



# UDOLAS

by Hugo Strötbaum

## ODD & EXTINCT (3) : OUDOLAS

It is a well-known picture: that of singer Roza Eskenazi together with violinist Dimitrios Semsis and oud-player Aghapios Tomboulis. It shows Roza with a tambourine, Semsis with his violin and bow, and, standing proudly at the back, Tomboulis holding a strange instrument which looks like a cross between a large banjo and an oud<sup>1</sup>.

Thanks to Ilias Petropoulos we know what the instrument was called.

In Ilias Petrópoulos' book *'Rebétika Tragoudia'*, is a short fragment from an interview, which Petrópoulos had with Tomboulis' wife Alexandra in 1972.

Under the heading «*Ο άντρας μου*» Alexandra tells about the instruments her husband played and the capers he cut at times.

*Άντρας μου Αγάπιος Τομπούλης ήξερε ούτι, ήξερε ουντόλα, έπαιζε πάντζο (= τζιουμπούς = çümbüş) και τέφι και τούμπανο (= τουμπελέκι). Ζίλια έπαιζε. Κι άμα πήγαινε κάπου και δεν είχε τίποτα έπαιρνε το τεφι κι έκανε ντάγκα-ντάγκα-ντάγκα. Όργανα είχε ούτι, ουντόλα, πάντζο (= çümbüş), ντέφι και τούμπανο (= τουμπελέκι) και ζίλια. Έκανε κάτι χωριάτικα μπέ-μπέ, τ' αρνάκια. Έδενε κουδούνια στο πόδι του και τραγουδούσε και φώναζε μπέ μπέ (αχ, το γιαβρί μου<sup>2</sup> πως τραγουδούσε) και τα κουδούνια χτυπούσανε. Απ' το ούτι έκανε άλλο είδος, ένα στρογγυλό είδος κι ονόμασε ουντόλα, εφεύρεση δικό του. Αυτός το είπε, άλλοι το φτιάσανε, όπως ένα φουστάνι μοδίστρα σε ράβει, εφεύρεση δικό του...*

*My husband, Aghapios Tomboulis, played oud, oudola, banjo [çümbüş], tambourine and vase drum. He also played finger cymbals. If he went somewhere and there was nothing to beat on, he took a tray and started banging on it.*

*He had all kinds of instruments: an oud, an oudola, a banjo, a tambourine, a toumbeleki and finger cymbals. He also did a village farm act, imitating/mimicking sheep: then he tied bells to his feet, sang and bleated: "Baa, baa!" while the bells were clanging. My man sure could sing.*

*He also had a different type of oud made, sort of round, and he named it "oudola".*

*He explained what he wanted and others made it for him, just like a dressmaker makes a dress. It was his own invention.*

Apparently this instrument had been custom-built for Tomboulis, that is, made according to his own specifications. Combining the words "oud" and "mandola", he had named it "oudola".

Leafing through Petropoulos' hefty volume I came across another picture of Tomboulis with an oudola (ill. 7a). But this oudola was different from the one in the picture with Semsis and Roza!<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The picture is found in Petropoulos on page 353, in Lisbet Torp's *Salonikios* on page 55, on the sleeve of the LP "*Ta gnísia rebétika tis Róza Eskinázi*", and no doubt has been reproduced elsewhere too.

The best (high resolution) reproduction of this photo can be seen in the documentary on Roza Eskenazi, *My Sweet Canary*, a DVD by Roy Sher (Time: 46.47 – 46.53; Title: 2/8; Chapter: 12/18).

<sup>2</sup> From Turkish *yavrum*: my darling, my sweetheart, my sweetie.

<sup>3</sup> On page 367 in *Ρεμπέτικα Τραγούδια* by Ilias Petropoulos.

Things would have ended right then and there, if it had not been for Stavriana Livadarou, a Greek lady who was living not far from Utrecht, my hometown.

