

WOLFGANG MIEDER

DEMETRIOS S. LOUKATOS (1908-2003)

International paremiology has lost one of its last giants of the twentieth century. The sad news reached me from his former student and colleague Aristeides Doulaveras in the morning of October 23, 2003, when I turned on my computer in the morning. The concise message on the subject line of the e-mail message read "Demetrios S. Loukatos' death", and the short message read simply "With much sadness I announce the death of the great paremiologist Demetrios S. Loukatos (1908-2003). His funeral ceremony will take place on Saturday, at 11:00 local times, in Athens. P.S. We have not yet received *Proverbium* 20 (2003). As I sat grieving in my chair staring at the computer screen, it slowly came to me why Aristeides Doulaveras had added the note about not having received the new *Proverbium* volume as yet. I had asked him to write a survey of Demetrios Loukatos' phenomenal contributions to paremiology and paremiography as a present on his ninety-fifth birthday. This comprehensive bio-bibliographical essay with the title "Demetrios Loukatos as a Paremiologist" is indeed printed in *Proverbium* 20 (2003), 133-158, discussing Loukatos' work on "Proverbs in General," "Proverbs from the Domain of the Church [Bible]," "The Proverbial Discourse in Heperos," "Local Collections of Proverbs," "The Study of the Types of Proverbs," "The Categorization of Proverbs," "The Form of Proverbs," "The Study of Ancient [Greek] Proverbs," "Proverbs and Social Life," "Proverbs and Economic Life," "Proverbs and Political Life," "Proverbs and Natural Environment," "Proverbs and Neighbouring Nations," "Other Works on Proverbs," and "Book Reviews. This overview tells the life story of an internationally recognized scholar, including complete bibliographical references of the numerous publications with English translations of their Greek titles (Loukatos published primarily in Greek and also in French). Regrettably, Demetrios Loukatos missed seeing the new *Proverbium* volume by a couple of weeks. Doubtlessly he would have been pleased with

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Aristeides Doulaveras' detailed account of his scholarly accomplishments.

Since this comprehensive treatise of the life and work of Demetrios Loukatos has just been published in last year's *Proverbium*, I shall refrain from repeating his biography and from attaching a list of his innumerable publications to this obituary. I will simply include a few general and personal comments, as I remember a mentor and friend who helped shape my own career as a paremiologist. Readers of *Proverbium* will recall that I offered its second volume in 1985 as a *Festschrift for Demetrios Loukatos* with the following statement:

We as the representatives of the international community of paremiologists take great pride and pleasure in dedicating this issue of *Proverbium* as a much deserved "Festschrift" to our Greek colleague and personal friend Demetrios Loukatos. Just as Greek proverbs have had a large influence on the proverb stock of most other nations and languages, Demetrios Loukatos' paremiological research has influenced scholars throughout the world who admire his work and who build on it. We all join congratulating Demetrios Loukatos on his many paremiological publications and wish him the best for his future projects, of which some will undoubtedly appear in forthcoming issues of *Proverbium*.

(*Proverbium*, 2 [1985], vii)

Demetrios Loukatos carried on with his scholarly quest for almost another twenty years after this heartfelt wish for continued good health. As his fellow paremiographers Archer Taylor (1890-1973), Grigorii L'vovich Permiakov (1919-1983), Wayland D. Hand (1907-1986), Bartlett Jere Whiting (1904-1995), Matti Kuusi (1914-1998), and Kazys Grigas (1924-2002), Demetrios Loukatos had reached a Biblical age, quite befitting a scholar who dedicated much of his work to the proverbs of the Bible.

