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| University of Leeds Nikos Ordoulidis PhD student info@ordoulidis.gr www.ordoulidis.gr |
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Paper Title: The Greek laikó (popular) rhythms: Some problematic issues

The issue of Greek laikó rhythms is one of the most complex, multi-faceted, and long-standing problems in ethnomusicological field study. I will describe some of the problems that I have encountered throughout my research for my doctoral thesis, as regards the laikó rhythms. My thesis, whose subject is the analysis of the work of the songwriter Vasílis Tsitsánis, is an ongoing process which has been taking place at the University of Leeds in England since the end of the year 2008. The aim of my paper is to shed light on the elements that have obstructed not only my own research but also all sorts of research akin to it. Another intended goal is to draw the attention of every researcher to the possible traps involved in subjects regarding rembétiko and Greek laikó music and the usage of the laikó rhythms.

A couple of events played a crucial role in the development of the rhythms that Greek songwriters used in laikí music. The first, and possibly the most important, is the “Indocracy period”. Evidence uncovered in my research shows that a major reason for Vasílis Tsitsánis’s decline in the number of recordings was the new era that Greek laikí music has entered mainly beginning with the affection of Hindi music found in Hindi films that used to be played in Greece. This is the so-called by scholars, *περίοδος της Ινδοκρατίας*, that is, Indocracy period. This is the period when movies from India started to be played in Greece, approximately from 1954 until 1968. These movies contained many popular and traditional (in the Indian context) songs from India. Many famous and not so famous Greek songwriters of that period used to take some of these songs and supply Greek lyrics. Then, these people recorded these changed songs using Greek style popular orchestras, and by selling the records, achieved great fortunes without people knowing the truth. It was unavoidable that many elements of the Indian music style should not ‘leave’ Greece when this period

ended. New rhythms appeared and were transformed in order to match Greek popular standards and, perhaps most possibly, to match Greek ears, year by year became musts on Greek stages and venues with *laikí* music. New rhythms such as the *dãdrã* from India and the Afro-Cuban *guaracha* and *rumba* were from now on essential in Greek discography.

I will play two songs as examples. The first one is entitled *Υπάρχει μια φλόγα*. It is based on the *dãdrã* rhythm; recorded in 1963. The second one is called *Έλα να κλάψουμε μαζί*. It is based on the *guaracha* rhythm; recorded in 1963 (*play*)

The second subversive event was a consequence of the trips of many Greek musicians to the USA. The most important reason for going was their ambition for an international career, a better job, or simply for some gigs at places where many Greek immigrants lived. The result of these trips, for the famous songwriter, bouzouki virtuoso and modernizer Manólis Hiótiς, was that he returned to Greece having many Afro-Cuban and Latin rhythms in his baggage. By combining these elements with the already existing multicultural style, he instantly created a new school both for performance technique, and songwriting. There is a huge corpus of songs, creations of Hiótiς, based on this style.

Tsitsánis recorded in forty six rhythms. Owing to the fact that the very same musicians took part in the recordings of the other songwriters too, this can be a characteristic that will help someone to have a general image not only for Tsitsánis's songs, but for Greek *laikí* music in general, especially in terms of the rhythms' interpretation.

Let us look at examples of some problematic points as regards the rhythms. After the examination of the corpus of songs of Vasíliς Tsitsánis, three major styles of *zeimbékiko* rhythm have been observed. Two of them are known and used by Greek musicians. These are the old *zeimbékiko* and the new-contemporary *zeimbékiko*. However, thirty-one recordings have been noted in a *zeimbékiko* rhythm for which none of these two aforementioned styles is applicable. Due to the non-existence of this style in the books about Greek *laikó* rhythms as well as the fact that I have never heard a musician talking about this particular style, I call this style 'mixed *zeimbékiko*'. There are, however, many cases where I have heard or worked with musicians who tend to play very closely to this performing style, that is, the mixed *zeimbékiko*, only because they are familiar with old recordings such as those we are dealing with.

One type of this mixed zeimbékiko is clear on recordings in which the orchestra sometimes plays in the old style and sometimes in the new (during the same song). Sometimes, the orchestra gives the sense of the accidental choice of the interpretation style and sometimes the sense of the conscious, that is, of pre-arranged and agreed parts where the orchestra plays together either in the old or in the new style. This is the mixed zeimbékiko number one.

