Richard M. Dawkins: a pioneer in the field of Modern Greek folktales

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R. M. Dawkins may be known to readers in different capacities: that of a classicist, an archaeologist, a medievalist, a linguist, or a folktale scholar, and in fact Dawkins was all of these but at different times. What may not be quite as commonly known is that he was also an intelligence officer in the British Secret Service and a mature student at Cambridge.

Since the oral version of this paper was given at his old university, I thought it appropriate to let him explain in his own words how he chose Cambridge and his future career:

> It has sometimes occurred to me that the more important actions of my life have been to all appearances directed by the merest chance [...]. Jimmy was now at St Jacut, having just finished first year at Selwyn with a view to holy orders. At Stratford Road I had frequently met a young clergyman called Tapper, a running blue and scholar at St John's Cambridge. At St Jacut I formed the plan of going to Cambridge and then seeing what would happen to me: Orders were in my mind for I had lately moved back to a perhaps rather nebulous form of Christian belief. However I had never looked much to the future and did not so now. Why Cambridge rather than Oxford? Jimmy was at Cambridge: Tapper had been at Cambridge; Latin prose was needed for entry into Oxford and Latin prose I was certain I could not do and I had neither time nor money to get myself taught. So it was to be Cambridge. But I knew nothing of the colleges; I asked Jimmy Hamilton. He said that he had never heard anything against Emmanuel. So I wrote to the Master of Emmanuel asking to be admitted that October. Confident that classics were beyond my powers I thought I would read Modern Languages. But when I came to London some time in Septem-

> ber I began to talk to Tapper and he insisted upon my reading for the Classical Tripos. So chance, Jimmy Hamilton and Tapper together sent me to Cambridge rather than to Oxford, where I should hardly had attained entrance, and to Emmanuel and to read classics there. It would have been impossible for me to have met with a more fortunate combination of circumstances.[1]

This quotation is from one of two sketches for an autobiography that remain in the Dawkins Archives at the Taylor Institution at Oxford.[2] I have used these documents extensively for my portrait of Dawkins.

Dawkins was born in 1871 and came to Cambridge in 1898. So it was not until he had reached the age of twenty-seven that he seemed at last to have found his niche. His first education he had obtained from his mother at home and he was very pleased with that arrangement. He describes his mother as "extremely competent and well read".[3] After that he seemed a misfit in the educational system. He went to a local grammar school and then to Marlborough College. He has almost nothing positive to say about the years at Marlborough, where he was bullied because of his red hair and lack of skills in any kind of sports, and furthermore he was left-handed.[4] When later on in life he wants to offer some kind of explanation for misleading his parents, he remarks: "I was the last boy who ought to have been send to a public school."[5] What he did bring with him from Marlborough was an interest in botany and in classics – both of which would develop in the years to come.

After Marlborough Dawkins studied electrical engineering at King's College, London. This was the career path his father had chosen for him and he was not at all pleased with it. He secretly saved part of his allowance in order to buy books and in his spare time he studied all kinds of humanities subjects. In particular, "exotic" languages, such as Icelandic and Sanskrit, seem to have drawn his attention, but he also read much classical literature.[6]

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[1] Dawkins 1938: 22-3.
[2] Dawkins 1938 and 1950a.
[3] Dawkins 1938: 6.
[4] Ibid., pp. 8-12.
[5] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

When his parents died in the years 1896-97, Dawkins felt morally and economically free to make his own decisions about the future and, as mentioned above, this led him to Cambridge. Once in his right element he flourished. He could now freely indulge in the subjects he had earlier studied in secret, and, not surprisingly, he specialized in linguistics.

