection of the radical feminist analysis. I do not think that would be very fruitful. My main objection to the approach is that it took the tales out of their context and criticised texts that were products partly of a feudal and partly of a Victorian bourgeois culture for their failure to represent values of the 1970s. But it provoked me to look at the state of affairs in the traditional folktale material, since I had the feeling that the picture might not be as one-sided as the feminists claimed it to be in their material.

However, before entering into the main subject of this paper I find it necessary to add a few remarks on the choice of the term folktale for the title of the project. I have chosen this broader term even though I am almost exclusively treating a segment of folktales, namely the fairy tales, also known as tales of magic, or wonder tales.[3] I have done so in order to stress that the material used will be traditional, orally produced tales told by the folk for an audience of the folk. In this connection it should also be stressed that the main audience of folktales is formed by adults. In traditional society children may listen to tales but they are not their primary recipients.

Women's role in the tale tradition

The first collection of Greek folktales was published, in German translation, in 1864 by Johann Georg von Hahn.[4] From some remarks in his introduction to the translation we may conclude that von Hahn believed the bearers of the fairy-tale tradition to be women, whereas men were ashamed to tell fairy tales and would limit themselves to telling jokes. He knew that the young girls and women of the countryside would gather during the long winter nights and pass the time while they were working by

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[3] I.e. the tales listed under the numbers 300-749 in the Aarne-Thompson classification.

[4] For a study of von Hahn's work see B. Olsen, "Η γερμανοπρέπεια των ελληνικών παραμυθιών στη συλλογή του J. G. von Hahn", *Ελληνικά* 41 (1990) 79-93.

narrating fairy tales. He also knew that even men sometimes took part in these gatherings.

A later collector of folktales on the island of Tinos, Adamantios Adamantiou, informs us how the people of the villages, especially in winter when the nights were long and the cold forced them to stay together in one place to keep warm, would gather in the evening, often at the baker's shop, and among other activities they would tell tales, just as townspeople would assemble for literary soirées. Both men and women had skills in telling stories, and among the more gifted of the narrators, who knew many tales, the men were called "paramythades" and the women "paramythoudes".[5] As part of his study Adamantiou also published one version of a tale told by a male informant, and four variants of the same story told by women.[6] On the other hand, Michail Michailidis-Nouaros informs us regarding his native island, Karpathos, around the turn of the century, that the narrators at the evening gatherings were mostly men. Women very seldom had the courage to tell tales in public and would normally restrict themselves to telling shorter tales to the children at home.[7] Like Adamantiou, he also published tales told by male and female narrators alike.

In his work on the interpretation of fairy tales, which will be discussed below, the Danish folktale scholar Bengt Holbek argues that seemingly there are cultural differences in the gender distribution of folktale narrators. Whereas in some parts of Scandinavia, in Ireland, parts of Germany and Eastern Europe it seems to be a male-dominated craft, in the Mediterranean area it seems to be a female one.[8] Linda Dégh's field research in Hungarian communities with a living storytelling tradition showed that when it came to performances in public places the

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[5] A.I. Adamantiou, "Τηνιακά", *Δελτίον της Ιστορικής και Εθνολογικής Εταιρείας της Ελλάδος* 5 (1896) 277-326, especially pp. 278-81.

[6] Ibid., pp. 293-318.

[7] M.G. Michailidis-Nouaros, *Λαογραφικά σύμμεικτα Καρπάθου*, I (Athens 1932), p. 267.

[8] B. Holbek, *Interpretation of fairy tales. Danish folklore in a European perspective* [FF Communications No. 239] (Helsinki 1987), pp. 154-5.

narrators were normally men.[9] I believe that this is also applicable to Greek local communities.

Another circumstance that may influence the picture is that tales lingered longer among women. That at least was the conclusion reached by Holbek's source Evald Tang Kristensen, who collected folklore material in the western part of Denmark from the 1860s to the 1920s. In his later collecting period he found it more difficult to get male informants.[10]

A last aspect that one may expect to be of importance when collecting folklore is the gender of the collector. But for Tang Kristensen at least there does not seem to have been any difficulty in approaching women. Even though he listed almost twice as many male informants of folktales as female, when it came to ballads most of his informants were women.[11] Likewise, both Adamantiou and Michailidis-Nouaros, as mentioned above, as well as Yakovos Zarraftis, who will be discussed below, refer to women as their informants.

Unfortunately folktales have not been one of the predominant subjects for folklore studies in Greece until rather recently, and when studied earlier it was with either a linguistic or a nationalistic purpose in mind (i.e. in order to establish a cultural continuity to ancient Hellas). For that reason we do not have any detailed accounts of a Greek storytelling community from the time when this craft was still a living and integrated part of adult entertainment. References like the above are all we have to give us a picture of the context of the tales: the occasions of storytelling, the narrators, and the audience, and, as indicated, we therefore have to look to other, better-documented cultures for comparison. By mentioning the names of Holbek and Tang Kristensen I have also mentioned the main sources of my inspiration.

