



Iphigenia as A Bestseller: The *Sacrifice of Abraham* and Its Slavic and Ottoman *Nachleben*¹

Vladimir Boskovic*

*National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Modern Greek Literature, Post-Doc,
boskovic@fas.harvard.edu*

APA Citation:

Boskovic, V. (2018). Iphigenia as A Bestseller: The *Sacrifice of Abraham* and Its Slavic and Ottoman *Nachleben*. *Journal of Narrative and Language Studies*, 6(10), 48-65.

Abstract

The Cretan religious drama *The Sacrifice of Abraham* (*Η Θυσία του Αβραάμ*) enjoyed great popularity among Orthodox populations of the wider cultural realm of Southeastern Europe. Soon after its composition the text entered the sphere of oral tradition and it was written down in various forms throughout the Greek-speaking world. In addition, the Cretan text also surpassed its initial linguistic framework by a series of translations which in turn became very popular: the Serbian translation by Vićentije Rakić (*Žertva Avraamova*, which is also the first known stage performance of the text, set up by Milovan Vidaković in the Serbian gymnasium of Novi Sad in 1836), the Bulgarian translation by Andrey Popdoynov Robovski (*Služba, ili žertva Avraamova*), as well as at least two Karamanlidic Turkish translations by Sophronios of Şile and Ioannikios of Kazanlık (*Hazreti Avraamin... kurban hekyaesî*). My paper focuses on the diachronic interaction of the elements of oral tradition, performativity, and Biblical myth characteristic of this text. The (post-)Ottoman *Nachleben* of the Cretan version raises some important questions about the modes of construction of literary histories and their narratives in Southeastern Europe, simultaneously comprising a somewhat unanticipated example of an early modern transnational literary text.

Key Words: The Sacrifice of Abraham, Vićentije Rakić, Milovan Vidaković, Andrey Popdoynov Robovski, transnational literature

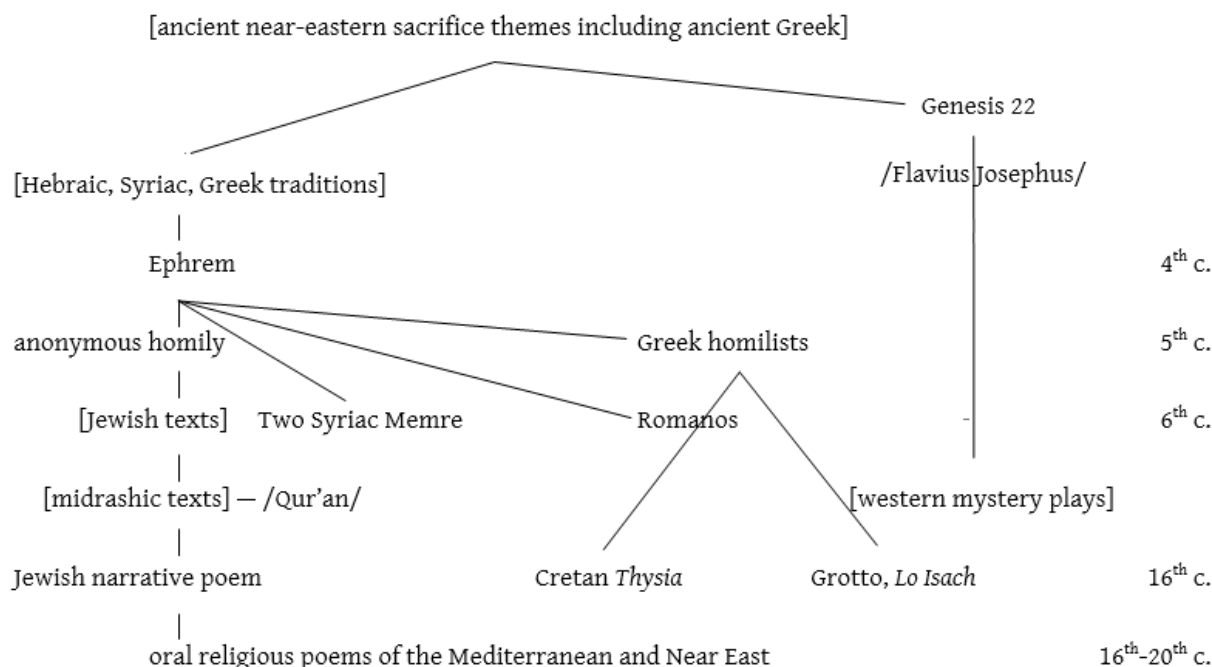
The Biblical story from Genesis 22 stands at the center of the three Abrahamic religions. It is explored in Kierkegaard's classic work on ethics and religion, *Fear and Trembling*, and more recently by Derrida in his very interesting book on the 'secrets of European responsibility,' *The Gift of Death*. In literature, the story is retold in Midrashic *Genesis Rabbah*, in Flavius Josephus' *Antiquities of the Jews*, in the homilies of the Christian church fathers, in two sixth-century Syriac poetic homilies called *memre*, in a hymn (*kontákion*) by Romanos the Melodist, in the 37th Sura of the Qur'an, and in innumerable other literary adaptations and oral compositions covering the vast geographic space from England to the Middle East. The motif remains popular to this day and can be found in the works of various artists of all profiles, from

¹ My warmest thanks go to Julia Dubnoff for her generous help with proofreading this paper and correcting several mistakes. All errors and omissions in this work are mine.

* Modern Greek Literature, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Greece. boskovic@fas.harvard.edu

Emily Dickinson to Woody Allen to Madonna. The story was also rewritten by Russian director Andrei Tarkovsky in his masterpiece *The Sacrifice* (titled *Offret* in Swedish).