On other pieces the guitar along with the other accompanying instruments (where they exist) plays in the new zeimbékiko style while the double bass (which had only recently begun to take part in the orchestras) plays in the old zeimbékiko style. In most of the cases the recordings give the impression of a lack of preparation and rehearsal on the part of the musicians, something that has been confirmed by Evangelía Margharóni, the pianist and accordionist of Tsitsánis’s band for 33 years. This is the mixed zeimbékiko number two.

I will play an example for each one of the zeimbékiko styles. The first one is a normal old zeimbékiko whose pattern follows. With smaller staves, I show some altered versions of the particular instruments.

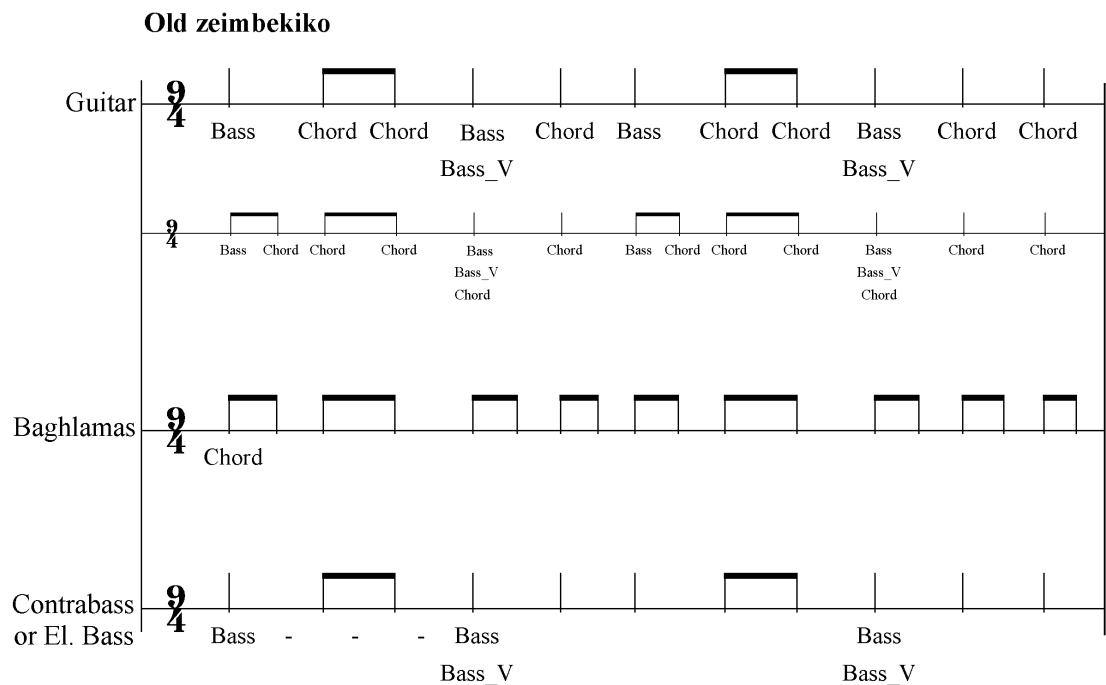


Figure 1: Old zeimbékiko pattern

The song’s title is *παλιοκόριτσο για σένα*, recorded in 1950. The next one is the new zeimbékiko whose pattern follows.

