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“Masqueraders” of İstanbul: The Apokries Carnivals in the 1930s

Göktuğ İPEK**

Abstract

Some contemporary carnivals, such as Rio and Venice carnivals, date back to pagan and ancient times. However, another carnival, which is not as well known as these two carnivals, but has a long history, was also celebrated in İstanbul. This carnival was Apokries (Apukurya), now known as Baklahorani Carnival.

Apokries was a Greek Orthodox carnival tradition. It was celebrated in places such as Galata, Pera, and Tatavla where the Rums densely populated. Especially, Tatavla was identified with this carnival. While Apokries traditionally came to end after three weeks, in Tatavla it was extended for another day. On its final day, the carnival entertainment was reaching a peak, with people coming from all over the city, as well as those who had been walking around İstanbul in various costumes for three weeks. Those who dressed in these costumes were called “masqueraders”.

The number of masqueraders gradually dwindled towards the end of the 1930s. The carnival started losing its importance in the early Republican era due to state policies against minorities and it was prohibited by a general law of the early 1940s, excusing the Second World War. The aim of this study examines how carnival was celebrated in the 1930s, the Turkish approach to the carnival, and the participation of other communities in the city. For this purpose, the İstanbul Press, which contains the most important information on the subject, was used as the

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main source, considering that there is very little information in other sources.

Keywords: Carnival, Apokries, Masquerader, Baklahorani, İstanbul

İstanbul'un "Maskaraları": 1930'larda Apukurya Karnavalları

Öz

Rio ve Venedik karnavalları gibi bazı çağdaş karnavalların geçmişi pagan ve antik dönemlere kadar uzanmaktadır. Ancak bu iki karnaval kadar bilinmeyen ama tarihi oldukça eskiye dayanan bir karnaval da İstanbul'da kutlanıyordu. Bu karnaval Apokries (Apukurya), yani günümüzden bilinen adıyla Baklahorani Karnavalı'ydı.

Apokries bir Rum Ortodoks karnaval geleneğiydi. Bu karnaval Galata, Pera ve Tatavla gibi Rumların yoğun olarak yaşadığı yerlerde kutlanıyordu. Özellikle Tatavla bu karnavalla özdeşleşmişti. Apokries geleneksel olarak üç hafta sonra sona ererken, Tatavla'da bir gün daha uzatılırdı. Son gününde, şehrin dört bir yanından gelenlerin yanı sıra üç hafta boyunca İstanbul'da çeşitli kostümlerle dolaşanlarla karnaval eğlencesi doruğa ulaşıyordu. Bu kostümleri giyenlere "maskara" deniliyordu.

Bu maskaraların sayısı 1930'ların sonuna doğru giderek azaldı. Karnaval, erken Cumhuriyet döneminde azınlıklara karşı uygulanan devlet politikaları nedeniyle önemini yitirmeye başladı ve 1940'ların başında II. Dünya Savaşı bahane gösterilerek genel bir kanunla yasaklandı. Bu çalışmanın amacı, 1930'larda karnavalın nasıl kutlandığını, Türklerin karnavala yaklaşımını ve şehirdeki diğer toplulukların karnavala katılımını incelemektedir. Bu amaçla, diğer kaynaklarda çok az bilgi olmasını da dikkate alarak, konuyla ilgili en önemli bilgileri içeren İstanbul Basını ana kaynak olarak kullanılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Karnaval, Apukurya, Maskara, Baklahorani, İstanbul

Introduction

The word "carnival" defines a liturgical period for Christians. Nonetheless, there is a difference for Catholic and Orthodox in terms of terminology. The Greek Orthodox used the word "Apokries"¹ instead of the word carnival. "Apo" means "from", "kreas" means "meat".

The first week of the Apokries is the fast-free week. The second week, named "Kreatini", is the last week to eat meat. The third and last week, named "Tyrofagou", consumes dairy products. Sunday is the last day of the third week as well as the last day of Apokries.²

However, in Tatavla, Apokries was not ending after three weeks. It was celebrated with one extra day. This Monday of Lent is called "Kathari Deftera" (Clean Monday). Although the main purpose is to clean the house and mentally get prepared for fasting, the revelry was peaking and ended at a fair in Tatavla on Kathari Deftera.³ This day was also called "Baklahorani" used to name the Tatavla Fair. Thereas no such event using this name at other carnivals.⁴ Following this day, Lent began, and it was Easter time 40 days later.⁵

Although this carnival was intrinsic to the Rum Orthodox community, all ethnic, religious, and socio-economic classes of society were interested in it.⁶ This interest and embracement caused some expressions among the Ottoman public. For example, poor-quality paint of the fezs would run down the neck of the person wearing it when it rained. Colloquially, these people were called

¹ The Turkish version of this word at that time is Apukurya. However, the original Greek word was preferred in this study.

² Naz Vardar, *Carnival Celebrations in İstanbul: The Changing Perception and Experience of Apokries and Baklahorani*, Unpublished Master Thesis, Boğaziçi University, 2020, p. 16.; Sermet Muhtar Alus, "Apukurya", *Hayat Tarih*, 72, December 1955, p. 4228.

³ Ibid., pp. 20-25.

⁴ Ibid., p. 25.

⁵ Reşad Ekrem Koçu, "Apukurya Maskaraları", *İstanbul Ansiklopedisi*, Volume 2, Ansiklopedisi ve Neşriyat Kollektif Şirketi, İstanbul, 1959, p. 892.

⁶ Sada Payır, "Umumda Mahremiyet: Geç Osmanlı İstanbul'unda Tatavla Karnavalı," *Toplumsal Tarih*, 321 September 2020, p. 32.