Stemma



This is the *stemma* of the story proposed by Margaret Alexiou in her important analysis (1989:17; my additions are between slashes), in which she discerns two branches in the tradition of the motif: The Biblical version on the one side and the rich popular tradition of the Mediterranean and Near East on the other. One of the ‘popular’ branches of Alexiou’s scheme is the Cretan drama *Ἡ Θυσία τοῦ Ἀβραάμ* that had a rich afterlife I will address in this paper.

The Cretan version was composed in the late sixteenth or the early seventeenth century, likely by Vincenzo Cornaro, the famous author of the chivalric romance *Erotokritos*. The work is based on the Italian play *Lo Isach* by Luigi Grotto, as shown already by John Mavrogordato (1928). Its form is typical of the Cretan Renaissance literature, the rhymed couplets of 15-syllable iambic verses very common in Greek poetry (‘political verse’).

Holding a ‘quite unique position in Cretan theater’ (Politis 1973:62) and in the histories of the Greek literature and being utterly remote to the tastes of modern audiences, it is not easy now to imagine the popularity the *Sacrifice of Abraham* enjoyed in the past, up until the interwar period. Bakker (1978) enumerates thirty-seven Greek editions between 1696 and 1874² and the editions continued in the following years. To this we may add numerous manuscript copies, out of which two came down to us: Kollyvas 221 and Marcianus Graecus XI.19 (1394); the latter was written in Latin characters. The play was spread from Crete to the Ionian Islands and then

² Legrand (1874) mentions editions of ‘1535,’ ‘1555,’ and ‘Glykos’s 1668,’ but later scholars, ever since Xanthoudidis’s objections in the introduction to *Erotokritos* (published in 1915), dismiss these dates. For an excellent review of the many editions of the *Sacrifice*, see Skowronek 2016. (In a truly postmodern turn, the author widely quotes and opens discussions with the present paper, whose draft was previously posted online.)

throughout the Greek-speaking world. Its popularity is partially due to its compliance with church doctrine: the Vortoli edition in 1713 carries the subtitle ‘the most edifying story, excerpted from the Holy Scripture.’ The ideological context of the play should, thus, be considered equally as its demotic character as a factor contributing to the text’s unhindered reach; all the translations and most of the adaptations were done by priests.

It is hard to imagine today the popularity *The Sacrifice of Abraham* enjoyed in Greece, in the complex interaction between the oral and written tradition of the text. It was turned into a *cento* love poem from Naxos, where Sarah’s and Abraham’s laments for their child are transformed into expressions of sorrow for a lost lover. The Greek scholar Xanthoudidis recalls that the *Sacrifice* was read aloud in Crete in his childhood, in the 1870s, ‘as much as *Erotokritos* and *Erophile*,’ often by women ‘on Sundays and other holidays... with much piety and sometimes with tears’ (Megas 1954:134-5, my translation). In 1943, G. Lianoudakis describes his memories of sung performances of the *Sacrifice* in the region of Sitia in Crete, with his grandfather, a priest, singing the role of Abraham, his daughters the roles of Sarah and the Angel, and his nephew the role of Isaac (Lianoudakis 1943, reference in Megas 1954:86n1). He describes the music as ‘nothing special, monotonous melodies.’ As late as 1953, D. Oikonomidis reports: ‘Many of my compatriots read the *Sacrifice* so often that they knew the entire passages by heart.’ He mentions two copies of the book (most likely from Venice) in the village of Aperathos in Naxos, known to be inhabited mostly by Cretan settlers, and gives examples of the two laments from the play he recorded in 1935 (Oikonomidis 1953:112, my translation).

The play is written in a popular language close to that of the oral folk tradition. It abounds with ‘markers of orality’ in Zumthor’s terms.³ On the first level, it contains ‘anecdotal signs’ or ‘quotations’ from oral tradition, that is, popular poems inserted into the text. Sarah responds to the tragic news about her son with a series of embedded funeral laments, a product of centuries-long intertwining between the folk song and lamentations of Virgin Mary (vv. 171-6):

Ὅφου μαντάτο, ὅφου φωνή, ὅφου καρδιάς λακτάρα,

ὅφου φωτιά ποὺ μ’ ἔκαψε, ὅφου κορμιοῦ τρομάρα!

Ὅφου μαχαίρια καὶ σπαθιά ποὺ ’μπήκαν στὴν καρδιά μου

κι ἐκάμαν ἐκατὸ πληγὲς μέσα στὰ σωθικά μου!

Μὲ ποιὰν ἀπομονὴ νὰ ζῶ, νὰ μὴν ἐβγεῖ ἡ ψυχὴ μου,

ἀξάφνου μ’ ἔτοιμο θάνατο νὰ χάσω τὸ παιδί μου;

(Oh the message, oh the news, oh how my heart is beating.

³ Zumthor (1990:44-5) lists four basic criteria by which elements of an oral tradition can be traced in a literary text: anecdotal signs, formal indications, allusions to oral transmission, and contemporary practices.

Oh the fire burning me, oh how my body trembles!

Oh the knives and swords that struck my heart

And inflicted my innards with a hundred wounds!

Where can I find patience to live, how can my soul not leave me,

When I am losing my child, suddenly and through such a death?)

Another Zumthor's marker for orality are the 'formal indications.' In the Greek case it is the dominant 'isometric phrasing,' to borrow the term from the eminent Greek scholar Stilpon Kyriakidis. More specifically, those are 'tripartite constructions'—the terms are rather self-explanatory (*Ὁφρου μαντάτο, ὄφρου φωνή, ὄφρου καρδιάς λακτάρα*, v. 171), 'isometric parallelisms' (*κι ἐσύ 'σουνε τὰ μάτια μου κι ἐσύ 'σουνε τὸ φῶς μου*, v. 378), and 'isometric oscillations' (*ὥσάν ἀρνάκι κείται κι ὥσάν πουλὶ κοιμάται*, v. 411).