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[9] L. Dégh, *Folktale and society. Story-telling in a Hungarian peasant community* (Bloomington 1969), pp. 92-3.
[10] Holbek, op. cit., pp. 82 and 154-7.
[11] Ibid., pp. 155-6.

The Danish case

When it comes to the Danish material we are better helped than with the Greek material. It is therefore quite natural for me to use my own country, among others, as a comparative case.

The reason for the more favourable situation in Denmark is that by the end of the last century Evald Tang Kristensen, a local teacher, had collected an extensive amount of folklore material in Jutland. Fortunately he was, for his time at least, a very conscientious collector.[12] Not only did he succeed in developing a method of transcribing that reproduced the narrative form and style of the orally performed material, but he also presented brief portraits of his most important informants. In this way we get a picture of the context of storytelling at a time when it was a dying craft. The narrators of tales were men and women belonging to the lowest strata of the rural population. Among the more wealthy part of the population the old lore had already ceased to have any interest.

Bengt Holbek used Tang Kristensen's material for his extensive and important study *Interpretation of fairy tales*. In my turn, I shall use Holbek's approach in my analysis of Greek tales. Holbek exclusively analyses the fairy tales which end with a wedding or the reunion of a couple. These tales begin with the break-up of a family and end with the creation of a new one. As mentioned above, his material is from Jutland but, to quote Holbek himself, is "part of a tradition which extends far beyond our borders".[13] The social setting of this tradition was more or less the same in other countries, even far distant ones. So the method should also be applicable to a Greek community.

Holbek's selection of the material is based on the "craftsmanship" viewpoint: in other words, on the assumption that connections exist between the contents of the tales and the living conditions of the narrators. In summarising the social setting of a storytelling community Holbek makes a list of six main features which may be summarised as follows:[14]

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[12] Holbek (op. cit., p. 39) groups him with the so-called "ethnographers".
[13] Ibid., p. 405.
[14] Ibid., pp. 405-6.

1) The number of people who specialise in the telling of fairy tales is – and probably always has been – strictly limited. Tales are told by specialists.
2) Nearly all the people who tell and listen to these tales belong to the lower or lowest strata of traditional communities.
3) Fairy tales are told for and by adults (children do not form a culturally separate group in traditional communities).
4) Male and female repertoires differ. Men tend to prefer masculine fairy tales whereas women's repertoires are more evenly distributed. Men would often tell tales away from home, to all-male audiences, whereas women would normally perform in domestic circles only.
5) Fairy tales are regarded as "lies", i.e. as fiction. This is signalled by opening and closing formulas emphasising the distance in space and time.
6) Tellers and audience identify with the hero(in)es of the tales. The social circumstances of the hero(in)es are similar to those of the audience. In traditional communities fairy tales provided a means of collective daydreaming. They were escape fantasies in which wrongs were righted and the poor and powerless justly recognised for their true worth, and they kept alive a keen sense of justice and fairness and depicted a true world, i.e. the world as it should be.

I am much attracted by Holbek's connecting the tales closely to their surrounding community, and I find it a fruitful way of approaching the Greek material. We do not have a Tang Kristensen in the Greek-speaking area, but in the Dodecanese at the beginning of this century we meet the local *con amore* scholar Yakovos Zarraftis, who, among other activities, collected folklore material, especially in the town and villages of his native island, Kos. Unfortunately, Zarraftis does not provide us with any information about his informants either – with one exception. In a footnote to one of his tales he casually mentions a woman called Chatzi-Yavrouda (Yavrouda the Pilgrim). This tale was collected in the village of Asfendiou in Kos and there are reasons to believe that other tales from this village were also told by the same narrator. I have therefore chosen to present Yakovos Zarraftis as an example of a collector and to use his

informant Chatzi-Yavrouda as the point of departure for an analysis of a female narrator and her presentation of women and gender roles. Accordingly, Kos will be the local community studied at closer range.

Yakovos Zarraftis

Yakovos Zarraftis was born around 1845-50 in the village of Asfendiou in Kos. His father was a priest from Kalymnos who had married a woman from Asfendiou. Yakovos went to the newly established local primary school, continued his secondary education on Kalymnos, and thereafter studied for two years in Athens. He probably never finished his studies, but they left him with an ardent interest in the study of local matters. He was an enthusiastic local patriot who between 1906 and 1923 published various studies on Koan subjects, including history, archaeology, mythology, and folklore. But he also wrote literature: we have a tragedy as well as a comedy from his hand. The comedy is particularly interesting for us, because it is written in the local dialect and includes interpretations of dialect words. Its main purpose was to show the state of the language, in particular the damage it had suffered from the many years of Turkish domination.

