

THE ANACREONTIAN POETRY IN GREEK AND BULGARIAN
LITERATURE

The anacreontian poetry in the Balkans during the last decades of the XVIIIth and the beginning of the XIXth century consists the continuity of a tradition which starts with Anacreon in antiquity, the anacreontian poems of the hellenistic and roman era, the work of Ronsar and the pleiade poems and is directly related to the renaissance of the ancient greek and roman civilization in the XVIIth century, the poetry and philosophy of the late illumination and is firmly bound to the corresponding kinds of folk songs as far as the content, language and form in general are concerned. This anacreontian poetry in the balkan literatures has not been the object of a special study up to date, even though, according to our opinion, the newer lyrism owes exactly to these poets its national birth, as well as its flourishing for the first time in recent chronicles. The descriptive, narrative poems of many pages of the XVIIIth century give way to purer or still completely lyrical, brief and with few verses poems, such as the love song with a teasing, sensual and dionysiac content, the physiolatric and prudent-philosophical verse, the ode (we would rather call it monody according to the ancient model), the elegies and other poems. According to the aesthetic demands of the time, a fruitful approach of poetry to music, as well as to painting and architecture is achieved. The verse was developed towards a greater and richer melodiousness, optical beauty, expression and nobleness, increased variety and flexibility appearing for the first time.

The anacreontian poets have used and established an unconceivable for previous periods manner (beyond antiquity and early byzantine era) innumerable kinds and feet of verse—starting from the tetrasyllabic, the pentasyllabic and so on up to the polysyllabic verse (fifteen syllables in Greece), interchanging mesures and rhythms, often breaking the verse to succeed a more natural form, a vivacity and expressiveness in poetry. To conclude we could say that without the discoveries and artistic realisations of Christopoulos and Vilaras in Greece, of Petko Slavejkov in Bulgaria, it would be not only extremely difficult, but also impossible for Solomos and Botev to climb so high on the top of poetic art.

Speaking of anacreontian poetry in general, we usually bear in mind those periods when one or more poets wrote verses praising the joys and sorrows of human life, giving priority to pleasure and delight as physical needs of natural human beings.

Herodotus speaking about the customs of ancient Egyptians makes the following comment: at the end of their amusements they performed an imaginary funeral—a group of people walked around and showed to the bystanders a wooden image of a dead man, a warning for the end of human life. The anacreontian poets through their philosophy about death and life, old-age and youth, winter and spring, wealth and sanity, knowledge-study and consumption of valuable time spent on pleasure and delight taught quiet the contrary from the ancient Egyptians: they said that since old-age and death is the end of all human beings—poor and rich—people should enjoy life and each day, driving away sorrow and distress. See how the same point of view is expressed in lyric verses in the work of Christopoulos:

Νέος είμαι; θα γεράσω·
 Ζω και τρέχω; θα περάσω
 και σαν ίσκιος θα σβηστώ.
 Όσα κάμω και πασχίσω,
 εις τον κόσμο θα τ' αφήσω
 και γυμνός θ' αφανιστώ.

Το λοιπόν, γιατί φροντίδες;
 Γιατί φόβοι και ελπίδες;
 γιατί τόση ταραχή;
 Φάγε, πιε, στη γη τανύσου,
 με τον Έρωτα κοιμήσου·
 να φροντίδα μοναχή¹

/Am I young? I will get old. / Do I live and run? I will perish / and like a shadow
 I will fade. / Whatever I do and strain for / I will leave to the world / and I
 will disappear nude. / So why should I worry? / Why should I fear and hope? /
 Why so much confusion? / Eat, drink, stretch yourself on the ground, / sleep
 with Love; / that's the only concern you should have! /

1. Athanasios Christopoulos: “Φροντίδες”. See Linos Politis, *Ποιητική Ανθολογία*, book 4, p. 43. In the edition of *Άπαντα* by A. Chr. edited by G. Valetas, p. 262 and in the “Λυρικά” by A. Chr. (Nea Ellenike Bibliothek, Athens 1970, p. 93) the three last verses read as follows: Βάκχε φίλε, κοίμισέ με· / Έρωτά μου, ξύπνησέ με, / όταν φέξει το ταχύ.

