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FOLKLORE, LITERATURE AND IDENTITY, OR ONCE MORE ABOUT AZOV GREEKS¹

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Literature in dialects is an essential phenomenon for Greek literature. In Ancient Greek literature each literary genre was connected with some dialect. Superficial unification during the Hellenistic Koiné could not hide regional variants. Literary traditions in dialects reappeared in the late Middle Ages in Crete and in Cyprus and had little to do with the rise of national identity, though literatures in dialects are usually based on local folklore. Local literatures in the dialect are very interesting as a linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon. In this article I will describe the development of the literature of Azov Greeks. Raised on the local folklore tradition, it became a part of the unique Soviet experiment of 1920s – 1930s that was tragically interrupted in 1938. Modern Azov Greek literature is a typical Greek literature in dialects that lacks readers, subjects and links with today's life. However, there is still hope to improve this situation if local cultural policy is changed and new web-technologies (like language corpus and online dictionary) are introduced.

Keywords: Modern Greek dialects, Greek folklore, Azov Greek, *Ruméika*, Greeks of the USSR, Azov Greek literature, Modern Greek literature in dialects

¹ This research was supported by the Russian Science Foundation under Grant No 15-18-00062).

ФОЛЬКЛОР, ЛИТЕРАТУРА И ИДЕНТИЧНОСТЬ, ИЛИ ЕЩЕ РАЗ О ЛИТЕРАТУРЕ ПРИАЗОВСКИХ ГРЕКОВ

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Диалектная литература представляет собой важнейшее явление для греческой культуры. Еще в Древней Греции за каждым жанром был закреплен свой диалект, и даже в эпоху эллинистического койне в текстах периодически проявляются отдельные диалектные особенности. Собственно греческая диалектная литература вновь возникла лишь в Позднем Средневековье на Крите и на Кипре. Ее появление не связано с ростом национальной идентичности, а скорее обусловлено наличием диалектного фольклора. Литература на диалекте — это очень интересное лингвистическое и социокультурное явление. В настоящей статье оно рассмотрено на примере литературы приазовских греков. В основе его лежит диалектная фольклорная традиция, однако эксперимент, предпринятый советскими филологами в 1920-е – 1930-е гг., вывел литературу приазовских греков на принципиально иной уровень. Репрессии 1937–1938 гг. фактически ее уничтожили. Сейчас литература приазовских греков не отличается от других греческих диалектных литератур. Она не представляет интереса для современного читателя и в его сознании связана исключительно с прошлым. Тем не менее, есть надежда, что изменение культурной политики и использование новых информационных технологий (языковой корпус, интернет-словарь) позволят изменить ситуацию.

Ключевые слова: мариупольские греки, греки Приазовья, греческий фольклор, греческая диалектная литература, новогреческая диалектология, греки СССР, литература приазовских греков

1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Literature in the dialects is a very important phenomenon for Greek culture. It is well known that each Ancient Greek literary genre was appointed to a specific dialect regardless geographical distribution of Ancient Greek dialects. Thus, prosaic texts were in Ionic or Attic, Boeotian became the dialect of elegy, and choral odes even in Attic tragedy were in Doric. Evidently, the distribution

of the dialects in Ancient Greek literature lost its geographical basis², and literary dialects could be rather far from their non-literary counterparts.

Although superficial unification during the period of Hellenistic Koiné has not entirely destroyed all regional variants, and some specific local features frequently appear in written texts³, real literary traditions in dialects reappeared only in the late Middle Ages in Crete⁴ and in Cyprus⁵. The emergence of Cretan and Cypriot literatures had little to do with the rise of national identity. Both Crete and Cyprus were under Venetian rule, and there are some famous authors with Venetian/Italian names who used the dialect in their poetry (for example, Cretan poets Leonardo Della Porta and Vincenzo Cornaro). It is possible to hypothesize that literature in dialects may appear only in the regions with folklore in local dialect. Greek folklore is mostly superdialectal as it generally happens with the language of the oral poetic tradition⁶. Even in the regions that were either remote or not easily accessed (like Tsakonia in Peloponnese⁷) folk songs in local dialects appeared not so long ago. However on the islands and in Greek-speaking enclaves in Asia Minor, in Italy and in the former Soviet Union, folklore was/is in the dialect⁸. The existence of the folklore in dialects obviously does not always lead to the emergence of the literature in dialects, but if it happens, one can observe a very interesting linguistic and sociocultural phenomenon. In this paper I am going to describe the literature of Azov Greeks, its origin and its development.

