

CHAPTER 21

New evidence on Greek music in the USA: Spottswood's *Ethnic Music on Records*

Ole L. Smith [University of Gothenburg]

The publication of Richard Spottswood's magnificent discography of pre-war ethnic recordings in the U.S.A. will surely be a stimulus to renewed research into this rich area, which Spottswood himself has been one of the first scholar to map out. His various contributions to the study of ethnic music in the U.S. have established him as one of the leading authorities in the field.¹ It has been known for some years that this *magnum opus* was on its way, and now we have in our hands an indispensable tool, irrespective of which language or culture we are interested in. The amount of material presented is staggering, and one can only admire Spottswood's energy and patience in collecting this information, scattered as it is and until now completely indigested. It is to be hoped that scholars in their various special fields will contribute to further clarification of the many unsolved problems still left. No one would have expected that this first major attempt to deal with the whole area would have filled out every hole and blank spot in our knowledge.

The following remarks should be seen partly as a contribution to further clarification of the Greek recordings (3:1133-234), partly as a first outline of future research possibilities on the basis of Spottswood's book. I should emphasize that I have concentrated on the recordings of *rebetika* and *dimotika*. I have tried to keep in mind that writing a discography is a thankless job that everybody will find fault with once the work is published.

At the outset, however, it must be said that the Greek material seems to have been hard to deal with, and in some respects I find the result here much below the high quality of other parts of the work where I can claim some familiarity with the problems of the material.² I strongly recommend that for a second edition the section on the Greek recordings should be revised completely by someone who knows the language and the pitfalls of the material.

The language problems

Since Greek is written in an alphabet of its own, label information, so far as it is not in English, can be given either by using the Greek alphabet, or transliterating. For technical and economic reasons foreign alphabets have as a rule been transliterated, and no one can criticize that decision. However, in the Greek case Spottswood has not followed a single uniform system. There is total confusion here. It would have been relatively simple to use a uniform system, since such systems exist.³

It may be objected, of course, that in many cases the company ledgers will have used their own unscholarly system. Perhaps this is the explanation behind the baffling entry on p. 1187, where two rejected titles by Marios Lyberopoulos are given as "Kothunockia" and "Creefee Agapee." I am not sure what the first title means (Κουδουνάκια?). But as Spottswood emphasizes, there is always the Greek text on the actual record label to consult as the highest authority (1: xlvi), and it would have been preferable to have resorted to a system that indicated whether the actual record label had been consulted or not and to transliterate in a scholarly and uniform way the Greek texts found on the record label irrespective of what idiosyncratic transliterations may have been used by the record companies; such transliterations may be added.⁴ Of course, this can only be done in case of records actually issued and will not help much where unissued selections

without a title written in Greek are concerned. On the other hand the unissued material is clearly recognizable as such.

The important thing is that the reader should be told in an unmistakable way exactly what is on the label and what is not. This is not always clear from Spottswood's presentation. Basically, the reader cannot see whether the sometimes highly idiosyncratic transliterations are from the label or come from elsewhere, that is, are taken from a company source or made by the editor. Some records did carry transliterated titles of songs, but some did not, and where I have been able to check labels without transliterated titles, my doubts as to Spottswood's practice and reliability have been confirmed.

In connection with the language problem one could ask whether translations of song-titles should be given. In general, Spottswood has refrained – wisely, I think – from translating, and seems to have given translations (in brackets) only where such were to be found in the companies' ledgers. The labels themselves in general do not seem to have offered translations. This must be the explanation of many of the questionable or even hilarious translations given. Some of them must derive from the artists themselves. Since most of the translations added come from Victor recordings I would think that Victor's A & R man, Tetos Dimitriadis, a Greek himself, may have had something to do with this. These translations have been added in brackets, which the book uses to present information not on the label, after the Greek title, mostly in an unambiguous way. Still there are a number of cases where errors of various kinds disfigure the discography. I may mention such a case as Katsaros' "Exekinisa Ap' Tin Andro" on Vi V-58052 where the translation (?) "I Left Ap' Tin Andro" has been added in the customary brackets. The entry on p. 1214 "Sto Nisi Mas (At Our Island) [In The Mountain]" defies me; both translations can hardly stand and I cannot see what happened here, except that no one read this before it was printed. On p. 1137 among the titles recorded by the Athenian Operatic Company⁵ we read the entry "Tsigani (Gypsy) [Chicken]." I cannot think of any explanation.⁶ On the whole, I think, these translations should have been omitted, and the brackets could have been reserved for more indispensable information (composer credits, for instance, which are sometimes lacking, even when stated on the label). In fact, in my opinion, the reader would have been better served if translations had been omitted altogether except where they occur on the label, and the space used to correct the more insidious errors.