New zeimbekiko

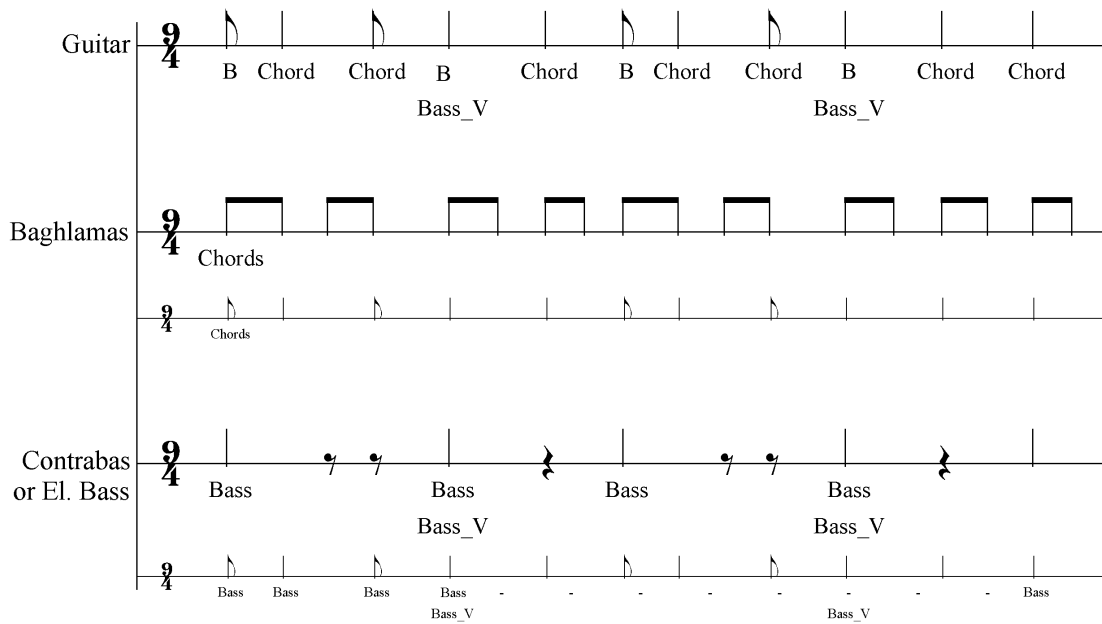


Figure 2: New zeimbékiko pattern

The song's title is *μαζί μου δεν ταιριάζεις*, recorded in 1946. Now, let's listen to a song based on the mixed zeimbékiko number one, which as I said is a combination of the old and the new. The song is entitled *η λιτανεία του μάγκα*, recorded in 1983. It initially plays in old zeimbékiko and, when canto comes in, it plays in new zeimbékiko. Finally, we have the mixed zeimbékiko number two whose pattern follows.

Mixed Zeimbekiko-2

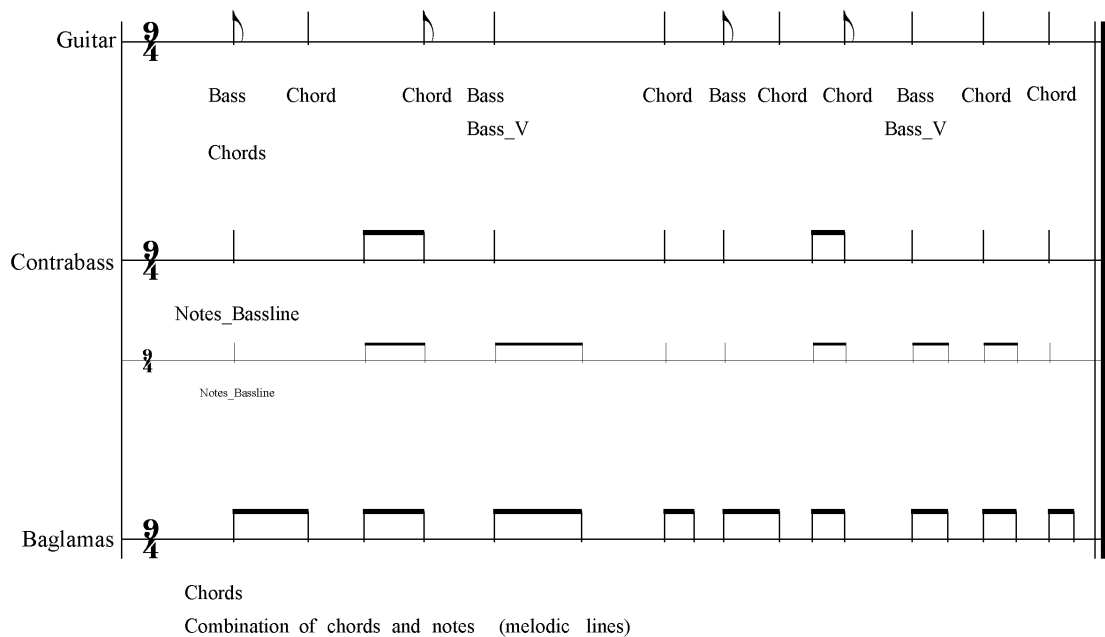


Figure 3: Mixed zeimbékiko-2 pattern

The song's title is *θέλω να είναι Κυριακή*, recorded in 1961.

There are several zeimbékiko songs whose interpretation is according to the new style. Yet, due to the speed of their tempo they give the feeling of the tsiftetéli rhythm. After interviewing some percussionists friends, my conclusion is that there is no common term which is followed by all of them as a general rule. For instance, one of them responded that during his career, he used to refer to these fast zeimbékikos as nine-beat tsiftetélis rather than fast zeimbékikos. However, other percussionists, as well as other musicians, responded that they never even thought about this special connection between the zeimbékiko and the tsiftetéli, thus, they never thought of a term for these rhythms, that is, whether they should refer to them as fast zeimbékikos or nine-beat tsiftetélis.

