

Manolis Varvounis & Georgios Kouzas, *Eisagogi stin Astiki Laographia, Theoritikes Prosegisis, Methodologia, Thematiques [An Introduction to Urban Folklore. Theoretical Approaches – Methodology – Themes]*

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In autumn 2019 “Papazissis Publications” published the book of Manolis Varvounis and Georgios Kouzas titled *An Introduction to Urban Folklore. Theoretical Approaches –Methodology – Themes*. It is fortunate that two well known folklorists in Greece collaborate in this book, Manolis Varvounis, Professor of Folklore Studies at the Department of History and Ethnology, Democritus University of Thrace and Director of the Laboratory of Folklore and Social Anthropology at the same University, and Georgios Kouzas, Assistant Professor of Urban Folklore at the Department of Philology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens. With their interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach on the issue of urban folklore, they managed to combine theory and practice and to deliver to the scientific and reading audience a work that is useful for the academic community.

As it can be understood also from the title, the book has a dual aim: on the one hand, to introduce the reader to the concept of urban folklore, and on the other hand, to propose a methodology research project especially for the urban space.

However, let’s see the book in detail. The main body of the book refers to the history and the theory of urban folklore in Greece from the begging of the 20th century until our days (pp. 125-250).

The first chapter is dedicated to Nikolaos Politis, the founder of the science of folklore in Greece. Particularly in Greece, urban folklore is a field, the beginning of which is around in 1909, when Nikolaos Politis, pointed out issues of the emerging urban culture in his article “Folklore” in the official journal of the Hellenic Folklore Society, which he founded. Ever since, urban folklore in Greece has followed a course that is not straight, but has undergone many changes, depending on the conditions of every era (pp. 129-137).

After Nikolaos Politis, Stilpon Kyriakidis at the University of Thessaloniki and Georgios Megas at the University of Athens mentioned superficially issues of the urban space, but did not write extensive studies on issues of the

urban space. The main reasons were the tendency in Philosophical Schools that wanted folklore to be connected with the agricultural areas of the Hellenic region, and, also, the poor growth of urban centres in Greece until the 1950s, when the internal migration flow towards Athens, Thessaloniki and other regional urban centres starts to become very big (pp. 137-147).

During the Interwar period, extracurricular folklorists Melpo Merlier and Dimitrios Loukopoulos, who investigated the urban space of Athens and Piraeus in order to record the life of refugees from Asia Minor, Cappadocia and the Black Sea, were the exception. These extracurricular folklorists proactively applied multi-sited ethnography for the Greek area, moving continuously, following the subjects of the research in the urban space (pp.147-150).

The 1950s and 1960s were crucial for the field of urban folklore. Hundreds of thousands of internal migrants from various areas of Greece swarm towards the big cities and a peculiar and incomplete urbanisation gradually begins. It is then that Dimitrios Loukatos first publishes his articles on "folklore of the streets", as well as his book *Folklorea Contemporanea*, which is also the first complete text on urban folklore in Greece. This book, even though not theoretically grounded, proportionately to other works of his time in Europe and America, being innovative and unique in the field of humanitarian and social sciences in the country, gave a strong boost for the development of the field of urban folklore, as it took place later on, during the 1980s and 1990s (pp. 161-176)

Also important is the contribution of Georgios Spyridakis and Dimitrios Oikonomidis, who, even though they did not provide a completed work in terms of the city, significantly contributed to the promotion of the development of urban folklore in Greece. In this chapter, also many useful data on ethnographic film in Greece are provided, while the efforts of Professor Georgios Spyridakis, and Georgios Aikaterinidis, researcher of the Academy of Athens, for the creation of ethnographic films during the 1960s are presented in detail (pp.150-161).

Professor M.G. Meraklis played an essential role in the establishment of urban folklore in Greece, both with his articles and studies, and with his contribution to the elaboration of theses. Meraklis was the first professor in Greece, who taught courses of urban folklore at an undergraduate and postgraduate level, while he also supervised the first theses that referred to the area of the city (the thesis of Avdikos on Preveza and of Raptis on Kanalaki, Preveza and its urbanisation). It is, indeed, important to point out that throughout his scientific course and until today, M.G. Meraklis insists on the use of the "urban folklore" term (pp.176-188).