The worst fault in Spottswood's discography is the inconsistent treatment of the transliteration problem. In some cases the transliterations have completely disfigured the titles so that you have to be a textual critic to see what the title is in Greek. The reader without access to the originals has no means of control, and can never be certain whether the error is on the label or may be Spottswood's faulty transliteration. Certainly not all of this can be ascribed to the labels as will be proved below.

Let me begin by quoting an example where I have been able to check the original recording listed by the discography. Kostas Gadinis recorded a zeibekiko in 1940 called 'Αλληλοῦα (Co 28950-F). The transliteration of this title on the label is as given by Spottswood: "A Liluoe A Liluoe," which makes no sense at all. What the editor should have done here in order to make the Greek title intelligible was to give a correct transliteration. In the absence of the Greek original title in the discography, one is surely at least entitled to get a transliteration that can be understood. Spottswood has in too many cases, it seems, been content with reproducing an incorrect and sometimes totally meaningless transliteration. The reader will usually not be in a situation that allows checking the original, and will not be able to tell whether the meaningless transliteration is from the label or from the editor, and will be in doubt as to the Greek title of the item. Unfortunately, the reader cannot wholly discount the editor as the source of the error.

Another example: Vasilios A. Kyros recorded in 1925 two titles for Gennett in the company studios in Richmond, Indiana, one appearing as "Sta Thena," the other as "Stin Theni Hi" (p. 1187). I wonder how many readers would have been able to understand these titles if the added translation of the first title did not give a clue: "Away From

Home.” The intelligent reader will then be able to decipher the second word of the other title, and make the reasonable inference that “Hi” must be a rather idiosyncratic way of transcribing $\eta\eta$. The translation of the second title does not help, for it is only the added subtitle/alternative title in brackets “[Elpis]” that has been translated [“Hope”].” But the problem remains that in no recognized system of transliteration is it possible to render E, by “th.” The same happens on p. 1183 where `Η ανοιξις” (recorded for the label Acropolis in New York, September 1924) is transcribed “I Anoithis.” Here one can also find an entry which would have been a real mystery if a translation had not given the clue. “I Eklasa” on Acropolis M 25109 can be deciphered as `Η σκλάβα because the translation “The Slave” is added in brackets. How did this happen? Are we to suppose that the same unusual error was committed independently in New York in 1924 and in Richmond, Indiana, in 1925? In fairness it must be emphasized that the reader cannot tell whether the error should be laid at the companies’ or the editor’s door.

However, an entry like Sotiris Stasinopoulos’ “Baino Mes’ St’ Abeli [Mpeno Mesta Mpele]” on p. 1224 casts a somewhat ambiguous light on the standards of scholarship here; the information added in brackets comes from elsewhere and not from the labels themselves. But even if the rubbish printed here can be found in some company source, the reader ought to be told why the editor thinks it necessary to add a completely wrong transliteration. This title seems to have been particularly difficult to transcribe; on p. 1146 Koula’s recording of the same song becomes “Beno Mes’ Ta Belli.” One wonders why; but again we cannot say whose fault it is. At some point in the process of editing, it seems, someone has been involved in transcribing who had the unfortunate habit of adding the letter “b” in the most amazing places. This feature together with a very unconventional way of transliterating makes for some incredible titles. If no translation had been given, who would be able to discern what “Themesoo Ekenah Tah Hronea” should mean? (p. 1189).’ On the next page we find the equally notable “Aona Phele Ste Mana Moo.” This cannot, I think, be accepted in a book published by Illinois University Press. Further cases of such grotesque transliterations can be found on pp. 1137, 1177, 1179, 1183, 1187, 1206, 1220, and 1221. Spottswood’s inconsistency (or at best, lack of precision) makes it possible for the reader to doubt whether such things can be ascribed to company ledgers or sleepy clerks only.

Some kind of uniformity must be brought in, and the innumerable errors coming from slight or no knowledge of Greek must be removed. There are scores of them, of every imaginable kind. I may be wrong in thinking that anything like the majority of these errors are to be attributed to the editor. But even if some of these remarkable things can be found on the labels, the reader is surely entitled to have a scholarly presentation of the facts through transliterations with the use of a uniform unequivocal system. As it is now, too much information is rendered incomprehensible through the faulty transliterations. Let me remind the reader that consistent presentation of the facts is one of the discographer’s duties.

