

# The Etiology of a Disorder (Dis-ease) and the Restoration of Order (Therapy). A Case of a Greek Belief Narrative Connected with Charms against Abdominal Diseases

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**Abstract:** Although belief narratives and charms are regarded as two different folklore genres with different modes of transmission, performance and function, they are both in a constant dialectical relationship, yielding mutual feedback. One of the main forms of this interactive relationship concerns the etiology of a dis-ease (construction of a dis-order, i.e. belief narratives) and its therapeutic treatment (restoration of order, i.e. charms). This relationship between the cause of diseases and their treatment is clearly reflected in a Christian content belief narrative closely associated with incantations used to heal abdominal diseases. The basic personage embodying this belief narrative – registered in many and different areas of Greece – is the figure of a monk or Christ himself, who, often disguised as a beggar, is hosted by a family. Violations of both religious norms associated with fasting and social ethics connected with accepted behaviour towards a guest have as a result the manifestation of an abdominal disease, which eventually the monk or Christ treats using an incantation. This article shows that the parallel analysis of legends and charms, where possible, is necessary since it can provide useful information, not only on the ways by which the charm text is produced and reproduced, but also on the position and status of the genre in the context of a wider folk religious system. Furthermore, it could contribute to the understanding of the charm text, without which the knowledge of the belief narrative is often incomprehensible, if not nonsensical.

**Keywords:** Greek charms, belief narratives, kind landlord, cunning landlady, monk, folk religious system, abdominal diseases

## INTRODUCTION

Belief narratives or, according to Bascom (BASCOM 1965:4), legends and charms, constitute two different folklore genres with distinctive characteristics, ways of transmission, performance and function. The study of their relation is usually unexplored by researchers of both genres and is partially focused on one category of charms; narrative charms, also known as *historiolae*. This is not by accident, since this charm type is closely associated with the fact that the belief in the efficacy of magic lies on narratives and myths, comprised of descriptions of magical events that have occurred in the distant

past and offer solutions to critical situations. Such narratives, however, do not appear as autonomous texts, independent of charms, but are closely related to charms and are in fact charms themselves. The myth of Osiri and Isida is a typical example of such a case, as it exists only as ritual verbal magic (FRANKFURTER 1995:472), along with the text known to researchers as the exorcism of Gello or Saint Sisinnius' prayer (PASSALIS 2014). Thus, they are myths of magic, as stated by Malinowski as well, and they exist only within the boundaries of magic (MALINOWSKI 1954:141).<sup>1</sup> According to Nadel's arguments, this is due to the fact that magic is closely related to myth. Consequently, whenever a form of magical practice occurs, a mythology/legend simultaneously appears to justify and sustain the efficiency of magic (NADEL 1968:191).

While the narratives of the *historiola* type have been studied and attracted researchers' interest (PASSALIS 2011a; 2016:237–246), the relationship between charms and belief narratives remains unexplored. This is not surprising as the documented belief narratives connected with charms and the evidence we hold from recorded ethnographic data are, at least in Greece, rare and inadequate to promote a consistent study. Such scarcely recorded data in most cases comprise belief narratives which are connected to the first occurrence and transmission of charms, associating their origin with a sacred figure of high authority, thus validating their effectiveness<sup>2</sup>, or refer to restrictions of secrecy (transmission and performance), establishing their possession (factor of ownership) onto individuals responsible for their performance.<sup>3</sup>

The study of both genres, legends and charms, whenever and wherever possible, is considered vital and may contribute to a holistic approach, enlightening elements of a wider contextual frame within which both genres are produced and reproduced. The study of this interpretive frame is a basic prerequisite for the comprehension of the genres of folk oral literature.<sup>4</sup> Regarding charm studies in particular, it could be said that since the aim of the verbal part of the genre is neither to transmit information nor narrate something, its analysis has to be based on a full comprehension of the consequences that the words allegedly have. Accordingly, their interpretation depends on their integration within a framework of cultural and symbolic relations. Those relationships include the connections between verbal magic and healing, the role of the supernatural world in human life, faith in the power of words, the beliefs of traditional culture regarding the order of things in the world along with the practices and methods used for their adjustment into this order.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. MALINOWSKI 1954:74; 1965:223 (primeval texts).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. "According to the mythical system of verbal charm transmission, secret and sacred knowledge is passed down by word of mouth through the Virgin Mary, the saints or the angels (...) Moreover, in that type of narrative charm with a 'historiola', where a mythical event or encounter is described, the sacred person (Christ) is described as transmitting the verbal part orally to the saints" (PASSALIS 2011b:12).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. It is worth mentioning also the case of one female charmer who refused to share the secret text of a charm against ants because, as she believed, "the moment she breathes her last, all the ants will gather around to feast on her body" (PASSALIS 2011b:9).

<sup>4</sup> According to FOLEY 1992: 276: "To ignore the immanent context is to force situated words out of their natural significative setting - obviously a crippling and artistically violent reorientation". Cf. also the notion of "implicit meaning" (HERZFELD 1981:123), "traditional referentiality" (FOLEY 1991:7, 38–60) and "expressive ecology" (FOLEY 2005:27). For the dependence of the effectiveness of the charms on contextual factors such as a) the power of the verbal part, b) the power of the performer c) the attitude of the ritual powers, d) the connection with religious and mythological tradition and e) the accompanied rituals, see LUDWIG 1987:147.

