

# Research Center for Modern Greek Dialects - Historical Dictionary

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## 0. Introduction

This paper aims to give an overall presentation of the Research Center for Modern Greek dialects - Historical Dictionary of the Academy of Athens (henceforth RCMGD), by providing a short description of its research, lexicographical and publication activities. Detailed information is available at the Center's website, <http://www.academyofathens.gr/ilne/>. Special emphasis is accorded to the presentation of the content, the methodology and the problems of compilation of the Historical Dictionary of Modern Greek (*Ιστορικὸν Λεξικὸν τῆς Νέας Ἑλληνικῆς Γλώσσης τῆς τε κοινῶς ὁμιλουμένης καὶ τῶν ἰδιωμάτων*), which constitutes the RCMGD's main publication activity.

## 1. Foundation- History

The RCMGD was established in 1908 on the initiative of Georgios Chatzidakis, the founder of the linguistic science in Greece<sup>4</sup>, and is one of the first research centers to be placed under the auspices and superintendence of the Academy of Athens (1927).

Its first appellation was "Research Center for the Compilation of the *Historical Dictionary of Modern Greek, both of the common language and its dialects*", which described exactly the main purpose of the Centre. That is, its initial purpose was the compilation of a unified dictionary of the Greek language, from antiquity until modern times, which would be called "historical" because it would provide information on the history of words, i.e. their phonological, morphological and semantic evolution along the time axis. It would constitute "proof of the linguistic unity of the nation through the centuries, and a monument to the immortality of the Greek race" ("μνημεῖον τῆς γλωσσικῆς ἐνότητος τοῦ ἔθνους διὰ πάντων τῶν αἰώνων καὶ μνημεῖον τῆς ἀθανασίας τῆς ἑλληνικῆς φυλῆς")<sup>5</sup>. This over-ambitious initial purpose, understandable within the framework of late 19th c. nationalism and romantism (see Giakoumaki, Karantzi & Manolessou 2004), was of course unachievable with the means available at the time. Thus, the scope of the dictionary was soon revised and reduced to the spoken Modern Greek language, "both the commonly spoken language and its dialects".<sup>6</sup>

The slow rate of progress in the creation of the *Historical Dictionary*, as well as the new standards required by modern linguistics and dialectology, to which it must conform, led to yet another revision of its purposes, and in 2003 the Center was re-named "Research Center for Modern Greek Dialects- Historical Dictionary".

## 2. Archives of the RCMGD

Given that the surviving linguistic material of the ancient, medieval and early modern period exists in written form, the first step for the compilation of the *Historical*

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<sup>4</sup> For details on this major figure in the history of Greek linguistics see Vayakakos (1977).

<sup>5</sup> In the "Prolegomena" of the first volume of the dictionary (*HD*, vol. 1, p. η') the type and the content of the dictionary under preparation is described as follows: "all ancient linguistic items, i.e. all words, all word-forms and sounds, all meanings etc. must be followed down to their final disappearance, if they have been lost, or down to the present, if they have survived, and conversely, all new linguistic items, be they words, word-forms, sounds, meanings, phrases etc. must be followed back to their first appearance in history"

<sup>6</sup> See also the 1925 Introduction to the Liddell-Scott *Greek-English Lexicon* (LSJ: vi) where the initial scope of the Historical Dictionary of Modern Greek and its subsequent revision are discussed.

*Dictionary of Modern Greek* was the coverage of the spoken modern language, i.e. the local spoken varieties in all Greek-speaking areas, inside and outside Greece. Therefore, the creation of the Historical Dictionary archives begins with the collection of modern Greek vernacular spoken language, on the one hand from printed sources (dictionaries, glossaries, scholarly and literary periodicals and books containing samples of spoken language) and on the other from manuscript collections of linguistic material compiled by the Linguistic Society of Athens (εν Αθήναις Γλωσσική Εταιρεία), the Greek Philological Society of Constantinople (Ελληνικός Φιλολογικός Σύλλογος Κωνσταντινουπόλεως) or coming from the private archive of Michael Deffner (1848-1934), one of the first researchers of the Tsakonian dialect. In parallel, regular fieldwork collection of linguistic material from various Greek-speaking areas was conducted (and is still being conducted) by the researchers working for the Historical Dictionary. As a result, the RCMGD archives nowadays contain the following material:

### 2.1. Manuscript collections archive:

There are 1680 manuscript collections (transcriptions) of spoken language in the Historical Dictionary archive, whose provenance is the following:

- a) data collected/ transcribed during fieldwork by the researchers of the Center from 1908 until today.
- b) data submitted to the annual linguistic competitions of the Linguistic Society of Athens and, nowadays, to the linguistic competition organized by the Academy of Athens on behalf of the RCMGD
- c) 191 manuscripts donated by the Greek Philological Society of Constantinople to the RCMGD, compiled around the middle of the 19th c. (the oldest is dated 1854, but the linguistic situation these mss. reflect is much older). Most of these manuscripts are in a very poor condition of preservation and are kept in a separate sub-archive.
- d) linguistic data collected and donated by private individuals.

The archive material of the RCMGD is of very considerable value, since it constitutes the oldest and by far largest collection of data on the Modern Greek dialectal varieties. On the contrary, the representation of common (standard) Modern Greek in the the RCMGD archives is much more restricted. The content of most data collections in the archives, especially the older ones, shows that the interest of the collector usually lay in the recording of words which were unfamiliar to the speaker of the standard language; and the further excerpting and use of these collections as sources of lexicographical material for the compilation of the Historical Dictionary was to a certain extent based on the same principle.

### 2.2. Card slip archive

The card-slip archive consists of more than 4.000.000 card-slips indexed by lemma in alphabetical order (for example, the lemma *γριά* 'old woman' includes the dialectal forms *γραιία, εγραιία, γραιίε, γρία, γρία, γρ<sup>α</sup>ιά, γιργιά, γριτζιά, ρκά, γρέ...* as well as the plural forms *γριές, γρες, γραιάδοι* etc.)<sup>7</sup>. It has been excerpted from:

- a) the manuscript data collections described above
- b) printed sources containing vernacular and especially dialectal material.

The card-slip archive is divided in three parts: i) the excerpts used for the compilation of the already printed volumes of the *HD* (α-δαχτυλωτός) ii) the appendix containing additional material for the printed lemmata, excerpted after the publication of the first volumes and iii) the main body of the card-slip archive, containing material from the lemma *δε* and following (up to *ωωχά*). Sections (ii) and (iii) are constantly being added to. The card-slips are hand-written, and most of the older ones are especially problematic due to the unsystematic way of recording of the data (abbreviation of the source, phonetic

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<sup>7</sup> Concerning the methodology of choosing and compiling a lemma in a historical dictionary, see Bassea-Bezantakou (1997, 2006).

transcription) and sometimes to the bad state of preservation of the paper, ink etc. To give a characteristic example, many of the older slips, especially those created during the period of the German occupation of Greece (1941-45) are written on the margin of paper-slips coming from book pages, newspapers, voting papers etc.

### 2.3. Donated archives.

Three archival bodies have been donated in their integrity to the RCMGD:

- a) the archive of M. Deffner (Tsakonian)
- b) the archive of St. Karatzas (Euboea and other areas)
- c) the archive of A. Karanastasis (S. Italy)

### 2.4. Sound archive

This part of the RCMGD archives is currently in the process of being created, through the digitization of older sound recordings preserved in various mediums, such as magnetic reels, cassette tapes, videotapes, and vinyl records. These sound files contain live recordings of oral dialectal material, of various local provenance, collected from 1930 onwards. The digitization is being carried out with the valuable assistance of the Laboratory of Modern Greek Dialects of the University of Patras.

### 2.5. Toponyms archive

Since 1984, an electronic database of Greek place-names is being constructed and constantly enriched. The data is excerpted from the manuscripts archive. For more information, see Afroudakis (2001).