It was also during his Cambridge days that Dawkins had his first encounter with Greece. In the Easter of 1900 he travelled for thirty-three days to many of the well-known sites and he published his impressions from this first journey to Greece in his college journal, the *Emmanuel College Magazine.*[7] What strikes the reader in this account is the lack of details when it comes to the famous classical sites, whereas the descriptions of the landscape and the way of life of the peasants are much more thorough. Dawkins was obviously more interested in the botany and customs of Modern Greece than in the remains from antiquity, or at least this is what he chooses to present to his readers. After having described, for almost a page, the Greek Easter celebrations, this is, for example, how he presents the rather famous location where he was staying at the time: "The beautiful situation of Delphi is so well known as to hardly need mentioning."[8]

We may detect the first signs of Dawkins's interest in folklore in this brief account from his student days, but it was not until much later in life that this interest was turned into a professional line of study. In his essay to commemorate the tenth anniversary of Dawkins's death, the folklore scholar Robert Georges claims that Dawkins's first excursions into folklore were more in the form of descriptions,[9] and this is exactly what we see here. An example is the description of the tools of a spinning woman – to which the classicist Dawkins remarks that they seem not to have changed since antiquity.[10] For many years Dawkins continued to include such folkloristic observations in his travel accounts.[11] But what I would like to stress here is that this tendency started at an early stage even before he began his professional career in classics – or, to be more precise, classical archaeology.

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[6] Ibid., pp. 12-18.

[7] Dawkins 1900.

[8] Ibid., pp. 179-80.

[9] Georges 1965: 203.

After taking his Cambridge degree in 1902 Dawkins joined the British School at Athens, and worked there – mainly in the field of archaeology – until the First World War. It is in this period that we see his first contact with the Greek folktale.

Until rather recently the interest in folktales has been very limited among Greek folklore scholars and therefore Dawkins's contribution is all the more important.

Folktales were collected in Greece from the beginning of the nineteenth century and, especially after the middle of the century, this activity was increasing. In 1856 a general appeal from the Ministry of Education to all schoolteachers to collect the folklore of their local area resulted in a massive accumulation of material, but unfortunately most of it still remains unpublished in the archives, especially that established in 1918 by Nikolaos Politis and now in the Academy of Athens. A small proportion of the material was published in the various local folklore journals and especially in the journal of the Folklore Society, *Λαογραφία.*[12]

However, almost nobody collected folktales in the late nineteenth or early twentieth century because of an interest in these tales as such. (Adamantios Adamantiou, who worked on Tinos, may be an exception to this general picture.) The first collector of Greek tales, the Austrian Johann Georg von Hahn, wished with his collection to support the theories of the Grimm Brothers, and in his German translation of the tales he treated them as though they were ancient myths.[13] The Danish philologist Jean Pio, who was the first to publish a collection of Greek tales in Greek, did so for linguistic reasons. Being an advocate of the demotic language Pio wanted to present a language that was otherwise "hidden from the foreign student [...] by the purified language of the books".[14] This was also Dawkins's way into the field.

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[10] Dawkins 1900: 173.

[11] See for example Dawkins 1902-3,1903-4, 1904-5 and 1906.

[12] Olsen 2005: 396.

[13] Olsen 1990.

In his above-mentioned essay, Georges examines Dawkins's folklore scholarship by categories, starting with the collection of material. I do not fully agree with Georges's positive evaluation of Dawkins's contribution on this point. As for Pio and others, Dawkins's motives for studying folktales were purely linguistic. He himself began collecting as early as 1909. At that time he had lived in Greece for seven years and had become Director of the British School at Athens. Over the years he had been developing an interest in Modern Greek and especially in its various dialects.[15] Between 1909 and 1911 he made several field trips to Asia Minor, where he collected a considerable amount of tales. These he incorporated as samples of speech in his important study *Modern Greek in Asia Minor,* published in 1916. However, Dawkins had no interest in the tales as such and in his memoirs some forty years later he regretfully remarks: "It is curious that when in [...] 1909, 1910, and 1911, I collected a mass of stories in the Greek speaking villages of Cappadocia I found the texts themselves apart from their language of so little interest that I induced a friend to write the necessary notes on them."[16] So it is not surprising that Dawkins gives very little information about the collection, the informants, the recording situation etc., or that the texts are not very interesting as *tale* texts. His approach was not necessarily the best for obtaining a good version of a tale told by a skilled narrator.