## THE CHARM AGAINST ABDOMINAL DISEASES

The significance of examining charms and legends together, especially for the researchers of charms, is evident in the text documented in this study. It is a charm used against diseases of the abdominal area (pain in the intestines or abdomen) (See also IONAS 2007:A:41) which is widespread in various parts of Greece: Lefkada (KONTOMICHS 1985:93),<sup>5</sup> Paros (STELLAS 2004:41–42),<sup>6</sup> Megara (VLACHOU 1959:548),<sup>7</sup> Cyprus (LOUKAS 1974:54–55),<sup>8</sup> Ksirochori (ROUSIAS 1912–1913:499),<sup>9</sup> Athens (POLITIS 1931:709);<sup>10</sup> Crete (LENAKAKIS 2007:117).<sup>11</sup> This type of charm is not only used against relevant human diseases but also, to a lesser extent, against animal ailments (KONTOMICHS 1985:93; IONAS 2007:B:85–87). Characteristic of the expanded use of this charm is the fact that in Cyprus 53 variants are published in the *Σώμα των Κυπριακών Επωδών* [Corpus of Cypriot Charms] (IONAS 2007:A:42–44, B:63–87).<sup>12</sup>

It should be also noted that in the contextual framework of the charm, the use of a knife with a black handle is documented. The charmer waves the knife around, forming the mark of the cross (IONAS 2007:B:79, 81, 85) over the abdominal area of the sick person (IONAS 2007:B:63, 73, 78) or over the chest (IONAS 2007:B:63), simultaneously chanting the words of the verbal part. In other cases, a reed with three knobs is used, or a three-inch stick of *styrax officinalis* (IONAS 2007:B:62), or a piece of yew (IONAS 2007:B:86), while there are also narratives which indicate that during the charm, three olives and burnt bread are placed on a plate (IONAS 2007:B:67, 83). The use of the knife and of the olives is also documented and embedded in the narrative, as will be discussed later on. In Crete, as the charmer performs the ritual, he takes three pebbles, forms the sign of cross on the abdominal area and throws one behind the patient, the second towards the left and the third to the right (CHRISTODOULAKIS 2011:201). There is no apparent differentiation in the ritual (IONAS 2007:B:62, 85) whether performed on humans or animals, although there are instances when instead of a knife with a black handle a stick from a plant (*styrax officinalis*, στερατζιά) or yew is used to thrice hit the

<sup>5</sup> Lefkada: <http://lefkadamaia.blogspot.gr/2013/01/gia-ton-strofo.html> (accessed November 6, 2019).

<sup>6</sup> *Τ' αντεροφά* [for the pain in the intestines].

<sup>7</sup> *Διά το κόψιμο* [for diarrhea].

<sup>8</sup> *Περί καρδιακών πόνων* [For pains in the intestines]; PHILIPPOU 1912–1913: 530; *Για τον πόνο της καρδιάς* [For pain in the belly]; IONAS 2007:A:42–44, B:63–87; *Γητεία για τον πόνο της κοιλίας, των εντέρων, για τον καρκίονον* [Charm against the abdominal pain, pain in the intestines, stomach ache].

<sup>9</sup> *Γήτεμα για πόνο τς καρδιάς* [Treatment for the abdominal pain].

<sup>10</sup> *ζόρτσι σε κολικόπονο* [Charm against the abdominal pain].

<sup>11</sup> *Για τον κοιλόπονο* [Against the stomachache]; CHRISTODOULAKIS 2011:201, 202; *αφαλός* [For the navel].

<sup>12</sup> It seems that this type of charm – as well as the corresponding legend which will be discussed later – with the expected variations in content and structure, is widespread and quite common in Central and South East Europe. According to Pócs 2014:895 (transl.): “Besides the Italian data, we also know of sporadic Romanian, Croatian and Serbian variants, which show that once this type of charm may well have been considerably more widespread in the Mediterranean region and Central and Eastern Europe. We are hoping that later exploration of the material in the Balkans will complete this currently incomplete picture.” It is also worth mentioning that this charm type, according to Barbara Hillers’ (HILLERS 2019, 81–82), is well known and popular in Ireland as well as in Gaelic Scotland.

sick animal (IONAS 2007:B:85, 86). In some cases, the combination of magical methods with the practical ones against the disease is documented: recitation of the charms along with drinking a glass of wine, which the patient consumes after the treatment (IONAS 2007:B:65), or applying oil or ethanol on the belly (IONAS 2007:B:72).

The typical structure for the charm of this type has two standard parts.<sup>13</sup> The first one includes the objective element of the charm – objektives Element, according to Ohrt (OHRT 1935–1936. See also PASSALIS 2016:117) terminology – which appears in the form of a narrative. In the second part, the subjective element (subjektives Element) appears as a command on the personified pain in the abdominal area. Two of the most relatively complete versions of this type of charm, one from Cyprus and the other from Paros, are presented below:

<p>“Νοικοκύρης αγαθός,          πονηρή νοικοτζυρά,          λάρδον εμαίρευκεν,          φάκον παρασώνωνεν.          Έναν φτωχόν καλοήριν,          πέντε ελιές εις το σκουτέλλιν          μian κόρταν ψουμίν καμένον,          τζαι το κρεβάτιν του κληματένον,          τζαι το μαουλούτζιν του πετρένον.          Τα μεσάνυχτα επιάσεν την ο πόνος.          Έβκα, πόνε της καρκιάς          τζαι πόνε των αντέρων,          τζ’ ο Χριστός σε κατατρέσει,          με το δίστομον μασαίριν,          εις το δεξιόν του σέριν.          Εις το όνομα του Πατρός          και του Υιού          και του Αγίου Πνεύματος, Αμήν.”          (Cyprus, IONAS 2007:A:42)</p>	<p>[The landlord kind          the landlady cunning,          pork she cooked,          yet lentils she served.          A poor little monk,          five olives on the plate,          a piece of bread burnt,          his bed made of vine,          of stone his head bed had.          At midnight she felt pain.          Get out, pain in the belly          and pain in the guts,          Christ chases you          with a double edged knife          on his right hand.          In the name of the Father          and of the Son          and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.]</p>
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<p>“Αγαθός ο ν’κοτσύρ’ς,          πονηρή η ν’κοτζουρά.          Φάκον εμαγειρεύε,          χέρον απογεύτηκε,          χέρον εξεκένωσε.          Ψωμί φέλι εμέρασε.          τρία λίγδια στ’ απλαδένι.</p>	<p>[The landlord kind,          the cunning lady,          Lentils she cooked,          pork she ate          and defecated pork.          A slice of bread she offered.          three small olives on the plate.]</p>
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<sup>13</sup> Cf. for this type of charm Pócs 2014:895 (transl.): “The specific action narrated in the charm (looking for shelter, punishing the heartless host and then curing them) sets it apart from all other types of epic charms recording encounters between the healer and the sufferer, even though one of the cores of the narrative (one holy person asks the other to perform healing) fits in well with what constitutes the second group of ‘encounters’ in Ferdinand Ohrt’s own system which he defined by the title *Encounter with the healer*”.