The same motive is found in different verses and strophes in all the anacreontian poetry—starting from Anacreon himself up to the relative poems of the XVIIIth and XIXth centuries. Anyway, father of Anacreon and the anacreontian poetry must be considered the folk song of any time and any people which has a strong sense for love, youth, beauty and joy. And especially the folk song which has a strong sense for reality, the possibilities offered by the times, the society, the concrete way of life, the realisation of the desires.

Never did lyric creation consist only an inner outburst of the poet, without the deeper relation to time, the demands of a certain generation, the philosophy of the people of his time. Christopoulos' whole poetry which we are going to mention further, is a repetition (regarding the content) of the convictions of nephew Rameau in the well known work by the French philosopher of the XVIIIth century Diderot. Beyond the reports of the illuminators of the XVIIIth century on the natural life of man, the natural man (in obvious contradiction to the ideal of the Middle Ages when man was expected to be a hermit and his life a flight from the joys of the mind and the pleasures of the flesh, so as to redeem the eternal kingdom of the sky), Diderot makes his hero in one of his works pronounce the following:

“Lui...: Imaginez l'univers sage et philosophe; convenez qu'il serait diablement triste. Tenez, vive la philosophie; vive la sagesse de Salomon: boire de bon vin, se gorger de mets délicats; se rouler sur de jolies femmes; se reposer dans des lits bien mollets. Excepté cela, le reste n'est que vanité”².

“Moi: Est-ce qu'il y a là quelqu'un qui ait le courage d'être de votre avis?

Lui: Qu'appellez-vous quelqu'un? C'est le sentiment et le langage de toute la société”³.

If we include (and we cannot omit them) among the immediate antérieurs of Christopoulos and up to a point of Vilaras and Slavejkov the “μισμαγιές”, that is the handwritten anthologies of love poems by anonymous versifiers, which were widely spread in Constantinople, Jassy, Bucharest, Vienna and other big for the time urban centers, we will come to the conclusion that the anacreontian verses by the three poets form the highest poetic limit, the highest artistic level of a senseless tradition. From here onwards and for some years we can observe the continuity which in the best cases is a repetition, but never

2. D. Diderot, *Le neveu de Rameau*. Satire seconde, Oeuvres complètes, v. 10, Société encyclopédique française et le club français du livre, [Paris] 1971.

3. *Op. cit.*

surpasses the verses of Christopoulos, Vilaras or Petko Slavejkov.

But all three poets mentioned above differ not only among themselves, but also within themselves in various periods of their lives, as well as their creations. What they have in common in this concrete kind of poetry is their common effort to fill up a certain gap. Or even better, their effort to add a very important for their time and the developing national literatures ring to the chain of lyric art. I stress the word “lyric” because the meaning of lyricism in national literatures is an invention of the anacreontian poets by the end of the XVIIIth and the beginning of the XIXth centuries. This was certainly prepared by illumination, even more by sentimentalism and by the discovery of folk songs and the common oral language of each people.

Here are some references to texts by Christopoulos and Slavejkov. The former says about his poems in a letter: “I did all this only to show the harmony of our language”⁴. And a little further: “Songs like these I had many. But my people have lost them by scattering them here and there. These are the remnants”⁵. Some decades later a manuscript by Christopoulos was found by his friends. It was on this manuscript that all later publications of his lyrics were based, something that the poet himself knew.

Slavejkov in his autobiography notices as well: “Great part of my poems was, as they used to say in those times, ‘scholastic’ (we would call them educational now-a-days, Y.M.), that is they were written with the purpose to induce young people to learning, while love poems (written, Y.M.) to restrain young people from the turkish songs which were in fashion... Almost all poems and many others from the same series, written later, while I was a teacher, were lost and I can no more restore them. In spite all these, even today I meet aged people, former students, of my age, who remember fragments from these poems and melodies we used to sing—these were learned by heart and spread around with great fervor, because they were new. In the city of Lovets, I did not limit myself to the composition of poems of this kind only, but I started writing big poems and satires in verse”⁶. In other words, the practical result was that the poetic creation of this sort was greater and richer than the intention and concrete aims the poets posed to their muse. A general remark: both poets are interested in the verse which does not form in itself an aim, but in the verse which does fulfill a national purpose—the former to prove the effective