From the end of the last century Zarraftis was involved in the archaeological excavations in Kos. Various European archaeologists took him on as their helper in their search for the Asklepios sanctuary. According to local tradition Zarraftis was the very person responsible for the eventual discovery of the Asklepieion because, after some fruitless attempts, he succeeded in persuading the German archaeologist Rudolph Herzog to start digging in the right place.[15] Subsequently he was put in charge of a small museum on the site, and after the Italian occupation of the island he was given the supervision of the first archaeological museum, established in the fortress in Kos town.[16]

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[15] So it is generally believed on the island; cf. A.I. Markoglou, *Κωακό πανόραμα* (Kos 1992), p. 175.

[16] For Zarraftis's biography see Markoglou, op. cit., pp. 172-3 and V. Chatzivasileiou, *Η ιστορία της νήσου Κω* (Kos 1990), pp. 516-19 and 663-4.

The British classical philologist and headmaster of the Perse School in Cambridge, William H.D. Rouse, probably came into contact with Zarraftis while visiting Kos in 1898, and their correspondence lasted until 1915. During this period Zarraftis collected and sent folkloric material to Rouse, such as tales, ballads, proverbs, riddles, jokes, etc. Only part of this material has been published,[17] but the manuscripts are still kept in the Faculty of Classics at Cambridge University, along with the letters Zarraftis sent to Rouse. Through these letters we get a very vivid picture both of Zarraftis's activities and of the man himself. Even though in a letter of 1912 he complains about his old age, he did not die until 1933 – and then as a consequence of the earthquake that befell Kos in that year. Zarraftis was buried under the ruins of his house and he is specifically mentioned as one of the victims in a local ballad describing the catastrophe.[18]

Today Zarraftis is held in very high esteem by the local intellectuals. He is considered one of the main sources for the history and culture of the island, and when in 1950 the British classicist and neohellenist Richard M. Dawkins published the *Forty-five stories from the Dodekanese*, based on Zarraftis's material, he also presented a very positive portrait of him, including a list of his publications.[19] Of all Zarraftis's activities, however, the most interesting for us is obviously his considerable collection of folklore material.

In my opinion, Dawkins's bilingual edition of the tales collected by Zarraftis is one of the most important publications of Greek folktales. It contains some of the longest, most complicated and most interesting Greek tales. Of the forty-five tales, twenty-eight came from the town and villages of Kos, and

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[17] For the tales see below and note 19. Apart from the tales Dawkins also published a collection of forty-three ballads in the periodical *Λαογραφία*. See R.M. Dawkins, "Τραγούδια των Δωδεκανήσων", *Λαογραφία* 13 (1950) 33-99.

[18] See M.A. Alexiadis, "Η έρευνα του λαϊκού πολιτισμού και η περίπτωση της νήσου Κω (1980-1990)", *Τα Κωακά* 4 (1993) 198.

[19] R.M. Dawkins, *Forty-five stories from the Dodekanese* (Cambridge 1950), pp. 1-2.

of these Zarraftis collected the largest part, ten altogether, in his native village of Asfendiou.[20]

Unfortunately Zarraftis does not give us any direct information to shed light on our picture of the social setting of the folktales. He says nothing about the performance situation, his own working method, or his purpose, and next to nothing about his informants. However, we may deduce a few things from the letters and the manuscripts of the material. In a letter dated October 1901 Zarraftis presented Rouse with the idea of publishing a newspaper that would include both the archaeological matters Zarraftis came upon from time to time and any kind of folklore he found it interesting to write about. The folklore material he would supply with notes on the language and dialect, and the purpose of publishing this kind of material was "να ζωγραφίζει τ' ανατολικά μας συνήθια" ("to depict our Anatolian customs"). The project obviously did not materialise. Instead Zarraftis collected, copied, and sent all kinds of folklore material to Rouse at Cambridge and was paid to do so. Most of the material he copied into plain exercise books and arranged systematically according to genres. Here we recognise the intended content and layout of the newspaper-to-be, and of so many of the contemporary folklore collections, published in local journals. A small part of the material he sent on loose leaves, one tale or one song at a time. The exercise books are often signed and dated on the last page. Likewise the material sent on loose leaves was normally enclosed with a dated letter that referred to the tale or song in question. It is thus possible to establish a chronology telling us when a substantial part of the material was sent from Zarraftis to Rouse and probably also when it was copied, but of course this does not prove anything about the time of collection. On the contrary, it is evident from the correspondence that Zarraftis sometimes kept the material for quite some time before copying and sending it to Rouse. For example, in a letter of April 1902 he was pleased to announce that he had rediscovered the ballad "Η Νεραντζιά", which he had mislaid, even though he had it "γραμμένην από πολύν καιρόν" ("written

[20] The other Koan tales are distributed as follows: five from the town of Kos, four each from the villages of Andimakia and Kefalos, three from the village of Pyli, and finally two from the village of Kardamena.

down long since"). In the exercise book he had left space for it, obviously in the hope of finding it before finishing the copy and sending off the material.