During the 1970s and 1980s the contribution of Alki Kyriakidou-Nestoros, professor at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, was also important. Even though she initially did not accept the creation and existence of popular culture in urban centres, Kyriakidou-Nestoros gradually re-examined her positions and using oral history she infiltrated the urban space, investigating the narrations and life stories of first- and second-generation refugees from Asia Minor (pp.188-196).

From the 1990s and on, there is a systematic development of folklore studies on the urban space. Of course, the most distinguishable are the researches of Evangelos Avdikos, Minas Alexiadis and Konstantina Bada on urban culture. At the same time, more recent researchers (Manolis Varvounis, Anna Lydaki, Rea Kakampoura, Mariathi Kaplanoglou, Vassiliki Chsyssanthopoulou, Giorgos Vozikas, Giorgos Kouzas, etc.) combined the urban space with other fields of folklore (social folklore, religious folklore, philological folklore etc.), providing us with studies of urban folklore, which are more complete and have a wider study of themes. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that several folklore PhD holders continue to be occupied with the urban space (pp. 196-250).

Also, the two writers at the final chapter of the book propose many issues for the field research in the city. During the last decades, the issues of urban folklore have been extended very much and to a much larger degree, from what was initially proposed by Loukatos and Meraklis. The main reason for this extension is that during the past years the conditions of life in Greek cities have changed a lot: the overcrowding of population from the Greek region, the immigration from the Balkans, Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia, the full integration to the urban mentality of second-generation internal migrants, the huge expansion of Greek cities, the complexity of their structures and the variety and heterogeneity of cultural expressions in the urban space. Therefore, with a city that keeps transforming and changing as subject of research, urban folklore could not remain a static and non-evolving field of the science of folklore. Today more than ever, as compared to the past, urban folklore embraces new topics and contributes decisively to their comprehensive interpretative study, helping, in essence, the research of the urban phenomenon in Greece (pp. 193-379).

In this book, a research methodology is also suggested, which is based on: a) field research (participant observation, semi-structured questions, life stories, focus groups etc.), b) archival research, and c) the use of literary testimonies, under certain conditions, mainly when we refer to the urban folklore of the past. On the contrary, an approach that is exclusively based on archival or literary material and does not take into account

field research, is definitely unilateral and not complete (pp. 273-291). Finally, the comparative approach is also attempted in the book, and there is a detailed reference to urban folklore in Germany, Finland, and France, while a separate reference is made to the course of urban folklore in the United States of America. Moreover, it is significant that both authors explicitly set the boundaries of folklore and pinpoint the methodological similarities with anthropology and sociology in Europe and United States of America. Thus, they essentially contribute so as to overcome various misunderstandings between the disciplines of folklore and anthropology, and also contribute to an essential dialogue between these social sciences by pointing out the common traits that characterize them (pp. 63-123).

The book is completed with very analytical and extensive bibliography, Greek and international, which is a useful tool for those occupied with the issues of urban folklore (pp. 389-452).

And another important point: the authors dedicate the book to Evangelos Avdikos and Anna Lydaki, the tireless researchers of urban folklore research, as they correctly stress. This is a praiseworthy move, which is essential and with a deep symbolic content. Evangelos Avdikos was the first researcher in Greece who, in the late 1980s completed the first thesis about Preveza, a peripheral city in Greece. So Anna Lydaki, was the first folklorist that did research on a marginalized group in Athens (the Roma, an ethnic group of traditionally itinerant *people*).

Concluding, I would like to point out the following regarding the book of Manolis Varvounis and Georgios Kouzas. The book titled *An Introduction to Urban Folklore. Theoretical Approaches-Methodology- Themes* is definitely an important work for the field of social sciences in Greece. The book par excellence refers to the fieldwork in the city, it provides very useful ideas and examples for younger researchers to implement in practice in the future. In addition, the authors offer to the reader various and innovative themes from the contemporary daily life or from the popular culture of the past, which can be studied from the archives.

Finally, we must stress the fact the book provides a specific framework for the theory and the methodology of urban folklore in Greece. At a theoretical level, its offer is particularly important, since it brings the sciences of folklore and social anthropology closer together, contributing in this way to the dialogue between the two sciences and at a methodological level, it is important that it offers the appropriate methodological tools for the researcher to approach the various issues of urban ethnography.

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