

## The Origins of the Urban Areas Folklore Studies in Greece: the Work of Dimitrios S. Loukatos

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Since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Greek folk culture has displayed clear signs of the influences of modernity and post-modernity. Thus even popular culture shows the influence of phenomena derived from cultural globalization, which can be perceived in the adoption of foreign cultural prototypes, secularization, as described by Augé. These are phenomena that form part of the so-called ‘urban folklore studies’ and from the 2000s onwards, more than anything else, they attracted the attention of Greek scholars of folklore. Urban folklore studies today deal with social phenomena through ethnographic fieldwork and employ cross-disciplinary collaboration both with social anthropology and with urban sociology. Prof. Dimitrios S. Loukatos was the founder of urban folklore studies in Greece. His work was pioneering, since he laid the foundations for future studies and identified the main research topics. In this paper we examine the contribution of his academic legacy.

*Keywords:* Greek folklore, urban folklore, modernist cultural phenomena, Dimitrios S. Loukatos.

Dimitrios S. Loukatos (1908–2003) was one of those most responsible for modernizing the subject matter, methodology, and theory of the academic study of folklore in Greece (Varvounis 2003: 1237–1242; Serras 2003: 1242–1246; Edwards 2004: 107–109; Polymerou-Kamilaki 1999–2003: 559–561). He did it in the course of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century (Varvounis 2019: 27–29), producing a body of work that influenced the urban Athens folklore study directly while contributing more widely to the development of urban areas folklore in Greece (Varvounis, Kouzas 2019: 161–175). His modernizing activity springs from his return from France, where he had moved in 1950 to study at the postgraduate level and where he had finally written his doctorate. His modernizing attitude found its expression both in his numerous academic neologisms and in the subjects and points of view

evident in both his academic and popular writings (Alexakis 2008: 23–25; Avdikos 2008: 43).

His modernization can be perceived mainly in three areas. The first one concerns folklore terminology, particularly the one used in the study of proverbs, to which he introduced many new terms. He sometimes accomplished this by successfully translating into Greek an expression used in folklore studies abroad and sometimes by creating words capturing his insights or arising from his studies. His lexical creativity was certainly the result of his modernizing tendencies, developed under the influences of the French post-war ethnology, which he had embraced while living abroad during the postgraduate work on his doctoral dissertation. The third area of influence involves the new topics he introduced into the folklore studies, since Loukatos turned the Greek folk culture students' attention to the urban areas in Greece and to their new folklore phenomena and manifestations, thus becoming the forerunner of modern, innovative folklore studies in Greece (Alexakis 2008: 23–25).

In his texts (Alexiadis 1988: 22–53; Alexiadis 1993–1994: 392–401), lived experience and an experiential approach to phenomena occupy the most prominent place. This is followed in importance by his precision and his ability to deal with abstractions. Loukatos mainly describes phenomena, whereas he studies topics from a comparative or historical perspective less frequently. He is more interested in how the forms and artefacts of folklore are expressed and what kind of impact they have, so he examines their social and psychological functionality among those who perform the customs he observes, that is, among the Greek people. He applies a contemporary, functional perspective that was quite unusual in the academic study of folklore in his time. This accounts for why his articles are to be found in local or national literary and intellectual publications, rather than in the established academic journals of the time. Conversely, his work published in foreign languages, mainly in French, appeared in several of the most prestigious journals dedicated to the studies of folklore and ethnology, which promoted academic innovative approaches that were not greatly welcomed in the Greek academic folklore community of the 1940s and 1950s.

During his lifetime, two factors were decisive. One was his postgraduate studies in France (1948–1950), where he became familiar with French ethnology and met important folklorists and ethnologists such as Arnold Van Gennep, Marcel Maget, Roger Lecotté and an extremely important Belgian, Albert Marinus (Alexakis 2008: 19–32). As early as the 1930s and 1940s, as we have already mentioned, these disciplines had opened up in terms of theory and begun to engage with urban areas. The results reached at that time were as pioneering as they are today. It was to be expected that Loukatos would be influenced by these new theoretical breakthroughs and that he would attempt to introduce them in Greece (Avdikos 2008: 42–43).

