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The historical formation of folklore studies in the 19th century – mid. 20th century in Europe and Greece[*]

Introduction

The folklore as a concept is to be found in the Anglo-Saxon term *folklore*, meaning "the people's knowledge", and as the German term *Volkskunde*, which means "the knowledge of the people". Two different meanings, because in the first place the subject of folklore is the traditional manifestations of the popular life, and in the second center of interest is not the manifestations but the folk life itself, the people in which they – the folklorists – were seeking the particular characteristics of the cultural life (Tzakis / Τζάκης, 2002: 24). Originally, the folklore had a static character, the elements of culture which composed it reverberating to earlier forms of social evolution, and could only survive in the rural area without being altered. In recent decades, this view of folklore has changed and it is argued that its constituent elements are shaped according to the prevailing social conditions. So we are not talking about a static traditional culture but about a dynamic one that adapts itself to developments in modern society. The concepts of people and nation were at the forefront of the currents developed at that time; we refer to the Romanticism and evolutionism that formed the field of ideological confrontations (*ibidem*, 24-25). What were the reasons for the folklorists to study and watch the lives and thoughts of the people? The reasons clearly vary because every time the historical environment that was being developed was different (Κυριακίδου-Νέστορος / Kyriakidou-Nestoros 1978: 16).

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[*] Translation from Greek by Μαρία Χασάπη-Σιδερά (Maria Hasapi-Sidera).

Historical shaping of folklore in the European space

The German folklore developed in the context of the dominant current of the romantic era, during the Napoleonic wars when the German nation had to defend its vital space. A reference point of Romanticism was emotion, unlike the principles of Enlightenment, intelligence and the right reason. German Romanticism has highlighted the idea of the nation as being the only force capable of ensuring the cohesion and political stability of the state (Τζάκης / Tzakis, 2002: 30). Each nation seeks its roots separately, explores its particular characteristics based on distinction *we* and *others*. The concept of the nation in Germany is based on the principle of racial consciousness as a biological phenomenon and not as a social phenomenon. It is understood by someone as "the popular feeling of a community or an ethnic group". The people of this ethnic group speak the same language, reside for many years in the same area, have common customs and moral or religious traditions (Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 1978: 20, 22).

The nation for the German folklorists was an unchanging concept that was not influenced by social, economic and political factors. The Germans attributed themselves the superiority they considered to have with the term "the soul of the people". This transcendent essence could be traced to traditional or folk life events and sought more in the rural area because, according to the German folklore that was formed at that time, this place was not altered. Folklore as a science will set the focus of its field of study on the morals, customs, behaviours of the rural population, thus acquiring the character of a science of the nation. The "soul of the people" should be reflected in the state and permeate the spirit of laws and, more generally, the exercise of power. At this point folklore is called as a science of the nation, on the one hand, to help the state to fit the laws to the spirit of the people, on the other to influence the spirit of the people in order to accept a policy as national, whether it is cruel or onerous. Its task is to educate the nation as well as to manipulate it (Tzakis, 2002: 30-31).

The people are the body that has developed popular culture. As a concept, the term "people" was necessary to identify specific social layers. When folklore shaped its scientific profile within the industrial development of Europe, the people found themselves in the midst of economic, social and political upheavals. The people were on the one hand the bearer of the collective memory of the past, conceived from the perspective of national ideology as equivalent to the nation, on the other. With the creation of sovereign nation states there was the demand for the creation of a nation and a people. Nation and people have developed a single national

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consciousness. As regards the social aspect, different social consciousnesses and two different cultures developed: the one dominating and the one dominated (Ντάτση / Datsi, 1990: 41-43).