As mentioned, Dawkins's interest in folklore was to some extent present already at the time of his first journey to Greece. This interest developed further, partly through his linguistic research and partly inspired by his long-lasting and close intellectual relationship with Frederick W. Hasluck.[17] Hasluck was also a classicist, also a former Cambridge student, and for many years librarian at the School at Athens. He moved into the field of folklore and religious beliefs and is now considered an important figure in early British anthropology.[18] His main work was posthumously collected and published by his wife Margaret M. Hasluck, in two volumes entitled *Christianity and Islam under the Sultans* (1929).

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[14] Pio 1879: III-IV.

[15] This interest started already in his first year at Athens with a journey to Karpathos. See Dawkins 1938: 31.

[16] Dawkins 1950a: XI, 3-4.

This is how Dawkins himself characterizes his correspondence with Hasluck during the war:

> I think that after all the main preventative of mental rust in those years was a long and close correspondence with F. W. Hasluck. [...] it would be difficult to estimate how much I was benefited by this close contact with a mind in many ways so very different from my own and yet bent on the same studies and with the same interests. Hasluck's knowledge of the mentality of the people about whose beliefs he was writing showed me that no study of savages and still less of prehistoric peoples can ever lead to results as solid as can a study of people nearer to us with whom we can come into personal contact. This knowledge Hasluck had won by many years of sympathetic travelling in Greece and still more in Turkey. [...] I must count this correspondence and our close though always very limited friendship as one of the most profitable to my mental development that has ever come my way.[19]

After the war Dawkins once more left it to chance when he was to decide on his future career. He had resigned from the directorship at the School at Athens before the war broke out and during it he had been occupied in the British Secret Service[20] – as had other academics, including Hasluck.[21] But now Dawkins was searching for a job and did not quite know in which direction to look. He felt he had left archaeology behind him and that he was not capable of teaching classics. But when at the same time a Chair of Byzantine and Modern Greek was established at Oxford, Dawkins applied and was elected as the first Bywater and Sotheby Professor of Byzantine and Modern Greek language and literature. This post he occupied for almost twenty years, until his retirement in 1939.[22]

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[17] Olsen 2004: especially 110-13.

[18] For a full description of Hasluck's life and work see Shankland 2004.

[19] Dawkins 1950a: IX, 7-8.

[20] Ibid., IX, 1-9.

[21] Ibid., IX, 7.

In 1929 Dawkins gave the presidential address to the British Folklore Society with the title "Folklore and literature". At the opening of this paper he reflects on his own path to folklore:

> Folklore first came to me [...] through my study of the modern Greek language, and this had begun in the earliest days of a prolonged residence in Greece; linguistic study led me to popular songs and ballads, and next to a serious collecting of folktales amongst the now scattered Greeks of Asia Minor. These I collected in order to have, for purpose of linguistic study, continuous samples of the popular dialects [...]. Gradually these stories became to me more and more interesting for their own sake [...]. Folklore appeared as the key to unlock many a door, the torch not only to throw light upon many an obscure passage in popular stories and songs, but by whose illumination alone their true colour was to be appreciated.[23]

He concludes: "In the library as well as in the field the folklorist still has a lot to do."[24] We see in this paper how Dawkins's attitude towards folklore has changed since, some twenty years earlier, he had collected this kind of material only as samples of language; this interest in the subject matter of the texts was to become predominant in the latter part of his life when folklore, and especially folktales, became his major field of research.

At about the time of his retirement, in 1939, Dawkins came into possession of a vast amount of folkloric material. At the beginning of the last century Yakovos Zarraftis, a native of Kos, had collected oral folklore of all kinds at the request of another Cambridge classicist, W. H. D. Rouse, headmaster of the Perse School. Rouse had intended to publish the material himself but never found the time and therefore, according to Dawkins's own information, entrusted him with the task.[25] The contact with this material was, I believe, the essential point of departure for Dawkins's serious involvement with folktales. From this point on he produced a continuous stream of publications about Greek folktales. These include both studies on specific tales, or tale types, and discussions of a more general nature about various aspects of folktale studies. They are obviously inspired by his work on the edition of the tales and many of his examples are taken from the Zarraftis collection.

