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GREEK PROVERBIAL PHRASES FROM MODERN SATIRICAL PARAPHRASES OF TEXTS AND TITLES OF THE GREEK ORTHODOX CHURCH

Abstract: This study presents the phenomenon of satirical paraphrase of ecclesiastical texts, some of which acquired in the passage of time proverbial use in the daily life and communication of the Greeks. The study is focused on: a) proverbial phrases from corruption of liturgical phrases and texts, b) proverbial phrases from the corruption of ecclesiastical administrative titles of Metropolises and c) metropolitans proverbial phrases from the corruption of hymns and prayers.

Keywords: proverbial phrases, religious folklore, church, ecclesiastical texts, everyday communication, humour, indiscretion.

Introduction

Professor Dimitrios S. Loukatos,¹ in a series of studies, especially with his dissertation,² systematically studied the phenomenon of the use of phrases from the Holy Scripture and ecclesiastical texts as proverbs and proverbial phrases by the Greek people. Indeed, in one of his studies he dealt with the phenomenon of satirical paraphrase of ecclesiastical texts, some of which acquired in the passage of time proverbial use in the daily life and communication of the Greeks.

Similar examples have also sporadically been included in their collections both by Mary Koukoule,³ regarding modern Greek profanity, and George Melikis,⁴ referring to outspoken songs of the Greek carnival, which paraphrase holy texts, psalms and hymns of the Greek Orthodox Church and its seasonal rituals. Continuing with this research, we will be occupied with the modern Greek proverbial phrases, which were formed from satirical and, as a rule, outspoken paraphrases of texts, titles and phrases, which are used both in cult and in the administration and daily life of the Greek Orthodox Church.

Before presenting the samples that have been accumulated, it should be noted that these are not misunderstandings and

paraphrases of texts due to ignorance of the older form of the Greek language in which they are articulated. We have to do with intentional variations, which often include outspoken elements, which were made aiming at satire, and which survived in the modern daily verbal communication of the Greek people with a proverbial character.⁵ Therefore, it is a modern genre, which is originating and is under formation, and this is why it is important to examine it here from a folkloric and proverbial aspect.

Research methodology

The samples that are quoted above result from modern field-work based research⁶ and recording, which was carried out from 2016 until 2018 at the Municipality of Peristeri, Attica, the island Municipality of Samos at Eastern Aegean, and the continental Municipality of Komotini, in Greek Thrace. Their intersection shows that this is a phenomenon with Pan-Hellenic dissemination and urban origin, since similar examples were not recorded in villages and towns of the Greek territory. In our relevant questions to the informants we insisted that they informed us both regarding the proverbial phrases and the social and cultural occasions where they are used, in order to also examine the social impact of proverbial speech.

In addition, we made an effort to cross the ethnographic material with similar examples from the Internet,⁷ since it is widely known nowadays that the Internet is an ideal space for the creation, recreation and dissemination of the types of popular speech.

The results of the research

However, let's see the categories in which this new Greek proverbial material can be classified, with characteristic examples per case:

A. Proverbial phrases from corruption of liturgical phrases and texts

1. *Ειρήνη πάσι – Το κεφάλι σου να σπάσει* = Peace upon everyone – May you break your head [and with the phenomenon of proverbial extension: *το κεφάλι σου να σπάσει / και να γίνει περιβόλι / να χορεύουν οι διαβόλοι* = may you break your head / and it becomes a garden / for evil creatures to dance].

In case of challenging the good intentions and honesty of each mediator.

2. *Κύριε ελέησον – Ο παπάς πίνει Carnation* = Lord, have mercy – The priest is drinking Carnation [from the famous brand of standardized milk widely circulating in the Greek market].

In cases of clichés and words without an essential result.

3. *Και εις τους αιώνας των αιώνων – Και εις τας χελώνας των χελώνων ~ Και εις τους χειμώνας των χειμώνων* = And now and forever (in the ages of the ages) – And in the turtles of the turtles ~ And in the winters of the winters.

In case of hearing words that do not have particular significance, but are spoken conventionally.

4. *Και ελέησον ημάς – Και ελέησον κιμάς* = And have mercy on us – And have mercy on minced meat.

In cases of challenging the truth and the accuracy of the words that have preceded.