“masquerader of Apokries”.⁷ Masquerader is the name given to people who dressed in different costumes and walked around during the carnival period.⁸ These costumes consisted of various animal heads and masks. This costume and carnival tradition was grounded in the Dionysus festivals (Great Dionysia) in ancient Greek.⁹

The oldest well-known visual of the carnival and masqueraders was published in L'illustration magazine on May 19th, 1855.¹⁰ In the Ottoman archive records, we observe the issues related to carnival were happened for the first time in the 1800s. This period coincided with the years of Westernization movements. Ottoman, Turkish, French, and British sources indicate that the carnival celebrations were concentrated in Pera, Galata and Tatavla.¹¹ As a matter of fact, these districts were the places where the Christians were most populated.¹² These two areas had different social, cultural, and economic structures. European envoys, merchants, and aristocrats were living in Pera and Galata. Masquerade balls were organized for the carnival in the opera house, theaters, and embassies.¹³ The ones organized at the Odeon Theater were the most lively and suitable for everyone were.¹⁴ Balls, music halls, and coffeehouses burst at the seams.¹⁵ In addition, İstanbul looked like a city of the “Frenk”¹⁶ in many aspects. It even surpassed its cities in some points. When the festive season arrived, the

⁷ Ahsen Şahin, *Osmanlı Devleti'nde Başlık Olarak Fesin Kullanımı ve Feshane-i Amire (1829-1850)*, Unpublished Master Thesis, Sakarya University, 2019, p. 24.

⁸ Although the word carnival has a more general meaning, in this study, it is used to refer to Rum Orthodox celebrations. Additionally, “masquerader” is used to describe the people walking around the city in different costumes during the carnival.

⁹ Cengiz Kahraman, “Maskara’lar Sokakta”, *Atlas Tarih*, 45, 2007, p. 98; Payır, *ibid*, p. 33.

¹⁰ Kahraman, *ibid*, p. 94.

¹¹ Naz Vardar, “Dönüşen Şehrin Dönüşen Eğlencesi: Osmanlı’dan Günümüze İstanbul’da Karnaval.” in *Semtlerle Şehrin Hafıza Katmanları: Şişli*, pp. 28–29, <https://www.karakutu.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Semtlerle-Sehrin-Hafiza-Katmanlari.pdf>, (accessed: October 21, 2022).

¹² Zehra Hamarat, *Ahmed Rasim’in Eserlerinde İstanbul Folkloru*, Unpublished Master Thesis, İstanbul University, 2010, p. 396.

¹³ Vardar, “Dönüşen Şehrin Dönüşen Eğlencesi”, p. 29.

¹⁴ Sermet Muhtar Alus, *Masal Olanlar*, İletişim Yayınları, İstanbul, 1997, p. 71.

¹⁵ Ahmet Rasim, *Şehir Mektupları*, Lacivert Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 2007, p. 54.

¹⁶ The origin of this word is “Frank”. However, it has been translated into Turkish as “Frenk”. Frenk simply meant Western European in Ottoman era.

As in this example, many Greek words of that period were used in the press in Turkish form. In addition to this, journalists would also write as they heard them on the street. In other words, when colloquial language was included, Greek-Turkish became intertwined. In this study, these words are used as they appeared in the press.

"Frenks" saw how to be a masquerader! Because during the carnival season, the Turks even outreached them in terms of entertainment.¹⁷

Contrary to Pera and Galata, Tatavla had its own qualifications. It was the residence of the workers and middle-class Rum Orthodox. In addition to this feature, its geographical structure made Tatavla indispensable for Baklahorani celebrations. The Tatavla hill had both rural and urban characteristics.¹⁸ For these reasons, there were two different types of entertainment in Tatavla and Beyoğlu. The celebrations in Tatavla had a particularly bad reputation, which made many people curious about the entertainments there. The rich were secretly passing by and watching the events, looking through their own vehicles. At this point, it should be said that not all Rums accept these entertainments in Tatavla.¹⁹

The witnesses of the period say that the carnival entertainments and irregularity reached its peak during the Armistice Period.²⁰ After the Turkish War of Independence, there was a Turkish-Greek Population Exchange in accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne. Although the Rums in İstanbul were excluded from this exchange, they had to deal with many pressures, problems, and alterations during the nation-building process of the early republican period. One of the alterations specifically happened in Tatavla. A fire that broke out in Tatavla on January 21st, 1929, gave the state the opportunity it was looking for. The fire, which coincided with a period when the negotiations between Turkey and Greece reached a deadlock on the issue of the Greeks of İstanbul, was used as a political opportunity and, it was not the only.²¹ Following the fire, Tatavla was marginalized by the İstanbul press as "Little Athens" for two months.²² Finally, the name of Tatavla was changed to Kurtuluş.²³ But the carnival still resisted.

¹⁷ Ahmed Rasim, *Muharrir Bu Ya*, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Yayınları, Ankara, 1969, p. 310.

¹⁸ Orhan Türker, *Osmanlı İstanbul'undan Bir Köşe Tatavla*, Sel Yayıncılık, İstanbul, 1998, p. 25.

¹⁹ Vardar, "Dönüşen Şehrin Dönüşen Eğlencesi," pp. 29-30.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 31.

²¹ Aytek Soner Alpan, "Bir felâket olan yangın meğer pek hayırlı bir sabahın aydınlığı imiş": Tatavla nasıl 'kurtuldu'?", *Toplum ve Bilim*, 158, 2021, pp. 225-227.

²² Hüseyin Irmak, "Tatavla'dan Kurtuluş'a," in *Semtlerle Şehrin Hafıza Katmanları: Şişli*, p. 26, <https://www.karakutu.org.tr/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Semtlerle-Sehrin-Hafiza-Katmanlari.pdf>, (accessed: October 21, 2022).