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[22] Ibid., XI, 1.

[23] Dawkins 1929: 14-15.

[24] Ibid., p. 36

In general Dawkins's work on folktales is significant, extensive and often rather advanced. An especially illustrative example of his pioneering work is to be found in the 1948 volume of the periodical *Folklore.* Here he published "Some remarks on Greek folktales", which treats almost all important questions concerning this subject, such as diffusion and age, relations with the context, survivals, literacy versus orality, types and episodes, and the symbolic values of the tales. In what follows I would like to discuss some of these questions in more detail.

We saw above how, on his first visit to Greece, Dawkins described the method of spinning as an unbroken tradition from antiquity. In his later travel accounts too he would pay much attention to the tools and customs of the rural population and compare them to those of antiquity.[26] However, despite his classical background, survivalism was not his general approach to Modern Greek folklore. On the contrary he took a rather sceptical position, and in a paper from 1930 entitled "The recent study of folklore in Greece", he accuses the Greeks of not having shown much interest in their own folklore until they discovered the possibility of finding in it relics of their ancient life and culture.[27] Considering

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[25] Dawkins 1950a: XI, 3.

[26] See for example Dawkins 1902-3,1903-4, 1904-5 and 1906.

[27] Dawkins 1930: 122.

Dawkins's own route to folklore, through linguistics, I find it too tempting not to quote the following remark: "But at first folklore was hardly the conscious aim of these Greek scholars [...]. What the Greeks began with was rather their language and their archaeology [...] because they saw in them their clearest links with the great historical past, and their means of rousing the nation to emulate that old greatness."[28]

When, at the beginning of the tale *The fairy's revenge*, Dawkins meets elements that he could explain in no other way than as a survival he reluctantly does so: "On the evidence, though it is a point on which it is safer to be sceptical and always to proceed with some care, I am inclined to see in the first part of *The Fairy's Revenge* [...] a real survival."[29] The opening of this tale is a story about a tree fairy, in love with a young ploughman. However, the king of the country is in love with the fairy and he therefore fights and kills her lover. The fairy in despair takes refuge in one of her trees, and to get her out of there the king orders the whole grove to be cut down. The fairy escapes into the sky casting a spell on the king: he shall die of ravening hunger, and so he does. This tale is from the Zarraftis collection and was recorded in Kos. Dawkins relates it to the legend of Erysichthon, who cut down the sacred grove of Demeter and was punished by the goddess with ravening hunger. This legend has been shown to have its origin in Knidos – across the bay from Kos on the coast of Asia Minor – and in Modern Greek stories Dawkins found it only in the Dodecanese.[30]

As for the diffusion of the tales, Dawkins positions himself very much along the lines of the geographic-historical method of the Finnish school, and more specifically the branch that follows the ecotype theory proposed by the Swedish scholar C. W. von Sydow. Tale types – i.e. a fixed series of episodes, or as Dawkins has it "the permanent thread of the story"– he argues, must have been invented once in a given place and travelled from there to other parts of the world, whereas episodes may easily have been invented independently in more places. During their travels the tales constantly adapt to the local geographical and social circumstances, and it is exactly this different treatment in different places that makes it possible in the tales to detect differences between various peoples and their cultures.[31]

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[28] Ibid., p. 123.

[29] Dawkins 1950b: 348.

[30] Ibid., p. 347.