Στσι βίτσες απλωστάργιασε,  
ο χόγλαδας προσσέφαλος.  
Η μουνουτσ'θλιά ξαπόμεινε  
Φεύγα, φεύγα, εντρυφά,  
ο Χριστός σε κυνηγά  
με την άργυρα ντου μαχαίρα  
τσαι με τη χρουσή ντου χέρα.”  
(Paros, STELLAS 2004:41)

On sticks she lay,  
the pillow made of stone.  
The bed in the guest house unused.  
Go away, pain from the belly,  
Christ chases you  
with his silver knife  
and his golden hand.]

The objective element begins with a reference to a group of people, including two figures: the man and the lady of a house. The adjectives accompanying the two figures reflect the difference between them. On the one hand, there is the man of the house, who in most cases is characterized as ‘kind/naive/benevolent’ (*αγαθός*) (LOUKAS 1974:54; IONAS 2007:A:42, B:63, 66–71, 73, 74–78, 80–84, 86; STELLAS 2004:41; CHRISTODOULAKIS 2011:201–202; POLITIS 1931:7; ROUSIAS 1912–1913:49; VLACHOU 1959:548) and in some others as ‘discreet’ (*βρόνιμος*) (IONAS 2007:B:64), ‘polite’ (*ευγενικός*) (IONAS 2007:B:72) or ‘sensible’ (*γνωστικός*) (LENAKAKIS 2007:117). On the other hand, there is the landlady who is characterized in most cases as ‘cunning’ (*πονηρή*) (LOUKAS 1974:54; IONAS 2007:A:42, 43, B:63–66, 69, 70, 72–78, 80, 81–84, 86; STELLAS 2004:41; LENAKAKIS 2007:117; VLACHOU 1959:548; LOUKAS 1974:54–55; ROUSIAS 1912–1913:49; POLITIS 1931:70) and in one case as ‘insidious’ (*πίβουλη*) (CHRISTODOULAKIS 2011:201–202). There are also cases in which the two figures do not differ and both are described negatively (cunning the landlord, cunning the landlady)<sup>14</sup> or both positively (the landlord kind, the landlady kind).<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, those instances are rare and are due to the expected modifications of the text during the verbal transmission and performance of this type of charm. It is therefore noteworthy that there is no variation including a reverse of roles, that is to say the man of the house is cunning and the lady kind.

What directly follows the presentation of the hosts is the reference to activities related to cooking and offering of food. The food, on one hand, is associated with affluence and is cooked on special occasions - pork, rabbit/hare or meat in general - and is, on the other hand, connected with common, everyday food in agricultural regions, such as legumes, lentils or beads:

“(…) Φάκον εμαγείρευγε, χέρον απογεύτηκε (…)” (STELLAS 2004:41)  
[lentils she cooked, pork she ate and she was pleased];

“(…) κούκουσ (κουκιά) εμαγέρευγε, λαρδίκες (=κρέας) τότε τσίτωνε (…)” (VLACHOU 1959:548)  
[beans she cooked, meat she defecated];

<sup>14</sup> “Πονηρός ο νοικοτζύρης, πονηρή η νοικοτζυρά” (IONAS 2007:B:70, 71, 73).

<sup>15</sup> “Νοικοτζύρης αγαθός, νοικοτζυρά αγαθή” (IONAS 2007:B:700); see also IONAS 2007:B:74; KONTOMICHS 1985:93.

“(...) φάκον εμαείρεψε, λάρδον παραχένωσε” (ΛΟΥΚΑΣ 1974:54–55)  
[lentils she cooked, salty pork she defecated];

“(...) άφχου (στάρι ή είδος οσπρίων) έβραζε, σφαχτό ποδάρι μέσα (...)” (ΡΟΥΣΙΑΣ 1912–1913:49)  
[grains or type of legumes she boiled, slaughtered animal leg inside];

“(...) Τράγον εμαγείρευε (...)”<sup>16</sup>  
[male goat she cooked];

“(...) κούκουε εμαγέρευκε, λάδι παρασίνωνε (...)” (ΡΟΛΙΤΙΣ 1931:70)  
[beans she cooked, oil she defecated];

“(...) λαγόν εμαγέρευγε, φάκον εκατέβαζε (...)” (ΧΡΙΣΤΟΔΟΥΛΑΚΙΣ 2011:201)  
[hare she cooked, lentils she defecated].

At the same time, those types of food are related to the dietary restrictions and prohibitions (fasting) connected with the religious system that determines dietary habits.

What follows the report of food is the third dramatic persona of the narrative, presented as a monk. This person undertakes the role of a victim. Distinctively, the monk is always portrayed as poor - with both meanings of the term ‘poor fellow’ and ‘has not got the basics to live’ (ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:A:42, 43, B:64, 66, 71–75, 77, 78, 81, 83, 84, 86), while in most of the above instances he is referred to in the diminutive form *καλοήριν* [little monk] (ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:A:42, B:62, 66, 71, 73, 75–78, 80, 83, 85, 86). It is worth mentioning that the figure of a monk is mainly found in charms from Cyprus, whereas there is no report of this persona in charms originated in other areas of Greece (ΧΡΙΣΤΟΔΟΥΛΑΚΙΣ 2011:201; ΛΕΝΑΚΑΚΙΣ 2007:117; ΡΟΛΙΤΙΣ 1931:70; ΡΟΥΣΙΑΣ 1912–1913:49; ΣΤΕΛΛΑΣ 2004:41, 42; ΚΟΝΤΟΜΙΧΙΣ 1985:93).