4. A letter by Christopoulos to Psalidas (1811). See: Athanasios Christopoulos, *‘Απαντα...*, 1969, p. 58.

5. *Op. cit.*

6. Petko Slavejkov, *Izbrannoe*, Moskva 1981, p. 186.

possibility of oral language to record and pass on lyric elevations of human soul and life in general, the latter to neutralize the influence of the Turkish song and lay solid basis for the creation of a national poetry through which to arouse the national consciousness and patriotism of the Bulgarians. Thus the way Slavajkov chose was the most difficult and complicated, something that made him use the Bulgarian oral language in his work: "I had learned Turkish, Greek and ancient Slavic, so I did not know Bulgarian as I should, that is I did not know how to write. But how could I have experience in writing since I seldom held a pen in my hand"⁷. "In the city of Sliven I described an event to which I happened to be eyewitness, that is how a Turk in a coffee house beat with no reason a Bulgarian and no one from the bystanders had the courage to protect him. This event impressed me greatly and urged me to start writing. But all these written efforts were in ancient Slavic and not in Bulgarian. My first works in the simple popular language were written in the city of Lovets. It was here that I started gathering not only the 'old words' I adored, started recording songs, fairy-tails, fables and legends and all sorts of similar material, but also felt awaking in me the passion to arrange verses, to compose poems"⁸.

And thus strating from different points the two poets reached the same or nearly the same targets. The fact that they used to loose verses brings both poets very close to the practice and behaviour of the popular poets who, without caring much for the paternity of the verses, used all their talent on the liturgical role of poetry, on the culture of a new audience with completely new artistic tastes.

Here we should underline the positive and determining importance folk poetry of both countries had on the poetic career of both poets. We have already mentioned the case of Slavejkov. We have in our disposition more elements concerning Christopoulos. Count de Marchelieu in his edition "Folk songs of contemporary Greece", Paris 1860, in French, gives us the following information based on a discussion with the Greek poet in Constantinople: "This (folk poetry, Y.M.) is the one which has preserved tradition concerning our resistance to a long-lived slavery. This is the one which prepares our liberation, instigates patriotism and courage on the liberated mountains and sends its echo to our most enslaved islands. Finally, this is the one which initiates us into liberty... What do you think? Just because I praised Love and Bacchus and my hair has grown white, do you think I am not feeling this national flame beaming from our war songs? Oh! Just like those heroes who

7. *Op. cit.*, p. 124.

8. *Op. cit.*, p. 185-186.

fell for Greece in Souli, I am indignant for our shame and our sufferings. Did we deserve it? Why should we always find excuses for some of our weaknesses which have close ties to slavery and are due to the barbarism of our tyrants? Islam strangles and destroys whatever it touches... Even if you chain the Muses on our mount Parnassus, their original home, you will see that they will become mute”⁹. Thoughts and sentiments of this sort could reveal themselves as outbursts of the moment and the waves of the soul calm down again when they become aware of the hard and merciless reality of the poet’s environment, since he never tried to risk neither his life nor his warm position next to the rulers. This is also an obvious contrast to the stormy life and the open national struggles of Petko Slavejkov. Christopoulos is a classical example of a poet of the court, exactly like Anacreon in antiquity: the former following each time the ruler, the latter following the tyrant in foreign countries (far from his native one), in circles characterized by financial abundance and flourishing, where languages, customs, cultures meet—West, East and North for Christopoulos, Central Europe, Balkans and Russia for Slavejkov, in circles where the pleasures of life played a determining role together with the culture of science and arts, letters and civilization in general. As Anacreon in ancient Greece had behind him a big lyric tradition, so Christopoulos had behind him the big tradition of Cretan literature, which still remained vivid. We bear in mind “Ερωτόκριτος” by Vincenzo Cornaro, “Ερωφίλη” by Georgios Hortatzis, “Βοσκοπούλα” by an unknown writer and of course our folk poetry. That means he had in his disposition a verse of high quality with rich findings in the world of poetic expression, through the excellent help of sentiments full of kindness, enthusiasm and exaltation.