Let me quote a few of his examples: first, a story widely diffused both in Greece and elsewhere is the one we could call *The girl without hands*. Normally, it is about a father so depraved that he wants to marry his own daughter. In order to prevent this from happening, the girl first cuts off her hands and then takes refuge in the wilderness, where she meets a young prince who rescues her; her hands are miraculously restored, and finally the prince marries her. In an interesting variant version from the island of Chios the girl is the daughter of a Turkish father and a Greek mother. The mother, who is a prisoner-of-war, secretly brings up the girl in the Christian faith. When the father finds out, he tries to make his daughter give up her faith and submit to Islam. In this version this is seen as the monstrous crime the girl will go to any lengths to avoid. After this alternative opening, the tale goes on along the usual lines: the meeting with the prince and the happy ending. We see here how, in a religiously mixed society, as Chios was under Ottoman rule, apostasy is seen as a crime tantamount to incest and is used as such by a creative local storyteller. But an opening like this would have been unintelligible elsewhere. Dawkins is once again quite advanced in his theories. Apart from showing how the episodes of the tale types adapt to the various cultural, geographical, and chronological circumstances, with this example he also anticipates a phenomenon that was later to be named "allomotif" by the American folktale scholar Allan Dundes. By comparing a vast number of versions of a certain tale type Dundes found that motifs could be changed, according to the situation, without altering the meaning.

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[31] Dawkins 1948: 49-55.

One of his most striking examples is that, in folklore, decapitation is equivalent to castration.[32]

As another example of adaptation we could take the well-known story of Apollonios of Tyre. The ancient Greek novel begins with a king who has an incestuous relationship with his own daughter; in order to keep her for himself and hold suitors at a distance, he pronounces a riddle; anyone who tries unsuccessfully to solve it will lose his head. In the Hellenistic world, Dawkins argues, the father's attitude could pass as tolerable, but not in a Christian one. Therefore, when we meet the story as a Modern Greek folktale the father assumes quite a different attitude. He is eager to cover up his sin and tries by all possible means to marry off the girl.[33] In the version from Kos in the Zarraftis collection the father even repents of his evil deed.[34]

According to Dawkins, the tales' susceptibility to local conditions is at the same time also a very strong argument against the tales being of great antiquity, and as a consequence he rejects any suggestion that they represent layers of former cultures now unintelligible: "but the adaptability they show will surely suggest that anything extremely primitive must have step by step been discarded as the story was handed down through subsequent centuries more and more out of sympathy with many things which by age would either have lost any appeal to later generations, or even have become simply distasteful."[35] These views show how remarkably well Dawkins understood the special circumstances concerning the transmission of oral literature.

Dawkins also presents a very balanced view of the inter-relationship between oral and written literature. He rightly finds that there are no clear-cut division between the two and that very often it is impossible to decide weather a written source precedes an oral one or *vice versa.*

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[32] Dundes 1980.

[33] Dawkins 1948: 51.

[34] Dawkins 1950b: 486.

[35] Dawkins 1948: 54.

> I believe that these two currents of tradition, the literary and the oral, have been kept too much apart: the man of books is apt to forget the older, although humbler, sister of literature who passes on her treasures by word of mouth. This does not concern us here; what is our affair is the other side of the picture: that the student of folklore is often only too likely to neglect literature and literary tradition, and to regard its intervention as in some way detracting from the quality, the special virtue, of the pure folktale.[36]

I think Dawkins has a point here, and again he is ahead of his time. Folklore scholars have until recently been suffering from a rather negative attitude towards written sources as inspiration for oral tales. But as research in the craftsmanship of storytelling has shown, to the narrator a story's origin as oral or written has no importance – as long as it is a good story. We even have an example of a blind storyteller who was perfectly able to incorporate material from books in his repertoire.[37] As an example of the interchangeability between oral and written literature we could take the tale of *The ogre schoolmaster*. This tale is widely spread and probably of considerable age. In the course of time it was even transformed into a novel. We know the story from Petrarch and Boccaccio, and it is also present in *The Canterbury Tales*. It is that of Griselda. After its appearance in the Italian works the story of Griselda circulated widely as a chapbook and then again found its way into the oral tradition[38] – a true *Rückwanderer*. In my opinion there is little doubt that the chapbooks were one of the main written sources of inspiration for oral narrators; an investigation into the relationship between a given tale repertoire and the known chapbooks could prove interesting.