## 3. The Historical Dictionary of Modern Greek

### 3.1 Aims-Scope-Problems

As already discussed, the compilation of a dictionary for the contemporary spoken language (both the common language and its dialects), which would also provide the historical overview of each lexical item, was the ultimate aim set down in 1910 by G. Chatzidakis, the dictionary's founder. The "contemporary spoken language" was considered to be the linguistic form in use from 1800 onwards, and in particular "the language of the people, and not the written demotic used by many" (τῆς γλώσσης τοῦ λαοῦ καὶ οὐχὶ τῆς ὑπὸ πολλῶν γραφομένης μάλιστα σήμερον δημοτικῆς), with the addition of lexical items "preserved in lexicographical or literary works, so long as they are of genuine vernacular form" and with the exception of such words "if they appear to be nonce formations" ("πᾶσαι αἱ λέξεις, αἱ ὁποῖα παραδίδονται ὑπὸ λεξικογράφων ἢ λογοτεχνῶν, ἀρκεῖ νὰ φέρουν γνησίαν δημῶδη μορφήν... ἀποκλείονται δὲ λέξεις λεξικογράφων ἢ λογοτεχνῶν, αἱ ὁποῖα φαίνονται πρόχειρα κατασκευάσματα" (*HD*, Prolegomena to vol. 1, p. ιζ'). The contemporary spoken language was thus defined on the basis of a single criterion: that the words in question be not ignored by "the people", a criterion of doubtful accuracy and practical applicability which needs no further comments. Irrespective of how rich the archival material is, it is impossible for it to be analysed synchronically, considering that it was collected in different periods, following different criteria, and especially since it was collected over such a long period (from 1916 and still ongoing), from informants answering to variable presuppositions as to educational level, age, gender, social class etc. In addition, the temporal distance between the initial conception of the *Historical Dictionary* and the present day has inevitably brought about a discrepancy between its original principles and purposes and the current status and methodology of research of the Modern Greek dialects and the Modern Greek linguistic reality.

The specification of the scientific research domain of the Center as being the Modern Greek dialects, as expressed by its renaming in 2003 to "Research Center for Modern Greek Dialects- Historical Dictionary" (Κέντρον Ερεῦνης Νεοελληνικῶν Διαλέκτων καὶ

Ιδιωμάτων -IANE), gives a more accurate picture of the lexicographical work being carried out by its researchers. That is, the lexicographical purpose of the Historical Dictionary is first of all the charting of the history of the Greek language through the investigation of its dialects, since true linguistic history is most often detectable through dialectal material and obscured in the standard language. Through spatial linguistic variation it is possible to establish the changes that affect the later Greek language, not only on the level of lexicon and semantics, but on the phonological and morphological level as well. It is thus the very nature of the material that requires a double form of investigation (historical and comparative-dialectal) for the compilation of the Historical Dictionary. This double attention to both language history and dialectal variation is a unique, although necessary, practice in the domain of international lexicography, since usually the focus of major national lexicographical projects is either historical or dialectological.<sup>8</sup>

To conclude, the aim of the Historical Dictionary is not to hoard the whole thesaurus of the Modern Greek language from 1800 onwards, but to ensure the preservation of the dialectal fund of the Greek language (not only as lexical items but as meanings as well) and to investigate the history of the Modern Greek language. The complete coverage of all aspects of the lexicon of Standard Modern Greek is the domain of other well-known lexicographical projects, such as the already published dictionaries LNE and LKN, as well as the new Dictionary of Current Greek which is will shortly appear under the auspices of the Academy of Athens (see Charalambakis 2009 for details).

### **3.2. Sources of Historical Dictionary**

The provenance of the material used to compile the HD is the following: 1) primary/oral sources, which provide mainly dialectal material (see above under archives of the RCMGD) and 2) secondary/written sources, which provide material both on standard Modern Greek and its dialects. The secondary sources of dialectal material can be divided into:

- a) Linguistic sources: local dictionaries and glossaries, linguistic treatises and papers concerning a certain dialect, phenomenon or lexical item
- b) Folklore sources: collections of folk-tales, songs, proverbs, customs
- c) Literary sources: literary works written in a certain dialect

Correspondingly, the secondary sources for standard Modern Greek can be divided into:

- a) Linguistic sources: the major and minor dictionaries of Modern Greek, the available electronic corpora of Modern Greek (Hellenic National Corpus and the Corpus of Greek Texts (ΕΘΕΓ and ΣΕΚ)<sup>9</sup>, linguistic treatises and papers concerning a certain phenomenon or lexical item
- b) Literary sources: literary works written in standard Modern Greek, electronic corpora containing literary works of Modern Greek

Additionally, in order to document the history of the Modern Greek vocabulary more fully, the HD consistently uses written sources containing material from earlier periods of Greek such as Lexica and Grammars of Ancient, Koine and Medieval Greek, electronic corpora of Ancient, Koine and Medieval Greek (mainly the TLG, [www.tlg.uci.edu](http://www.tlg.uci.edu)), etc.