These characteristics set the text inside the frame of Greek oral poetic tradition, and it is not strange that soon after its composition it entered the orbit of oral transmission. More precisely, the text existed within a dynamic system of interrelations between oral and written domains. It was a good example of what Alexiou (1991) calls 'integration of oral, literary and religious tradition,' with a mutually dependent set of transfers and interventions, resulting in a particularly rich *Nachleben* of the play.

If we return to Zumthor's theory, it is possible to take the same path in an opposite direction, and to list ways in which both forms of the same text can exist and relate to each other:

1. writing down
 - a. 'standardization' of the text
 - b. linguistic and stylistic intervention ('correction,' 'purification')
2. reading aloud, reciting, and performing
3. reading to oneself
 - a. using written text for memorizing
 - b. using written text for 'correction' of the oral version

In this arrangement, it is of secondary importance whether the 'first' or 'original' text comes from written or oral sphere, in other words, whether it is *δημῶδες* or *δημοτικό*. These distinctions depend largely on the socio-cultural milieu of a given society and on particular

meanings given to the terms for ‘poets’ or ‘artists’; in premodern times the boundaries between the two were not exactly clear. Modern writers of popular songs can belong to either oral or literary tradition, or both; or they can establish boundaries between the two domains, with dynamics of osmotic exchange between them.

Cretan plays were works of literary educated individuals, written for wide audiences but directed primarily to the island’s social elite. This poetry was cultivated in Renaissance academias and literary salons, and divulged through theater performances, copies, and early printed editions. The *Sacrifice of Abraham* was in many ways connected to the oral tradition, orally transmitted and susceptible to variations in form and language, composition and form, submerged into the generative system of oral poetry. For the major part, however, it remained a distinctively literary work, transmitted primarily in the form of a chapbook, copied, and translated.

Following the outline above, one may postulate a continuous cycle of editions, readings, and performances (not necessarily including all three), with sub-branches of memorization and oral transmission; the oral forms of the poem were continuously checked by the coexisting written editions. The textual changes in the editions regularly came from editors, and their interventions were based on older editions or manuscripts. The literary form remained the chief source of the text dissemination, notwithstanding the popularity of a given oral version. With these precautions, then, I will claim that *Sacrifice* was part of the popular tradition.

The point at which the text entered the purely oral tradition is not easy to discern. The total number of copies in circulation needed not be too high, but the text appears to have been able to reach the audience in urban or rural settings alike. The oral character of the text materialized itself in two ways: the text was learned by heart and its fragments and poetic phrases entered the repertoire of folk poetry. In the first case, the ‘authority of the written text’ (numbered 3-a above) is dominant; in the second (number 2), the written and oral transmissions are combined to form a composite set of interrelations.

To the first group belong testimonies by D. V. Oikonomidis mentioned above, who gave examples of the two most popular laments from the play he recorded in 1935, composed in the local dialect. The first of them reads:

Ὁχου μαδᾶτο, ὦχου φωνή, ὦχου καρδιᾶς λαχτάρα
ὦχου φωθιὰ ποὺ μ’ ἔκαψε, ὦχου κορμιοῦ τρομάρα·
ὦχου μαχαίρια καὶ σπαθιά, πὸ βῆκα στὴ γαρδιά μου
κι ἐκάμαν ἐκατὸ πληρὲς μέσα στὰ σωθικά μου.
Μὲ πκοιὰν ὑπομονὴ νὰ ζῶ, νὰ μὴν ἔβγ’ ἡ ψυχὴ μου
ἀξαφνικὰ κι ἀνόρπιστα νὰ χάσω τὸ παιδί μου;
Ἄς ἤθελε ’ενῶ κουφή, στραβὴ στὰ ’εραθειά μου

νὰ μὴ θωροῦ δὰ μάθια μου, νὰ μὴ γροικοῦ δ' αὐθιά μου.

(Oh the message, oh the news, oh how my heart is beating,

Oh the fire burning me, oh how my body trembles:

Oh the knives and swords that struck my heart

And inflicted my innards with a hundred wounds!

Where can I find patience in life, how can my soul not leave me,

When I am losing my child, so suddenly and unexpectedly?

I wish I had become blind and deaf in my old age

So that my eyes cannot see, so that my ears cannot hear.)

If we juxtapose this to the verses 171-8 quoted above (p. 11), we note that the text matches accurately the phrasing of the written editions. The differences show the interpreter introduced phonetic features of the local dialect (*φωθιά, πό, πλήές, πκοιάν, 'ενῶ, 'εραθειά, μάθια, αὐθιά*) and replaced the exclamation *ὄφου* with the more common *ὠχου*. He also simplified syntax in the phrase *ἀξαφνικὰ κι ἀνόπιστα* where Bakker & van Gemert write *ἀξάφνου μ' ἔτοιο θάνατο*; the written tradition was also leaning towards simplicity in this verse, with alternative readings *ἔξαφνα* (Vortoli 1713) and *mé ton thanato* (Marcianus). These simplifications liken the structure of the verse to that of traditional oral poetry; similar adjustments are noted in *Erotokritos* (Roilos 2002:217) and *Erophile* (Puchner 1983:178-81). They show exactly how thin the dividing line between written and oral really is, and how a text can detach from its written form and enter the orbit of oral transmission.