Dawkins also enters into what he himself sees as a rather neglected aspect of tale studies, when he tries to give some answers to why these supposedly childish stories about fairies, monsters, princes and princesses have had such vitality and such an appeal to adults all over the world and for so many years. Again he is a pioneer in the field – and not just the Greek part of the field. Thus, the Danish folktale scholar Bengt Holbek, who wrote a doctoral dissertation of more than six hundred pages about the interpretation of fairy tales, quoted Dawkins as one of the first scholars to approach the problem of the function of the marvellous elements in the tales.[39] Without explicitly saying so, Dawkins touches upon the symbolic value of the tales. The telling of stories, he concludes, is a way of dealing with subjects otherwise surrounded by taboo in rural societies.[40] I think Holbek has a point when he says that Dawkins only *approached* the function of the marvellous, because he barely scratched the surface.

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[36] Ibid., p. 60.

[37] Olsen 1999: 35.

[38] Dawkins 1948: 63-4.

For an example let me return to the Griselda story. In the folktales about *The ogre schoolmaster,* the title character is an ogre disguised as a schoolteacher who devours a child every day. A girl finds out, runs away and gets married. But the schoolmaster tracks her down and successively carries away three of her children. This becomes too much for her husband who dismisses her and marries a less unlucky girl. The heroine endures all these trials. She even endures becoming a servant to the new wife. The husband, about to leave on a journey, asks each woman of the household what he should bring them. His first wife wants "the stone of patience". When the husband comes back, he overhears her telling all her trials to the stone. The stone begins to break under her tears, and she says: "If my sorrows make even you who are of stone break, how could my heart not break." Then the mysterious schoolmaster appears again but transformed into a kind character and bringing her lost children. She is restored to her husband and everything ends happily. Dawkins's problem here is the character of the ogre/schoolmaster. What does he symbolize? Dawkins's answer is that it is: "the strange decrees of fate, whose incalculable doings, for which the only remedy is patience, are a theme appearing in various shapes and disguises in Greek stories".[41] I am not entirely convinced. I think Dawkins would have come closer if he had looked for taboos. If we apply Holbek's model of analysis to this story, we will see that – like most fairy tales – this is a tale about maturity. Two persons are to pass from the status of young person to that of adult – in this case the girl and her husband. But one (or both) of them is not mature and has to pass a test. The ogre is what in psychology is called "a split". He represents a part of the young man, namely his untamed sexuality. Since food and sex are allomotifs in folklore, devouring children could be interpreted as a symbol of unnatural sexual appetite. The young man has to be redeemed, that means he has to become mature and able to control his sexuality. The heroine must help him in this, and since this is a feminine tale – a tale where the main character is female – she is the one who has to undergo the trials. In Greek rural communities the virtue of patience is the female virtue *par excellence* and it is therefore her mastery of this virtue that is tried in the tale, as in so many other Greek tales.[42] I think it is open to discussion whether it is the young man who actually has a problem or the girl who lacks maturity. We could perhaps also explain the split of the husband/ogre as what in psychology is called externalization. This means that, because the heroine cannot cope with masculine sexuality, she sees it, and therefore also her male counterpart, as something demonic. In further support of this interpretation of the ogre as symbolizing a split of the husband is the fact that, when the story passed into written literature, the role of the supernatural ogre was taken up by a cruel husband.

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[39] Holbek 1987: 393.

[40] Dawkins 1948: 61-8.

[41] Ibid., p. 64.

As mentioned above, Dawkins edited most of the folktales from the Zarraftis collection and published them in a bilingual Greek-English edition by Cambridge University Press in 1950 with the title *Forty-five stories from the Dodekanese.* Before his death in 1955 Dawkins published two more collections of tales, but this time in English translation only. He furnished all his editions with very extensive notes, and these – as well as studies like the ones mentioned above – clearly show that he had become an important folktale scholar who no longer saw the tales as the means to approach something else. He was by now interested in the tales for their own sake and, as we have seen, he studied almost every important aspect of their tradition.