Following the presentation of the monk, there is a reference to another list of food offered to him (ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:B:63). In almost all cases, this list includes: two (ΛΕΝΑΚΑΚΙΣ 2007:117), three (ΡΟΥΣΙΑΣ 1912–1913:49; ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:B:64, 67; ΧΡΙΣΤΟΔΟΥΛΑΚΙΣ 2011:201–202) or in most cases five olives (ΛΟΥΚΑΣ 1974:54; ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΥ 1912–1913:530; ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:A:42, 43, B:63–86; ΒΛΑΧΟΥ 1959:548). It is often enriched with the listing of other types of food that all belong to the category of trivial or even ruined food: thin slice of bread (*ψομί φέλι*) (ΣΤΕΛΛΑΣ 2004:41, 42), half bread burnt (*μισόν ψουμίν καμμένον*) (ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:B:72) or scorched (*συγκαμμένον*) (ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:B:72), burnt slice of bread (*ψουμίν κόρταν/κορτίν/ κορδίν καμμένον*) (ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:A:42, 43, B:64–70, 73–81, 83–86; ΛΟΥΚΑΣ 1974:54), dry burnt bread (*ξερόν ψουμίν καμμένον*) (ΦΙΛΙΠΠΟΥ 1912–1913:530; ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:B:84), cheese full of worms (*τυρίν σαρατζιασμένον*) (ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:B:64, 69, 70, 72, 73), bitten cheese (*χαλλούμιν δακαμμένον*) (ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:B:72), rotten onion (*κρομμύ(δ)ιν σαπημένον*) (ΛΟΥΚΑΣ 1974:54; ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:A:43, B:64, 66–69, 72, 74–78, 82, 85) or stinky (*βρομισμένον*) (ΙΟΝΑΣ 2007:B:80, 87).

<sup>16</sup> <http://lefkadamia.blogspot.gr/2013/01/gia-ton-strofo.html> (accessed November 6, 2019).

Subsequent is an extra list which does not include food, but sleeping conditions. These conditions appear to be demeaning and insulting towards the guest, whom the hosts ask to sleep on vines (bed made of vines) (*κρεβάτιν κληματένον*) (IONAS 2007:A:42, B:64–66, 74, 78; LOUKAS 1974:54), *κλήματα* *‘χε στο κρεβάτι* (LENAKAKIS 2007:117), *κλήματα στην κλίνη* (CHRISTODOULAKIS 2011:201), *κλήμα(τα) τα στρώματα* (POLITIS 1931:70; ROUSIAS 1912–1913:49), *βίτσες* [sticks on the mattresses] (STELLAS 2004:41) or on the ground (*χωματένον*) (IONAS 2007:B:70, 71, 73, 75, 86) or the marble floor (*μαρμαρένον*) (IONAS 2007:B:83) having marble as a pillow (*μαξιλάριν μαρμαρένον*) (IONAS 2007:B:64) or stones (*προσσέφαλον πετρένον*) (IONAS 2007:B:67, 73, 81, 83), *μαουλούτζιν/-κιν του πετρένον* (IONAS 2007:A:42, 43, B:67, 68, 76, 77, 86), *μαγλούκα πετρένη* (IONAS 2007:B:71), *πέτρα μαξιλάρι* (LENAKAKIS 2007:117), *πέτρα προσκεφάλι* (CHRISTODOULAKIS 2011:201), *λίθος ο προσέφαλος* (STELLAS 2004:42), *πέτρα προσκέφαλο* (ROUSIAS 1912–1913:49), *πέτρα τσεφαλώματα* (POLITIS 1931:70), *soil (μαουλούτζιν/-κιν χωματένον)* (IONAS 2007:B:74) or pebbles (*χόχλαδας προσσέφαλος*) (STELLAS 2004:41) and cover himself with a cover made of vines (*πάπλωμαν κληματένον*) (IONAS 2007:A:43, B:68–69, 70–75, 77), threads (*πάπλωμαν νηματένον*) (IONAS 2007:B:76), copper (*πάπλωμαν χαρκοματένον*) (IONAS 2007:B:85, 202) or bags (*σακί σκέπασμα*) (ROUSIAS 1912–1913:49).

The subjective element (subjektives Element) in the second part of the charm is presented as a command addressed to the personified source of pain and expressed through the imperative form of two basic verbs: get out (*βγες*) and go away/leave (*φύγε*). This command is often enhanced by an additional element, which involves the sacred power. Christ is presented to chase the personified disease: Christ chases away the pain in the intestines holding a silver knife in his right hand.

“Φύγε, πόνε των αντέρων,  
ο Χριστός σε κατατρέσει  
με το δέξιόν του σέρνι,  
με το αρκυρόν μασαίριν,  
τζαι τζει που να ορτώσει,  
τζειαμαί σε κατακόβκεις”  
(IONAS 2007:B:64)

[Leave, pain in the intestines,  
Christ chases you  
with his right hand,  
with the silver knife,  
and when he reaches you,  
instantly, he cuts you into pieces.]

There are alterations and modifications among variants in this part as well. These differentiations involve the means and the way of chasing: double edged (*δίστομον μαχαίριν και με την χρυσήν την λόγγην*) [with two edges knife and golden spear] (IONAS 2007:B:65), silver spear (*αργυρήν λόγγην*) (IONAS 2007:B:65), holding the silver knife and the cross (*με το αρκυρόν μαχαίρι και με το σταυρόν στο σέρι*) (IONAS 2007:B:72), with the twelve Gospels and his holy hand (*με τα δώδεκα Βαγγέλια και το άγιο ντου χέρι*) (LENAKAKIS 2007:117), with the leg and the hand and the silver knife (*με τον πόδα με την σέραν, τζαι με τη αργυρήν μασαίραν*) (IONAS 2007:B:82), with his silver knife and his golden hand (*με το αργυρό μαχαίρι και με το χρυσό του χέρι*) (POLITIS 1931:70), *με την άργνα (=αργυρή) ντου μαχαίρα τσαι με τη χρουσή ντου χέρα*) (STELLAS 2004:41), with the double edged knife and the golden spear (*με το δίστομον μαχαίριν και με την χρυσήν την λόγγην*) (LOUKAS 1974:54–55), with the silver knife and his right hand (*με την αργυρή μαχαίρα τσαι με τη δεξιά του χέρα*) (VLAXOU 1959:548).