There was yet another decisive factor for guiding Loukatos in the direction of the study of urban areas – his intelligence and curiosity. He did not feel the pressure of any of the traditional limitations that dictated what academic folkloristics should supposedly study. Even before his professional shaping in France, it was obvious from his writings that he was particularly open-minded in his research, refusing to restrict the study of folklore to the world of the village, to which it was traditionally limited.

Upon his return from France in 1963 – at that time he published *Synchrona Laografika (Themes from Contemporary Folklore)* – Loukatos produced a series of articles and columns which sparked academic folklore studies spirit renewal (Loukatos 1950a: 295). During the 1940s and 1950s, Loukatos proposed to the folkloristic community a new range of subjects rooted in the contemporary thought on urban life topics. These included military life, contemporary folk creativity products, gambling, trips, Christmas and Easter in the center of Athens, slang names of the bus stops in Athens, contemporary culture objects collecting and keeping, displays of food and drink at the Zappeio, an emblematic 19<sup>th</sup>-century neo-Classical building in the center of Athens used for ceremonies and exhibitions, card games, and organized working-class summer trips to the seaside (Loukatos 1963: 138–140).

Loukatos did not merely remain content with proposing renewal in terms of theory. He also promoted a more general ethnographic methodological shift in the studies of folklore. In his work entitled *Contemporary Problems in Folklore* (Loukatos 1950b: 1377–1379), inspired by the discussions at a conference on the topic of milk organized by the Société d'Ethnographie Française at Caen, France, Loukatos proposed a similar ethnographic approach to other products of material culture, such as raisins, tobacco, honey, and fruit. His point of view clearly rests on a holistic approach to the subject. That is, the folklorist is not only to examine proverbs and superstitions relating to milk, tobacco, or olive oil. Instead, while not ignoring these aspects of the subject, the folklorist is also to look into consumer behavior, the links among producers, producers' co-operatives, the technology involved, and the economic aspects of production. It was his belief that only by means of such a general examination of all the aspects of each subject, rather than by dealing with the subject from an index-oriented point of view, could the academic folklorist examine his subject in depth and as a whole. Intimately linked with these two factors is the fusion of the term "ethnography" with the term "folklore" (Loukatos 1950a: 294).

From 1963 onwards, Loukatos' work *Folklorica Contemporanea* held sway. This work was a turning point for both the study of folklore in urban areas and for academic folklore in Greek in general. In *Folklorica*

*Contemporanea*, Loukatos summarizes what he had learned in France and what he perceived as transformations in the culture of everyday life in Greece that others could or would not see. These changes were accompanied by a frenetically fast urbanization of Greece, migration from the countryside and the concomitant enormous growth of cities.

*Folklorica Contemporanea* consists of two main parts, the introduction and chapters on various subjects (Loukatos 1963: θ'). The introduction, which is the first folkloristic text completely focused on urban areas, is extraordinarily important. It approaches the phenomenon of urban folklore by breaking up with the paradigms previously formulated in the folklore studies; however, at the same time, it remains respectful of the early folklore theory. Loukatos coins the name of a new branch of folklore studies – contemporary folklore or urban environment folklore, which has two aspects. Loukatos' new discipline involves the study of urban environment folklore and the contemporary folklore, which is concerned with the transformation of economic and social structures in the countryside. Loukatos then moves on to the creator of folk culture, that is, the common people themselves. He thus breaks the simple, monosemic link between common folk and the countryside which maintains that common people, who are the source of culture, are to be found only in the countryside. Furthermore, the countryside, unpolluted by technology, is supposedly the place where the true, pure features of ancestral Greek culture survive (Loukatos 1963: ι'–ια'). Loukatos claims that, apart from the inhabitants of the countryside, there is yet another group of common people, the ones raised in towns and cities. According to him, the chronological starting point is the Asia Minor “Disaster” of 1922, when thousands of refugees flowed into Athens and a new type of proletariat consequently began to develop on the outskirts of the Greek capital. The ideas presented in the introduction of the book show a clear influence of the ethnologists and folklorists encountered by Loukatos during his stay in France, where the idea that towns and cities produce culture had been accepted long before it gained ground in Greece.