For documentary purposes it is of course necessary to have a precise reproduction of the text of the label even if faulty, but then a correction should surely be added. This also pertains to other matters than the simple title. In too many cases the knowledgeable reader has to make inferences, some very obvious, some less so. For example, when Koula’s Το Παρορι, σαρτος / Η Τριανταφυλλιά, τσάμικος on Co E5146 is given (1144) as “Sirtos Parori” and “Tsamiko Triantafilia” (on the analogy of “Sirtos Silivrianos”?), with a smattering of Greek one can see what has happened.

Some titles have become riddles in the process of transcribing and transliteration. Tetos Dimitriadis appears on p. 1162 with a Song called “Gia Naressi Ston Andratis,” which anyone who knows Greek can decipher. On p. 1220 it also requires some Greek to recognize the correct title of “Signomi Susito.”

Other label information

Apart from giving the customary master-, take-, and catalogue-number, Spottswood also has tried to include reissues on LP and Cassette. This is very useful especially since most of us have to work from reissues. But as I will show later, exactly on this point something must have gone wrong.

Label information on artist(s) is given in an exemplary way. I am not so sure, however, whether we can trust that additional information on the type of dance or song given on the label has been included with the necessary precision and completeness. And unfortunately this is another important point where we would have preferred to feel completely assured. I can give an illustration from a case where the book itself gives proof that exact reproduction of label information has not been provided in 'all cases, even where the information was available.

In vol. 1, after p. liv there is an appendix with photos of labels and of advertising material. The first page of this appendix offers two photos of Greek labels. The one reproduced on the lower part of the page is taken from Alexis {Zou(m)bas}, ΑΛΑΜΠΕΗΣ issued on Panhellenion Record 8008.⁹ I write the title as given on the label, in capitals. The label carries the following description and artist credit: Ευζωνικό Μπεράτι βαρύ, υπό Αλέξη βιολίστα. In the discography the title is given as "Adampeis" and nothing is said about the description. The artist is given as Alexis,¹⁰ and this is clarified by a note saying that this is Alexis Zoubas. This case shows that we cannot expect label information to have been given in its entirety, and we can also see one of the cases where the transliteration is erroneous, not because of different systems, but because of unfamiliarity with Greek and/or the common failure to distinguish between capital lambda and delta.

Another case: on p. 1145 one of Koula's titles is given thus: "Achi Ti Tha Geno-Trellokoritso" (Panhellenion 5025). Apart from the fact that "Aχ!" has been read wrongly and thus been turned into a non-existing word, the presentation of the title will lead the non-specialist to believe that "Trello-koritso" is either a dance or a type of song like "kleftiko," whereas it is the subtitle of the song.

One of the first Greek artists in the United States to have records issued with the song subtitle "rebetiko" was Giannakis Ioannidis whose recordings of *Απο κάτω απ' τις οτομάτες / Τουτοι μπάτσου που 'ρθαν τώρα* on Co 56137-F have become well-known from reissues.¹¹ On the label both songs are characterized "rebetiko" and "zeibekiko" as if this was either the type of song or the type of dance. In his Ph.D. thesis Stathis Gauntlett mentioned the fact that both these songs on the label also were described as "Greek Bum Song" which is an important piece of information in view of the heated debate of the meaning and the origin of the term "rebetiko."¹² Now Spottswood gives the label information "The Bum Song," and only in connection with the first title. And further, both songs are described as on the label with the term "zeibekiko." Who is correct here? The original record is rare, so that the interested scholar may never have an opportunity to inspect a copy to find out for himself. There is a world of difference between "zeibekiko" as the only description and "rebetiko-zeibekiko." I am afraid that Gauntlett is right about "rebetiko-zeibekiko," since his report can be corroborated from another source.¹³ This is not the real problem here. The issue is that in order to be of service to scholars, there must be no room for doubt as to the painstakingly correct information given in an authoritative work like Spottswood's.

The reissues

Elsewhere I have lamented the fact that almost none of the many reissues of pre-war Greek recordings give us information about the original recordings: no date, no personnel, no master number.¹⁴ It is therefore a great relief that Spottswood has included reissues, so that we now can see from where the various reissues were taken. Unfortunately, Spottswood either made some extraordinary mistakes, or forgot to check his material. For in those cases where there exists more than one recording of the same song (as a rule one for Victor and one for Columbia) by the same artist, Spottswood gives