²³ The Turkish name, Kurtuluş, means salvation.

The Apokries Carnival Celebrations in the 1930s

Azrael of the 1931 Carnival

Since the Carnival in 1930 and 1931 coincided with the Ramadan Feast, the city was even livelier. Masked groups with colorful costumes were visible on the streets of Beyoğlu, Harbiye and Taksim until midnight.²⁴ There were many stores renting out carnival costumes. However, some second-hand costumes had to be rented out making sure they were clean. The police took precautions for those who did not follow this rule. It was forbidden to rent costumes if there was no stamp showing they had been cleaned. Those who did not comply with this rule were penalized.²⁵ When the ebullience increased among some incidents at the carnival in 1930, the police had to take further precautions in this regard.²⁶

According to the Yenigün newspaper, the carnival was stagnant for a long time in that year. Even though it was the last week of the carnival (week of the 18th), there were masquerader groups in groups of two thirds almost everywhere in Beyoğlu. Nevertheless, while there were masquerader people from seven to seventy, now only young girls and boys attracted attention.²⁷

Another newspaper claimed that the carnival lost its religious character and had become an international entertainment. According to the newspaper, it was astonishing that everyone was so cheerful, despite the economic crisis caused by the Great Depression. It was written, "our nerves were shot, our consciousness got numbed, we turned into junkies because of bad straits. We are laughing, dancing, and having fun."²⁸

²⁴ *Cumhuriyet*, March 4, 1930; "Karnaval Mevsimi," *Son Posta*, February 18, 1931.

²⁵ "Karnaval elbiseleri temizlenecek," *Cumhuriyet*, February 11, 1931.

²⁶ Kahraman, "Maskara'lar Sokakta," p. 99.

²⁷ "Karnaval mevsimi bu sene hayli hararetli," *Yenigün*, March 18, 1931.

²⁸ "Karnaval bugün artık dini bir âdet değil, beynelmilel bir eğlencedir," *Milliyet*, February 22, 1931.



Figure 1: Four masqueraders at the carnival celebrations in 1930²⁹

Some journalists wrote their impressions of the carnival in 1931. One of them was Osman Cemal Kaygılı. He heard some noises such as “The funeral is coming, the funeral is coming”, while he was walking to Kurtuluş with the crowd. There were candle holders and hymnists in the front, the coffin in the middle, and weepers in the back. He realized that this cortege was a masquerader group, while he was worrying about how the cortege would pass inside this crowd.

Despite the cold weather, the Apokries celebrations were better than last year. Crowds were pouring out of both inside and outside of the prairie music halls. There were funambulists in the square right side of the music halls. One funambulist was on a rope the height of a minaret. An Albanian music band was playing in front of the Hrant’s music hall. The small music hall which was on the left side of the tramline was like a doomsday place. Woman masqueraders were dancing with mandolin and accordion there. The most famous violinists, clarinetists, and lute players of İstanbul were in the other music halls. The crowd scattered around in the other districts towards the evening. Those who were drunk sometimes tottered and sometimes sank into the mud.³⁰

Another journalist who joined the carnival in 1931 was Hikmet Feridun. He went to the district via Kurtuluş tram to join the Tatavla Fair on the last day of the

²⁹ Suna and İnan Kırâç Foundation Collection, Inventory no: FA_004169.

³⁰ Osman Cemal Kaygılı, *Köşe Bucak İstanbul*, Can Yayınları, İstanbul, 2019, pp. 325–327.

carnival. There were 30-35 horsemen around the tram: “Cossacks in red dresses, white caps and long boots, Italians in broad hats holding the bridle of his horse with one hand and playing the guitar with the other, bullfighters with long sideburns, medieval knights in cardboard armor.” The horses, like its horsemen, were made into masqueraders. Some of them were wearing glasses, some of them were dressed in a kind of cutaway. From time to time, the carriages adorned with red, green, and purple ribbons, passed by the tram. From time to time an old song was heard, mixed with a hurdy-gurdy and a guitar:

“Koroçeri trava

Napane sta tatavla

Oooooh travaaa!”³¹

Finally, the tram stopped at Sinemköy station. It was not possible for the tram to move because of the crowd. Everyone went towards the small, blue-painted holy spring on the side of the creek on the slope of the Kurtuluş hill. Masqueraders dressed in red, green, blue, and purple clothes took off their hats and cones and entered the holy spring. If you looked through the door of this small temple, you would see these colorful people praying with painted hands and faces. And when they were done with praying, they suddenly began to act crazily. Dances, songs, cavortings, yells...³²



Figure 2: A group of masqueraders in 1930³³

³¹ This is an old Rum song.

³² Hikmet Feridun, “Eğer Kurtuluş’ta Güzellik Müsabakası Yapılsaydı,” *Akşam*, February 26, 1931.

³³ Suna and İnan Kırar Foundation Collection, Inventory no: CFA_004176.