Speaking of this group of distinguished paremiologists, let me recall an international meeting where all of them, except for Grigorii L'vovich Permiakov and Bartlett Jere Whiting, gathered thirty years ago. The occasion was a "Paremiological Symposium" that

Matti Kuusi had organized from June 19 to 21, 1974, at the University of Helsinki in conjunction with the VIth International Folk Narrative Congress. In addition to these distinguished paremiologists, there were also present such renowned proverb and folklore scholars as Dan Ben-Amos, Alan Dundes, Gerda Grober-Glück, Galit Hasan-Rokem, Bengt Holbek, Anna-Leena Kuusi, Pentti Leino, Ricarda Liver, Katherine Luomala, Dov Noy, Lutz Röhrich, Vilmos Voigt, and many others. I was one of the youngest with my thirty years of age, a mere beginner and awed by such distinguished and knowledgeable professors from around the world. But I remember to my surprise how everybody welcomed me into this international group of paremiologists, and before I knew it, I became the personal interpreter for Matti Kuusi and Demetrios Loukatos, dealing with English, French, and German in somewhat of a maccaronic fashion.

Incredible friendships were formed at this symposium that have lasted for decades. One example dear to my heart is the treatment that I have received from my friend Demetrios Loukatos during the past twenty years as I have edited our annual *Proverbium*. Every year, when Demetrios Loukatos received the new *Proverbium* yearbook, he would sit down and write me a congratulatory note in French, telling me that he was pleased once again with my work. I have a wonderful collection of nineteen such letters and cards, and I am saddened that Demetrios Loukatos was no longer able to drop me a note for the twentieth volume that contains the article about him by Aristeides Doulaveras. Little did Demetrios Loukatos know how much his positive reactions meant to me as they gave me the courage and strength to continue serving paremiologists world-wide. But he was a very smart man, and I guess he knew what he was doing. Matti Kuusi did the same thing until his death, always encouraging me to carry on the torch of paremiology. I owe both of them, and the other friends mentioned on these pages, much thanks for their trust and support during all these years. I know that I am the proverbial dwarf (you know that I am of small physical stature) standing on the shoulders of many giants.

It is once again very difficult for me to say good-bye to one of my international mentors and personal friends. The great paremi-

ologists of the twentieth century are slowly but surely passing away, and I feel a terrible void and loneliness as I write these thoughts in my cold, snow-covered, but sublimely beautiful Vermont, far away from my many friends in the United States, Europe, and the rest of the world. The scholarly life is at times a lonely business, as we sit in our studies working with dedication and commitment on our various projects. But when the feeling of loneliness becomes almost unbearable, I remember my paremiological friends who have left their workplace forever and my thoughts move on to all the paremiological family, including my dear students, who are working along with me. And then a warm feeling enters my heart, and before I know it, I am back at work editing the next volume of *Proverbium* - carrying the torch especially also for Demetrios Loukatos.

But let me close these remarks by quoting my spontaneous words that I wrote to Aristeides Doulaveras on the morning when I heard about his departure from the scholarly world. I probably should have taken more time to formulate my thoughts more eloquently, and I would certainly have prepared a better rhetorical piece if I could have traveled to Athens on such short notice to speak at the funeral, but the following words are nevertheless sincere expressions of sadness at the death of Demetrios Loukatos while also celebrating his life and accomplishments:

It is with much sadness that I have just received your message that our dear friend and colleague, Prof. Demetrios Loukatos, has passed away at the Biblical age of ninety-five. As you know, he was a giant in Greek folklore studies, and he was also a world-renowned paremiologist. I have learned so much from him over the past three decades, and I treasure the time when I met him personally at the international symposium in 1974 at Helsinki. I was just a beginning scholar at the time, and he was so very kind and supportive to me. Since I can speak French, I became his interpreter at the meeting. We became friends very quickly, and I have wonderful letters and postcards from him. He was always very supportive of "Proverbium", writing me every year that he was pleased with the new volume.

I will think of my dear friend Prof. Demetrios Loukatos tomorrow when you will carry him to his last resting place. He was a great scholar, an excellent teacher, a kind colleague, and a special friend.

With much sadness,
Wolfgang Mieder
(in the name of all proverb scholars around the world)

Demetrios Loukatos had a long life, and as a proverb scholar, he obviously knew many folk proverbs that deal with a multitude of metaphors about the inescapable fact that life must come to an end. I am certain that he died knowing that he had made a positive difference in the world and that he had accomplished much in his long and influential life. Most assuredly he could have uttered the proverb "All's well that ends well" as his last words. Farewell, dear friend, and thank you for having touched all of us paremiologists with your friendship and wisdom.

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