Most of the Koan material was copied and sent to Rouse during the period 1905-9. Of the twenty-eight tales we can attach precise datings to twenty-six. The year 1905 seems to have been especially productive. Most of the tales and the list of Koan dialect words were copied and sent to Cambridge during this year.

That Zarraftis was a conscientious collector who did not interfere too much with his material may be deduced from the fact that style and language vary from tale to tale. But naturally we cannot be certain to what extent he played the role of editor. This is a problem most students of western folktales will meet, since the technical facilities for recording the narrations were not available until the craft of storytelling had died out in most parts of the area. Therefore, to quote Holbek, "if we are not to abandon all folktale study ... we must make do with what we have".[21]

Chatzi-Yavrouda

As mentioned above, Zarraftis only once reveals information about his informants. In a footnote to the tale "Myrmidonia and Pharaonia" he remarks that these localities were unknown to his female storyteller Chatzi-Yavrouda. Likewise, in his notes to the ballad "Η Νεραντζιά", he states the name of his informant as Chatzi-Yavrouda, and since this song was also collected in Asfendiou we may assume that we have to do with the same woman. But otherwise it has so far not been possible to find any other references to her.

Chatzi-Yavrouda was probably born in the first half of the last century, and we meet her at the beginning of this century in the village of Asfendiou. At that time Asfendiou was a thriving village, second in terms of population only to the town of Kos, with approximately 1,900 inhabitants, all Christians.[22] It consisted of five parishes which extended along the wooded mountainsides close to Dikaios, the highest point of the island.

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[21] Op. cit., p. 48.

[22] Chatzivasileiou, op. cit., p. 396.

The main occupation of the inhabitants was farming. The villagers had their homes in the mountain village but their fields on the plain below, some three to five miles away. We may assume that from 1845 primary education was provided in Asfendiou, and in 1868 a primary school was established in the cellars of the Asomaton monastery.[23] In 1908 the village school had four classes, two teachers and 160 pupils, of whom 30 were girls.[24]

The tale attributed to Chatzi-Yavrouda is obviously told by a very skilled storyteller. It can therefore probably be assumed that she was the source for more than this single tale. Thus far I ascribe four tales to her.[25]

These tales are complex with many details. They are often built up of different tale types and sometimes they also include motifs from written tradition. We thus meet the Apollonios story, a variant of the Susanna in the bath story, and I also sense an inspiration from *Erofili* in the way the king threatens to kill his daughter in "Yannakis". Chatzi-Yavrouda's style is dramatic, with dialogues, brief interjections, lots of onomatopoeic words, and vivid descriptions of storms and other natural disasters, as for example, "οι βροντές βροντούσαν βροντερότερες και τρομαχτικότερες" ("the thunder thundered in a more thundering way and more terrifically").[26] In general she has a very elaborate sense of language. She knows how to play with words – some are probably even made-up. She uses a lot of compounds, repetitions and even the technique of *coppia,* all elements familiar to Greek vernacular literature. Let me give a few examples: "ψευτογογγυσμούς και ψευτοαναστεναγμούς" ("lying murmurs and groans"), "τέντωναν και ξετέντωναν" ("stretched and slackened") "η κακομοίρα, η κακογραμμένη του κόσμου" ("poor me, the saddest fate in the world is mine"), "βουβός και απολόιτος" ("dumb and with no answer to make"). She is also very fond of details. For example, she describes the wedding

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[23] Chatzivasileiou (op. cit., pp. 384 and 387) is somewhat ambiguous on this point.

[24] Chatzivasileiou, op. cit., p. 390.

[25] Nos. 17, 33, 36 and 45. Dawkins (op. cit., p. 3) believed her to be the source also of no. 42, but I do not agree with this view.

[26] The quotations from the tales are all in Dawkins's translation.

garment and jewellery of the heroine Yavrouda in every detail, the coffee-making and the men's dancing in "Yannakis", and the orthodox wedding ritual in "The Crab". (Here it is interesting to see how priests, and wedding candles and crowns easily go along with autokinetic objects, especially when one of these objects is the altar with the book of the gospels upon it!)