both selections as reissued on the same LP – which is absurd. For example, Papagika made two recordings of ‘Αθήνα και Πειραιά μου, one for Columbia in 1923, issued on 56002-F, and one for Victor in 1925, issued on V-68685. The song was included in one of the (musically, at least) fine sets on Greek CBS, the LP 82290, but as usual, it was not stated from which of the two originals the reissue was taken. Spottswood gives both the Columbia and the Victor recording as reissued on the same LP, Greek CBS 82290! A slightly different case is the following. Papagika also recorded “Όπου δείξ δυο κυπαρίσσια twice, one for each of the major companies. This song has been reissued twice: on Falirea 22/23 (with notes partly by Spottswood himself) and on Greek CBS 26116. The problem now is which original was used-or both? Spottswood gives the Columbia version, originally issued on Co 56002-F as the one reissued on both LPs, but he also says that the Victor recording was used on the Falirea LP. To confuse the situation further: it is not wholly certain that the two reissues of the song are identical. The sound quality of the track on the Greek CBS is abysmal, probably because it was pressed from a run-of-the-mill original, so it is difficult to hear whether the two are identical. My guess is that they are. In any case, something is wrong in the discography. Then, still on the subject of Papagika reissues, the wonderful “Smyrneikos Ballos” was recorded by her three times, twice (for both major companies, Victor in 1922 and Columbia in 1923) accompanied by Nikos Relias on clarinet and once (for Columbia in 1928) accompanied by an unknown violin player.¹⁵ The recording with violin was reissued on Folklyric 9033 in Martin Schwartz’s superb collection, and it was stated by him that the original used was Co 56138. The problem is the two clarinet recordings. Which one has been used on ‘the reissues of the song on Greek CBS 53753? Spottswood settles for none of them. He gives the track on CBS 53753 as the same as on Folklyric 9033, in spite of the very clear difference in the accompaniment. For other reasons, I am almost certain that the track used on Greek CBS came from a Columbia original.” This does not affect my query with the mess in Spottswood.

It should be mentioned that there seem to be no serious omissions in his covering of the reissues. The 2 LP set of Katsaros on Falirea 92-93 probably reached him too late to be included, although one or two later LPs from the same company have been taken into account. The reissue of one track by Jack Gregory in the Greek series Ρεμπέτικη ιστορία also escaped him.

One final remark on reissues: what happened to Markos Melkon, whom we now have on a superb LP from the indefatigable Falireas people (96) ? Are all his Greek titles later than the 1942 Petrillo ban that is Spottswood’s chronological limit?

What a discography may tell us

To give an idea of what a discography may tell us, and what may be its use in future studies, I will give two examples here at the publication of the work. It is now possible to get a much more balanced view of the emergence of the term “rebetiko,” which can now be shown beyond doubt to have made its first public appearance as a musical term among Greeks in the U.S. What follows from this fact must be discussed in another context. And more important, we can get a precise picture of the music culture among Greeks in the United States, as reflected in the record production. There is a wealth of material to be analyzed.

For the term “rebetiko” it is now absolutely clear that the term was first used in print among Greeks in the United States and that the first to have songs characterized as “rebetiko” must have been Marika Papagika who recorded a “rebetiko” at least before December 1926. This was the song *Σμυρνιά* on Greek Record Co. 511. The date “before December 1926” can be inferred from the fact that Spottswood gives GRC 525 by Angelos Stamos as from December 1926 (1222). It is not absolutely certain that the Papagika record with a lower catalogue number must be earlier. Yet it is the most obvious possibility. There is also a record not mentioned in Spottswood: *Εκει κατω στο νησί μας / Καϊριανή* on Acropolis M-45008 where the latter song is labelled “rebetiko,” probably

from the same time.”“ Other records with this subtitle are few until the middle of 1928. There is L. Kavadias’ *Τουρνεύε* from October 1927, Giannakis Ioannidis and Vrysoula Pantopoulou’s *Ποιό είν’ το γιατρικό* from January 1928 on Columbia 56095-F, Ioannidis’ recording of the song *Ψάλλη θα φέρω αρχάγγελο* in March 1928, issued on Co 56102-F (1174). Further, there is the recording by J. Kovoros and N. Papoutsis, *Χάϊδω* on Co 56114 from April 1928. Then Papagika in May and June 1928 recorded several songs thus called (1203). Whether there are any common characteristics in these songs remains to be worked out. At present we cannot say why the songs were called “rebetika.”¹⁸ It is to be noticed that the great majority of these recordings was made for Columbia.

It would seem to be very bad taste to call for a second edition of a six-volume work even before the first has been out for a year and stood the test of time. The drawbacks of the Greek section, however, are so pervasive that a complete revision of this part is needed. As it is, one dares not trust it. And this is probably the worst thing you could say about a discography. Perhaps a thoroughly revised separate publication of the Greek part would be the best way to remedy the situation.