Regarding the assimilation of cultural tradition (eponymous and anonymous) by Christopoulos, we should underline a kind of weakness in the organic incorporation of its values in his personal creation. Many of his poems resemble translations from the work and tradition of Anacreon in greek and world literature. But if we take into consideration that all the Balkan people in the stage of formation of their national consciousness and birth of their national literature begin with translations —paraphrases— adaptations of foreign models, we will see that Christopoulos finds himself in this strong literary current, continuing the tradition of Rhigas Velestinlis (“Σχολείον των ντελικάτων εραστών”), of “Ερωτος αποτελέσματα” by unknown writer, of Antonios Martelaos, of Adamantios Koraes and all the future composers of war-songs on the eve and during the revolution of 1821. Yannis Vilaras owing not only to

9. Count de Marcellus, *Chants populaires de la Grèce moderne*. Paris 1880, p. VI-VII.

his epirotic origin, but especially to his almost permanent stay in the heart of Epirus, even though he was only two years younger to Christopoulos, succeeded to assimilate more creatively and to use more effectively folk tradition. Of course Vilaras showed greater capacity to assimilate all the cultural tradition (both domestic and foreign), and consciously used its values in his personal creation. Slavejkov combines in the Bulgarian literature the two ways followed by the Greek poets Christopoulos and Vilaras, as well as their results in Greek poetry. Generally, Slavejkov plays the same role in Bulgarian poetry that Christopoulos and Vilaras played in Greek. In the meantime there existed also a distance of time (Slavejkov starts his work when his Greek colleagues have already finished) so he adjusts with greater prudence and better possibilities the foreign loans and his personal creation to the needs of the given historical moment in Bulgaria.

One more thing places the anacreontian poets close to the anonymous creators of anonymous poetry: their songs have a more eloquent inspiration or at least that is the impression they give. Poets before the anacreontians had certain and usually high national aims, which they posed not only consciously, but also tried to base them theoretically as well. Almost all Greek poets of the XVIIIth century starting with Kaisarios Daponte and Momars up to Rhigas Velestinlis, Alexandros Kalfoglou, Adamantios Koras, Antonios Martelaos and the anonymous writer of “*Ῥωσοαγγλογάλλος*” demanded that each literary work combined “the pleasant with the useful”. The same was the directive line of European illumination as a whole, including the Balkan. Diderot writes in his theatrical work “*Le neveu à Rameau*”: “The target of art is not to amuse the audience. Art is not an obligation to be the luxury of loafers. Every art should have a social mission and usefulness. What could be a better aim for theater than render virtue attractive?”¹⁰. Maybe more effective and whole is the formulation of the meaning of human life which rather expressed the later illumination, when sensuality predominated art and the illuminators did not want to be left behind their times, nor identify themselves with it, but to keep themselves on the level of the social mission of art. It is the Philosopher that speaks and not the nephew when he expresses the opinion that man’s aim in life is to enjoy the pleasures of the flesh, all the delights offered by terrestrial and physical life. The Philosopher says: “*Moi...Je ne méprise pas les plaisirs des sens. J’ai un palais aussi, et il est flatté d’un mets délicat, ou d’un vin délicieux. J’ai un cœur et des yeux; et j’aime à voir une jolie femme.*”

10. D. Diderot, *Le neveu de Rameau*. See: *Ο ανεπιός του Ραμώ*, Athens 1970, p. 31.

J'aime à sentir sous ma main la fermeté et la rondeur de sa gorge; à presser ses lèvres des miennes; à puiser la volupté dans ses regards, et à en expirer entre ses bras. Quelque-fois avec mes amis, une partie de débauche, même un peu tumultueuse, ne me déplait pas. Mais je ne vous le dissimulerai pas, il m'est infiniment plus doux encore d'avoir secouru le malheureux, d'avoir terminé une affaire épineuse, donné un conseil salulaire, fait une lecture agréable; une promenade avec un homme ou une femme chère à mon cœur; passé quelques heures instructives avec mes enfants, écrit une bonne page, rempli les devoirs de mon état; dit à celle que j'aime quelques choses tendres et douces qui amènent ses bras autour de mon cou"¹¹.

