

MY MEDIEVAL LEXICON:  
ITS BEGINNINGS AND PROGRESS.  
THE PROSPECTS FOR ITS CONTINUATION

EMMANUEL KRIARAS

Professor Emeritus, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki

Dear Delegates, I wish to apologize in advance because I am obliged to refer to my lexicon and myself in this presentation.

A research project that engrossed me during the course of my life, was the compilation of the *Dictionary of Medieval Vulgar Greek Literature* (1100-1669). What preconditions existed which propelled me in this direction? In addition, how has my lexicon progressed until the present time? To what extent has the Dictionary been completed? What research remains to be completed?

The initial reason for the fundamental direction that my research took was, of course, my fervent interest, even from my secondary school years, in the ancient Greek language. For it was this language that was used almost exclusively for instruction at the old Gymnasium (secondary school) (1918-1924). Occasionally, particularly if we were fortunate enough to have bright and inspired teachers of ancient Greek, this instruction had a genuine impact on our spiritual development. I was fortunate to have had such teachers on occasion. Therefore, it is not odd that I was guided without hesitation to the School of Philosophy at Athens University. I must say that in discussions among my classmates during my sophomore year, I did not hesitate to expound my desire to specialize –given the opportunity– in the field of ancient Greek literature. As my university studies progressed though, I began to detect a relative shift in my interest from ancient, towards medieval and modern Greek literature. My association, with the demotic movement and its leading proponents as well as with modern Greek literary works, which began as early as my final years at secondary school, prepared me to such an extent that upon the completion of my education I already possessed significant knowledge on most of the leaders of the linguistic movement and their writings. The debates between Hatzidakis and Psyharis, as well as the adherents of one or the other linguistic factions, had become familiar to me. I had the opportunity to meet Psyharis in person and converse with him during his final trip to Greece, in the summer of 1925, while he was on a visit to Chania in Crete (among

other Greek provincial cities) on a lecture tour. The reverberation of our linguistic conflicts here in Greece, among philologists associated with the issue in Europe, was not unknown to me. I deliberated upon this linguistic question in connection with the views of the German Byzantinist Karl Krumbacher, and the objections to those views raised by George Hatzidakis.

In this way, now a graduate, I found myself adequately qualified as a candidate when the Athens Academy –rather rashly as I discovered later– decided to establish a medieval archive with the intention of compiling a dictionary of the medieval language. In 1930, as a scholar of the Academy, I was employed in Munich for six months in the service of the *Thesaurus of the Latin Language*, becoming adept in the techniques used in the collection of lexical material for subsequent lexicographic use.

For a variety of reasons and causes, which now is not the appropriate time to elaborate on, the medieval archive of the Athens Academy, where I served as an associate and later as director (1939-1950), was incapable of essentially approaching the specific objective for which it was founded. I should make a few comments on this issue and will not fail to do so in the future since I was, as previously mentioned, director for quite a few years and justifiably can be considered responsible, or at least partially responsible, for the non-completion of the project.

In 1950, when I took over the Chair of Medieval Greek at the University of Thessaloniki, I began to be occupied with the ambitious idea that at last I could possibly, with the assistance of my selected and mature students, even during the course of their studies, embark on the compilation of the *Dictionary of Medieval Vulgar Greek Literature*, at least with the popular writings of the late byzantine and the first post-byzantine period (1100-1669) as a base. I note, in addition, that my pro-demotic ideology favoured the direction taken towards these δημώδη works of literature.

After a lot of hesitation and a few trial collections of lexical material with the assistance of my students, I decided to begin the compilation of the *Dictionary of Medieval Vulgar Greek Literature* (1100-1669). I note that in 1948 I proposed to the Senate of the Athens Academy that the Medieval Archive should undertake the compilation of a lexicographic project of that kind (with a tight schedule) with a corresponding increase in research personnel. Unfortunately, the Senate that had in 1930 –with what I believe to have been unjustifiable boldness– sanctioned the compilation of a Medieval Lexicon, now –with what I consider inexcusable caution– did not seem willing to approve my proposal.