Different and interesting costumes were worn during the carnival. One of these costumes amazed those who saw it. If a competition was held, this costume would be the one to win it. Imagine a person in a skeleton suit, holding a sickle. Sometimes he pretended to attack the public with his sickle, sometimes he turned his back against the crowd. When he turned his back, you would see the word "Terkos" on his back. This costume was subtly and humorously criticizing the water company whose name was Terkos Water Company at that time. Nobody was content with this company. As this example shows, some used the carnival as a means of protest while others were attributing different meanings to it.³⁴

At night, a few "cross-eyed drunk masqueraders" were molesting people in the middle of the street. One of the police officers in the neighborhood started chasing them. Therewith, the masqueraders started to run, and the police officer shot them behind in order to stop them. However, the bullet accidentally hit another person who was passing by.³⁵

Some journalists did not like the walking of the masqueraders in Beyoğlu. For example, a journalist whose pen name was "Felek"³⁶ stated, he had never seen as many masqueraders as in 1930 in Beyoğlu. The crowd was so huge that it was impossible to find a way to walk on İstiklal Street. The residents living in this neighborhood could not sleep because of the noise of the masqueraders. A friend asked the journalist why the masqueraders were on this day of the year. He responded, "to hide their foolery on the other days of the year". The following year he complained about the same issues. However, he also added that celebrations like European carnivals could not be done. At the carnival in İstanbul, the brightest idea was to walk around with a broom, but the municipality was disturbed by it.³⁷

³⁴ "En güzel maske", *Cumhuriyet*, February 26, 1931.

³⁵ "Maskaralar," *Akşam*, February 26, 1931.

³⁶ This is the surname of the journalist. It means destiny.

³⁷ Felek, "Maskara hikâyeleri!", *Milliyet*, February 23, 1931.



Figure 3: The masquerader dressed as Azrael³⁸

Another Turkish journalist, with a pen name “Pin”, said it would be unpleasant and meaningless to walk around as a masquerader in Beyoğlu. Many were singing bad songs and making a fuss. According to him, a lot of people were waiting for this carnival just to show their own ugliness and drabness.

The night before, he witnessed some children following and yelling “Voyvo!”³⁹ a masquerader group in Nişantaşı. Normally, nobody wants to hear this word, but he enjoyed it when the children spoke behind the group.

The journalist actually wanted to say, “Masks down!” to masquerader. However, he feared the Rum “Aneksartitos” newspaper since, so-called, this newspaper was waiting for an opportunity to be provocative and give the image of heroism.⁴⁰

A newspaper, on the other hand, states that the carnival, celebrated every year by the Christian minorities living in Turkey, was not inappropriate to Turkish-Muslim traditions. According to this newspaper, it is also odd and

³⁸ Hikmet Feridun, “Eğer Kurtuluş’ta Güzellik Müsabakası Yapılsaydı,”

³⁹ Toğlu İğne, “Maskalara voyvo!,” *Vakit*, February 14, 1931.

⁴⁰ *Vakit*, February 14, 1931.

meaningless to walk around in a masquerader dress. After giving information on the history of the carnival, it underrated the carnival as a "commons entertainment".⁴¹

"Joy, Dance, Laugh"

Hikmet Feridun mentioned the carnival the following year thrice. One day while walking, probably in Beyoğlu, a store caught his attention. The sign above the shop read "All kinds of masquerader dresses are ready for rent and masks are available for purchase." Stockings and handkerchiefs were also sold in the store. He went in on the pretext of getting a handkerchief. Since not much time was left for the carnival, masquerader products were available almost everywhere. There was an ox head on the shelf. Next to it stood a donkey head. If there was a demand to be a masquerader as a couple, there was also a donkey body.

On one side, there was a broom with a red tip and a gilded handle. The price was 3 liras. There were red, green, blue, yellow, and purple dresses on the walls. A couple liked a masquerader outfit for themselves. A young woman bought a half mask made of red silk. A fat husband could like any of the clothes. He tried the ox head, then put on the bear head and, tried the ox head again. Finally, when he put on the donkey head, his wife shouted:

"It fits very well!"

"Really?"

"Of course. Look at the mirror."

As many old shoes and ripped dresses as there were in İstanbul, they were all sold in this shop and too expensive. In fact, their value was due to their age. Bargaining here was also strange. If you wanted to be a donkey, it would cost 3.5 liras, and if you wanted to be a mule, it would cost 2 liras. Being an ox was 1.5 liras, while a witch cost 3 liras.

⁴¹ "Bugün hayretle seyrettiğimiz maskaralar kadim Yunanlıların içki ilahına yaptıkları şenliklerin tekrarıdır," *Vakit*, March 8, 1931.



Figure 4: "Carnival Season"⁴²

"Mr. Hasan - What a happy people, there is no longer any fear of meeting a payee."

Most of the people who came to rent clothes were Turks. From time to time, a group of young girls were coming to the store. Girls could not share animal costumes.

"You should dress like a donkey!"

"Being a donkey does not suit me. I would rather be a mule."

"It is true."

"I was a donkey last year. When the garbage man's donkey saw me, he thought it was a real donkey, it would bray after me for a long time."

"It likened to its girlfriend!"

⁴² *Son Posta*, February 28, 1933.

Expensive masks and dominos⁴³ were rented, brooms were bought. People were filling up the store.⁴⁴

One morning, he encountered some masqueraders on his way to work on the tram that departed from Tepebaşı. In fact, there was no one else on the tram who was not a masquerader other than himself and the ticket inspector. The chicest of these masqueraders were coming to Beyoğlu for the carnival from other places. These masqueraders were laughing, enjoying and talking all the time. Some of them were not suitable for a second-class tram like this one because of their dresses. There was a Spanish nobleman wearing a wide hat. He was all the time calling out to the ticket inspector "10 liras! Don't forget the 10 liras!". There was a countess sitting next to the nobleman. The countess suddenly said, "Pish! These shoes are tightening my feet too much. I can make it to the bazaar." and she took off her shoes. The socks of the countess were too old. Just then the nobleman, who was taking a nap, woke up. He looked at the sock of the countess and said:

"I see those ten toes of your feet are bored. I think your ten toes teared ten windows for themselves in the socks!"

The countess was angry.

"Go away, lizard face! These socks came from Paris!"