I will play an example in tsiftetéli rhythm first, which is a 4/4 rhythm. The song's title is *πρίγκηπας*, recorded in 1978. Let's now listen to a zeimbékiko that reminds of tsiftetéli, which is a 9/4 rhythm. The song's title is *ο Τακατζίφας*, recorded in 1975.

Also noted are two different approaches to the interpretation of karsilamás rhythm, whose pattern follows.

Karsilamas

The musical score is organized into four main sections, each with two staves (treble and bass clef):

- Guitar:**
 - Staff 1: Bass, Chord, Bass, Chord, Bass, Chord, Chord, Bass, Chord, Chord. Bass_V annotations: Bass_V, Bass_V, Bass_V, Bass_V.
 - Staff 2: Bass, Chord, Bass, Chord, Bass, Chord, Bass, Chord, Chord. Bass_V annotations: Bass_V, Bass_V.
- (for faster tempi):**
 - Staff 1: Bass, Chord, Bass, Chord, Bass, Chord, Bass, Chord, Chord. Bass_V annotations: Bass_V, Bass_V, Bass_V.
 - Staff 2: Bass, Chord, Chord, Bass, Chord, Chord, Chord.
- Contrabass or El. Bass:**
 - Staff 1: Bass, Bass, Bass, Bass, Bass_V.
 - Staff 2: Bass, Bass, Bass, Bass, Bass, Bass, Bass_V. Bass_V annotations: Bass_V, Bass_V, Bass_V, Bass_V, Bass_V.
- Congas or Bongos:**
 - Staff 1: Bass, Treble, Bass, Treble, Treble, Treble.
 - Staff 2: Bass, Treble, Bass, Treble, Bass, Treble, Bass, Treble, Treble.
 - Staff 3: Bass, Treble, Bass, Treble, Bass, Treble, Bass, Chord, Chord.
 - Staff 4: Bass, Treble, Bass, Treble, Treble, Bass, Treble, Treble, Bass, Treble, Treble, Treble.
- Baghlamas or Piano (Treble):**
 - Staff 1: Chords

Figure 4: Karsilamas pattern

The character of the first approach is closer to, what is called in Greece, *παραδοσιακή μουσική*, that is, folk-traditional music, while the second more modern approach seems to be a mixture of Greek musical elements and various others introduced in the Greek commercial (and not only) music around the 60's, such as Hindi, Latin, Afro-Cuban music etc. Another issue regarding karsilamas is the wide range of tempi noted. Occasionally, this fact is often connected with the aforementioned issue of dif-

fering aesthetics, that is, folk-traditional, and popular-modern. Let's listen to two examples in order to see the difference in the tempo of karsilamás, as well as in the aesthetics. The first one is entitled *Για κοίτα κόσμε ένα κορμί*, recorded in 1956. The second one is called *Το βαπόρι απ' την Περσία* recorded in 1977.

In conclusion, I would like to underline the fact that many non-scientific books exist containing a huge number of mistakes regarding the rhythms. My research revealed many problematic issues found in these editions, something that shows that in many cases, people who do not have sufficient musical education, deal with subjects which are very complicated, and instead of solving them, make the whole situation even worse.

Finally, mistakes have even been found on record labels; such as the label of the song *μεθυσμένος θα 'ρθω απόψε* which writes tsiftetéli, where the correct rhythm is a mix of tumbao and salsa rhythms. The same is true of the label of the song *αφού δεν μ' αγαπούσε*, which writes sirtotsiftetéli. However, more careful listening shows that its rhythm is based on the bayo rhythm.

The issue of Greek laiko rhythms is one that has never before been thoroughly covered at an academic level. Although most Greek rhythms are unique and special, musicologists, especially in Greece, have not treated them with the attention that they deserve. Therefore, there is an urgent need that the many, and complex, gaps created by this lack of research be covered. Research on issues like this can help the study on Greek laiki music to prosper, as well as shed light on issues that have been troubling musicians and musicologists both in Greece and abroad.

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¹ n.d. = no date.

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² The 'gramophone era' is the translation given by Daniel Koglin in 'Marginality –A key concept to understanding the resurgence of rebétiko in Turkey', p. 34.

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³ anon = no author’s name mentioning.