Loukatos then notes the singular, near-ferocious urbanization of Greek society. He points out that this process – in contrast to Western Europe, where urbanization had been a matter of centuries – took only a few decades in Greece. He then moves on to a third topic. He asserts that towns and cities create culture and that their inhabitants produce their own folk culture (Loukatos 1963: ιδ'–ιε'). Finally, he embraces this new object of folklore studies. In the pre-war and post-war Athens, different groups of population were concentrated in one place sharing no common native customs. Rather, there was a hodge-podge of customs, beliefs, tendencies, and convictions derived from all over Greece (“a mixture of traditions,” as Loukatos puts

it). It is, then, in the view of Loukatos, the folklorist's job to examine this concentration and osmosis of local cultures.

Loukatos adds "neo-urban tradition" to this "mixture of traditions." This is how he refers to a contemporary urban folk culture created in large towns and cities, the examination of which should be one of the most important objects of research in folklore studies. At the same time, he leaves his own stamp on it, to which he was faithful in his research and teaching: it was his conception that folklore was a matter to be observed in its entirety, rather than as something fragmentary. He thus refused to ignore either the millennia that lie behind Greek customs or the study of the countryside. In fact, he insisted that it was through the village traditional world study that one could comprehend much more easily the phenomena of today, which, of course, derive from the older forms of customs.

Loukatos dealt with the topics from the everyday life. He would elaborate on some of them in the years to come, while others served as a starting point to other scholars of folklore who built upon them in their articles and monographs. Some of the various sets of subjects in the book have still not been examined completely and await the attention of the scholarly community. Loukatos mentions an enormous range of topics (Loukatos 1963: ιβ'-ιγ'): traditional Christmas songs (*kalanta*), lotteries, the figures on the traffic lights at pedestrian crossings, known as *Grigoris* and *Stamatis*,<sup>1</sup> which common folk in towns and cities immediately adopted, contemporary superstitions, the cries of street vendors, photographers' shops, the male pursuit of the ideal female face ("the modern worship of Aphrodite"), organized trips to the seaside for a swim, the use of proverbs in advertisements, the presence of proverbs in *rembetika* songs,<sup>2</sup> the study of central market places, such as the Market in Athens, spelling mistakes in signs and their acceptance by common folk, the increasing presence of plastic in contemporary life, football, the folklore of elections, the folklore of the aristocracy, the importance of newspapers for the study of folklore, saints' festivals held in urban environments (here Loukatos concentrated on the festival of Saint Marina in the Thission area of Athens), belief in saints as revealed by their adoption as trade associations' protectors, the folklore of the Church, the elements of traditional folklore in contemporary weddings – Loukatos' starting point here was the wedding of Princess Sophia, and the relationship between folklore and tourism.

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<sup>1</sup> Both *Grigoris* and *Stamatis* are familiar forms of Greek personal names drawn from saints' names, but the word play implies their etymology: they can be translated here as 'Mr. Speedy' (green) and 'Mr. Stop' (red).

<sup>2</sup> *Rembetika* songs were produced by the poorer strata of urban society from the late 19th century to the 1950s and deal with the subjects of particular importance to such people.

In *Folklorica Contemporanea*, Loukatos showed a great gift of foreseeing the processes in culture yet to come. He even suggested that folklore scholars and film-makers should co-operate, so as to record the aspects of contemporary folklore (Loukatos 1963: 134), and went so far as to propose the foundation of a folklore cinema archive in every municipality in Greece. At the same time, he suggested a wide range of phenomena that should be the objects of research in those institutions (Loukatos 1963: 135–137): religious life in towns and cities, including such important holidays as Christmas, New Year's Day, Easter, Epiphany, and "Clean" Monday – the first Monday of the "Great" Lent before Easter, right before Shrove Tuesday – customs related to life cycle, including urban weddings, baptisms, and funerals, urban religious fairs, lotteries, newspaper kiosks, street carnivals in Athens, the fires of St. John<sup>3</sup> lit in various parts of Athens, folklore phenomena observed on beaches and swimming, football, buses and transport, peddlers and street vendors, children's team games, fairgrounds, clubs where *bouzouki* music is played, cafes, neighborhoods in towns and cities, folkloric festivals and revivals of customs. Loukatos insisted that scholars should not restrict their efforts to Athens alone. Instead, they should include other large towns and cities of Greece which had been undergoing cultural and technological change since the 1960s (Varvounis 2008a: 54–55).