There is a realistic or down-to-earth touch to Chatzi-Yavrouda's tales, and she seems to have been a pious person with high moral standards. Her characters often pray to God or mention God as their helper or as responsible for their punishment. The main characters are tried and the villains are punished for their impious or immoral deeds. Some of the elements, supernatural in other tales, are explained in Chatzi-Yavrouda's versions as God's work. But this does not exclude her from operating with supernatural elements or beings more familiar to the fairy-tale tradition. As mentioned above, the introduction of religious phenomena along with magic elements obviously presents no conflict. For instance, both the ogresses in "The Crab" and the snake prince in "Yavrouda" are traditional fairy-tale elements, and in the latter story we also meet *neraides* and a man enchanted by these creatures. However, as Charles Stewart has also shown in his book *Demons and the Devil*,[27] the belief in such *exotika* is not opposed to Christian faith for the traditional villager. So in her mixing of religion and superstition, or even fiction, Chatzi-Yavrouda is probably very much in accordance with the general way of thinking of her fellow villagers.

The more naturalistic touch to her tales, as well as her skills as a narrator, are also seen in the inserted remarks where she steps out of the frame and addresses the audience more directly with asides like "mothers love their children much and what they ask for they give them", and "sometimes things become so complicated in cases like these that, while a man is trying to unravel the ravelled skein of his affairs, other circumstances arise and make the unravelling still more difficult." She also familiarises her tales by references to localities on the island, known to her audience, as for example when she compares

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[27] C. Stewart, *Demons and the Devil: Moral imagination in Modern Greece* (Princeton 1991). See especially pp. 97 and 99.

Paradisi to Alonaki: "it was called Paradisi, and indeed it was like paradise. It was a level place high up, like Alonaki." Alonaki was a locality with terraces just outside the parish of Zia in Asfendiou. Other familiar elements could be references to common practices, as for example when the owner of the coffee-house sends off Yannakis to take coffee to the king, or the reference in "Yavrouda" to embroidery and an embroidery teacher. We are informed by Zarraftis – at a time when he was head of an embroidery school at Astypalea – that in Asfendiou there were women skilled in "old-time" embroidery.[28]

There can be no doubt that Chatzi-Yavrouda was a real "paramythou", who mastered the traditional craft to perfection. I am also convinced that a teller of her capacity did not restrict herself to telling tales to children at home, but definitely performed to gatherings of adults too.[29] She is a gifted teller who is able to combine the different elements of traditional fairy-tale material, inspiration from written works, and her own view of life, and a teller who masters the balance between detail and action. The result is a very personal style because she does not just tell a good story in an entertaining and exciting way, but also conveys her own moral message to the audience.

How did a woman like Chatzi-Yavrouda obtain her story material and build up a repertoire? Again we have to make our conclusions by drawing on parallels from other cultures.

The repertoire of a skilled storyteller is voluminous. A good narrator knows at least 40 tales – "του σαραντήμερου τα παραμύθια" ("the tales of the forty days")[30] – but the number will often be as many as 200-300.[31] Both men and women learned their stock of material through a whole lifetime and therefore the most skilled narrators, those with the widest repertoire, were the old people. They also had the necessary authority and

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[28] Letter dated Kos 20 October 1905.

[29] I share this opinion with Antonis Chatzinikolaou, who has published a study and a revised edition of tale no. 45. See A. Chatzinikolaou, "Ένα λογοτέχνημα από μια αγράμματη Ασφενδιανή!", *Τα Κωακά* 5 (1995) 376.

[30] Adamantiou, op. cit., p. 278.

[31] For a description of the narrators cf. L. Dégh, op. cit., especially pp. 165-86.

respect in the community, which came with greater knowledge and experience.

The gifted narrators need nothing but an outline of the plot or the raw material, and from that they form their own tales. Skills learned as a basis are the technique of composition, the traditional ways of storytelling, and the proper presentation. In the course of time themes and, especially, motifs are added to the basic skills, and in combining these elements the storyteller is left with hundreds of possibilities. The tales may be made longer or shorter, two themes may be combined into one tale, and so on. The narrators' greatest freedom is in the details concerning reality. They add their personal imprint to the tales in the way in which they actualise and perform them. Again we notice how our Chatzi-Yavrouda fits the picture of a skilled narrator.