While Hikmet Feridun was getting off the tram, the masqueraders were there with bells on.⁴⁵

When he went to Tatavla Fair on the last day of the carnival, he came across a large crowd. People chasing each other with broomsticks, South American cowboys on horseback, gentlemen in top hats made of stove pipes... When he came in front of the fair, suddenly a rider appeared before him. Actually, the donkey which was continuously whipped by a woman was not real. It was just a man disguised as a donkey. He was crawling. He lifted one's head for a moment:

"Please baby, get down and let me take a walk. The saddle hurt my back a lot."

His wife got very angry.

"What an impertinent man you are! We are having great fun. Walk, giddy up!"

⁴³ A long, wraparound, hooded dress.

⁴⁴ H. F., "Âlâ büyük patlıcan burunlarımız, iki karış kepçe kulaklarımız var," *Akşam*, February 10, 1932.

⁴⁵ Hikmet Feridun, "Maskaralar," *Akşam*, February 28, 1932.

“Ah my darling, don’t whip my buttock!”

At the carnival in 1932, most noticeable to Hikmet Feridun was the emptiness of the music hall and other entertainment venues. However, in front of the casinos, beer crates were piled up like a mountain, waiting for their customers. Nobody was sitting on the chairs to watch the acrobats; all were watching them outside of the hall. When he asked an Armenian passer-by the reason for this situation, the answer was “indigence,”. Meanwhile, a red-masked girl with red lips approached him and handed him a plate of boiled broad beans. The taste of broad beans was awful. He later learned that it was a tradition at the fair.

Christians were required to attend the ritual via attending a small monastery on one of the hills of Tatavla. A woman dressed as a Mexican cowboy began to sing in Greek on her horse as the crowds of masqueraders were heading towards the monastery. Her voice was sonorous and beautiful. Everyone was silent, listening to her. When the group arrived in front of the monastery, she stopped, got down and, continuing to sing, entered the courtyard. There was a crowd of women in front of the monastery. Some had taken off their masks. When he looked at their faces, he saw that they were more beautiful than the European beauty queens. The ritual took short, and the group started the journey again. By the time they arrived at the fairground, the hurdy-gurdies had already started playing and the songs were rising toward the sky.⁴⁶

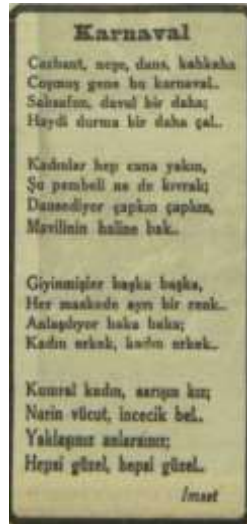


Figure 5: A poet was written for the carnival in 1932⁴⁷

⁴⁶ H. F., “Tatavla Panayırı,” *Akşam*, March 15, 1932.

⁴⁷ İmset, “Karnaval,” *Akşam*, February 25, 1932.

The Carnival

Jazz band, joy, dance, laugh
This carnival gushed again
Saxophone, drum once more
Come on, don't stop, play again.

Women always are friendly,
How lithe is this pink one
She is dancing flirtatiously
Look at the posture of the blue one

They dressed up differently
Various color in every masks
You can see it when you look
Woman man, woman man.

The brunette woman, the blonde girl
Delicate body, slim waist
Come closer, you will get
All beautiful, all beautiful.

"Felek" also mentioned masqueraders in 1932. He actually was using the word masquerader as allusive and implicitly ridiculed those who dressed in masquerader attire. Besides, he made some observations in this article.

He thought that there was no need to identify which class or religion those who aspire to be masquerade. In the past, being the masquerader was common to Christians, but now, the Jews were also participating in the carnival. Despite economic depression and poverty, there were quite pretty costumes. The writer could not understand why most of the masqueraders were women. He attributes people, especially young people, for the demand of becoming masqueraders so as to be deprived feeling of shame. He draws the following conclusions on this situation:

1. Being a masquerader is a stylish habit that allows the need for shamelessness and indecency to be satisfied.
2. Masquerader owes its freedom to its mask.
3. It is good to have a mask in one's life, since no one condemns the masked masquerader.
4. Masked and dressed masqueraders are seasonal masqueraders. Constant masqueraders use leather masks! Nonetheless, they do not have costumes and seasons.
5. If every abashed person put on a mask, the world would always be like a carnival.⁴⁸



Figure 6: The last day of the carnival was on February 27th, 1933, Tatavla (Kurtuluş)⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Felek, "Maskaralar," *Milliyet*, March 15, 1932.

⁴⁹ Kahraman, *ibid*, p. 96; Cengiz Kahraman Archive.

"Masquerader is so's your old man!"

The day prior to the last day of the carnival in 1933, a group of masqueraders hung around while they were singing songs and yelling with their guitar and mandolin until the sunrise in Beyoğlu. After some fuddling, they took the road to Kurtuluş for the last day of the carnival.

Since the beginning of the early morning, people were coming to Kurtuluş via trams and automobiles. It was not possible to get on the Kurtuluş tram from Taksim. Lots of masqueraders who dressed in various costumes had been seen around Pangaltı. After passing through Feriköy, the atmosphere was like a feast place. The tram could not move forward because of the crowd and was stranded. The windows and balconies of houses were full of people. There were tables set up in the open air. On one table, there were two friends of Paskal, wearing curly mustaches and playing the harmonica, closed-eyed. On the other table, there were women who covered their faces dancing "çiftetelli"⁵⁰ with zurna.

"From below baby, from below!"

"Come on happatis, happatis!"

"Trava, trava!"

A woman who was riding a horse and dressed in a white jockey costume with a covered face, was yelling in the street:

"Get out of the way! Here I am, Miss world! The queen is coming!"