And that is exactly what happened. Already Megas (1954:133-8) noted a remarkably diverse *Nachleben* of the play in the oral tradition. Sarah's laments were still heard in villages of the Eastern Crete and recorded by Maria Lioudaki in the late 1930s. Their form is very close to the *Sacrifice*: the quotes from these laments—e.g.: *Ὁφου τρομάρα, ὠφου καημός, ὠφου μεγάλη λαύρα, / ὠφου φωθιά ποὺ μ' ἔκαψε μέσα στὰ φυλλοκάρδια* (Lioudaki 1939:412)—show that their structure is identical to Sarah's lament. The replacements of *μαντᾶτο* with *τρομάρα* and *φωνή* with *καημός* serve to decontextualize the text so that the lament can fulfill its function outside the play. The close thematic kinship with the oral tradition—metaphors of death as journey and death as marriage—are analyzed in detail by M. Alexiou (1991). The phrasing and imagery of some fragments of the *Sacrifice* are also shared with various *mantinades*, ranging from possible echoing the play (*Mant. 155: Ἄχι, μέ ποιὰν ἀποκοθιά νὰ μπῇ 'ς τὴν ὄρεξή μου, / νὰ κάμω πέτρα τὴν καρδιά, νὰ σ' ἀρνηθῶ, μικρὴ μου*)⁴ to structural formulas of traditional oral

⁴ Cf. *Sacrifice* vv. 37-38: *Ὁφου, μέ ποιὰν ἀποκοθιά νὰ μπῇ στὴν ὄρεξή μου, / μέ τίνος λιονταριοῦ καρδιά νὰ σφάξω τὸ παιδί μου;*

poetry employed by both (*Mant.* 134: *Ἐνα μαχαῖρι μ' ἔσφαζε, μὰ ἐδὰ μὲ σφάζει κι ἄλλο, / μὰ δὲ γατέχω, μὰ τὸ Θιό, ποιό 'ναι τὸ πλιὰ μεγάλο*).⁵

Bouvier (1976, no. 164) notes the correspondences in a lament recorded in 1889 in Çeşme, also known as *Kρήνη*, in Asia Minor (reference in Bakker & van Gemert 1996:135). It might be useful at this point to compare three different versions of the verses 377-8:

*Τρεῖς χρόνους, γιέ μου, σοῦ 'δίδα τὸ γάλα τῷ βυζῶ μου,
κι ἐσύ 'σουνε τὰ μάτια μου κι ἐσύ 'σουνε τὸ φῶς μου.*

(For three years, my son, I gave you the milk of my breast,
You were my eyes, and you were my light.)

This couplet is recorded in Crete by Lioudaki (1939:415) in the following form:

*Κι' ἄς τάζω, δὲ σ' ἐβύζασα τὸ γάλα τῷ βυζῶ μου,
ἐσύ 'σουν καὶ τα μάθια μου, ἐσύ 'σουν καὶ τὸ φῶς μου.*

(And still, I have never nursed you with the milk of my breast,
You were my eyes, you were my light too.)

In the Çeşme version (204-5) the fragment reads as follows:

*Γιέ μου χρυσέ, γιέ μου καλέ, ποὺ σ' ἔθρεψα μὲ γάλα,
γιὰ λόγου σου πολλὰ 'παθα, τοῦτα 'ν' τὰ πιὸ μεγάλα.*

⁵ Cf. *Sacrifice* vv. 113-4: *Γεῖς πόνοσ μ' ἔσφαζε δριμύς, μὰ ἐδὰ μὲ σφάζει κι ἄλλος, / καὶ νὰ λογιᾶζω δὲ μπορῶ ποιὸς νὰ 'ναι πλιὰ μεγάλος.*

(My golden son, my good son, whom I nursed with milk,

I suffered much for you, but this is the hardest pain of all.)

The three versions show three different treatments of the common reference to nursing. The period of three years from the first version is inexistent in the second, while the third one (spatially remote from Crete?) not only contains no reference to the number of years but also introduces a gradation of mother's sufferings. It would be appealing to conjure an 'original' phrasing of an individual poet, whose formulation becomes ever weaker as it leaves its original spatial, chronological, or cultural orbit. But an individual poet may have also used a familiar phrase and make it more concrete, including it in the linear structure of the lament embedded in the text (375-90): pregnancy-nursing-childhood-death, which was reproduced in Bouvier's version.

Another quotation from the *Sacrifice* in oral tradition is found in *Panaratos*, the popular adaptation of Chortatsis's *Erophile* (Zoras & Kretsi-Leontsini 1957:119; reference in Bakker & van Gemert 1996:133):

Ὄφρου τρομάρα μὲ κρατεῖ, ζάλην μεγάλην ἔχω

ἢ ἄγρυπνος ἢ ζύπνιος ἂν εἶμαι δὲν κατέχω.

(Oh what fear is consuming me, my confusion is great,

I do not know if I am awake or asleep.)

Perhaps what we have here is a trace of performances of the *Sacrifice* by popular theaters, which would explain the transmission of a fragment into another play that was itself an adaptation of a learned text.

Apostolos Karpozilos (1994) published an oral version of the *Sacrifice* in the dialect of Mariupol Greeks. The song was recorded in the villages of Sartana, Makedoniya, and Khersonets by A. Beletskii, in seven versions of which the longest one comprises 106 verses. Those versions are remains of a longer poem entitled *Sacrifice of Abraham* composed in 1902 by Damian Bgaditsa from Sartana, but that text has not survived. A fragment of 14 stanzas entitled 'Lamentation of Sarah' was published by K. Kostan (1932) in Ukrainian translation; the original is now lost. Karpozilos brings the longest song with a translation, comments, and variants of the remaining six versions. The song is in rhymed fifteen-syllable verse, with an additional rhyming of half-verses (on caesura). It is not known whether Bgaditsa's poem came as result of an oral tradition or the Greek *Sacrifice* was circulating in written form; what is certain, though, is that its distant echo is heard in the Mariupol song (vv. 29-30; this dialect is not comprehensible to standard Modern Greek speakers):

Γνεφα, Avram, γνεφα, Avram, ty t'masy us ta tora?