The charm ends with a typical phrase which is in the form of a) reference to the Holy Trinity,<sup>17</sup> b) a simile “just like ...so”,<sup>18</sup> or more rarely c) a combination of a and b (IONAS 2007:B:84).

The documented material and the comparative study of the variations allow us to perceive a minimum of textual meaning, which is though inadequate to accomplish a satisfactory comprehension of the context in the charms of this type. Furthermore many parts of the charm are ambiguous and require further clarification. Why is the landlord characterized as kind/naïve whereas the landlady is cunning? What is the purpose of naming certain types of food and referring to sleeping conditions, and also how are these elements connected with narrative? What is the relationship between the monk and the main characters? As it has already been mentioned, the reference to the monk is sometimes omitted. The textual relation between the objective and the subjective element of narration, which includes the command of removing pain, is loose, not to mention absent, while in some charms it has been omitted (PHILIPOU 1912–1913:530; ROUSIAS 1912–1913:49; KONTOMICHS 1985:93; IONAS 2007:B:68). It is not evident which person is sick and why. Only in one variation is there a reference to «*έπιασε πόνος την νοικοκυρά*» [At midnight she [the landlady] felt pain] (IONAS 2007:A:42), while another variation mentions «at midnight he felt pain» (*μέσα στο μεσ'άνυχτον έπκιασέν τον ο πόνος*) the poor little monk» (*το φτωχόν το καλόηριν*) (IONAS 2007:A:43). In any case, it is evident that we have to deal with an elliptic text, partly readable and in some variations totally illegible or even incomprehensible (IONAS 2007:B:77).

### THE BELIEF NARRATIVE

The parallel analysis of the charm examined here and the belief narrative with which it is related responds to all the previous questions. The belief narrative, which allows the decoding of the obscure and illegible parts of the charm, is encountered in different areas of Greece: Cyprus (IONAS 2007:A:42), Athens (POLITIS 1931:70), Lefkada,<sup>19</sup> Paros (STELLAS 2004:41–42), Megara (VLACHOU 1959:548–549), Cyprus (LOUKAS 1974:54–55; PHILIPPOU 1912–1913:530), Ksirohori (ROUSIAS 1912–1913:49), Crete (ANAGNOSTAKIS 1932–1933:4; POLITIS 1931:71 note, LENAΚAKIS 2007:117).<sup>20</sup> The number of this particular narrative, although inadequate, is indicative of its popularity and lets us study the relationship between charm and legend. It is certain that further research in archives will increase this number considerably.

<sup>17</sup> “*Εις το όνομα του Πατρός και του Υιού και του Αγίου Πνεύματος...*” [In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit] (IONAS 2007:B:64, 65, 68, 69, 70–86).

<sup>18</sup> “*σαν τρέχουν τ' άστρα, σαν τρέσει ο ήλιος, σαν τρέσει η Παναγιά με τον Μονογενή της, έτσι να τρέξει το κακόν από*” [just like the stars run in the sky, just like the sun runs, just like the Holy Mother runs towards her only son, so shall the evil leave from] (IONAS 2007:B:77); “*σαν τρέσει ο ποταμός σαν τρέσει το φεγγάριν, σαν τρέσει ο ήλιος και πα στην μάναν του, έτσι να τρέσε το κακόν από το δούλον του Θεού... (τάδε)*” [just like the river runs, just like the moon runs, just like the sun runs and goes to his mother, so shall the evil go away from the servant of God] (IONAS 2007:B:80).

<sup>19</sup> <http://lefkadamaia.blogspot.gr/2013/01/gia-ton-strofo.html> (accessed November 6, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> The same narrative, despite its relation to a different charm, is also documented on the island of Milos (VICHOS 1960), and Kea (SPYRIDAKIS 1960).



It should be noted that the available documented narratives feature variations and modifications from area to area, as far as their extent and specific elements of their text are concerned. In all cases, however, the legends follow a consistent structure that can be clearly understood. The following texts, one of Megara and one from Crete, are two of the most representative variants;

“Μια φορά πέρασε ο Χριστός ’πό ένα σπίτι τσαι ’καμε το ζητιάνο. Έβραζε η νοικοτσουρά τσαι κουτσία τσαι τη μπαρακάλετσε να ντου δώσει ένα πιάτο ’πό τα κουτσία, όχι από το κρέας, γιατί ήτανε Τετράδη ή Παρασκευγή. Για ινάτι του Χριστού έπαιρνε ξαργού το κουτάλι ’πό τα κουτσία τσαι το βούταε στο κρέας. Ο άντρας της τη βράδυ της είπε: δώσε του χριστιανού ένα πιάτο φαί τσαι ’τσεινη δε ντου ’δωτσε. Δώσ’ του ρούχα να πλαγιάσει, ’τσεινη δε ντου ’δωτσε. Επειδή ο άντρας της τη στεναχώρησε, του πήγε πεισματικά ψωμί καημένο τσαι ελές τσαι κλήματα τσαι λιθάρι για στρώμα τσαι προτσέφαλο. Τη νύχτα έπιασε το παιδί της κόψιμο. Είπε πάλι ο άντρας της: “Να μιλήσομε του χριστιανού μη γκαλιάσει τσαι ξέρει καμιά γιατρεία να κάμομε το παιδί μας καλά”. Πάλι τονε αρχίνησε τον άντρα της, αλλά ετσεινος πήγε τσαι τονε παρακάλετσε. Τότες ο Χριστός του είπε: “Πάρε ένα μαυρομάνικο μαχαίρι τσαι τρία κλήματα τσαι βάν’ τα πάνω στο παιδί”. Τσαι πήγε ο Χριστός τσαι είπε: Αγαθός ο νοικοτσούρης, πονηρή νοικοτσουρά (...) Τσ’α σε φτάσει, αλί ’πό σένα.” (Megara, VLACHOU 1959:549)