5. *Μετά πνευμάτων δικαίων τετελειωμένων – Μετά συσκευών μοντέρνων και εντοιχισμένων* = With just spirits that have passed – With modern and built-in appliances.

In cases of challenging established mentalities, perceptions and behaviors.

6. *Ζώον έντιμον – Ζώον έντομον / τον ορθοτομούντα – τον κέρματα μετρούντα* = Honest animal – Insect animal / the one who cuts in equal parts – the one who counts coins.

In cases of challenging the role, the honesty, the integrity and the offer of a public figure or a spiritual and ecclesiastical leader.

7. *Αμήν – Αμήν και κόντρα αμήν / κι ώσπον να βγει ο μην / θα έχουμε και πάλι την δραχμήν* = Amen – Amen and again amen / and until the month passes / we will have drachmas again.

On the occasion of the rumors regarding the exit of Greece from the Eurozone and the return to drachmas as national currency during the economic crisis in Greece (2010 and onwards). It is said in

cases of challenging the truth of what is heard or repeated as declarations by politicians and public figures.

B. Proverbial phrases from the corruption of ecclesiastical administrative titles of Metropolises and Metropolitans

1. *Λαρίσης – Θα λαχταρίσεις* = Of Larissa – You will crave for something.

In cases of intense disappointments. It was occasioned by episodes against the Metropolitans of Larissa by followers of the overthrown Metropolitan of Larissa, Theologos, in 1974.

2. *Λάμπης και Σφακίων – Λάσπης και Σφαγείων* = Of Lampi and Sfakia – of Mud and Slaughterhouses.

In cases of important and rapid changes that cause the opposite of the anticipated result.

3. *Θηβών και Λεβαδείας – Ο φυγών εκ Λεβαδείας / Θυμών και Λαιμαργίας* = Of Thiva and Levadia – The one leaving from Levadia / Anger and Gluttony.

In cases of intense and rapid changes towards the worse. It was occasioned by the coexistence of two former and one active Metropolitans of the specific Metropolis during the '80s.

4. *Τρίκης και Σταγών – Φρίκης και Αναστεναγμών* – Of Trikki and Stages – of Horror and Sighs.

In case of reversal of the existing and prevailing of new unfavorable conditions either at a social, work or family, or at a personal level.

5. *Αμασείας – Αμασίας* = Of Amasseia – Inability to chew.

In cases of poverty and economic distress. It was created by the similar sound between the name of the Metropolis that was based in the city of Amasseia in Pontos and the inability to chew due to lack of food, which entails hunger.

C. Proverbial phrases from the corruption of hymns and prayers

1. *Πάτερ ημών – Το βρακί του Σολομών / ο εν τοις ουρανοίς – το βρακί της μαμμής / αγιασθήτω το όνομά σου – το βρακί της μαμμιάς σου / ελθέτω η Βασιλεία σου – το βρακί της θείας σου = Our Father – Solomon's underpants / who art in heaven – the midwife's underpants / hallowed by thy name – your mother's underpants / thy kingdom come – your aunt's underpants.*

In cases of satire of the prevailing class and point of view and expression of challenging regarding the common assumptions of society.

2. *Χριστός Ανέστη – Ο παππάς εχέσθη = The Christ has risen – The priest shitted himself [and with the phenomenon of proverbial extension: *κι από τη λαχτάρα του / σηκώθηκ' η ψωλάρα του = and due to his craving / he had an erection].**

In cases that small stimuli cause big and rapid changes, or when unforeseen and unexpected changes are observed.

On the other hand, a small research in posts and websites online showed that some of these phrases are repeated in certain posts of texts. This shows that they are proverbial phrases that are rapidly disseminated through the Internet and the various social media, often changing their meaning or getting other conceptual dimensions, depending on the environment and the context of each post or online discourse.⁸

The Greek people often jokes about issues of faith and ecclesiastical persons or rituals, producing facetious narrations and anecdotes, corruptions of hymns etc.⁹ As we have ascertained on the occasion of a previous study regarding the anecdotes referring to priests,¹⁰ these do not have the sense of secularism or of the direct challenge of the Orthodox Church and its clergy, but are possibly jokes and indications of the exceptional intimacy Greeks feel for the orthodox faith and the Orthodox Church, its administrative structure and hierarchy, and its rituals.