## **4. New principles in the research and lexicographical activities of the RCMGD**

Within a general framework of modernization in the processes of compilation of the HD according to the principles and presuppositions of modern Lexicography and Dialectology, the following innovations are currently under way:

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<sup>8</sup> For a comparison of the Historical Dictionary of Greek with similar international lexicographical projects see Giakoumaki & Karantzi & Manollessou (2004).

<sup>9</sup> See their web-pages, <http://hnc.ilsp.gr/> and <http://sek.edu.gr/> respectively.

a) phonetic transcription of all linguistic forms with the International Phonetic Alphabet and use, where necessary, of a set of special phonetic symbols for the transcription of dialectal texts in the Greek alphabet. These symbols are included in a font designed and created specifically for this purpose, the *Athens Academy Greek Fonts*, and a table of one to one correspondence with the phonetic symbols of the IPA allows their appropriate use.

b) The metalanguage of the HD will no longer be the linguistic form of the previous volumes, i.e. the katharevousa (or occasionally an even more archaic form) but Standard Modern Greek, obeying determined grammatical and orthographical principles.

c) use of electronic databases: for the facilitation and the speeding-up of the compilation process, a number of digital/electronic databases have been constructed, namely:

i) a database containing detailed information on the manuscript collection, allowing complex searches by author, date of collection, area of provenance, or content of the manuscript. Especially for material collected after 1922 from Asia Minor refugees, special attention is paid to the recording both of the area of provenance and the area of relocation. The contribution of this database is crucial, since it will ensure the reliability of the archival material and will allow the user of the HD to conceive the material both in its synchronic and its diachronic dimension. This information will be provided also in the printed form of the HD.

ii) a database containing the place-names (and their abbreviations) used for the description of the provenance of linguistic material in the HD (see Bassea-Bezantakou 2001). The place-names are fully defined geographically according to prefecture, county, older appellation etc., on the basis of the official Administrative Division of Greece of 1996.<sup>10</sup>

iii) Digitised archive of scanned mss and digitized archive of sound recordings (under construction)

iv) Electronic edition of the first published volumes of the *HD* (α-δαχτυλωτός) (under construction)

v) Bibliographical database containing a) updated and cross-checked bibliography of the published volumes and b) catalogue of the research library of the RCMGD, which is the richest one in Greece in the domain of dialectology

vi) Digitised archive of scanned printed secondary sources (dictionaries, dialectal glossaries and treatises)

vii) Electronic database containing in summary form the contents of the card-slip archive and allowing complex searches by lemma or linguistic form. This database, although not providing a full electronic and accurate transcription of the archive, is an invaluable first step in the detection and location of dialectal linguistic forms.

## 5. Publications of the RCMGD

Apart from the Historical Dictionary of Modern Greek (in its new form) and its other previous publications, the RCMGD is also responsible for the following publications:

- the RCMGD's journal *Λεξικογραφικόν Δελτίον* (the 26th volume is currently in preparation)

- the collective volume series *Νεοελληνική Διαλεκτολογία* (the 6th volume is currently in preparation)

- the new dictionary of dialectal archaisms, by the ex-director of the RCMGD, Dr D. Krekoukias, which will shortly appear in 2 volumes (*Αρχαϊσμοί στα Νεοελληνικά Ιδιώματα*)

<sup>10</sup> *Γεωγραφικός Κώδικας της Ελλάδος* Υπουργείο Εσωτερικών, Δημόσιας Διοίκησης και Αποκέντρωσης, Athens 1997.

## 6. Conclusion

It is hoped that this short overview of the research and lexicographical work being carried out at the RCMGD has allowed the reader to form an optimistic view of the new perspectives which the of the research and lexicographical work being carried out at the RCMGD allows, not only concerning the publication of the Historical Dictionary but in general concerning the scientific progress in the study of both the Modern Greek dialects and the history of the Greek language.

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