2. AZOV GREEKS AND THEIR DIALECT: GENERAL INFORMATION

Azov Greek (or *Ruméika*⁹) was primarily spoken in the Crimea. Its origin is unknown, but evidently it was influenced by various Greek dialects. *Ruméi-*

² For example, Hippocrates was a native Doric speaker but wrote in Ionic: Karali 2001, 722; Panayotou 2001, 301.

³ Pretty often these peculiarities may be found in Greek papyri (Gignac 1976; Gignac 1981) and sometimes in Early Byzantine hagiography, especially in the texts from the Middle East: Kisilier 2011a.

⁴ Holton 1991.

⁵ Texts in literary dialects usually are the only source for description of the language/dialect in the Middle Ages, cf. Symeonidis 2006, 137 f. However it should be taken into account that these texts may reflect only some particularities of the dialect, while certain features may be caused by meter: Kisilier 2010, 45–67.

⁶ Cf. Desnitskaia 1970, 11–42. Sometimes this phenomenon is also called *Koine der Dichtersänger*: Eideneier 1987, 115; Eideneier 1991, 24–25; Eideneier 2005, 14.

⁷ Kisilier 2016, 28–33.

⁸ Probably, this is also true for Greek songs in Albania and Bulgaria.

⁹ There are several terms that speakers of Azov Greek use for nomination of their dialect. *Ruméika* is the most frequent one. It originates from *Ρωμαῖος* “citizen of the Roman [=Byzantine] empire”. This is not a unique model of dialect nomination. For example, Greek-speaking Moslems in the region of Uzungöl (Turkey) call their dialect *Rumca*.

ka has some similar features with Cappadocian, Pontic, Cretan¹⁰, Northern Greek, etc.¹¹ Not all orthodox Greeks in the Crimea spoke *Ruméika*. Those who lived in the cities used a dialect of Crimean Tatar known as *Urum*¹². Most speakers of *Ruméika* (*Ruméjs*) were bilingual and could also communicate in *Urum*, because it was the language of commerce. As a result, there are a lot of lexical borrowings from *Urum*: *ajrán* ‘ayran, doogh’, *burán/bran* ‘storm’, *vaxt* ‘happiness’, etc. Some Azov Greek traditions (for example, wrestling *kuréf* with a sheep as prize to the winner) and meals (*tjeburék* ‘chebureki’) are of a Tatar origin.

Greeks came to the Azov Sea region in 1778–1780, after the Crimea became a part of Russia. According to the official version, the orthodox population of the Crimea sent a letter to Catherine the Great and asked her to let them move to some other region of the Russian Empire. Actually, Russian authorities were extremely interested in colonization of Azov steppe, because it was often used by Tatars for their disastrous attacks. The colonization project was definitely regarded as a very important one, and the migration of Greeks from the Crimea to the Azov Sea was under personal supervision of the best Russian general Alexandr Suvorov. Most migrants were younger sons with their families who did not have any chance to inherit anything from their parents. *Urums* migrated together with *Ruméjs*, but as in the Crimea they would not live in the same villages¹³. Now *Ruméika* is spoken in 17 villages. In some of them (like Yalta), most inhabitants remember just a few words while in others (Maloyanisol) it is still a means of communication. There are five local variants (subdialects) of *Ruméika* which demonstrate some differences in vocabulary, phonetics and morphology¹⁴.

3. FOLKLORE IN *RUMÉIKA*¹⁵

The oldest Azov Greek songs date back to the Byzantine period. They were brought to the Azov region from the Crimea. The most frequent meter of these songs is decapentasyllable as in Byzantine/Early Modern Greek folk poetry. It can be illustrated with a famous Acritic song in *Ruméika*¹⁶:

¹⁰ Until 1960s in *Ruméika*-speaking village Yalta the phrase “he speaks *Ruméika*” was *lej kritiká* — lit. “[he] speaks Cretan”, cf. Chernysheva 1958, 3.

¹¹ Kisilier 2012, 355–368.

¹² *Urum* like *Ruméika* descends from *Ρουμαϊος* and is a Turkic phonetic variant of the same term.

¹³ In this paper *Urums* will not be described. Information about them is available in Baranova 2010.

¹⁴ Sokolov 1930, 63–64; Spiridonov 1930, 176.

¹⁵ In this paper prosaic forms of folklore are not analyzed. Language and structure of Azov Greek fairy tales are described in Kutna 2013, 17.

¹⁶ Cited from Khadzhinov 1979. The song was transcribed by means of modern Cyrillic orthography invented by Andrei Beletskii and used for the first time in Shapurmas 1986.