[Christ once visited a house as a beggar. As the housewife was boiling broad beans, he begged for a broad beans plate, not meat, as it was Wednesday or Friday. Her stubbornness made her dip the spoon from the broad beans to the meat on purpose. Her husband told her in the evening: “Give the poor man some food” but she did not. “Give him clothes to fall in bed”, but she didn’t. As her husband made her feel angry, she deliberately gave him burnt bread with olives and vines as a mattress and stone as a bed head. During the night, her kid suffered from diarrhea. Her husband said again: “Let’s talk to the poor man in case he knows any treatment to heal our kid”. Despite her repeatedly grumbling to her husband, he begged him (the beggar). Then Christ said; “Virtuous the landlord, cunning the housewife (...) and when Christ comes to the point where you are, alas”]

“Κάποτε ο Χριστός, προσποιούμενος τον επαίτην επήγε εις μίαν οικίαν και εξήτησε φιλοξενίαν, της οποίας ο νοικοκύρης ήτο αγαθός και η νοικοκυρά πονηρή. Η νοικοκυρά εμαγέρευε λαγόν. Ο άγνωστος την ερωτά τι ψήνει κι αν θέλει να του βάλει να φάγει λίγη μαγεριά. Εκείνη του λέγει ότι ψήνει φακή, αλλά είναι άψητη. Του έδωκε ένα κομμάτι ψωμί με λίγες ελιές κι έφαγε, κατόπιν τον κοίμισε στα κλήματα με πέτρα προσκεφαλάδι. Σαν εκοιμήθη ο Χριστός εκατέβασε το τσικάλι και έβαλε να φάνε και ο λαγός είχε γίνει φακή. Τη νύχτα έπιασε μητρόπονος την πονηρή νοικοκυρά κι ο Χριστός άμα ήκουσε τις φωνές εσηκώθη και την γήτηψε και έγινε κι ύστερα έφυγε. Ύστερα το κατάλαβαν πως ήτο ο Χριστός.” (Crete, ANAGNOSTAKIS 1932–1933:4)

[Once Christ, pretending to be a beggar, asked to be hosted in a house where the landlord was virtuous and the housewife was cunning. The housewife was cooking a hare. The stranger asked her what she was roasting and if she would like to offer him some homemade food. She told him that she was cooking lentils soup, but it was still raw. He ate a piece of bread with some olives that she gave him; then he was offered to sleep on the vines with a bed head of stone. When Christ fell asleep, she laid the table, but the hare had turned into lentils soup. During the night, the cunning housewife suffered from stomach ache and when Christ heard her cry, he got up, healed her and then he left. Later on, they realized that he was Christ himself.]

Almost all the variants belong to the same framework, with minor changes which do not disrupt the basic pattern. The characters are classified into two groups. The first one includes the landlord and the housewife and the second group includes the guest, while in some variants there is also the sick family child (VICHOS 1960). In most variants, however, the disease afflicts the housewife herself rather than the child:

“Στ’ αμεισονύχτι, στητέται τσαι ήπιγασε χορό στο Μαρουσώ ο ντεροφάς (ο εντεροφάγος). Ήπό το γερό μπονότσουλα τσαι τη γκολοσφεδονία ήπεσε η τσουρά τσ’ αποθαμού” (Paros, STELLAS 2004:41)

[At midnight, Marouso was afflicted by an awful and terrible pain. The severe pain almost drove the lady to death]

There is also a variant from Crete, where the sick person is the landlord:

“Τη νύχτα όμως έπιγασε πόνος το νοικοκύρη από τσι φακές και δεν εκάτεχε η γυναίκα ντου είντα να του κάνει” (LENAKAKIS 2007:117)

[During the night, the landlord suffered from pain because of the lentils soup and his wife had no idea what to do]

These legends clarify all the illegible elements of the aforementioned charm. Firstly, they define the characters appearing in the majority of the independent charms: the benign landlord, the cunning housewife and the poor monk. These references are sufficiently explained in the main narrative, while in the charms they are not. The cunningness and the negative description of the housewife is related to the fact that she usually withholds the main meal of the family<sup>21</sup> and offers the guest some poor quality food, ranging from a humiliating meal (lentils soup, fava bean soup, three or five olives on the plate etc.) to even letting him starve in some variations.

The rude behaviour of the housewife totally contradicts the kind behaviour of her husband:

“Ότ’ ήφευξε ο τύρης για τα χτήματα, τον απαντά απάνου στη στραθιά. Το γκαλοδέχτη τσαι τον έπερε στη γκατ’τσα ντου να ξωμείνει τσαι να ξαποστάσει. Λέει στ’ απόκουρφα τση τσουράς του: – Θωρ’ς δα Μαρ’σω. Καρατάριζε τον αί γέροντα (...) Τσ’ ήφνε για τσι δούλεψές ντ”” (Paros, STELLAS 2004:41)

[When the landlord set off for his land, he came across him. He welcomed him and took him home to rest and if he wanted, he could even stay overnight. He secretly asks his wife: – Look Mar’so. Take care of the holy old man (...) and he left for his work]

<sup>21</sup> “Η νοικοκυρά εμαγέρενε λαγόν. Ο άγνωστος την ερωτά τι ψήνει κι αν θέλει να του βάλει να φάγει λίγη μαγεριά. Εκείνη του λέγει ότι ψήνει φακή, αλλά είναι άψητη” [The housewife was cooking hare. The stranger asked what she was cooking and if she was willing to offer him a cooked meal. She told him that she was cooking lentils soup, but it was not ready yet] (ANAGNOSTAKIS 1932–1933:4).