In other words, the intention and will to find a new equilibrium and harmony between the spirit and the desires of the flesh, as well as the sentiments, is evident.

We made some parallels between ancient lyric poetry and the work of the new Anacreon, as Christopoulos was named by his contemporaries. We will make the last parallel which happens to be considered the most important: Christopoulos and Slavejkov, just like the ancient lyric poets, thought the combination of verse and musical melody to be indispensable, and here we mention not only an incidental gesture, but a completely new view of lyric art in the XIXth century. To be more exact—an approximation of poetry to music aiming at the strengthening of the pure lyric element. The motives, the ideas and especially the sentiments transformed in verse by the poets, were very personal, even though they were simultaneously typical (characteristic) for more people and the nation as a whole. More “subjective” must have been their artistic transubstantiation. That is the ways and means of expression must have been more lyric. This could be achieved when the epic, narrative, descriptive element were kept away from poetry. The aim would be achieved more directly when more musical, even pictorial and architectural elements, were used, and so it happened.

We refer to the first edition of “Λυρικά” by Christopoulos published after his death, with a foreward written by a close friend and biographer of the poet, Nicholaos Korytzas, who mentions the following: “It looks as if the prominent passion of his mind was poetry. That is why studying his poetry we see a close relationship and bond, as well as mutual support, to music, as far as the harmony and satisfaction of the ear is concerned. So as to save more elegance and grace in his poems and attract the souls of the unknown people, he tried during his youth to obtain musical knowledge and its principles, so that he

11. D. Diderot, *Le nouveau de Rameau...*, p. 342.

tuned and arranged his poems in accordance. Knowing the principles of music, he played the drum and the flute according to the rules of this science and having their practice he composed not only many of his songs, but also various ecclesiastical hymns and chants"¹².

Slavejkov wrote also something parallel about the role of music in his "Memoari". Referring to a greek chanter who could not find a job, the Bulgarian poet says: "I was acquainted to him and loving the music I was learning at that time—because a teacher who cannot sing in church is worth nothing—I invited him to visit me at my place"¹³. We should bear in mind that the great german philosopher Hegel in his aesthetic studies gives priority to music among the arts, just like the ancients considered poetry to be the highest form of art. This approachment to music, in order to transmit harmony and pleasure to the ear took place so that poetry had more naturalness, vividly and expressiveness.

We will conclude this essay with a remark on the psychological condition and disposition of the late anacreontian and at this stage romantic poets right before and during their poetic creation, that is the moments of emotion, of setting out, of development and aesthetic result. A colleague of Petko Slavejkov who worked in a newspaper gave us a very fine and useful to the understanding of artistic creation testimony: "It is a worth of attention and curious at the same time event: it was when he was particularly distressed and passed difficult hours that his pen became unique"¹⁴. The following fragment from a letter by Yannis Vilaras to his friend, compatriot and bearing the same ideas scholar-illuminator Athanasios Psalidas takes us into the artistic workshop of the later anacreontian and romantic poets, at the moment when their work is placed between two artistic trends—the late anacreontian-sensual and the romantic which has passed on to the new and transformed quality of romantism by means of the dawn of a new and unique period in the life of poetry and prose. The preference to a vivid observation which extends up to the field of human life and philosophy is evident. The element of the spontaneous recording, the overabundant (to the point of anarchy) lyric narration, as a result of multiple thoughts, ideas, sentiments, impressions, alternative poetic scenes so that the poet doesn't have time enough to record them was cultivated as much as

12. N. Korytzas, *Βίος Αθανασίου Χριστοπούλου*. See: *Αθανάσιος Χριστόπουλος, 'Απαντα*, edited by G. Valetas. Athens 1969, p. 126.

13. Petko Slavejkov..., p. 132.

14. *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

possible by writers, poets and prose-writers of the purer romantic lyric art. Yannis Vilaras notices:

“1812, May 11, Tripolitsa...