Яна́кус дѣ́вин стѹ нирѹ, стѹн пиза́дѣ екате́вин,
Не ѹвер ки тон дѣ́ракунда стѹ пиза́дѣ та ши́ли.
«Не, калиме́ра, дѣ́ракунда!» «Кало́ стѹн Яна́ку!
Ако́непса та дѣ́ондя-му, ире́ву на се фа́гу».

- 5 «На ми му тройсь-ме, дѣ́раконда, на ми мен катевáси,
Пѣло-м ас па́го с мани́ца-му, стѹн кард́аки-м тын ма́на-му».
«Дѣе се писте́ву, Яна́ку, дѣе се катáпистеву».
«Тун ѹлю ва́не ма́ртира, ту фѣ́нску я пистѣ́я,
Не о́са а́стра ст урано́, ва́ну та я та сма́дѣя».
- 10 «Па́ре стра́ты – стра́тыца-су, тон ме́га-т мунупáти».
Пель тун пае́нь с мани́ца-ту клюме́нус, дѣакруме́нус.
«Тѹ е́шишь, ѹе-му, кле́йсь си, варѣ́он анастенáзис?»
«Тѹ е́ху го на ми му клапсь, ти на ми настѣ́на́ксу.
Не ѹверь ме тун дѣ́ракундась, ире́ви на ми фа́и...»
- 15 На дѣ́оку т адѣ́рифѣ́ца-му – авр адѣ́рифѣ́ дѣе ка́му.
На дѣ́оку тын мани́ца-му – авр мани́ца дѣе ка́му.
На дѣ́оку тын кали́ца-му – па́ли кали́ца ка́му».

‘Johnny came down to the water, [he] approached the spring,
And he found there a dragon by the edge of the spring.

“Well, good morning, dragon!” — “Good morning, Johnny!
I have sharpened my teeth, I am willing to eat you”.

- 5 “[Please,] do not eat me, dragon, [please,] do not kill me,
Let me go to my mommy, to my dearest mother”.
“I do not trust you, Johnny, I do not believe you”.

“Let the Sun be my witness and the Moon my adpromissor,
And all the stars in the sky will be the proof of my words”.

- 10 “Take your road, follow your great path”.

And he comes back to his mommy weeping and full of tears.

“What has happened, my son, why are you crying [and] groaning bitterly?”

“Why should not I cry, why should not I groan bitterly.

A dragon found me [and] wants to eat me...

- 15 If I send him my sister, I shall have no sister tomorrow.
If I send him my mother, I shall have no mother tomorrow.
If I send him my sweetheart, I shall find another one’.

This text requires some commentaries. In line 2, *не* /ne/, probably, is a misprint or phonetic variant of a modal particle *на* (cf. lines 14–17), while *пиза́дѣ* /pɪzǎdʲe/ has a flexion *-e* that is added for metrical reasons, (cf. *пиза́дѣ* /pɪzǎdʲ/ in line 1)¹⁷. The variant *дѣ́раконда* /dʲrǎkonda/ (line 5) is less dialectal than *дѣ́ракунда* /dʲrǎkunda/ (lines 2, 3) with a constriction of unstressed /o/ into /u/. This phenomenon is frequent but irregular in *Ruméika*. Pronoun *мен* /men/ in the same line (5) could possibly be either a pronominal non-clitic form 1SG

¹⁷ It is also possible to reinterpret word boundaries in *пиза́дѣ* *ekatévin* with past tense augment *e-* as *пиза́дѣ* *katévin* without augmentation.

ména (cf. Modern Greek έμενα) or just a phonetic variant of a clitic pronoun 1SG *me* where *-n* is added for euphony in front of the occlusive (/k/). In line 13, instead of *κλαψ* /klaps/, one should expect *klápsu* (1SG, cf. *настына́ксы* /nastináksu/ in the same line). The loss of flexion is evidently due to metrical reasons.

Possibly, *δρράκундаць* /δράkundas/, in line 14, is *δράkunda* with a possessive pronoun 2SG *-s* (*δράkunda*=*s* ‘your dragon’). It is more difficult to explain the accusative/indirect case *тун δρράкундаць* /tun δράkundas/ instead of nominative/direct case¹⁸. Hypothetically, the article *tu* could become *tun* for some euphonic reasons and the noun *δράkunda* remains the same in all cases though the form *δράkus* also exists¹⁹ and is used in other versions of the same song²⁰. Even less clear are *πέλο* /pélo/ and *пель* /pel/, in lines 6 and 11.

