

A LEXICON OF SMYRNEIKA

Alex Baltazzi, George Galdies and George Poulimenos

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There is currently a trend in Turkey towards rediscovering forgotten aspects of the country's Ottoman past, including lost minority cultures. This volume, published in Istanbul with the assistance of the Izmir Chamber of Commerce, is a study of the Greek dialect of Smyrna by three amateur lexicographers. Baltazzi and Galdies were born in Izmir and are native speakers of Smyrneika; the former still lives there, while the latter lives in London; Poulimenos was born and lives in Athens but his family originates from Asia Minor.

Since 1922, Greek has been spoken in Izmir not by Greeks but by Levantines, the descendants of western Europeans (Catholics and Protestants) who settled there for the purpose of trade, intermarried with Greeks and other Christians (and no doubt occasionally Muslims). The Levantines were a *mouskoulantza* 'of mixed origins', to quote one of the *Lexicon's* entries. Over the generations they adopted Greek as their native language and wrote it in Latin script. This method of writing was known as *Frangochiotika* because it was typically used by the Catholics of Chios. Because the criterion for the compulsory exchange of minorities between Greece and Turkey laid down by the 1923 Treaty of Lausanne was religion rather than language, the Greek-speaking Catholics and Protestants of Smyrna were allowed to remain, and so the language survived there after the Greeks themselves had been forced out. The dialect continued to be spoken normally until the 1960s, whereas 50 years later the authors are attempting to preserve what has almost become a dead language.

This book originated from notes on the dialect compiled by the late Peter Polycarp Galdies, the father of one of the authors, who was given his middle name in honour of the city's patron saint. Alex Baltazzi and George Galdies then asked a number of elderly Smyrniots, both Greeks and Levantines, to supplement the original vocabulary with additional words and phrases. The volume contains entries for more than 2000 words, for each of which an English, Standard Greek and Turkish translation is given and (where necessary) an etymology provided. The vocabulary is followed by a collection of proverbs and a series of dialogues illustrating the language and customs of the pre-1922 Smyrniot *belle époque*, in which most of the characters are Greeks rather than Levantines. These dialogues are printed first in Latin script and then in Greek, but they are not translated because any translation would dissipate their particular local flavour.

The use of Latin script in the *Lexicon* disguises the fact that the Smyrniot dialect is easily comprehensible (bar a few individual words) to anyone who knows Standard Modern Greek. As far as the grammar is concerned, the most striking features are also found in some of the Aegean islands, from where many of the Smyrna Greeks originated, e.g. forms such as *tsi adri* 'the men' (accusative plural) and *irha* 'I came'.

The entry *psari* includes a rich list of fish names, while other entries include information about calendar customs and various other activities, whether related to business or leisure.

Many of the words are of Turkish, French and Italian origin, since these were the chief languages spoken in Smyrna apart from Greek. Most of these loanwords have been assimilated to Greek phonology and morphology, e.g. *adapternos* 'adapt', *defetismenos* 'defective', *oskulterno* 'listen to [a patient's] chest' (French *ausculter*).

Some words are particularly evocative of the place, though a number of them are still used in slang in Greece today. Here is a personal choice of examples:

Agharinos (literally 'descendant of Hagar' and metaphorically 'Muslim'): 'an Athenian' (!)
andipatikikos: 'unpleasant' (a blend of Greek and French)
antikum dokumentum: 'traditionalist'
atridhones (a Chiot word, from Latin *attritio*): 'haemorrhoids'
bizbilizo: 'irritate'
dadanizo: 'shudder'

dantistas: 'dentist'
dhializomai: 'comb one's hair'
eskirobotzis (from Turkish *eski* 'old' + Italian *roba* 'stuff'): 'rag-and-bone man'
Flamingos: 'Dutchman'
ghlasadha: 'ice-cream'
hlapas: 'clumsy person'
kalmiras: 'tight-fisted'
kouseli (ultimately from Latin *consilium*): 'gossip'
loloservaghia: 'crazy woman'
malimati: 'flattery'
maloupa: 'thick mop of hair'
mamaloukos: 'mamby-pamby'
pitsilithra: 'pump-action atomiser against insects; (derisory) small car'
servitsialo 'enema; Victorian bidet'
tsaklaboutis: 'sloppy person'
tsoupanakia: 'applause'
tzeriaris: 'stern or sour person'
Tzour-Matzour (stil' tone sto Tzour-Matzour: 'let him go to Hell')

Many of these words are not included in Christos Solomonidis' *Smyrnaiko glossario* (1962) – but then one of my favourite Smyrniot words (*lemondrofes* 'lemon drops') is missing from both of these dictionaries.

Smyrna used to be known as *fthomana* 'mother of the poor' (as in the old Kostas Roukounas song). Salonika inherited this role immediately after the Smyrna Catastrophe, when it became a refuge for many of the city's destitute inhabitants.

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