

la rivista di **en**gramma
ottobre **2018**

159

**Pikionis
ri-costruttore**

La Rivista di Engramma
159

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Pikionis ri-costruttore

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La Rivista di Engramma

a peer-reviewed journal

159 ottobre 2018

www.egramma.it

sede legale

Engramma
Castello 6634 | 30122 Venezia
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redazione

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edizioniengramma

ISBN carta 978-88-94840-87-2

ISBN digitale 978-88-94840-54-4

finito di stampare ottobre 2019

L'editore dichiara di avere posto in essere le
dovute attività di ricerca delle titolarità dei diritti
sui contenuti qui pubblicati e di aver impegnato
ogni ragionevole sforzo per tale finalità, come
richiesto dalla prassi e dalle normative di settore.

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From vernacular language to vernacular architecture

Dimitris Pikionis' Moraitis house (1923) as the culmination of a long discourse on Folklore

Nikos Magouliotis

Preliminary Note

Etymologically, the word *vernacular* comes from the Latin adjective *vernaculus*, which means “native” or “indigenous”. The word is derived from the Etruscan *verna*, meaning “home-born slave, native”. The term *Vernacular* originated in fields concerning the study of language and was originally used to refer mainly to a local dialect or a linguistic idiom (in the sense of the Latin *vernacula vocabula*) [1]. By now, the term *vernacular* has now surpassed its linguistic connotations and it is broadly used in the field of architecture. It is employed to refer to the different local architectural typologies, constructions and styles which occur in specific contexts, usually through the work of non-specialist social groups due to local material, and climatic and cultural conditions [2]. With respect to the linguistic and terminological specificities of the Greek context, this etymological and epistemological origin of the term “vernacular” in fields concerning with language, and its subsequent transfer to architecture, were crucial triggers for the writing of this text.

Prologue: Fotos Politis discovers Dimitris Pikionis' Moraitis house (1923)

His friend grabbed his hand and, without any explanation why, started dragging him through the streets of Athens. “You’ll get it”, he said...

This is how, in 1923, cultural critic and theater theorist Fotos Politis (1890-1934) began his article “Parascheia” (Politis F. 1923a); a unique piece of cultural critique which drew crucial parallels between poetry and architecture. In this short text, Politis adopted a particular narrative structure to demonstrate his point: he recounted a walk all over Athens, guided and narrated by a furious friend who would stop in front of

a series of nineteenth-century buildings and then recite macabre and melancholic verses. The poems that this fictional narrator recited to Politis had been written in the latter half of the Nineteenth Century by the famous romantic classicist poet Achilleas Paraschos (1838-1895), from whom the article took its title. At the end of the long walk, the author's friend explained his point: just like the pretentious poetry of the previous century, the late-classicist and eclecticist architecture that came with it was becoming increasingly outdated in the face of modernity.

The solution to this literary and architectural impasse came with the final stop of their lively walk at the southern suburb of Kallithea, in front of a small house that was still under construction [Fig. 1]. The house differed from all the buildings they had seen previously: it was a meticulous copy of a vernacular dwelling, placed in the outskirts of Athens. Marveling at the house, the author's friend this time recited verses of a more pastoral style. Politis immediately recognized them to be the writings of Kostas Krystallis (1868-1894), a poet who tried to incorporate the colloquial Greek dialect and the structure of folk songs into modern poems, in order to describe bucolic scenes of life in the Greek province. Pointing at the building in front of them, the author's friend explained: "This house is a Krystallis, too [...]. It's made by a young architect, Mr. D. Pikionis. [...] And its style is inspired by popular architecture, just like the lyrics of Krystallis are inspired by popular poetry" [1]. This was indeed Dimitris Pikionis' first built work, The Moraitis House (1921-1923). And the point of this peculiar analogy concerned the broader situation of the arts in Greece at the turn of the twentieth century: A young generation of Greek poets had abandoned the academic stiffness and the romantic pretense of Classicism for the more "real" and historically immediate world of Folk tradition. Architects were beginning to catch up with this trend, and Dimitris Pikionis, still at the very beginning of his career, was presented as the vanguard of this paradigm shift of Greek architecture towards the vernacular.



1 | Dimitris Pikionis' Moraitis House (1923), photographed shortly after the completion of its construction (Pikioni, Rokou-Pikioni 2010).