This song has multiple parallels in Crete, Cyprus and Asia Minor²¹. It means that Greeks of the Crimea were involved into the same cultural processes as the Greeks elsewhere within the Hellenic world and definitely had contacts with other Greeks. Sometimes the migration to the Azov Sea region is regarded as a catastrophe that resulted in alienation from the traditional Greek culture and loss of cultural connections²². However, it seems that cultural connections were lost much later and they existed still in the early 20th century. In 1902, Azov Greek poet Demian Bgaditsa (1850–1906) transformed famous Cretan drama “The Sacrifice of Abraham” into several songs in *Ruméika*²³. Some decades before, the “The Sacrifice of Abraham” was translated into local dialects in other parts of the Greek speaking world and it cannot be just a coincidence.

The folklorization of literary texts was a widespread phenomenon in Medieval Greek literature. One of the most famous examples is an oral tradition based on *Erotokritos* (Cretan romance written by Vincenzo Cornaro[s] in the early 17th century) that still existed in the 20th century²⁴. After migration from the Crimea, folklorization of literary texts became the main pat-

¹⁸ I make use of the terms “direct case” and “indirect case” together with “nominative” and “accusative” because genitive forms in Azov Greek are not widely used and are often replaced by accusative or periphrastic forms, cf. Viktorova 2009, 193–205; Mertyris, Kisilier 2017, 465–476.

¹⁹ See Diamantopulo-Rionis, Demerdzhi, Davydova-Diamantopulo, Shapurma, Kharabadot, Patracha 2006, 72.

²⁰ Tamara Katsi, song “Dragon” from the collection of the Hellenic Institute of the Saint Petersburg State University.

²¹ Kisilier 2011b, 43–51.

²² Khalangot, Shvetsov 2005, 5–10.

²³ Cf. the song “Wake up, Abraham” by Tamara Katsi and another variant of the same song performed by folk band “Pirneshu Astru” (“The Morning Star”) from the collection of the Hellenic Institute of the Saint Petersburg State University.

²⁴ According to James Notopoulos the songs about Erotokritos were still sung just before the World War II; cf. Notopoulos 1952, 228. However, Greek writer Vassa Solomou Xanthaki told me during our personal communication that she heard these songs as she was giving classes to illiterate women from Crete in 1970s.

tern for creation of new folklore. For example, during one of her expeditions to the Greek-speaking villages of the Azov region in 1926, Alexandra Gargala, better known as Kassandra Kostan²⁵, discovered the archive of the famous local poet Leontii Honagbei (1853–1918). In this archive, there were not only manuscripts of his own songs, but also the ones of Demian Bgaditsa with song about Leontii Honagbei himself²⁶. During the expedition of 2005, organized by Hellenic Institute of Saint-Petersburg State University, it became evident that this pattern has not disappeared. Local poets give their texts to the oral performers who transform them into songs, and thus, these texts become famous in the villages.

4. SOVIET LITERATURE IN *RUMÉIKA*

After the Russian Revolution of 1917, new Soviet government launched the policy of support of minor languages and literatures. Azov Greeks were no exception. Scholars from the Ukraine and Leningrad (former specialists in either Oriental or Byzantine studies) studied *Ruméika* and created the first alphabet that used Greek symbols and their combinations²⁷. It became the starting point for the local literature. There were two alternative approaches to the language of this literature. Some poets and writers were sure that it should be based on Demotic Greek. It can be illustrated with two lines from the poem “Στι λῖρα-μυ” “To my lyre” (1933) by Alekos Ryonis:

Πέκξε ο λῖρα-μυ, πέκξε-μυ
Κι αρχίζο το τραγῶδι
‘Play, my lyre, play for me,
And I [shall] start [my] song’²⁸.

Supporters of the other approach were sure that the language of the Azov Greek literature ought to make use of the local dialect and the local oral tradition. One of those who followed this ideology was Georgii Kostoprav (1903–1938), probably, the most famous poet who wrote in *Ruméika*. He did not just create a new language standard for the new literature but he also prepared the basis for its future development as he translated Russian and Soviet poets and writers into *Ruméika*. He was the author of the main poetic masterpiece in the dialect — the poem “Leontii Honagbei” (1934). While the poem is written in *Ruméika*, the style of the afterword is very close to Demotic Greek: “*Μετρυ χрызμῆνο на лῆγυ камбоса лоя я ту пиима «Леонти Хонагбейс».*

²⁵ Kassandra Kostan was the first to describe Azov Greek oral tradition: Kostan 1932.

²⁶ This song still exists in local oral tradition, cf. Agafonova 2004, 38.

²⁷ More details in Kisilier 2009, 11–12.