Usually, whenever the work of Loukatos is discussed, the discussion on his ideas about the folklore of towns and cities tends to be based on *Folklorica Contemporanea* alone. However, it would be very wrong to assume that he was no longer interested in urban environments folklore after 1963. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s and even later to the very year of his death in 2003, he was preoccupied with these topics. Indeed, in many studies he became even more radical in comparison to what he wrote in 1963, although this comes as no surprise if one recalls the degree of social change over these three decades, which gave rise to new subjects and matters of enquiry for folklore scholars.

In Loukatos' articles and his popularizing newspaper columns in the major Athenian newspapers, he often mentions the renewal of Greek folklore studies. The columns were published mostly in the Athenian press and deserve to be republished in a single volume for the benefit of folklore and other scholars (Alexiadis 2008: 33–40). Towards the end of his life, he also wrote letters to various publications, which should not be ignored, since some of them deal with contemporary folklore and folklore studies. The letters reveal his tendency to engage with the rest of society, an attitude that sprang from his view of the responsibility that he felt folklorists have towards

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<sup>3</sup> Fires in honor of St. John "Klidonas" are set in the night of 23–24 June and are associated with summer solstice.

society and the subsequent validity of comments offered by folklorists on the social and cultural structures that they study.

In addition to the traditional subjects concerned with annual calendrical feasts that Loukatos was accustomed to deal with, depending on the time of year he also examined various matters concerning urban life from the folklorist's point of view. To mention some examples here: he was interested in Gypsies, the marginalized, folklorism, postmen, changes in the Greek language, the institution of Christmas tree, contemporary observations on the customs of towns and cities, the preservation of items of contemporary culture and dance groups in Athens from abroad (Alexiadis 1988: 35). Sometimes these articles were popularizations, but sometimes they offered a profound analysis and blazed new trails in the discipline of folklore studies, for example, when he refers to the "folklore of the underworld" (Loukatos 1978a: 1,8).

Loukatos also elaborated on his views on the urban environment in his *Eisagogi stin Elliniki Laografia (Introduction to Greek Folklore)* and in various articles he contributed to the journal *Laografia*, published by the Hellenic Folklore Society, of which he was chairman from 1978 onwards. In the *Introduction*, he stresses that the existence of the urban environment folklore study does not threaten the traditional study of folklore, although he remarks that active traditional folklorists had already dwindled to small groups with an aged membership, who were generally countryside inhabitants (Loukatos 1978b: 295–296). While not excluding folklore investigation of the traditional type, Loukatos appends to it the study of the folklore of towns and cities and then goes on to talk about "the folklore of technology," which is certainly a field worthy of investigation (Loukatos 1978b: 296). In this, he includes numerous changes evident in daily life, such as organized events during the period of the *Apokries*, the period of carnival in the Greek Orthodox Church immediately before the Lent, cars decorated for weddings that replace horses once used for such a purpose and so similarly adorned, motorcycles that have replaced horses and other animals of the kind, electricity that has replaced the oil lamp burning before icons and suchlike, the threshing machine that has replaced the threshing floor and plastic Christmas trees (Loukatos 1979–1981: 432–436). Loukatos regarded all these topics as part of urban environment folklore, which deals with the change and transformation of traditionally organized social events and other such phenomena.