The German folklore under the influence of Romanticism turned to the study of the past and to the search for the traditional manifestations of the rural population to ensure those elements which would show the purity of the German race. England and France, influenced by the Enlightenment, approached traditional culture differently and because of evolutionary theory, which shaped the social sciences at those times. Evolutionary theory relied on Darwin's views on the evolution of species. According to E. Tylor's theory, man progresses through a cultural journey from inferior to superior forms of social organization and culture. European societies of the 19th century had travelled the distance that separated them from the higher cultural stages, while the primitive civilizations had not completed this progressive course and were in evolutionary stages. This theory influenced the science of social anthropology and, to a great extent, folkloric studies. This was aided by the theory of Tylor, which claimed that in the lower social level and in the rural area there were survivals from previous stages of development, which were preserved due to the custom of the social groups. So these survivals should be placed in the appropriate cultural stage to study. Of course, the most appropriate is considered to be the most inferior one, i.e. where they were created. Tylor, unlike German Romanticism – who uses a return in the past seeking the discovery of the origin and the pure form of these survivals in order to lead the "soul of the people" to the ultimate essence – adopts the discovery of those laws which characterize all cultures and enables the lowest ones to reach the level of the peoples of Western Europe. He prefers to compare survivals found in higher cultures with those belonging to earlier stages (Tzakis, 2002: 32-33).

Historical formation in the Greek region

We saw that the German folklore was born in critical political situations and that is why it was given a national character. It was for the Greek scholars a model when it was time to support and defend the rights of their own race (Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 1978: 21). German folklore was the model of the Greek one, but the last one was not a faithful copy of the first. Greek folklore at its beginning was influenced by the movement of Romanticism and nationalism, adding elements from other theories, such as evolutionism. Nikolaos Politis, father of the Greek folklore, used those elements from the theory of Tylor he considered necessary. In the initial phase of the Greek folklore, it was stated that the purpose was national as well as in the German folklore. That is

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why N. Politis was interested in those survivals that proved the ancient origins of Greeks from Greek Antiquity. He was looking for survivals that signified the relation between ancient Greeks with the New Greeks. The orientation of the Greek and German folklore converges, but not to find an invariant diachronic substance, because in the case of the Greeks this was granted, it referred to the ancient Greek civilization. However, it was necessary to find evidences that would prove this origin (Tzakis, 2002: 33-34).

For Greeks, contrary to the Germans, the notion of nation does not develop on the basis of the distinction between *us* and *others* but based on the relationship between *us* and the *ancients*. The Greeks turn to classical antiquity and that means liberalism, independence, equality and democratic spirit. On the contrary, for the Germans the orientation to the Middle Ages means a return to conservatism and a conflict with the ideals of rationalism (Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 1978: 31-33).

While the Greek folklore struggled to prove the origin of the New-Hellenes from the ancient Greeks, the opinion of the German historian J. Ph. Fallmerayer added that the ancient Greek world had ceased to exist since the middle of the first millennium after Christ. He argued that Slavic and Albanian races settled in the areas of Classical Antiquity, resulting in the distortion of the Greek race. So the inhabitants of the newly established Greek state do not originate from the ancient Greeks. The view of the German historian has shaken the faith of the Greek population as regards the unity and continuity of the nation. An important element of the Modern Greek identity was injured, which was boosted by both the Greek Enlightenment and the revolutionary declarations of 1821. In the same time, the philhellenic movement that dominated the European countries was under the charming idea of creating a state where ancient Greek civilization flourished (Tzakis, 2002: 35).

The sciences of history and folklore are called to declare the unbroken continuity of Hellenism from Antiquity up to the 19th century. However, they have become sciences of nation by identifying and limiting their interests to achieve their goal. The history tried through the agency of Zambelios and Paparrigopoulos (both distinguished Greek historians) to highlight the Greekness of Byzantium as a link between the modern Greek state and Greek Antiquity. Folklore, on the one hand, attempted to demonstrate the relationship between ancient Greek culture and the traditional culture of modern Greeks, and took on the task of developing the national consciousness (*ibidem*, 35-37).