⁵⁰ This dance is a traditionally folk dance. It emerged in İstanbul and then spread to all Anatolia. There are different versions between Greece and Turkey. Samet Kozanoğlu and Habib Derzinevesi, "Kuzey Kıbrıs Halkdanslarında Anadolu Esintisi", *The Journal of International Social Research*, 47, December 2016, p. 125.



Figure 7: Masqueraders in 1934⁵¹

"The carnival has begun. Despite snow and cold, masquerader groups are often gathering in Beyoğlu"

Madam Katina who had been watching the masquerader walking from Dolapdere to Kurtuluş since the morning yelled at her neighbor on the opposite sidewalk:

"Girl, look over there! God damn you! Did you see the original masqueraders? These are gentle masqueraders. The inferiorities ride on the donkeys backwards!"

So indeed, two masqueraders, one of them with a blue with indigo-painted face and the other with a black face painted with coal, were passing accompanied by many children. Madam Katina could not endure:

"Wouldn't it be better if you also painted the donkeys?"

One of the masqueraders asked:

⁵¹ *Akşam*, February 16, 1934.

"How do we paint the donkeys?"

"You will paint it the way you paint your own face."

Therewith, the masqueraders had to get the children two cans of paint near the hardware shop because they wanted to amuse those around. But the owner of the donkeys objected to that and did not want to get the donkeys painted. So long as he resisted, the crowd was laughing. The masqueraders also insisted on painting. Finally, they convinced him with 25 piastre tips. While they were painting the donkeys with colors of green and blue, the audience plumbed the depths with joy.

The steep road from Dolapdere and Yenışehir to Kurtuluş after 2 pm was crammed. Also, half of the Beyoğlu population was there. It was not possible to find any musicians in Sulukule and Ayvansaray because all of them were in Kurtuluş. Especially women masqueraders were walking accompanied by the musicians. Others were coming through horses and automobiles via Hamam and Tepeüstü from tram street.

Almost none of the masqueraders in 1933 had those old masks. Women and men covered their faces wearing short veils. "The great unwashed" and "cavalacoz⁵² group" painted their faces with indigo, chalk, coal dust and coffee grounds. In fact, one of them was constantly smearing yogurt on his face while the other was continuously licking his friend's face.

Because of the fine weather, people turned into portable musicians or swarmed in garden cafes and taverns that could not do much business in winter. Hawkers tried to find a way to dress as masquerader. Nevertheless, I think it was the tram company that made the most money, carrying too many passengers.⁵³

⁵² This is an Ottoman Turkish word. It means worthless and insignificant.

⁵³ Ayak Muhabiri, "Dün Tatavla'da ve caddelerde bir kepezektir gitti!," *Vakit*, February 28, 1933.



Figure 8: Masqueraders in the 1930s⁵⁴

From 1933 onwards, “Felek” started considering being a masquerader as a “disgrace”. In fact, being masquerade entered the calendar and made masquerade the calendar. He says that while masqueraders were as quiet as a mouse, they woke the people up, shouting and singing at night. Apparently, he was angry with these masqueraders walking in the streets of Beyoğlu and described them as “impertinent”. Although he did not know the history of the carnival, he said it was not a Turkish tradition and entertainment. Since it was the carnival season, nobody wondered, “What the noise was about?”. However, no one had the right to wake another one up during his sleep.

At dusk, people were still flooding into Papaz Bridge and Feriköy side and one could hear the songs at the fair from a distance.

“My brunette, my darling...”

“My Recep, I will give you money...”

⁵⁴ This photograph was originally taken in 1931. It was published in the above-mentioned issue of *Yeniğün* newspaper. It was also re-published in the following issue of *Milliyet* newspaper. It was used here because there are more photos above.

Milliyet, February 19, 1934; “Karnaval mevsimi bu sene hayli hararetli,” *Yeniğün*, March 18, 1931; *Baklahorani Tarihçesi*, <https://karnavaltatavla.org/hayde-tatavlaya/>, (accessed: October 23, 2022).

"Trava, trava..."⁵⁵

During the celebrations of 1933, an incident occurred when a young Turkish man dressed as a masquerader was walking in İstiklal Street on the last day of the carnival. One of those who saw him mockingly said that "Look at the masquerader!" When the young man heard that, he got angry, and he replied "Masqueraderi is so's your old man!" Things went out of control, the young man took off his dress, beat the person who dissed him as well as his friend.⁵⁶

"Tatavla died, long live Kurtuluş!"

A lot of masqueraders who dressed in "bizarre" attires, ate and drunk, and had fun all day. There was some news in the newspapers in 1934 that some masqueraders molested people when they were walking around on the street.⁵⁷ It was determined that some criminals, dressed in masquerader clothes, were wandering around Sirkeci and Beyoğlu. Apparently, the criminals were either using masquerader costumes to camouflage themselves or were just having fun. Because of this situation, it was decided that the police should strictly control the masqueraders.⁵⁸

On the last evening of the carnival in 1936, which was less joyful than in previous years, a fight occurred. Haçik, Eleni, Koço and Kalyopi, dressed in masquerader, went to a bar in Beyoğlu and started having fun loudly. Three people in the bar named Kemal, Mustafa and Cahit (they were Turks) are disturbed by this situation. They asked the masqueraders to be quiet. Therewith, when the masqueraders started making even noise, a fight took place among them. Eleni, whose condition was critical, was hospitalized. Three Turkish men were then taken into custody by the police.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Felek, "Takvime geçen kepezelik," *Milliyet*, February 26, 1933.

⁵⁶ "Bir maskara," *Vakit*, March 1, 1933.