Loukatos dealt with similar subjects in *Laografia*, in vol. 32–39. In each volume, he instituted a section entitled *Folklorica Contemporanea*. Among the topics for investigation that Loukatos looked into were mutual help and solidarity among the dwellers of large cities, the influence of songs and slogans, and the knowledge and use of cars in proverbs, subjects drawn

from cartoons (Loukatos 1985–1986: 135–150), the survival of traditional games, such as the children’s game *kolokythia*, the echoes of Aesop’s fable in a *rembetiko* song (Loukatos 1985–1986: 148; Blagojević 2005; Konstantinidou 1994), the importance – from the point of view of folklore studies – of social news made public in the announcements in newspapers (Loukatos 1987–1989: 365–370). He also examined various extracts from newspapers concerning contemporary subjects of folklore scholars’ interest. These subjects included Greek pop music, sellers of bread rings, street markets, leap years, photographs of social events organized by migrant Greeks (Loukatos 1990–1992: 230–252), contemporary Christmas customs and old customs still surviving (Loukatos 1995–1997: 131–149), the presence of proverbs, continuity and change in customs in cities and the countryside, the revival of customs by local associations (Loukatos 1995–1997: 233–249) and the highly diverse world of today’s Greece (Loukatos 1998–2003: 191–192). All these were part of the renewal of the range of subjects covered by *Laografia* during the period of Loukatos’ editorship. These subjects included football, the Greek family in the cities of Germany, Canada, and Australia, demographic changes, and the Olympic Games of 2000, held in Sydney.

Even at the time when they were produced, these articles were considered an important step forward in the overdue renewal of the folkloristics discipline in Greece with any bibliography. It is therefore strange that Loukatos provided them with no bibliography. Despite having studied in Paris and maintaining close contact with his colleagues abroad, he gives no more than a basic bibliography drawn from the numerous studies in French and English on the subjects he examines and offers no views regarding theory, which means these writings resemble newspaper columns or essays. Had he offered a proper consideration of theoretical matters and given proper bibliographies, this work would have been the foundation of the modern discipline of folklore in Greece. This was left for the next generation to perform, with scholars such as Michael G. Merakles and Minas Al. Alexiades.

For all who knew him, it was clear that Loukatos was more interested in appearances than in the underlying reality. He was uninterested in the historical roots and origin of the phenomena he examined. What drew him were the phenomena and their forms, where, to his mind, the greater part of their meaning and substance was to be found, which he frequently identified with their social function. When, for example, describing customs, he taught theory and method to his successors with no talk about theory. He completely respected the past of the discipline of folkloristics and displayed an obvious and practical wisdom (Varvounis 2008a: 50–64; Varvounis 2008b: 149–156).

Professor Dimitrios S. Loukatos, more than anyone else, was responsible for the introduction of the Athenian-oriented study of urban



environment folklore. He set the path to be followed and continued by many younger scholars. Moreover, he crucially and definitively renewed the folklore studies discipline theory, methodology, and subject matter in Greece, moving it forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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## Зачетак проучавања фолклора градских области у Грчкој: рад Димитриоса С. Лукатоса

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### Резиме

Од краја 20. и почетка 21. века грчка народна култура показује јасне знаке утицаја модерности и постмодерности. Стога чак и популарна култура открива деловање феномена проистеклих из културне глобализације, која се може посматрати као присвајање страних културолошких прототипова, секуларизација, огољавање мистерије ствари, као што је то описао Оже. Ови феномени су део такозваних проучавања урбаног фолклора која су, више од било чега другог, привлачила пажњу грчких фолклориста од двехиљадитих наовамо. Проучавања урбаног фолклора данас се баве друштвеним феноменима с ослонцем на етнографски теренски рад и подразумевају међудисциплинарну сарадњу како са социјалном антропологијом, тако и с урбаном социологијом. Само постојање и, наравно, снимање и проучавање таквих феномена директно су повезани са променама у начину живота које су се одиграле у Грчкој. Добро је познато да су у парохијима у градовима и варошицама видљиви модерни обичаји који дефинишу савремене урбане праксе и осећања. Професор Димитриос С. Лукатос био је покретач проучавања урбаног фолклора у Грчкој.

Идентификацијом главних истраживачких тема, Лукатос је својим пионирским радом поставио темеље будућим проучавањима на овом пољу. У тексту је дат осврт на његов истраживачки рад и допринос развоју изучавања грчког урбаног фолклора.

*Кључне речи:* грчки фолклор, урбани фолклор, модернистички друштвени феномени, Димитриос С. Лукатос.

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