Ato tu styšsis tu xurban, na tu pajs indun ora.

(Wake up, Abraham, wake up, Abraham, why are you still sleeping?

You need to offer a sacrifice, it is time for you to go.)

Compare the Cretan version (vv. 1-2):

Ξύπνα, Αβραάμ, ξύπνα, Αβραάμ, γείρου κι άπάνω στάσου,

μαντάτο άπό τούς ούρανούς σου φέρνου, κι άφουκράσου.

(Wake up, Abraham, wake up, Abraham, come and stand up,

A news from heaven is brought to you, listen to it.)

The resemblances to the Cretan play, although striking and obvious, are relatively few; structure of the plot, handling of motifs, relevance of actions have all undergone transformations to conform to the system of folk poetry. We can recognize, for instance, Sarah's and Abraham's laments, waking of Abraham (although due to the change in composition it appears somehow gratuitous), waking of Isaac, and Isaac's asking his father to bind his hands. The most striking difference is the three visitors introduced in the beginning of the song, representing the Holy Trinity in disguise, to which Abraham promises his long-desired child. This episode is likely based to the iconographic depictions of the Hospitality of Abraham, particularly popular in Russia (based on the Biblical story in Gen. 18:1-8). The poem ends somewhat abruptly, in the manner of traditional folk songs. The form of the verse is observed quite consistently, and the rhyme probably contributed to a more precise memorizing of Bgaditsa's text.

George Savvidis found quotations from the *Sacrifice* in a 12-verse poem entitled *Calliope's Return or On Poetic Method* written in 1819 by Phanariote Charisios Megdanis of Kozani (Savvidis 1990). The poem represents, as Savvidis puts it, 'an attempt of the Phanariote cycle in the early nineteenth century to innovate linguistically and to vary metrically the "monotony of Cretan epics" (Kalvos, 1824)' (1990:69, reference in Bakker & van Gemert 1996:132, my translation).⁶

⁶ Professor Savvidis also found quotations from the *Sacrifice* in texts by Kaisarios Dapontes; see Savvidis 1993, reference in Bakker & van Gemert 1996:131.

Glykeria Protopapa (1960) edited and published a short poem from an eighteenth-century manuscript from Naxos, described in the catalog of the National Library in Athens as *A Poem of a Lovelorn Maiden* (Ποίημα Ἀπαρνημένης, Ξ 1027). The poem consists of 58 verses out of which only four are *not* taken directly from the *Sacrifice of Abraham*. Protopapa calls this poem an ‘imitation of the *Sacrifice*’ (στιχοῦργημα κατὰ μίμησιν τῆς Θ. τ. Ἀ.) but the proper term for this type of work, known from late antiquity, is *cento* – ‘a patchwork of hundred pieces.’ When needed, the verses were slightly modified so that the fragments may fit into the genre of love poetry; Abraham’s and Sarah’s laments are transformed into sorrow for the absent lover. Here is an example (*eadem*:215, vv. 1-4):

Πῶς εἶναι τοῦτο βολετὸ ὁ Πλάστης νὰ θελήσῃ
τὴν ἀγαπᾶς νὰ ἀρνηθῇς ποὺ κάνει δίκια κρίση;
Ἦ ζυγαριὰ ἢ ἄσφαλτος, ὅπου τὰ δίκια κρίνει
πῶς εἶναι δυνατόν ἐδὰ νὰ σφάλῃ καὶ νὰ κλίνη;

The *Sacrifice* in this place reads (vv. 661-664):

Πῶς εἶναι τοῦτο *μπορετό*, ὁ Πλάστης νὰ θελήσῃ
τέτοιο μυστήριον νὰ γενεῖ, ποὺ κάνει δίκια κρίση;
Ἦ ζυγαριὰ ἢ ἄσφαλτος, ὅπου τὰ δίκια κρίνει,
πῶς εἶναι *μπορετόν* ἐδὰ νὰ σφάλλῃ καὶ νὰ κλίνη;

As one can observe, the only difference between the texts at this point is the beginning of the second verse, where the motif *impossible-made-possible*, omnipresent in the *Sacrifice*, is replaced with a phrase that fits better with the theme of the new poem. As Protopapa rightly suggests, the words *βολετό* and *δυνατόν* – instead of *μπορετό(ν)* – are likely due to Venetian editions of the *Sacrifice* that had the Cretan text ‘corrected.’

But it appears that it was in its *written* form that the play surpassed the limits of the Greek-speaking readership. It was translated in prose into Karamanlidic Turkish—that is, Turkish written in Greek alphabet for the use of Turkish-speaking Greek community—by a priest called Papa-Andreas, and published in 1800 by the Patriarchal Press in Constantinople. This version was reprinted in the Armenian script in 1812. The play was translated again in 1836 and published by Ignatiadis brothers, also in Constantinople, this time in rhymed couplets of the learned Ottoman poetry of ‘une valeur littéraire particulière’ as Salaville and Dalleggio’s put it in their catalog (1958:237). The name of the translator is hidden in an acrostic in a *sphragis* of

the text (*eidem*:239). I think even this short passage can show the difference in poetic discourses between the two texts; I owe thanks to my dear colleague Bilge Girgin for her help with the translation:

Σήتكλε Πακάσην Ρουχανι καρινδασίμ
Ιμάνιλε Πακήπ Οκουδουκτὰ σὲν δινδασίμ.
Λαηκλῆ Σαχήχ Νασιχέτ πουλατζάκσην,
Εττικατλῆ Ωλάρὰκ Ιταατῆ δουγῆατζάκσην.
Λὰ φὰρκ Φαζιλετλῆ Ολούρσαν ποῦ Ἀβραὰμ γκιπὶ,
Ινσαλλαχ, ποῦ χεκῖαγετ Σανάδα όλούρ τατλῆ ταὰμ γκιπί.