What determines how a tale is composed and performed is the interaction between narrator and audience, i.e. the narrator's mood, the audience's response, the whole situation. Different tales are told in different situations and different motifs are used according to the situation. For instance, Alan Dundes's study of what he calls "allomotifs" showed that in traditional lore decapitation is equivalent to castration. The audience is perfectly aware of this and the allomotif can therefore be used with the same effect. If the story is told by a male narrator to a male audience the castration variant would probably be preferred, but if women and children were present the decapitation variant would be chosen.[32] In the same way Margaret Mills, in her study of Afghan storytelling, found that in a version of the Cinderella story, when told in an entirely female context, the wicked stepsister is punished by being beaten with a snake and a donkey's penis. As a result she grows these two excrescences on her face. But other variants of the story lack the phallic imagery – none of Mills's own informants used it – and she explains this fact as probably due to self-censorship in a stranger's presence.[33] In the same way Chatzi-Yavrouda

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[32] A. Dundes, "The symbolic equivalence of allomotifs in the Rabbit-Herd (AT 570)", *Arv* 36 (1980) 95-6.

[33] M. Mills, "Sex role reversals, sex changes, and transvestite disguise in the oral tradition of a conservative muslim community in Afghanistan". In: Rosan A. Jordan and Susan Kalcik (eds.), *Women's folklore women's*

modifies the initial incest episode in "Yannakis". While the king in the original (the Apollonios story) deliberately removes any suitor in order to keep his daughter to himself, the father of our story is "urged by temptation" but immediately regrets his "ill deed".[34] These are sensitive subjects to be spoken about in public, especially by a woman.

New stories or new elements would be acquired by contact with the outside world either by travelling oneself or by listening to others who had travelled. In traditional society mobility was not great, particularly for women, and therefore much material must have been gained from listening to travellers. Good sources were itinerant craftsmen, day-labourers, sailors, fishermen, and gypsies. The gifted narrators were also able to extract material from written books, even if they were not able to read themselves. They would get somebody to read aloud to them, as is shown by a fine example from a blind storyteller in Finland. When interviewed by a scholar, he gave the information, much to the surprise of the interviewer, that he obtained a lot of his material from books at the local library. He simply had the children read the books to him.[35]

As mentioned above, Chatzi-Yavrouda's stories show traits of contact with written tradition, and she had made at least one long journey in her life. From her name we may conclude that she had visited the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem. But apart from this assumption we do not have any information about her mobility or her sources. She may have had some school education, and thus been able to read herself, but she may just as well have heard the literary stories either by somebody reading them aloud or as part of the oral tradition. Her stories show an intimate knowledge of the sea, sailing, and fishing. So even though she lived in a mountain village she must have had contact with sailors and fishermen. This may have happened

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culture [Publications of the American Folklore Society, New Series vol. 8] (Philadelphia 1985), pp. 204-6.

[34] See also Chatzinikolaou, op. cit., p. 419.

[35] G. Herranen, "Aspects of a blind storyteller's repertoire". In: R. Kvideland and H. K. Sehmsdorf (eds.), *Nordic Folklore. Recent studies* (Bloomington 1989), p. 65.

during the Summer period when the villagers camped in the plain close to the sea in order to attend to their fields.

Holbek's model

For analysing the content of fairy tales Holbek uses a synthetic model, based mainly on the works of the famous Russian formalist Vladimir Propp[36] and those of Elli Köngäs Maranda and Pierre Maranda.[37] The basic principle is Propp's definition of a function as "an act of a tale role, defined from the point of view of its significance for the course of action". This definition implies, in Holbek's words, that "the meaning of an action in a fairy tale is to be seen or deduced from its result. Superficially identical actions which lead to different results represent different functions." This principle Holbek applies, contrary to Propp, to the narrative as a whole, and he states the reasons for choosing this method as follows:

> it is the *only* way to expose the basic system of semantic oppositions in fairy tales as discovered by Köngäs Maranda. We regard that system as vitally important because it reflects the real oppositions dominating traditional storytelling communities.[38]

According to Köngäs Maranda a personage in a European folktale represented three "dimensions": that of status (H = high, L = low), that of age (Y = young, A = adult); and that of sex (M = male, F = female).[39] These dimensions or categories Holbek views as "the very categories we assume to have been of importance to the traditional storytellers and their audiences", and it "depicts a semantically defined system of tale roles", in

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[36] V. Propp. *The morphology of the folktale* [American Folklore Society bibliographical and special series vol. 9; Indiana University Research Center in Anthropology, Folklore and Linguistics 10] (2nd rev. ed., Austin/London 1968).

[37] E. Köngäs Maranda and P. Maranda, *Structural models in folklore and transformational essays* [Approaches to Semiotics 10] (The Hague/Paris 1971).

[38] Op. cit., p. 410.

[39] Holbek, op. cit., p. 347.

contrast to most structuralistic systems which are syntactically defined.[40]

According to Holbek's model the most significant part of the tale is the end. In that he follows Axel Olrik's "law of the weight of the stern", i.e. the most important comes last.[41] The wedding in the end of the story Holbek sees as the crowning achievement of efforts at three levels:

> that of gaining independence from parents and other authorities of the preceding generation, that of winning the love of a person of the opposite sex; and that of securing the future of the new family.