²⁸ Cited from Photiadis 1990, 79. This poem is so close to Standard Modern Greek that Costas Fotiadis even does not provide its translation, unlike some other texts in his book, for example, the poems by the most famous local poet Georgii Kostoprav.

Ту пиима-му инэ грамэну я тус яшларус” ‘I think that I must say several words about the poem “Leontii Honagbei”. My poem is written for the younger generation’²⁹. The only non-Demotic word here is *яшларус* (*jašlarús*) ‘youth’. This example, evidently, demonstrates that even in the 1930s Azov Greeks still had cultural connections with the Greek-speaking world. These connections were ruined in 1937 as the Soviet policy changed and literature in the dialect was forbidden. The change costed the lives of many people including Georgii Kostoprav.

5. LITERATURE FROM 1986 TILL NOW

After the elimination of the best writers and poets in 1937–1938, it may seem that literature in *Ruméika* ceased to exist. Until Khrushchev Thaw, nobody dared even to mention local poets. Only in 1961–1962, the name of Georgii Kostoprav and his poetry were revealed to the public again³⁰. On November 12th, 1962, TV channel of Donetsk broadcasted a poem by Kostoprav in *Ruméika*³¹. Despite these tremendous efforts, a new book in *Ruméika* appeared only in 1986³². It was published with a help of a brilliant philologist Andrei Beletskii who created a new alphabet for *Ruméika* based on Cyrillic letters. He thought that the new alphabet would grant better access to the literature in *Ruméika* and thus would attract more readers. However, it did not work as it was supposed to. Local poets and writers eagerly use the new alphabet but the new literature in *Ruméika* has not become popular. The only way to attract attention to the poetic text is to give it to a well-known oral singer or some folk band. In this case the text is often modified. It can be illustrated with a line from the poem by Leontii Kir’iakov³³:

Ах ту синьфу пису фанын фенгкус на кзи

‘Behind the cloud appears the moon [that is ready] to rise’.

The oral singer changed the verb form *на кзи* /na=gzi/:

Ах ту śínifu písu fánin fēngus na=gzen

The form *na=gzi* does not exist. The poet invented it because he needed a rhyme with *врадъы* /vrađi/ “evening”, but this rhyme was not important for the oral singer, and as he could not understand the form used by Kiryakov, he replaced it with the one he knew.

²⁹ Kostoprav 2012, 141. This edition makes use of the alphabet invented by Andrei Beletskii.

³⁰ Cf. Kovalevskii 1961; Voloshko 1962a; Voloshko 1962b; Saravas 1962; Ryl’skii 1962; Mazur 1962. In 1963, Kostoprav’s poems were even published in Russian: Kostoprav 1963.

³¹ Animitsa, Kisilier 2009, 52.

³² Shapurmas 1986.

³³ Cited from Kir’iakov 1993, 31.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Why the literature in *Ruméika* after 1986 had no chance to reach the position it had in 1937? There are several reasons:

1. After 1986, (unlike in 1937) most Azov Greeks could speak and read much better Russian than *Ruméika*;
2. Unlike in 1930s, there is no support from school;
3. It is much more prestigious to speak and read Modern Greek than *Ruméika*³⁴;
4. The literature in *Ruméika* lacks plots and subjects that are interesting for the modern reader. The literature is generally regarded just as an archive of antique but not as something that is needed today or may be important or useful tomorrow;
5. Current social functions of the dialect do not imply ability to read. For example, *Ruméika* is frequently used as a secret male language.

Modern literature in *Ruméika* follows the fate of the other Greek literatures in dialect: it is unpopular and its readers are few intellectuals who usually produce their own texts as well. However, it does not mean that it has no future at all. There are at least two factors that could improve the current situation. The first one depends on the cultural policy based on the dialect. It requires new texts, films, webpages and festivals that would demonstrate that *Ruméika* is applicable to something modern and popular³⁵. The second factor has to do with implementation of new web-technologies like language corpus of *Ruméika* mostly based on literary texts and online dictionary linked with the language corpus³⁶. It will be important to grant free access to all potential users from any computer or mobile device. Thus, the gap between the Azov Greek youth and the Azov Greek dialect/literature may be eliminated or at least reduced.

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³⁴ However, many Azov Greeks felt certain discrimination when they came to Greece, and as a result, there is a popular idea that the local culture is more “Ancient Greek” and more pure, and Azov Greeks are smarter than the Greeks from Greece.

³⁵ There are good examples with other Greek dialects like rap in Pontic.

³⁶ The corpus and online dictionary should work both with the older (Greek) and the new (Cyrillic) *Ruméika* alphabet.

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