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[42] Olsen 2002: 70.

Before concluding, I would like to say a few words about the *Forty-five stories*, and the background to this publication. The material was collected at the same time as Dawkins himself was collecting tales in Asia Minor, and he met the collector, Zarraftis, at least twice. The first time was in the summer of 1906 when Dawkins, according to Zarraftis's letters, visited the embroidery school he directed at that time on Astypalia. In his diary of the journey Dawkins does not refer to the visit to the school. This is peculiar since one of the stated purposes for the journey was actually the collection of embroideries. What Dawkins does mention in the diary is that he met Yakovos Zarraftis, who was working for Rouse, and that he saw some of his manuscripts – which presumably did not impress him. He found that Zarraftis could be not fully trusted. Nevertheless, Dawkins obviously used Zarraftis's services despite his misgivings. For in the Archives at Oxford there is a letter from Zarraftis to Dawkins, also from 1906, with information concerning the pronunciation of the dialect of Kos.

The second time the two men met was in 1910 when Dawkins was on his way to Asia Minor. This time Zarraftis was residing at Kalymnos, and Dawkins used his neighbour there, an old woman, as informant for the local dialect. Again Zarraftis functioned as his linguistic consultant.[43]

They probably did not meet again, but when forty years later Dawkins published the collection of tales from Zarraftis's manuscripts, he was aware of our debt to Zarraftis. In the introduction to the *Forty-five stories* he included the following portrait of him:

> Zarraftis I remember well: he was a kindly, hospitable and enthusiastic old man, carried along always by a real zeal for learning and a deep belief in the value of Greek life and Greek

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[43] For references see Olsen 2005: 397. This paper also provides a fuller picture of Zarraftis.

> culture [...]. Yakovos Zarraftis was in fact a worthy member of that brand of scholars [...] who out of their love for letters and for their country recorded for the future an immense amount of interesting material, which would otherwise have been by now completely lost.[44]

I know perfectly well that it is pointless to speculate, but I cannot help thinking that it is a matter of regret that it took Dawkins so many years to become interested in the folklore aspects of Zarraftis's services. Not only did the two men actually meet when Zarraftis's collecting was at its height, but Zarraftis also died only a few years before Dawkins got hold of his material. We could have obtained much valuable information about almost any aspect of the recording situation, had Dawkins interviewed Zarraftis in time about these matters – information which Dawkins himself regrets not having[45] and which he had sought from Rouse.[46]

That Dawkins's estimation of Zarraftis's work changed over the years is also evident from the way he handled his material. Dawkins is certain that Zarraftis "did his best to record the words as they were spoken",[47] and in his edition of the text he follows Zarraftis's manuscripts without much editorial interference.

The tales in Zarraftis's collection are of a high quality. Zarraftis obviously had access to very skilled narrators who could also tell tales of considerable length, and he was, for his time, a conscientious recorder. His collection of tales is the most interesting collection of Greek tales I know. In the edition, Dawkins organized the tales thematically and provided an introduction, an English translation, substantial notes, a description of the language and a word list. In my opinion the result can be seen as one of Dawkins's main contributions to the field of Greek folktales. It is therefore all the more unfortunate that this important edition has for years been out of print and perhaps for that reason is also very seldom referred to by Greek scholars. A revised edition – preferably in a more modest format – would be a most welcome supplement to the many new editions and studies that fortunately have been published in recent decades.

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[44] Dawkins 1950b: 2.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Olsen 2005: 392.

[47] Dawkins, 1950b: 525.

Let me conclude this paper on Dawkins's importance to Greek folktale studies by quoting Robert Georges: "To folklorists everywhere he is probably best remembered as the scholar who made modern Greek folklore most extensively known, understood and appreciated. His numerous studies of modern Greek folktales provide the most extensive survey of that tradition and the most penetrating analysis of the material in any language, including Greek."[48]

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[48] Georges 1965: 202.

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