These efforts are, then, dominated by three sets of thematic oppositions: "1) that of the conflict between generations," (Y vs. A, following Köngäs Maranda's system) "2) that of the meeting of the sexes," (M vs. F) and "3) that of the social opposition between the 'haves' and the 'have nots'" (L vs. H).[42]

To sum up, the general theme of fairy tales could be expressed as two conflicts: a social and a sexual conflict. Every tale has two main characters: a young person of each sex, one of them being of low social status and the other of high. Both main characters have to pass the sexual conflict or the conflict of maturity, i.e. they both have to pass from Y to A. But the young person of low social status (LYM/LYF) in addition has to pass the social conflict, i.e. to pass from L to H. The gender of the tale corresponds with the gender of the young person of low social status. If this character is male (LYM) the gender of the tale is also masculine and accordingly if this character is female (LYF) the gender of the tale is feminine. Some tale types are found both in masculine and feminine versions.

Gender

Tang Kristensen's material showed that while women tend to tell almost the same amount of masculine and feminine tales,

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[40] Holbek, op. cit., p. 388.
[41] Holbek, op. cit., p. 411.
[42] Op. cit., p. 410.

men tell far more masculine tales than feminine.[43] Mills's study of Afghan storytelling revealed almost the same situation,[44] and I thus find it reasonable to assume that the situation must have been similar in Greece. It is obviously not interesting to men to tell stories about the female world, or else they do not have the required knowledge to do so. Women on the other hand find it equally interesting to tell stories about the female and the male worlds, and it might also be easier for them to gain information about the male world than *vice versa*. This is definitely the case in a traditional Muslim society like the Afghan, where the male world is more visible and public than the female. But I do not think the situation in a traditional Greek community would be very different. Here we also encounter a strong gender segregation, the male sphere being the public and the female the private, and strict regulations on women's mobility.[45] This is reflected in the tales as we shall see below. Taking into consideration the parallels drawn from other cultures as well as the documented gender segregation of the traditional Greek community it is thus far my hypothesis that in Greece too the greater part of the feminine tales are told by women. All the four tales I ascribe to Chatzi-Yavrouda contain feminine stories. One of them ("Yannakis") has a masculine frame story but with a feminine insert.

The picture of women

How are women portrayed in Chatzi-Yavrouda's tales? Are they just passive and beautiful as the feminists claimed the heroines of the so-called best-known tales to be? Of course the activity level depends on the gender of the tale. In a masculine tale the hero plays the active role but is normally helped by the heroine, and correspondingly in a feminine tale the heroine plays the active role. It is therefore a prerequisite to any analysis to clarify the gender of the tale. It is no less important to define what is meant by activity. Obviously we cannot expect the two sexes to act in the same way in tales rooted in a

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[43] Holbek, op. cit., pp. 161-9.

[44] Op. cit., pp. 187-8.

[45] Cf. J. Dubisch, *Gender and power in rural Greece* (Princeton 1986), pp. 9-12 with further references, and Stewart, op. cit., pp. 49 and 67

traditional society. It would be anachronistic to expect the heroines of the tales to act by the same means and in the same ways as the heroes. To illustrate this I shall use Chatzi-Yavrouda's story "Myrmidonia and Pharaonia". It is a complex tale comprising different tale-types, but for now I shall concentrate on the main story.

The initial part of this tale is normally known in a masculine version where a young prince mocks an old woman and consequently he is cursed with the longing for Trisevgeni (Thrice-Noble). He therefore takes off in search of her, and on his way he has to perform various tasks. But our narrator chooses to change the gender of the tale, and this has some consequences. The heroine, Tartana, being a young girl of marriageable age, is not able to set off in search of her beloved, so she sends her brother in her stead. He gets into trouble because of her, and hence she has to rescue him. Again this cannot be done directly, so she is forced to leave home, hidden in a trunk, and is sent to sea. Up to this point she has not been very active on her own behalf, but from now on she takes both her own and her brother's fate in her hands. The tool she uses for saving her brother's life and clearing her own name and honour and in the end winning the young king, is female cleverness. Disguised as a veiled dancer she gains access to the palace and succeeds in threatening her evil spirit, the Negro, to make him admit his falseness against herself and her brother.

She *is* described as beautiful and the king's first motive for marrying her is her beauty. But when necessary she is also clever and assertive. She merely acts within the confines of a woman's possibilities in a traditional society.

