

WOLFGANG MIEDER

Entipa mesa epikoinonias kai laikos politismos. Neoterika laografika. By Minas Al. Alexiadis. Athena: Instituto toiu Bibliou – A. Kardamitsa, 2011. Pp. 246.

The study of folklore in general but also the research on proverbs in particular have during the past decades become ever more interested in the appearance, use, and function of folkloric and paremiological references in the modern age. Hermann Bausinger's ground-breaking study *Volkskultur in der technischen Welt* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1961) set the general tone for such investigations, Lutz Röhrich followed with his invaluable investigation of *Gebärde–Metapher–Parodie. Studien zur Sprache und Volksdichtung* (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1967; rpt. ed. Wolfgang Mieder. Burlington, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2006), and my own book on *Tradition and Innovation in Folk Literature* (Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1987) also looked at this phenomenon with a special emphasis on fairy tales, legends, and proverbs. In the meantime similar studies have been published for various cultures and languages, including in particular the modern survival of proverbs as I had begun to show in my analysis of *Proverbs Are Never Out of Season. Popular Wisdom in the Modern Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Now, it is with much excitement for the scholarly world that the internationally recognized Greek folklorist Minas Al. Alexiadis of the University of Athens has stepped forth with a truly outstanding book on *Entipa mesa epikoinonias kai laikos politismos. Neoterika laografika* (Athena: Instituto toiu Bibliou – A. Kardamitsa, 2011) whose title in English translation reads as *Printed Media and Popular Culture. Studies in Contemporary Folklore*. Fortunately for those readers who are not familiar with the Greek language, the author has provided a detailed English summary (pp. 195-197) of his study.

The book is comprised of five studies of which four had been published previously between 2008 and 2010 and with the third and central chapter being an original contribution. They all deal with

folkloric elements as they appear in the Greek mass media of books, newspapers, magazines, postcards, photographs, etc. The book is richly illustrated by fifty-four fascinating pictures indexed on pp. 217-219, and there is, of course, also an extensive international bibliography (pp. 199-214), indicating in particular what has been done in Greece on the multifaceted appearance of folklore in modern times. A giant index of names, subjects and terms (pp. 223-238) reveals the comprehensive nature of this book written by a distinguished folklorist of whom a bio-bibliographical sketch is presented on pp. 239-243.

Following a short but erudite introduction (pp. 9-15), the first chapter (pp. 17-51) is an intriguing study of the appearance of traditional folktales in nine Athenian daily newspapers from 1986 until the present time. By way of textual examples and fifteen welcome illustrations Minas Alexiadis is able to show that such well-known tales and their motifs play a significant role in communicating various types of information. Folktale elements appear in full-length articles, in advertisements, as headlines of reports, as caricatures and cartoons, etc. The many journalistic references clearly show that folktales or at least allusions to them are part and parcel of the language of the mass media. Obviously these traditional folktales continue to be part of the cultural literacy of the Greek readers, and their innovative integration into the mass media adds much emotive expressiveness to the various reports, messages, and illustrations.

The second chapter (pp. 53-81) deals with the proverbial speech of Greek politicians as it is reported in the Athens press. The plethora of references comes from speeches, pronouncements, interviews, and other types of comments by various politicians reported in the newspapers. By way of his many contextualized examples Minas Alexiadis is able to show that the political discourse is not at all dry or stereotypically stylized but rather quite natural and full of proverbial expressiveness. It is argued that proverbs and proverbial expressions add much metaphorical prowess to political discourse, that such proverbial or gnomic language supplies political speech with a popular tone, and that this type of traditional preformulated language is of great communicative value as politicians relate to the people. Of course, some politicians are by nature more proverbial than others. In Great Britain, for example, Winston S. Churchill was a masterful proverb user, and in the United States at the present

moment it is President Barack Obama who employs proverbial language with considerable frequency and impressive effectiveness, as I have shown in my book *Yes We Can. Barack Obama's Proverbial Rhetoric* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009).

With the third and new chapter (pp. 83-124) on anti-proverbs in Athenian newspapers, Minas Alexiadis advances Greek paremiology by leaps and bounds. As he explains on the first few pages of his analysis, the term anti-proverb was coined by me in the early 1980s and it has created much interest in the scholarly community of paremiologists. The term has been translated into many languages, and we now have the Greek equivalent as “anti-paremia” to refer to the intentional variation of traditional proverbs in order to create innovative and often playful, humorous or satirical statements. Such parodied, manipulated, altered or amended texts have become quite popular in the mass media, including their appearance in newspaper headlines, advertising slogans, captions to cartoons, graffiti, posters, T-shirts, bumper stickers, etc. Alexiadis explains all of this for fifty-nine standard Greek proverbs and their anti-proverbs, and he also includes twelve important illustrations. There is no doubt that this chapter is of extreme importance not only for the life of proverbs in modern Greek society and media, but also as a proof that the linguistic, cultural, and folkloric phenomenon of anti-proverbs is indeed an international phenomenon. While proverbs clearly are still used in their traditional way as expressions of folk wisdom, they also survive by constantly being adapted to new situations. It is, to be sure, the juxtaposition of the traditional proverb text with the altered anti-proverb that results in truly effective communication.

With the fourth chapter (pp. 125-149) Minas Alexiadis moves on to an intriguing analysis of the depiction of folk professions on old postcards and photographs. The chapter includes eighteen valuable pictures and illustrates the importance of such pictorial sources for a better understanding of folk culture. Folklorists have started to pay much more attention to this type of archival material, and it is good to see that this is also the case in Greece. If I may, let me add a small account of what happened to me with my seventy-five folklore students in a recent lecture course on proverbs. I told them that the old Greek proverb “Cobbler, stick to your last” was translated into Latin and into most European languages hundreds of years ago and that we also have it in English in the form just cited. My stu-

dents told me that they had never heard of this proverb. Why? In the United States, the professional designation “cobbler” has been replaced by “shoe repairman” and, of course, the students also did not know any longer that a “last” is a tool used by a cobbler. The proverb is basically lost to American English by now, but I did show my students a postcard and a photograph illustrating the old proverb. There is no doubt that iconography of all types is extremely helpful in understanding proverbs of former times.

Finally, in the fifth chapter (pp. 151-189) Minas Alexiadis studies something very close to his heart, namely the rich folk culture of the island of Karpathos. He looks at how the folklore and culture of this small community has been maintained as people have left to move to other parts of Greece and the world. He presents various views of the Karpathian folk culture in the Greek and international diaspora, once again including ten illustrations from newspapers and magazines. On p. 188 I even learned that there exists a Federation of Karpathian Societies in the United States! Clearly the Greek immigrants that came to America have maintained many elements of their folk culture, thus enriching the multiethnic American society while maintaining wonderful old traditions from Karpathos.

In conclusion it can be said enthusiastically and emphatically that Professor Minas Alexiadis has presented us with an extremely important book on contemporary folklore with a special emphasis on how Greek folktales, proverbs, and folk culture survive in the oral traditions but also in the printed words of the mass media. Traditional proverbs and innovative anti-proverbs in particular continue to play a significant communicative role in the print media, and as such they deserve to be studied in the exemplary fashion as has been presented in the book under review. Minas Alexiadis' newest book *Entipa mesa epikoinonias kai laikos politismos. Neoterika laografika* will doubtlessly be of great influence on modern folklore studies in Greece and far beyond.

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