In many variants the husband condemns his wife's rude and offensive behaviour:

“– ‘Ευλογημένη’, της λέει ο άνδρας της, ‘ξένος, άνθρωπος ήτανε, δεν τον έβανες μέσα στο σπίτι;’ – ‘Μπα! Πού θα βάλω τέτοιον άνθρωπο στο τραπέζι μου!’ λέει εκείνη. – ‘Να που μας έφεραν λίγα κουκιά, του τα βαινουμε, τρώει’. Τι να κάμει ο άντρας της, για ν’ αποφύγει την γρίνια, την άφησε κι εκείνη έκαιγε λάδι να ζωματίσει πιλάφι. Λοιπόν του έδωσε τους κούκους και ένα κομμάτι ψωμί” (POLITIS 1931:710)

[– “Blessed you” her husband tells her, “he was a stranger, didn’t you host him?” – “No way! How can I dine with such a man!” she replies. – “Here are some fava beans that we were given, we will offer him and he will eat them”. Her husband left her, in order to avoid her moaning, while she was heating oil to cook pilaf. So, she offered him the fava beans and a piece of bread]

The positive and kind behaviour of the husband as well as the negative, rude behaviour of his wife is documented not only in the provision of food but also by the overnight conditions which are offered to the guest. The following excerpts of some variants certify and demonstrate not only the negative behaviour of the wife but also the objection of her husband, who finally does not manage to impose his opinion on her:

“Δεν άκουε τον άντρα της που της έλεγε να δώσει στο γέρο να φάει. Τελευταία με την κακία της είπε να του δώσει τις ελίτσες να φάει και τον έβαλε και στα κλήματα να κοιμηθεί. Κ’ έβαλε και μια πέτρα μαξιλάρι” (VICHOS 1960)

[She disobeyed her husband, who told her to give the old man some food. Finally, full of evil, she decided to give him olives to eat and to sleep on the vines with a stone bed head]

“Τον ήβανε στο μεγατζέ. Για φαΐ, του ’στησε τρία λίγδια στ’ απλαδένι τσ’ ένα φελί ψωμάτσι. Για τσοίτη, του στησε απλωσταργιά μι’ αγκάλη από τα κλαδέματα τσ’ αμπελιάς. Για προστόεφαλο, ‘να γερό χόγλαδο ξεφτερνια’σμένο οφτ’χώς” (Paros, STELLAS 2004:41)

[She offered him the warehouse (to sleep). As for food, she gave him three small olives on a small plate and a little slice of bread. (As for bed) she spread an armful of vine sticks. As for bed head, a big pebble, luckily without any edges and points!]

The aforementioned quotations sufficiently explain and clarify illegible parts of the charms, concerning not only food but also overnight and survival conditions.

The consequence and punishment for such behaviour is the appearance of a disease which is related, not at all randomly, to food consumption, and it concerns abdominal problems, pain or even diarrhea. However, this disease does not afflict the starving guest, but a family member and mainly the housewife. The guest is asked to cure this disease because of the intervention of the husband, who addresses him in order to provide help. This is the third character, which appears in most charms in the form of a poor monk:

“Ένας καλόερας, αποκαμένος ’π’ το δρομί, τα’ αφάωτος, επέρνα ‘πό μινιά κατ’τσα (από ‘να αγροτόσπιτο)” (Paros, STELLAS 2004:41)

[A monk, tired of walking and hungry, passed by the farmhouse]

The role and the function of the guest are explicitly clarified in the legends where he appears, not only as a monk, but often in the form of a poor man or a beggar, identified with Christ:

“Μια φορά πέρασε ο Χριστός και έκανε το Ζητιάνο” (Megara, VLACHOU 1959:549)  
[Christ once came by as a beggar]

“Όταν ευρίσκετο ο Ιησούς Χριστός εδώ κάτω εις την γη, εγύριζε τον κόσμο σαν φτωχός, διά να ιδεί την καρδιά του καθενός, ποίος ήτο καλός, ποίος κακός” (POLITIS 1931:71)  
[When Jesus Christ was on Earth, he wandered around the world as a poor man, in order to have an insight into everyone’s heart, those who were kind, those who were evil]

“Κάποτε ο Χριστός, προσποιούμενος τον επαίτην επήγε εις μίαν οικίαν και εξήτησε φιλοξενίαν” (ANAGNOSTAKIS 1932–1933:49)  
[Once Christ, pretending to be a beggar, visited a house and asked to be hosted, the landlord was kind and the housewife was cunning]

The identification of the poor monk, beggar and stranger with Christ, is not random. The belief that a holy person, mainly Christ, can appear in the form of a beggar, poor man etc. in order to check the people’s faith is quite popular in the context of the folk religious system. The following ethnographic testimonies from Paros are characteristic of the popularity of this belief, closely related to legend:

“Καλόερας. Με το πιστευτό ότι στη μορφή και στην πνευματική του παρουσία, αντικατοπρίζτανε ο ίδιος ο Χριστός, που ήθελε να δοκιμάσει την προαίρεση των ανθρώπων” (STELLAS 2004:42)  
[Monk. Believing that Christ himself was reflected in the form and the spiritual presence of a monk, aiming at testing people’s intention.]

## ETIOLOGY AND THERAPY OF DISEASE

The aforementioned narratives belong to the category of “legends”, according to the definition of this folklore genre of the American folklorist William Bascom (BASCOM 1965:3). One of the basic characteristics of legends is that they were believed to be real by people who lived in so-called traditional societies. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the belief narrative discussed here, along with other similar narratives, belongs to the sphere of myth; and as we all know, myths use symbolic and allegorical language, not literal. The American mythologist Joseph Campbell (CAMPBELL 1988:22–23), who is predominantly a researcher of myth and its function, refers to the “sociological function” of myths, which aims at validating and enhancing certain social norms and *statu quo*, and to the “pedagogical function”, which focuses on teaching a specific human way of life. Therefore, in a large number of folk narratives we observe that people’s fear of violations of socially acceptable rules is indirectly expressed, though, in terms of its general structure, an allegorical narrative.