⁵⁷ "Maskara kıyafetinde sabikalılar," *Milliyet*, February 14, 1934; "Karnaval yortularının son gününde," *Vakit* February 20, 1934.

⁵⁸ "Maskaraların halka sarkıntılık yapmalarına müsaade edilmeyecek," *Vakit*, February 14, 1934.

⁵⁹ "Karnaval biterken," *Cumhuriyet*, February 26, 1936.



Figure 9: A masquerader group in Beyoğlu, 1935⁶⁰

While the carnival entertainments were organized every year, the criticism continued in parallel. For one of the journalists, the end of the carnival means getting rid of the spoiledness and coldness of masqueraders. The masqueraders in İstanbul were far-fetched, unnatural and fake. Their clothes were old and did not follow any style. When a person realized these masqueraders, he could almost cry.⁶¹

A journalist attended the last day of the carnival in 1936. When the fully crowded trams entered Kurtuluş Street, masqueraders were surrounding the tram and welcoming their newly arriving friends. The shouts of men and women, songs, and music were loudening from the large coffee house in the corner. As it gets closer, a strong smell of alcohol is spreading. Inside the coffee house was a different world. Raki, wine and beer glasses jumbled together. Everyone was drunk. A dialogue of the deaf. There were people splashing all over beer and wine over the heads of those who fell asleep at the table. Another group of masqueraders, with their faces painted in black and dressed in Abyssinian clothes, were rapping on the windows of the coffee house outside. They were targeting the people inside by holding pieces of wood in their hands like guns. This was a reference to the Second Italo-Abyssinian war.

⁶⁰ *Akşam*, March 8, 1935.

⁶¹ Mahmut Yesari, "Baklakıran," *Cumhuriyet*, February 24, 1934.



Figure 10: The last day of the carnival in 1936⁶²

It is impossible to walk through the crowd of masqueraders on the streets. Everyone is talking about being a masquerader.

"Have you become a masquerader?"

"No, I couldn't find the time."

"You come to no good!"

"What is the point if you don't be a masquerader?"

"I have been masquerader for two days."

"The man across the street is shouting:

"Fie! Masquerader!"⁶³

Another journalist, who went to Tatavla Fair, could not see anyone except five or ten peddlers and a few curious children on the wide meadow. Since he did not expect to encounter such a thing, he asked one of the peddlers why. People usually came in the afternoon. Nevertheless, some "big guns" were sitting in the opposite music hall. Hereupon, the journalist went to the music hall and saw some furry guys. He asked a random person who they were. Once again, he got the same response: "really big guns!". These men, who were considered to be Russians, drank raki non-stop, having appetizers in front of them.

There are lots of donkeys in the fair area. And a few horse-drawn carriages. The meatball seller is grilling meatball, balloon seller is shouting:

"Horned, hornless, multifarious balloon!"

An old man lay down and was thinking absent-mindedly. The journalist asked:

⁶² "Karnavalın Son Günü," *Akşam*, February 25, 1936.

⁶³ C. R., "Vakit bulamamış!," *Akşam*, February 26, 1936.

"Where are the masqueraders?"

The old man answered:

"Now we are all masqueraders!"

Stoned two young men suddenly started singing a song:

Hush, without anyone hearing,

Without yielding to temptation,

Without getting enough of my love.

Put your head on my shoulder,

Let me caress your hair.

Afterwards, they started to dance "polka".⁶⁴



Figure 11: Two young men is dancing "polka"⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Salâhaddin Güngör, "Karnavalın Son Gününde Meşhur Kurtuluş 'Tatavla' Panayırı," *Tan*, February 25, 1936.

⁶⁵ Güngör, "Karnavalın".

The polka originated in Bohemia in the middle of the 19th century. It spread all over Europe as a Czech dance and folk music genre.

Is it a crime to be a masquerader?

As of 1934, some news on the carnival began to appear more frequently in the newspapers. This news was about several masked/unmasked balls organized by the Turkish Aircraft Society.⁶⁶ This could have been an effort to create an alternative to this old Greek carnival founded under the leadership of Atatürk. An article which was published in "Yeni Türk" journal⁶⁷ in 1937 supports this perspective. According to this article, old Turkics had similar carnivals in the West. This feast called the "pine" was held once a year, having masks.⁶⁸ This article corresponds to the Sun Language Theory and Turkish History Thesis of that period, which was an effort to create a new history, culture, and nation by establishing a bond between the Turks and ancient Anatolian civilizations.

Tatavla Fair in 1937 continued until late hours because the weather was nice.⁶⁹ On the last day of the carnival, Kurtuluş turned into a place of masquerader. Some merchants wanted to benefit from the mode of remarkable dressing of masqueraders at the carnival season this year. For this reason, various advertising slogans were written on masqueraders' dresses and hats:

"(.....)⁷⁰ toothpastes make teeth like pearls."

"Those who do not wear (.....) hats cannot win women's heart."

In old fairs, people were listening to hurdy-gurdy, but now the Turkish style records also started playing. Raki had been drunk in the past, now wine was being drunk. The lottery had been played erstwhile; backgammon was being played in 1937.

⁶⁶ "Karnaval eğlenceleri", *Kurun*, February 21, 1935.

⁶⁷ This journal was published as a Eminönü People's House periodical.

⁶⁸ Rıza Çavdarlı, "Eski Türklerde Hayat I: Karnaval Bayramları", *Yeni Türk Mecmuası*, 51, March 1937), pp. 844-846.

⁶⁹ "Tatavla panayırı eğlenceli oldu," *Cumhuriyet*, March 16, 1937.

⁷⁰ In the original source it is shown as such. Probably, it was written brand name in these blanks.