I have to finish even though I don't want it. The pedestrian looks eagerly in my eyes to see when I will seal the letter. Patience! I found some verses which I composed on my way to Tripolitsa. Leaving Kalavryta we came by a river; this river together with some others forms the big river Roupbias. Tired by the journey, I stretched myself on the grass near the bank under an old bushy plane tree. The cool shade, the green of the mountains and the plains and the loud but sweet murmur of the water brought me into ecstasy, whose pleasure one cannot feel without the assistance of the senses. Having my eyes fixed on the ceaseless running of the water, I philosophised on the parallel hasty running of human affairs. This was Minerva's advice, but the jealous Eros appeared suddenly and looking at me winked smilingly and I wrote the following:

Θωρώ σε, Χλόη, κι άδικο θέλ' απομαραθούν
 Οι κρίνοι, τα τριαντάφυλλα, στην όψη σου π' ανθούν.
 Διαβατικά τ' ανθρώπινα σαν ποταμιού νερό,
 Τα νιάτα, χάρου, κόρη μου, μη χάνεις τον καιρό.
 Πλακώνουν τα γεράματα προτού να φανταστείς,
 Κι αν μετανιώσεις ύστερα διπλά θα παιδευτείς.
 Τις σαίτιές του Έρωτα μη τις καταφρονάς
 Και μη τα δασκαλέματα ακούς της Αθηνάς!
 Τα ήθη, Χλόη, μέρωσε, μη θες να τυραννάς.
 Η φύση δε σου χάρισε καρδιά να μην πονάς.
 Κοιτάς την ψεύτραν Άρτεμη, δεν ξέρεις, σ' απατάει
 Κι αυτόν τον Ενδυμίωνα κρυφά τον αγαπάει.
 Τη νιότη χάρου, κόρη μου, ογλήγορ' απανθεί,
 Κι αφού τινάς την έχασε, χαμένα την ποθεί¹⁵.

In the discord between Minerva and Eros (in one's inner self or generally in life and human fate) Yannis Vilaras gives victory to Eros, but this victory is not absolute: the human hymn to youth, to the senses and to pleasure is sung in life having as background old-age, the advices of Minerva with the image of all the experiences of an accomplished man. The dialectical view of life as a field of conflict and new equilibriums between contradictory situations, tendencies and mainly between the rational (rational illumination) and the

15. I. Vilaras, *Άπαντα*. Foreward by Costis Palamas, (s.d.), pp. 312-313.

senses (predominance of the senses and romantism) by means of subjection of the former to the latter, as well as the different understanding of love through the intense projection of pain, distress, misfortune, designate Vilaras as the first romantic (with all reserves and especially in the poems of his last period) poet in greek literature. The deeper and substantial relation of his poems to the folk songs, the preference he showed to the spontaneity and negation deriving from the severe (according to the classicistic models of the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries) organization of ideas and forms together with the care for musical "orchestration" of the verse confirm the view that on a form level Vilaras passes on to the new wide trend of the time—romantism.

The romantic Greek writers under the completely new conditions formed during the 1821 revolution (especially towards the end) and mainly after the ending of the armed clash and the partial liberation of Greece describe more vividly the dramatic conflicts of society and man's inner self, conflicts which have more destructive effects for the fate of the persons in action. The strong contrast between the ideals of the revolution and new life on the one hand and the much smaller and insignificant, as expected, accomplishments on the other, made the chasm between dream and reality unbridgeable.

By the end of the XIXth century and mainly in the work of C. Cavafy we can observe a return, but on higher levels, to the form of contradiction, the clash of the rational with the sentiments. The full understanding of the impossibility to find the one, the only, the right and absolute solution to this tragic dilemma makes more intense the dramatic sentiment which in Cavafy often reaches the deadlock, as far as the tragic ratification and interpretation of life, as well as the tragic philosophy of human fate are concerned. So it is not at all accidental the preference Cavafy showed towards the new Anacreon—that is Christopoulos. And we think that the liking Cavafy felt for Christopoulos did not derive from a relationship of pure poetic structure and manner, but also from the understanding of dialectical antinomy of the combination of uncombined folds and elements in life and history.