Knowing the specific belief narrative is quite useful since it not only facilitates sufficient comprehension of the charms, but also associates the text with a network of contextual

elements that are connected to the wider cultural frame within which the incantations are produced and reproduced. The belief narratives integrate the cause of the disease. This relies on violating taboos and rules of ethical conduct, which aims at avoiding potential deviant behaviour as well as at enhancing social solidarity towards people in a crucial situation, whether it is about foreigners or socially and financially disadvantaged groups. This mechanism is based on and supported by a traditional religious cosmology that associates these groups with a sacred figure of high authority, Christ himself.

The narrative under examination also includes customs and rules which refer to dietary taboos. Such dietary prohibitions are connected to avoiding certain kinds of food, especially during days of fast as defined by the religious system of traditional Greek society, like Wednesday and Friday, when consumption of meat ought to be avoided:

“Μια φορά πέρατσε ο Χριστός ’πό ένα σπίτι τσαι ’καμε το ζητιάνο. Έβραζε η νοικοτσουρά τσαι κουτσία τσαι τη παρακάετσε να ντου δώσει ένα πιάτο ’πό τα κουτσία, όχι από το κρέας, γιατί ήτανε Τετράδη ή Παρασκευή” (Megara, VLACHOU 1959:549)<sup>22</sup>

[Once, Christ came by a house pretending to be a beggar. The lady of the house was cooking broad beans so he asked her to offer him a plate of broad beans, not of meat, because it was Wednesday or Friday]

The violation of those restrictions in combination with the attempt to deceive the monk is considered to be a sin and is punished by turning the meat into lentils:

“Σαν εκοιμήθη ο Χριστός εκατέβασε το τσικάλι και έβαλε να φάνε και ο λαγός είχε γίνει φακή” (ANAGNOSTAKIS 1932–1933:40)

[When Christ fell asleep and she served food, hare had been turned into lentils]

“Η γυναίκα εδέχτηκε και ύστερα την ερώτηξε είντα μαγειρεύει. Αυτή του ‘πενε πως ψήνει φακή, ψόματα, γιατί εμαγέρευγε κρέας (...) με το που το λέει γίνεται το κρέας φακή” (LENAKAKIS 2007:117)

[The woman agreed and then he asked her what she was cooking. She told him she was cooking lentils, but she lied to him, because she was cooking meat (...) the minute she told the lie the meat turned into lentils]

Her being sick is the ultimate punishment for her negative behaviour, which is considered to be a sin.

Some collectors of folkloric data are familiar with this belief narrative and explain the incantation by stating: “The charm (...) is based on the following myth. Christ disguised as monk requested accommodation from a priest whose wife was capricious and mean/evil. She took no care of Christ and as a result that very night she suffered from colic. They asked Christ to cure her and so he did. Afterwards, Christ disappeared and it was then that the priest realized he was not a common foreigner, but Christ himself.” (IONAS 2007:A:42 (transl.) “The chant derived from this legend. Once Christ, pretending to be a beggar (...). Then they realized it was Christ.” (Crete, ANAGNOSTAKIS 1932–1933:40

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<sup>22</sup> A similar case is documented in STELLAS 2004:41.

(transl.) It is also worth noting that a folklorist from Paros characteristically calls this kind of collected material a mixed genre, which does not follow the restrictions of transmission and the performance of charms (STELLAS 2004:42). That is to say, it neither requires special users nor a secret transmission and performance.<sup>23</sup>

Nonetheless, we observe a considerable amount of independent charms documented without a supplementary comment nor a reference to the belief narrative they associate with. These independent charms maintain all the basic traits of the genre, the restrictions on transmission and performance, and are used as treatment for the diseases in the abdomen area. It is still uncertain whether the absence of a correlation is due to insufficient documentation of the available folk texts or there is indeed ignorance of this narrative. It seems, however, that the specific incantation follows a second method of transmission: it is based on a legend, but in the process it becomes independent and follows the rules and principles that apply to the transmission and performance of charms. The illegibility of the text does not seem to worry researchers since nonsensical words and elliptic content are considered to be one of the main characteristics of the verbal magic. Besides, contrary to legends, comprehension of the charm is irrelevant to its assumed efficacy (PASSALIS 2016:218–20).

## CONCLUSIONS

The comprehension and legibility of the incantations examined in this paper would not be satisfactory without the knowledge of corresponding belief narrative to which they are closely connected. Such knowledge clarifies the verbal part of the charm, turning it from an illegible and inconsistent text into a comprehensive, readable one. Despite being quite different genres, the belief narratives and the charms are interrelated here in a functional, supplementary way. What is documented in the legend is the explanatory and justifiable model which clarifies the cause of the disease, rooted in the violation of rules. Hence, it is not only an explanatory model for provoking a disease, but also an example of warning against potential deviant behaviour. In this way, the social norms connected with acceptable behaviour towards guests are validated, thus reinforcing social solidarity towards people in need, such as the foreigners, the poor and beggars. The charm thus constitutes the therapeutic method of restoring a disorder caused by the violation of norms connected with the acceptable religious behaviour. What we see here is that charm and the belief narrative coexist as a whole entity that is functional within the framework of traditional Greek culture. Are there other cases of charms connected to belief narratives in such an integrated way yet to be examined? Further study could probably shed light and contribute to a more holistic approach to both genres.

<sup>23</sup> The relation and the close connection between charm and the relevant legend have also been noted by other researchers of European charm. Cf. Pócs 2014:895 (transl.): “However, due to further motifs of the *historiola*, this charm shows connections mostly with other genres, primarily with legends that represent Christ and St. Peter wandering on earth. In her relevant analysis, Tekla Dömötör traces this charm back to an Egyptian magical text: the goddess Isis walks on Earth and a rich woman refuses to give her shelter. Isis strikes her child down with a disease, but then takes pity on the child and teaches the mother a healing charm. Dömötör lists parallels from Southern Italy based on Ernesto de Martino, to which we may add further data from Sicily”.

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