Figure 12: The last day of the carnival in 1938, Tatavla (Kurtuluş)⁷¹

The smell of raki and the sound of singing voices were spreading toward other districts. There was so much singing, playing and dancing that almost no one was listening, it was silent and standing. It was not possible to stand in the music halls or in the streets. The journalist asked a Rum citizen why it was so crowded. The Rum citizen responded that the fair had been held for 120 years in Kurtuluş. On this day, especially oysters and snails are eaten, no one gets angry with anyone, any bad language was considered a joke. Finally, when asked what else they did, he gave the answer “We become masquerade!”⁷²

The main incident about the carnival in 1937 ended up with the arrest of three Rum girls who dressed in soldier costumes. These girls’ names were Marika, Eleni and Antuvanet.⁷³ Actually, they emulated some famous actresses. One of the famous actresses was the Hungarian actress, Marta Eggerth. The second one was the American dancer, singer, and actress Ginger Rogers. The third one was the French actress, dancer, and singer Danielle Darrieux. After watching the movies in which these actresses featured, the girls decided to look like the way they were dressed in those movies.⁷⁴ Antuvanet dressed like Marta Eggerth, Eleni dressed like Ginger Rogers and Marike dressed like Danielle Darrieux and then

⁷¹ “Karnavalın Son Günü,” *Tan*, March 8, 1938.

⁷² Naci Sadullah, “Kurtuluştaki Panayır,” *Son Posta*, March 16, 1937.

⁷³ “Bahriye elbisesi giyen Rum kızları,” *Cumhuriyet*, March 19, 1937.

⁷⁴ *Haber*, March 19, 1937.

started to walk in the İstiklal Street. However, it was a crime for civilians to wear military uniforms which led to their arrest. Although they stated they were not aware of this law and only wanted to imitate these actresses, it did not work for them.⁷⁵

The last day of the carnival in 1938 was celebrated in warm weather which was full of floral scents that cannot be felt even in May. Some people wanted to go to Kurtuluş by taking trams or buses, but it was not possible to get on them because of the crowds. So, they decided to take shared cabs. While they were trying to find a way to go to the fair, they were learning what the Apokries were or what one could drink (such as raki or wine), or eat (like olives, onion, broad bean) during the fasting period.



Figure 13: The last carnival of the 1930s⁷⁶

By the end of the 1930s, the fair was not splendor like before. Most of the crowd consisted of viewers, but not participants. Although there were not many people who set the table and ate and played, there were those who biked, rode donkeys, flew kites, and danced. On the one hand, some of the participants were dancing "hasapiko"⁷⁷ and "çiftetelli", on the other hand, some of the participants were waltzing and singing Tino Rossi songs. Laternas were replaced by gramophones. Sad songs sung by the Rum girls and the sound of the whimperer violin played by a lover gypsy was melding. European and Turkish styles, West and East were together.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ "Karnaval eğlenceleri", *Kurun*, March 19, 1937.

⁷⁶ *Haber*, February 21, 1939.

⁷⁷ This dance belonged to the Orthodox Albanian butchers of Ottoman in İstanbul. The Sirtaki was emerged from the "hasapiko" dance.

Argo Hasapiko, <http://www.folklance.com/LDNotations/ArgoHasapiko1970LD.pdf>, (accessed: October 25, 2022).

⁷⁸ "Apukurya eğlenceleri", *Haber*, March 12, 1938.

Conculusion: “We are now a drop in the sea”⁷⁹

The carnival was a means of getting rid of identities and origins. It did not matter who you were or where you came from. Everyone was equal. Even though it was only for a short time, everybody was laughing, having fun, and forgetting their troubles. It provided a means of expressing oneself; “I am here, too!”, hiding under the masks.

The Turkish-Greek Population Exchange (1920s), “Citizen, Speak Turkish!” campaign (1920-1930s), the incident of “20 Kur’a Askerlik” (1941), the Wealth Tax (1942), the 6/7 September 1955 (İstanbul Pogrom), 1964 Expulsion of Greek... All these incidents gradually dissolved the Rum population in İstanbul. The Tatavla fire, not only did the physical destruction occur, but the identity of the district had to change. Especially, the Second World War handed Rums to the state on a silver platter so to speak.

The increasing discrimination and oppression against the non-Muslim population within the context of the nation-state policies of the early Republican period were also clearly evident in the case of this carnival. The number of masqueraders who were walking in İstanbul gradually decreased in 1939. The celebrations became joyless. Outdoor activities were forbidden for public safety reasons by the government in 1941. The carnival was celebrated for the last time in 1942 with very few people in Kurtuluş. Following the prohibition, it started being celebrated only indoors. The story of carnival was conveyed through generations, from parentsthe children, from grandparents to grandchildren, in short, from generation to generation, for remembering and evoking, for eternizing. In other words, “*the carnival was now a memory.*”⁸⁰ This was a reflection of the social memory and collective traumas inherited from the empire, the wars, and the above-mentioned events.

The Apokries (Baklahorani) carnival was revitalized by means of an affinity group in 2009. From this date on, the carnival began to be celebrated again. Still, due to various national and international events such as the Syrian war, the Gezi Park Protests, the Covid pandemic and the Ukraine War, it cannot be celebrated on the streets regularly.

We do not know if the carnival will be able to return to its former splendor or to the streets. What we know is that masquerader passed through İstanbul.

⁷⁹ This expression was said by a Kurtuluş resident in the 2010s.

Semra Dursun, “Kurtuluş’ta doğan Kurtuluş’ta öldü”, *Göz*, 6, 2017, p. 69.

⁸⁰ *Baklahorani Tarihçesi*, <https://karnavaltatavla.org/hayde-tatavlaya/> (accessed: October 25, 2022).

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