Traditional / folk culture was considered to be the culture of the rural space (i.e. the civilization of the peasants) because it was only in this area that it could survive and not eroded

by the modern culture of the industrial centers. Very characteristically, this place is called by Kyriakidou-Nestoros «an immense golden area, where Greek scholars like other goldsmiths were zealously seeking the nuggets of the glorious past». Moreover, the Greek rural region was considered in the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century as the guardian of traditional Greek society, as in the urban centers western influences were increasing. Traditional manifestations of Modern Greek life became as I mentioned the subject of folklore with the aim to certify the continuity of Greek culture (*ibidem*, 36-37). Apart from traditional / popular culture, we also have the scholarly culture, the supreme spiritual culture of theological thought, philosophy, science, letters and arts. It is that culture that will organize the bourgeois national states in the early 19th century having as an ideological axis the idea of nation. It was necessary to reveal values that until then were ignored. Folk culture has been that cultural value that the ruling class has pulled from obscurity and cast it as a value that can withstand the time. Folk culture will strengthen the "temporal dimension of the past" and will be the unifying element between the people and the essence of the nation. The science of folk culture will be recognized as a science of the nation (Datsi, 1990: 41-43).

Kyriakidou-Nestoros argues that folklore before becoming a formal science, research unit has been the *place* (*τόπος*), but when it became official science of the state research unit was the topic (*θέμα*). The folklorists dealt with folk songs, customs and superstitions on a pan-Hellenic level, without paying special attention to the way these issues appear in each place separately. These issues constituted the life of each place, were the living body of the Greek community which was neglected for the sake of the national goal and purpose that had been laid out by the folklore as a science of the nation. It sought to reveal the soul of the Greek people, which substantially was the emanation of the ancient Greek soul. Its original features were considered to be those that traced their origin since antiquity; for that reason, folklore without the pre-history did not exist (Kyriakidou-Nestoros, 1978: 35).

Folklore, as a science in Greece, was established in 1909 by N. Politis who gave it the first definition. This definition does not bound the object of folklore only to the traditional orality (stories, popular songs, proverbs etc.) as happens in the English folklore. This object was also containing topics which would become later the domains of the material and spiritual life. He places the folklore closer to the German one as it deals with the manifestations of traditional culture which would prove the inherent relationship between Hellenism and antiquity (Tzakis, 2002: 37). In the same frame Stylpon Kyriakidis – a student and continuer of the work of N. Politis – would also situate himself. He would, in fact, define the subject of folklore based on its

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essence found in the same traditional culture and not on its origin as his teacher had done. It also places the people and the nation in the focus and promotes a folklore having a diachronic dimension. G. Megas, another pupil of N. Politis, would separate the domain of folklore in material, spiritual and social life. This format is accepted by the Greek folklore until today (*ibidem*, 37-38).

Conclusion

The flow of Romanticism, as expressed by the German Folkloric School, the evolutionist current with Tylor's theory, the Enlightenment and what Fallmerayer advocated have shaped the object of folklore in European and Greek space to a considerable extent. Folklore was necessary at that time to create a national consciousness. It began as a national science tool of government policy based on nationalism and racial discrimination. As a science it supports the identity of peoples through the manifestations of traditional culture.

In Germany, its purpose was to contribute to the national self-knowledge of the German people and its main task was to educate the German nation. This is done within the framework of the Romantic Movement, but Romanticism and history are closely linked in Germany. Within the framework of the Romantic Movement, the notion of the nation would be developed on the basis of distinction between *us* and *others*.

Folklore in the Greek area was established to prove the origins of modern Greeks from the ancient Greeks and not so much to discover the essence of the nation. Originally, although it followed broadly the German standards, the historical context gave it some special characteristics. The Greeks are looking for their roots in the context of Greek Enlightenment. Greek Enlightenment was formed in France. In the Turkish-occupied Greece, both historical circumstances and spiritual conditions were quite different from those prevailing in the West. Greece has adapted and transformed its supranational base into a climate of national pride. These two components of Greek enlightenment, the *lights* that came from France and the romantic notion of the nation are in a direct relationship when the historical consciousness begins to develop, *we* and the *ancients*.

The folklore, having a national purpose and character, managed to study, explore and interpret as well as rescue elements of traditional culture. The subject of folklore after the second half of the 20th century is being widened and an opening of anthropology to contemporary

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"historical" cultures is also noticed. New areas – such as urban folklore dealing with the phenomena of modern big cities, an area that has been blocked for a long time – are included.

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