I first met Stavriana and her Dutch husband Harrie some time in the 1980s (in the interval of) at some Greek concert in Utrecht and when we got talking about our mutual love for Greek Music, she told me that her family had always been very close with the family of Tomboulis. Back then I knew who Tomboulis was, but as yet had no special interest in the man.

She advised me to go talk to her mother in Athens, who she said knew quite a lot about Tomboulis. At the time I must have had other priorities, so I did not pay too much attention (like all other humans I make mistakes and wrong choices in life and this sure turned out to be one of them). In the meantime many years slipped by and I had completely forgotten about the whole thing.

Stavriana and I did not see each other very often, but each time we met, she brought up the subject and urged me again to look up her mother. And every time it seemed to fall on deaf ears.

One day Stavriana and her husband Harrie came to visit us and they brought along a couple of very interesting pictures. There were the very instruments Tomboulis played during his life! His *oud*, his *oudola*, his *toumbeleki*, his *finger cymbals* and even his pitch pipe (for tuning). Harrie had shot those pictures in the paternal Tomboulis home in Athens. Very exciting stuff!

Stavriana told me that in the meantime her mother had died, but of course I could look up Tomboulis' granddaughter, Alexandra, who was still living in the paternal home in Athens. No doubt she could tell me more about her late grandfather and it would be a great opportunity to see some of Tomboulis' original instruments.

But again, years passed and nothing happened. Until one day in 2012 I finally decided to do something about this neglected loose end. I phoned Stavriana and I told her I wanted to pick up the thread and do the much-needed research on Aghapios Tomboulis. Having been given the address of Tomboulis' granddaughter, Alexandra, I wrote her a letter and told her what I had in mind...

**To read the rest of this story click here:**

<http://recordingpioneers.com/docs/grurks/Lychnari-2012-1-12-14-EN.pdf>

OU DOLA TYPES	IMAGES	DETAILS
oudóla (ουντόλα) #1	1 a/b	<p>OU DOLA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 3 round sound holes with rosettes</li> <li>- 12 strings</li> </ul>
oudóla (ουντόλα) #2	2-4 a/b	<p>OU DOLA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- round sound hole with rosette</li> <li>- 12 strings</li> <li>- undulating head stock</li> <li>- violin-type tuning pegs</li> </ul>
	5-6 a/b	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- probably the same instrument as 2-4 a/b, but with modern machine head (tuning mechanism)</li> <li>- straight head stock</li> <li>- However, 6 a/b has a black-and-white decorative lining round the top and on both sides of the neck</li> </ul>
oudóla (ουντόλα) #3	7 a/b	<p>OU DOLA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- oval sound hole</li> <li>- 12 strings</li> <li>- modern machine head (tuning mechanism)</li> </ul>
oudóla (ουντόλα) #4	8-10	<p>OU DOLA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- exactly the same type as #3, but smaller</li> <li>- oval sound hole</li> <li>- 12 strings</li> <li>- modern machine head (tuning mechanism)</li> <li>- On the head stock (κεφαλι) of this <i>oudola</i> is a metal plaque with the text: ΕΦΕΥΡΕΣΙΣ ΤΟΜΠΟΥΛ[Η] (“Invention of Tomboulis”).</li> <li>Apparently at some time the tail end with the “H” must have broken off, as can be seen on illustration 10.</li> <li>The same plaque is also found on image 1b (Roy Sher’s DVD <i>My Sweet Canary</i> has the clearest picture; see also footnote 1)</li> <li>- total length: 88cm</li> <li>- length neck (including head stock): 49cm</li> <li>- diameter of round body: 39cm</li> <li>- depth of round body: 3,5cm</li> </ul>

Comparing oudola #3 on the old photographs to the oudola in the modern colour pictures, I got the impression that we are dealing here with **two** different instruments of exactly the same design and make. Which is why I called it oudola #4 in the overview. But maybe I am mistaken and are #3 and #4 one the same instrument.

Let me know what *you* think!