The formation of these modern proverbial phrases is based on the change and replacement of phonetically identical words in the initial ecclesiastical phrase and on the selection of words based on the rhyme to be accomplished, given that these are verses that rhyme.¹¹ This conforms to the ascertainment of Professor

Aristides Doulaveras¹² that most Greek proverbs belong to artistic, popular verses, and shows that in the modern Greek proverbial material the main terms and the fundamental requirements that determined the Greek proverbial material and traditional culture continue. In addition, these proverbial phrases are often extended, according to a known phenomenon in the proverbial material, which Dimitrios Loukatos¹³ specified as “extension of proverbs.” And these in turn show that a structural and morphological continuity exists in popular creation, at least regarding the techniques and the means of expression.

However, the outspoken expression of some of these phrases is also frequent by Greek people, who use similar sexual verbal representations and referral in their daily speech.¹⁴ The phenomenon of popular profanity is known in the Greek popular culture, both in the daily verbal communication of people and in various types of the artistic popular speech.¹⁵ Obscene proverbs, which are widely used in daily life, are also frequent. Therefore, the proverbial phrases that are recorded and studied in this paper fall into the category of Greek popular profanity, and, in this sense, continue the equivalent Greek popular tradition, in which they are transformed depending on the prevailing social, economical, and cultural conditions, and are expressed through new means.¹⁶

On the other side, based on the explanations that were given above for each case, it results that these modern proverbial phrases are, as a general rule, used in cases of challenging, reversal, violent change, rapid modification and intense differentiation in terms of the conditions that prevailed until then. Therefore, the sense of the reversal of the secular class is expressed proverbially through the corruption and the parody of ecclesiastical texts and titles, i.e. of a material that mainly expresses and shapes the sense of the secular class.

Therefore, what was aforementioned and ascertained may not be integrated either in the form of blasphemy as negative management of religiousness by the people or in the practice of secularism as practical challenge and opposition to the ecclesiastical hierarchy, but have a character of opposition and challenging of metadata. A character that resembles during periods of crisis the one being experienced by the Greek society since the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century.

Therefore, this is modern proverbial and phraseological material that expresses the Greek society of today. A material that is formed and transformed in front of our eyes, and which is studied by the modern Greek folklore, monitoring its potential evolutions or extensions, in the framework of the study of the modern Greek popular culture and its manifestations.

The existence of anti-proverbs was not ascertained in the proverbial and phraseological material that was quoted above. We do not have here the phenomenon of transformation and anew use of older proverbial material, which gets a new content or is adjusted to new conditions, social and cultural, which are imposed by modernity. On the contrary, in the case of the proverbial phrases that are studied here, the impact of the cultural procedure of secularization, in the sense of the secular use of holy and liturgical texts or titles of ecclesiastical offices, i.e. elements that are traced to religious life and the ritual practice of the Orthodox Church, is ascertained to be intense.

Hereto, it should be noted that several aspects of secularization have already been studied regarding issues relating to popular religious rituals, but the respective impact on types of the Greek popular artistic speech has not been an object of study, as it happens here. It is the phenomenon of the desacralization¹⁷ of these phrases and titles, which, in their first use, are distinguished for their holiness, and the rendering in those of proverbial meaning, which is based on variations of words –usually based on the similar sounds of the initial ones with the ones that replace them– with intense satirical and, sometimes, outspoken elements.

On the other side, it should be noted that these specific proverbial phrases usually circulate and are used in a relatively narrow and closed environment, consisting of people, clergy or secular ones, who have a direct relationship with the Greek Orthodox Church and its daily life.¹⁸ Therefore, they do not experience universal dissemination and use by the Greek people, but they survive within a narrow circle of individuals, constituting part of their daily communication and, sometimes, being used as signs, since, if they are told to people outside this circle, they will not become understood easily.

Therefore, these are proverbial phrases with almost sign use and conceptual signage, and this makes their tracing, as well as their recording and interpretation, even more difficult. Indeed,

sometimes they are connected with specific facts of recent and modern Greek ecclesiastical life and history, as these are recorded in the brief explanatory notes accompanying the samples that were quoted above. In any case, they show that new proverbial phrases are not only produced in everyday life environments and environments of marginal social groups, as indicated by El. Petropoulos,¹⁹ or even in environments of low social prestige, as indicated by G. Kouzas²⁰ but also in the ecclesiastical environment, which presents specific social and cultural characteristics that differentiate it significantly from the aforementioned.

Notes

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