As for the reflection of the cultural situation, it is now possible to get a precise idea about the variety of material issued in Greek, which tastes were catered for, and when. It is less easy to see, however, from a plain discography, how many of the songs were related to the situation of the immigrant and reflected the immigrant experience, as for example Katsaros’ *Με τις τσέπες αδειανές*.¹⁹

Almost all the commercial recordings were made in Chicago and New York.²⁰ The exceptions are few: Ioannis Afendras’ Orchestra from San Francisco recorded four sides for Columbia in 1935 of which two were meant for the Hispanic market. There were only a few local independent labels active, and the major companies did not go into the field to record Greek material.

However, the basis for further work is now laid, with a secure chronological foundation gained from the record companies’ own files. This serious gap has now been filled, and I have no doubt that our work will be much easier from here. After all, the American material is of tremendous value for the study of rebetika in Greece.²¹ Yet one cannot help thinking of the sadly paradoxical situation that a good part of the most interesting Greek music from this century has now been documented by a foreign scholar working for a foreign public institution, while absolutely nothing is being done in Greece either to preserve the documentary material in a safe and scholarly way, or to publish it. May we hope that the publication of Spottswood’s work could be a reminder? And, if nothing else, now at least it can be seen how a professional discography should look.²²

NOTES

1. See, e.g., *Ethnic Recordings in America*.
2. I have read the material on the French/Cajun recordings and checked various other parts (Scandinavian and Czechoslovakian).
3. For some years now American scholarly practice seems to have established a uniform system of transliteration which seems to have won general consent. See for instance the set of rules recommended by the *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*.
4. Since the labels were printed in Greek, the problem is not that there may have been other transliteration systems when the records were made, but how to transliterate the Greek texts today.
5. The term “company” here and elsewhere may mislead the non-specialist where it is used to translate the Greek *kompania*.
6. For my money, the bracketed entry after Katsaros’ “M’ Ekapses Gytonissa” from November 1929 takes the prize. I still have not been able to find out what “Son of the Cierei” means.

7. This title was made by a vocal quartet of which two members, according to Spottswood, bear names not easily recognizable as Greek, due to erratic transliteration (Kiparici and Moriethes). Again one wonders what is on the label.
8. I do not think any of these four words can be said to have been transliterated according to a recognized system.
9. In the caption to the photo the transliteration is correct.
10. "Alexi" in the caption.
11. They can be found on CBS (Gr) 82303 and 26118 respectively.
12. See Gauntlett 32 n. 185.
13. The cover notes on the LP issues.
14. Smith 178. No doubt the reticence has something to do with copyright of the material.
15. Schwartz says (in the liner notes to Folklyric 9033) that the violinist is Makedonas. I am willing to believe him, even though it must be from aural evidence.
16. Tasos Schorelis, who produced the CBS reissue, gave in the liner notes the copyright dates found on the labels, in the mistaken belief that these dates were the recording dates. The date given from the label of Smyrneikos Ballos is November 12, 1901, which is the copyright date printed on pre-electric Columbia labels.
17. Spottswood lists only a few records issued on this label, so it is impossible on the present evidence to say more about the date. The 10-inch 25000 series on Acropolis is from the early twenties and I would think that the 12-inch 45000 series is from the same time. Apart from this Papagika record, and the same artist's Βλαχούλα Εροβόλαγε / Στης Αρκαδιάς του Πλάτανο on Acropolis M-45009, I have found no omissions of consequence. There may be some undiscovered items on this label.
18. Cf. my paper "The Chronology of Rebetiko," which was written before I could consult Spottswood's work.
19. I have discussed some aspects of Greek recordings reflecting and expressing immigrant experience in a paper given at the 1989 Minneapolis Conference on Greek American Experience. See Georgakas and Moskos, 143-51.
20. Some Victor recordings were made in the company's Camden, N.J. studio. The Library of Congress made extensive recordings in Tarpon Springs and other Florida locations in 1939-40 for documentary purposes.
21. One example: it would seem that Panagiotis Tountas' popular Η Βαρβάρρα, which came out in the autumn of 1936, was immediately covered by Tetos Dimitriadis who recorded his own version on November 4. When Tountas' song was stopped by Metaxas' censors in late 1936 or early 1937 and he put out a cover version himself called Η Μαρίκα η δασκάλα (recorded by both Stellakis Perpiniadis and Roza Eskenazi for Columbia), Dimitriadis covered the new version in February 1937 (cf. 1161).
22. It is my pleasant duty to thank my friend and former colleague Dr. Lisbet Torp (U. of Copenhagen) for helpful criticism and pertinent information about some of the original recordings.

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Ole L. Smith

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The late Ole L. Smith was a historian and Chairman of Greek Language and Literature at the University of Gothenburg in Sweden.