If you look at it with Truthfulness, my spiritual sibling,
If you look at it and read it with Faith, my fellow believer,
You will find a worthy, true advice,
You will feel obedience like the faithful;
Even if you are as virtuous as this Abraham,
God willing, this story will become like sweet food for you.

The acrostic reads ‘Şileli Papa Sophronios’ or, in other words, Papa-Sophronios of Şile on the Black Sea (*Χιλή* in Greek). The adaptation of the text into the meters and forms of Ottoman learned poetry, including the passage above, is an appealing topic in its own right, with cultural and historical implications regarding the political and cultural setting of *millet-i Rum*. It clearly shows that the literary preferences of the educated Greeks of Ottoman Constantinople were at least partly overlapping with the Ottoman learned audience of the time. The translation was reprinted in Constantinople in Cyrillic in 1845, by a Bulgarian priest Ioanikios; there was also the third Karamanlidic translation of 1862, published seven times before 1905.

At about the same time as the first Karamanlidic translation, the text was translated into Serbian. This translation was published in 1799 by Vikentije Rakić, at that time a priest in the thriving Serbian merchant community of Trieste. Rakić attended a Greek school in his native town of Zemun and his position in Trieste probably helped him come in touch with some of the Venetian editions of the Greek *Sacrifice*. The translation was reprinted at least twelve times until 1907, and apparently was widely read. A geographer Stevan Milošević wrote at the time (1822: XIII):

I encountered with joy quite a few shepherds in Syrmia who were spending their time with flock in the field reading the *Sacrifice of Abraham*, *Life of St. Lazarus*, and other similar books. And why do they read them so gladly? Because, first, these books are intelligible for their mind, and second, since they are reasoning from the perspective of their nation [*rod*=γένος], they think all those things happened among Serbian people.⁷

But not only shepherds were interested in the *Sacrifice*; a well-known Serbian teacher and writer, Milovan Vidaković, teacher at the Serbian high school in Novi Sad, informs that the *Sacrifice of Abraham* was one of the plays performed by the teachers of his school in 1836 (Popović 1925:153). According to Bakker and van Gemert, to whom we owe an excellent critical edition of the Greek text, the first known Greek performance is given only in 1855 in the island of Zakynthos by Dionysios Tavoularis, who then was a sixteen-year-old boy (Bakker & van Gemert 1996:134). This makes Vidaković's staging of the *Sacrifice* the first known performance of the text.⁸

Here is a fragment from the Serbian translation; it is faithful to the original with almost word-for-word accuracy, but some of the ideas and images from the original are simplified to comply with the traditional phrasing of the shorter Serbian verse (Rakić 1799:13):

Ljuta vatra serdce mi upali,

Težak ognj dušu moju pali.

Kakvi noži serdce mi proizoše,

I utrobu moju probodoše.

(A fierce flame has ignited my heart

A painful fire is burning my soul.

Oh the swords that struck my heart

And cut through my innards!)

⁷ Reference in Vukadinović 1936:53-4, my translation.

⁸ The tradition of adaptations of Cretan theatrical works for performance was alive from the 18th to the early 20th century in Zakynthos during carnival, and points out to earlier performances; we have no surviving testimony for any performance in Crete.

While the Karamanlidic translations remain highly literary works, the Serbian translation, despite the elements of the learned language, is markedly popular in character. It is written in the traditional Serbian ten-syllable trochaic verse, rhymed after Greek original. The text fits perfectly into the formulaic diction of the Serbian folk song, following the patterns established by Albert Lord in his classical work, *The Singer of Tales*. This is Sarah's lament (Rakić 1799:26)

Ustaj sine žalostna ti majka,

Čeka tebe na dvoru babajka.

Žalostnici da s njime putuješ,

Do Morije gore da druguješ.

Da se tamo Bogu pomolite,

I žalostnu žertvu učinite.

(Wake up my son, don't make your mother sad,

Your daddy is waiting for you in the yard

So that you can travel with him in sorrow,

And keep him company to Moriah,

So that there you may pray to God,

And offer a sorrowful sacrifice.)

What Rakić translates here is not only the text itself, but also the *orality* of the original. Cicero would probably call it a translation *non verbum de verbo, sed sensum de sensu* (not word for word, but meaning for meaning). The meaning of the Cretan text was indeed to make the known story *sound popular*, to draft it to the living oral tradition. The most striking deep-structural element of the Greek play—its compliance to the rules and norms of oral poetic diction—is thus transferred into another language using analogous expressive means. This can explain the shepherds' perception that 'all those things happened among Serbian people.'

But not only Serbian priests were attracted by the charms of the Cretan drama. In 1858, a Bulgarian *sakellarios* Andrey Popdoynov Robovski from Elena published a book entitled *The Sacrifice, or the Service of Abraham* (*Žertva, ili Služba Avraamova. Razgovorka za Avraamovata i Isaakovata žertva*), at Taddei Divichian's print in Constantinople (Robovski 1858). Andrey Robovski was a teacher and priest in Elena and his work is a translation of Papa-

Sophronios' version; according to Fani Angelieva, who presented the Bulgarian translation in the *Balkanistischen forum* a few years ago (Angelieva 1996), Robovski was using the Cyrillic reprint of Papa-Sophronios' translation of 1845.