To some extent Chatzi-Yavrouda's other heroines have the same characteristics. Both Yavrouda from "Yavrouda" and Angelikoula from "Yannakis" are also forced out of their homes and sent on journeys. Like Tartana, Angelikoula also has to defend her honour, and even to overcome serious attacks on her virtue. Tartana and Angelikoula are both "active" heroines or female counterparts to the heroes of the masculine tales. Yavrouda on the other hand is a "persecuted" heroine. She has to redeem an ill deed, the killing of her mother, and as a consequence she has to pass different tests. She saves two men, and they are both as dependent on her as Cinderella and the

Sleeping Beauty are on Prince Charming. The tests that she passes are nothing like the killing of dragons or the fighting with giants that a male hero would undertake but activities normally associated with the female sphere. She has to deliver and nurse a child and to marry a young man. But when it is taken into account that this child, and later young man, is a snake that eats the hands of the midwives, the breasts of the nurses and, when married, the entire bodies of his brides in the wedding bed, her deeds are no less spectacular than those of a male hero.

All Chatzi-Yavrouda's heroines are good Christians and they are often helped by God. This is also one of the elements that places her stories closer to the reality of the surrounding community. In traditional Greek society the relationship with religion and the church is the women's responsibility. They are responsible for the family's spiritual condition as men are for its material condition.[46]

Tales and society

In general the heroines of Greek folktales present traditional female values. They are tested on skills associated with the female sphere: they have to spin enormous amounts of wool, sweep a whole tower, do the laundry without soap, provide food with no ingredients, etc. But that does not mean that they are passive or unassertive. They succeed in performing the tasks or deeds by a mixture of inventiveness and the mastering of female skills.

They are not able to set off to seek their fortune, but they can, for example, travel freely disguised as a nun. They can also let the world come to them by building an inn or a bath house and in this way obtain the contact and information needed, or they may be forced to leave home in one way or the other, as with the heroine in "Myrmidonia and Pharaonia". If the heroines leave home on their own initiative to seek their fortunes, they do so disguised as men. In some Greek tales the young heroines dress and act like men. These are the stories about the girl who went to war. The girl dresses and acts like a man, but if, at some point in the story, there is doubt about her gender, in the end she wins the test by proving very skilled in a specific female virtue: modesty.

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[46] See Stewart, op. cit., p. 68 with further references.

There are even examples of gender shifts in the tales. Again a girl goes off to war dressed like a man, acts bravely, and (unluckily) is rewarded by being given the king's daughter in marriage. After many trials she has to undergo a gender shift in order to secure the happy ending.

It is remarkable that in the Afghan tradition the tales about women dressing and acting like men were mainly told by male narrators.[47] Mills also refers to a few tales containing gender shifts *per se*, and these were all told by male narrators.[48] Unfortunately I have not thus far come across any Greek variant of tales concerning change either of sex roles or of sex told by an eponymous narrator, and therefore I am not able to make any conclusions yet about the gender distribution of this kind of tale in Greece.

The heroines of Chatzi-Yavrouda's tales are, of course, beautiful – would it be a fairy tale if they were not? But if their beauty plays a role at all it is a negative one because it makes them attractive and thus vulnerable to male desires, and to attacks on their virtue. Beauty is definitely not the heroines' only asset and does not function as such in the tales. It may also be noted that Chatzi-Yavrouda's male heroes are not less attractive than her heroines. Yannakis is described as "όμορφον" ("fair"), the Crab is compared to an angel and his brothers are "παράμορφα παλλικάρια" ("very handsome youths").

The final result of all fairy tales, masculine or feminine, is the same: the wedding. If we follow Holbek the theme of a tale is maturity and replacement of generations. The young persons have to come to terms with their own sexuality, to show themselves capable of meeting and living with the other sex, and to prove their ability to replace the older generation "on the throne". This is what the happy ending means, and in traditional society, in Greece as elsewhere, marriage is considered a necessity for male and female individuals alike.[49] Since the time of courtship in traditional society is a period when, to quote Stewart, "males and females exhibit very marked

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[47] Mills, op. cit., pp. 188, 193-5 and 210.
[48] Op. cit., p. 210.
[49] For Greece cf. J. du Boulay, *Portrait of a Greek mountain village* (Oxford 1974), p. 121, and Stewart, op. cit., p. 75.

and stylized gender traits",[50] it is only natural that the skills tested in the tales are the gender-specific ones.

In presenting the storyteller Chatzi-Yavrouda, I hope I have managed to give an outline of my project and its theoretical foundations. As stated at the beginning of this paper, it is my intention, after the detailed analysis of Chatzi-Yavrouda's tales and the other – anonymous – Koan tales, to extend the analysis to anonymous and eponymous tales from other parts of Greece. I expect this approach to enable me, in due time, to present a more detailed and well-documented picture of women and gender roles in Modern Greek fairy tales.

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[50] Op. cit., p. 175.