How did I begin my attempt at compiling this type of Lexicon? I motivated the interest and research genius of my most advanced and able students. Even if we did not achieve the desired goal, we would have amassed a significant amount of material that would be useful in a variety of future lexical and philological studies. Therefore, I organized the seminars of my students, especially juniors

and seniors, in such a way, that each one of them contributed as much as possible to the work that we aspired to achieve. After two years, we had collected enough material of medieval *δημόδη* writings and of related texts when by pure coincidence, when the Royal (subsequently National) Research Institute was founded, in 1958-1959; it funded us, with limited sums of course, providing the salaries of two of my associates.

Therefore, we began our research compiling citations from “popular” and semi-popular texts from the period in question. The work that had been done for years with the assistance of my most advanced students fortunately bore adequate fruits so that after approximately a decade I could envision compiling the first volume of the planned Lexicon. It was published in 1969 – exactly one year after the military dictatorship’s decision to forcibly remove me from my Chair at the University. Fortunately, this lamentable episode did more to galvanize my lexicographic activity than adversely influence it; I was able to proceed at an accelerated pace. Naturally, in order to reach my primary goal, but also to succeed in the following stages of the work, what was required, in addition to repeated attempts to organize the Lexicon, was the securing of grants and funding from institutions and the State, since the funding from the National Research Institute, which did not last long in any case, soon ceased. Naturally, the funding –always meager– was never enough for the work to advance. Certainly, I am grateful to the institutions and public bodies that supported me, although I do not wish to tire you by naming specific institutions and services. I have done so in the prologues to each volume of my Lexicon.

Allow me to add that for the duration of my lexicographic work, it was necessary to draw substantially from my personal resources to ensure its continuation.

Another difficulty encountered was the search for new staff. Staff were recruited, after a written examination, from among philologists waiting to be appointed to official teaching posts. Consequently, when such appointments were announced, it necessitated our having to recruit new staff.

I owe a debt of gratitude to my erstwhile associates, who experienced with me both the difficult and joyous moments of an undertaking that I placed at the centre of my academic activities.

Fortunately, the rate of publication of the volumes was steady: one volume biannually. This rate has been maintained almost without exception so that today we are awaiting publication of the fourteenth volume.

Allow me to mention that my Lexicon was received favourably, even from the publication of its first volume, by both Greek and international critics. The volumes that followed were also favourably received.

I believe there is no reason for me to speak more analytically on the technique that I followed during the compilation of the articles of the Lexicon. I have expounded on to this subject in several of my publications. Of course, there is suffi-

cient archival material, which has so far maintained and will, with further refinement, continue to support the Lexicon. I do not deem it necessary to refer to it.

It is apparent that in the near future I will have accomplished what I set out to offer, with the assistance of my associates, as an aid to the study of our language and literature. What prospects now exist for the completion of a work that has occupied me for over forty years? The Centre for the Greek Language, which has so auspiciously been active in our country over the past few years, and which is responsible for organizing today's Meeting, has already, as you are aware, undertaken the abridgement of the Lexicon based on the compiled and published sections. A team has been working towards this goal in recent months. I have reason to believe that the Centre's interest will continue and be enhanced in the near future. The Centre could invite both local and foreign specialists in medieval Greek to collaborate, commencing with archives of the Lexicon that have not been utilized in their entirety, to supplement, in a few years a work I did not have the pleasure to see completed. Fortunately, today's research possesses new decisive means that we earlier researchers did not have at our disposal. This facilitates international collaboration in research. Optimistically and with my best wishes, I predict a collaboration of many researchers, already recognized for their scholarly achievements in the fields related to Lexicography. Scientists of this calibre are participating in today's conference. An international partnership would lead to the fulfillment of a dream, which could not be realized by the one who initiated it.

*Translation* YANNIS GETSOS