If the translation was not ordered, then Robovski's motive may be linked to the popularity the *Sacrifice* already enjoyed among both Greeks and Serbs; by the middle of the nineteenth century, the translation of Vikentije Rakić took a prominent place among Serbian readership both in Austrian Empire and in the Principality of Serbia. At the time the Bulgarian version was published, at least nine Serbian editions were in circulation. The press of the Serbian Principality in Belgrade was a major center of print in Bulgarian language and many important works of the Bulgarian cultural revival (*възраждане*) were printed there; the same press also hosted an undated reprint of the *Sacrifice*, which can be roughly dated not long after 1848.⁹ At this point we do not know whether Robovski knew about Serbian translation and if it influenced his treatment of the Karamanlidic text, but it should be taken into consideration. The Karamanlidic translation was also transliterated into Armenian script and published in 1812 (Bekker & van Gemert 1996:133).

Robovski's text follows the structure of the Turkish translation, with a narrative introduction and a versified prolog to the readers. Angelieva gives the following examples:

Παδί μου, κανακάρη μου, θάρρος κι άπαντοχή μου,

παρηγοριά και ζήση μου, άμε με την εύκή μου.

(My child, my boy, my strength and my endurance,

My consolation and my life, go with my blessing.)

In Turkish written in old Cyrillic:

Хайде севюли оглумъ, ве сигинаджакъ, умудумъ йолуна барасинъ

*хайде гьозумунъ нуру, омрумунъ вари, хаиръ довами аласинъ.*¹⁰

(Go, my beloved son, my sweet shelter, my hope, take off to the journey,

⁹ The 'widow of Gligorije Vozarović' is signed as publisher; Gligorije Vozarović, editor, founder of the Serbian Principality Press, died in 1848.

¹⁰ In modern Turkish orthography: *Haydi sevgili oğlum ve sığınacak umudum, yoluna bakasın / Haydi gözüümün nuru, ömrümün varı, hayır devamı alsın.*

Go, light of my eyes, my life's all, you have my blessing.)

In Bulgarian:

*Хайде чадо и надеждо, въ пътя да си идиши,
свѣте на очите ми, прѣдъ Бога да прѣставиши.*

(Go, my child and my hope, take off to the journey,

Light of my eyes, present yourself before God.)¹¹

The verse of the Bulgarian translation was meant to be the rhymed trochaic fourteen-syllable (8+6), but the number of syllables varies from fourteen in the beginning up to twenty-four towards the end of the poem. Robovski has no control of his verse and his rhymes are poor and irregular. This is one of the extreme examples (Robovski 1858:53):

О Отче! Ты отъ тѣзи дростъ ако не съ от' върниши, послѣ щешъ да ся раскаиши,
(that is one verse!)

Защото съ тѣзи работѣ, на свѣтъ щешъ зѣлъ примѣръ ты да оставиши.

Angelieva's assessment of Robovski's translation is not a positive one; she says that 'the Bulgarian translation does not correspond to the Greek original in terms of artistry.' One may, however, suppose the high literary value of Papa-Sophronios's Karamanlidic translation had at least partially influenced Robovski's decision to translate the work. Robovski's translation never became popular, although it has its place in the early period of the Bulgarian *възраждане*.

In conclusion, I will list some of the fundamental questions raised by the *Sacrifice of Abraham*. The first is related to the field of literary history and the construction of its narratives. If we are to approach the works of the past reconstructing their sociocultural contexts, and I believe we do, then we should also observe the tastes and attitudes of the public of the period. Seen in this light, it might seem that the age of Enlightenment is less the age of the Enlightenment and more the age of the *Sacrifice of Abraham*.

¹¹ Rakić in this place has only *Sladkij sine ah uteho moja! / Žalostnica što će majka tvoja*. (My sweet son, oh my consolation! / Your unfortunate mother can do nothing now.)

The second point is related to the orality of the Greek text and its translations. I do not believe it is a coincidence that the versions that were closer to the oral poetic tradition had become significantly more popular than those that were strictly literary in character. Despite the text's themes and motives, which were largely incompatible with the repertoire of the popular poetry, its *form* allowed it to be osmotically absorbed into the textuality of the folklore tradition, often substantially changing the text's original themes, its important ideological and religious points, and even its genre. The style seemed to matter above all, while the content was negotiable and of secondary importance.

My third and the final question is: Was there a literature of the *Millet-i Rum*? I am fully aware how this question may sound at this point; but if there was one, the *Sacrifice of Abraham* would be its primary example—even though, strictly speaking, two of the versions were composed outside of the Ottoman borders. Its translation was so easily absorbed in another language that a reader thought it happened 'among his own kin.' A translation of a text in this case is not an exploration of otherness, as we like to think of it today, but on the contrary, a quest for similarity and familiarity, a palinode of one's own dominant identity.

In line with Maria Todorova, I argue that, somewhat paradoxically, it was the Ottoman imperial context that enabled those close cultural ties. Soon after the formation of the nation states, the interconnectedness, cooperation, and antagonisms between the ethnicities of the *Millet-i Rum* were irretrievably lost. The multilingualism was the first to disappear: the Greek school in Zemun, where Rakić like many other Serbs of his time learned Greek (although, strictly speaking, outside of the Ottoman borders), was closed in the mid-nineteenth century. The similar applies to the knowledge of Greek among Bulgarians. The widespread knowledge of Turkish was suppressed and replaced with standardized national languages, pushing the Karamanlidic or Cyrillic Turkish editions into complete irrelevance and oblivion. After the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, the Southeastern Europeans get to know each other through Western eyes and with the mediation of the Western cultural centers. To return to Todorova, the more efficiently the Balkan nation states erase the memory of their Ottoman past, the more they are losing the common denominator of their own cultural heritages.

REFERENCES

Alexiou, M. 1989. Women, Marriage and Death in the Drama of Renaissance Crete. In: Mary Margaret Mackenzie & Charlotte Roueché (Eds.). *Images of Authority: Papers presented to Joyce Reynolds on the Occasion of her Seventieth Birthday*. (Pp. 1-23). Cambridge: Cambridge Philological Society.

———. 1991. Literature and popular tradition. In Holton, 1991, pp. 239-274.

Angelieva, F. 1996. Жертва Авраамова. *Балканистичен форум* 3, 124-128.

Bakker, W. (1978). Οι παλιές εκδόσεις της Θυσίας του Ἀβραάμ. *Ὁ Ἑρμηνεύτης* 15, 23-74.

———. (1988). The Sacrifice of Abraham: A first approach to its poetics. *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 6/1, 81-95.

———. (1991). Religious drama. In Holton 1991:179-203, 297-300.

Bakker, W. & van Gemert, A. (1996). *Ἡ Θυσία τοῦ Ἀβραάμ*. Ἡράκλειο: Πανεπιστημιακὲς ἐκδόσεις Κρήτης.

Bouvier, B. (1976). *Le Mirologue de la Vierge. Chansons et poèmes grecs sur la Passion du Christ: I. La Chanson populaire du Vendredi Saint*. Genève: Institut suisse de Rome.

Holton, D. (Ed.). (1991). *Literature and society in Renaissance Crete*. Cambridge, New York: Cambridge UP.

Karpozilos, A. (1994). The Cretan drama of the Sacrifice of Abraham in the dialect of the Mariupol Greeks. *BMGS* 18, 155-185.

Kostan, K. (1932). *З літератури мариупільських греків*. Харків: Рух.

Legrand, E. (1874) *Bibliothèque grecque vulgaire*. (Vol. 1). Paris: J. Maisonneuve.

Lianoudakis, G. (1943). Περὶ τὴν “Θυσίαν τοῦ Ἀβραάμ”: Ἡ γλώσσα καὶ ἡ μουσικὴ της. *Ἐλεύθερον Βῆμα* 08/26.

Lioudaki, M. (1939). Ἡ τελευταία στὴν Κρήτη. *Επετηρὶς Κρητικῶν Σπουδῶν* 2, 410.

Mant. = Lioudaki, M. (1936). *Λαογραφικὰ Κρήτης*. (Vol. 1. *Μαντινάδες*). Ἀθήνα: Ἐλευθερουδάκης.

Mavrogordato, J. (1928) ‘The Greek Drama in Crete in the Seventeenth Century,’ *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 48, pp. 243-246.

Megas, G. (1954) *Βιτσέντζος Κορνάρος. Ἡ Θυσία τοῦ Ἀβραάμ*. Ed. Γ. Μέγας. Ἀθήναι: Τύποις Ἑλληνικῆς Ἐκδοτικῆς Ἑταιρίας.

Milošević, S. (1822). *Штатиѣстическое описание Сербіе*. Будимъ: s.e.

Oikonomidis, D. (1953) Τρία ἔργα τῆς κρητικῆς λογοτεχνίας ἐν Ἀπεράθου Νάξου. *Κρητικὰ Χρονικά* 7/1, 110-118.

Politis, L. (1973). *A history of Modern Greek literature*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Popović, P. (1925). ‘Milovan Vidaković’, *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor* 5, 124-167.

Protopapa, G. (1960). Ποίημα ἀπαρνημένης: Στιχούργημα κατὰ μίμησιν τῆς Θυσίας τοῦ Ἀβραάμ ἐκ Ναξιακοῦ χειρογράφου τοῦ ΙΗ’ αἰῶνος. *Παρνασσός* 2/2, 213-219.

Puchner, W. (1983). Ἡ Ἑρωφύλη στὴ δημώδη παράδοση τῆς Κρήτης. *Ἀριάδνη* 1, 173-235.

Rakić, V. (1799). *Жертва Авраамова и Собесѣдованіе грѣшника съ Богоматерію*. Въ Будимѣ: писмены Кралевскагѡ Вѣсеучилища.

Robovski, A. D. (1858). *Жертва, или служба Авраамова. Разговорка за Авраамовж-тж и Исааковж-тж жертвж*. Константиновъ Градъ: печ. Ф. Дивичїѡна.

- Roilos, P. (2002). Orality and performativity in the Erotokritos. *Cretan Studies* 7, 213-230.
- Salaville, S. & Dalleggio, E. (1958). *Karamanlidika. Bibliographie analytique d'ouvrages en langue turque imprimés en caractères grecs*. (Vol. 1). Athènes: Collection de l'Institut Français d'Athènes.
- Savvidis, G. (1990). Παλαιὸ κρασί σὲ νέα μπουκάλια, I: Λανθάνουσα Φαναριώτικη διασκευή τῆς Θυσίας τοῦ Ἀβραάμ. *Μαντατοφόρος* 32, 68-69.
- (Ed.). (1993). *Κωνσταντῖνος Δαπόντες. Ἡ Θυσία τοῦ Ἐφθάε καὶ Ἱστορία Σωσάννης*. Ἀθήνα: Ἴστος.
- Skowronek, M. (2016). O dwóch słowiańskich przekładach dialogu Ofiara Abrahama. *Slavia Meridionalis* 16, 154-179.
- Vukadinović, N. (1936). O prevodima Vićentija Rakića sa grčkog. *Prilozi za književnost, jezik, istoriju i folklor* 16/1, 51-63; 16/2, 255-262.
- Zoras, G. Th. & Kretsi-Leontsini, P. (1957). Πανάρατος, νέα λαϊκὴ διασκευή τῆς Ἑρωφίλης. *Ἐπετηρὶς Ἑταιρίας Βυζαντινῶν Σπουδῶν* 27, 110-126.
- Zumthor, P. (1990). *Oral poetry: An introduction*. (K. Murphy-Judy, Trans.). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.