At the time of Politis' article, Krystallis had been dead for more than two decades. In fact, within poetry and literature, this shift in style and theme had already occurred in the 1880s. Architecture was apparently catching up with a noticeable phase difference in the early 1920s. So what had occurred in the meantime? The parallels which Politis drew between poetry and architecture (or between language and built form), with regards to Greek intellectuals' interest in folklore and the vernacular, had a long prehistory. To understand what Pikionis' Moraitis House (and its distinctive interpretation by Politis) signified in 1923, we will have to begin by going back to the Nineteenth Century and the debates which gave rise to a linguistic and then an architectural discourse on Folklore.

From ancient monuments to “monuments of the word” (1880s-1900s)

Greek and European concern with the folkloric traditions of Greece has a long, turbulent pre-history, which began at the start of the Nineteenth Century (and even before that; Kyriakidou-Nestoros 2007, Herzfeld 2002). But at the time of the foundation of the Modern Greek Nation-state (1830) and for several decades afterwards, the interest of foreign and local intellectuals in the popular culture of the country was rather marginalized. The young country's national identity was being forged through a recourse to its distant, ancient past (Hamilakis 2007). Classical antiquity was considered the principal focus of all scholarly research, as well as the basis for most forms of artistic creation. Every other aspect of Greece's history and culture (its medieval Byzantine and Ottoman past, and its more recent Folk tradition) was, for a long time, either ignored or scorned. At a time

when other European intellectuals sought to define their nationhood through a recourse to their medieval and folk heritage, Greek artists and architects were still confined to an exclusive study of Classical Antiquity. For a great part of the Nineteenth Century, this Classical heritage served as both an element of rational enlightenment and a romantic symbol of national identity (Kyriakidou-Nestoros 2007).

This particular narrative had been challenged already in the 1830s: Tyrolean historian Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer (1790-1861) claimed that, although Greece was the geographical locus of Classical Antiquity, its modern population had no relation to this distant past and was the racial and cultural outcome of a centuries-long mixture with Slavic and Ottoman tribes (Fallmerayer 1835). This provocation against the Greek nationalist narrative of historical continuity gradually forced local intellectuals to study the dialects, beliefs and practices of the country's commonfolk, in an attempt to prove that they still carried the spirit of their ancient ancestors (Herzfeld 2002). This was the starting point of an interest in the country's folk heritage, which grew from sporadic publications in the 1850s, to a formulated and consistent field of scholarship in the 1880s. The person credited with establishing Folklore studies (or "Laographia" as was the local term) [2] as an autonomous academic discipline in the end of the Nineteenth Century, was Nikolaos Politis (1852-1921); the father of the aforementioned Fotos Politis. It is evident that the writings of the latter in 1923 did not occur in a vacuum: like his father Nikolaos, Fotos Politis was personally invested in the long debate concerning the acknowledgment of Greek folk tradition as an object of scholarly interest and of national importance.

Nikolaos Politis' folkloristic shift would eventually develop into a significant challenge to the cultural and ideological dominance of the Classical. But the early establishment of this new field and the legitimization of its object of study was rather cumbersome. Emerging through a milieu of philologists and literalists, the main material of Folklore studies was language: folk songs, popular sayings, traditional fairy-tales, and other aspects of oral folk tradition. For most of the Nineteenth Century, Classical Archaeology had been dealing with concrete material artifacts and was charged with the mission of establishing, through them, a relationship between Modern Greece and its ancient past

(Hamilakis 2007). Measured against the ruins of antiquity, the oral traditions studied by folklorists appeared as an elusive and unscientific set of materials, unfit for the ambitious national claims championed by archaeologists. In response to this imbalance, Nikolaos Politis attempted to describe the immaterial objects of his work by employing the peculiar phrase “Monuments of the Word” (“Μνημεία του Λόγου”; Herzfeld 2002). Through this, he was drawing a rather striking parallel between the architectural (material) objects of archaeology and the philological (immaterial) objects of folklore studies. Politis was cleverly trying to borrow legitimacy from the already established field of architects and archaeologists, by claiming that the folk songs and fairy-tales he was collecting and transcribing were equally important “monuments” of Greek national heritage.

The Greek folklorists’ attempt to demonstrate the value of the colloquial dialects of the provincial commonfolk was also fuelled by a broader linguistic and ideological issue: the “Greek Language Question” was a fierce debate between two sides: The “Katharevousianoι”, i.e. the classicists, who argued for an official modern language on the basis of Ancient Greek; and the “Demoticistes”, i.e. the colloquialists, who were conversely defending the value of the vernacular dialects of the country’s periphery. In a way, Folklore studies were the scientific branch of the Demoticistes, many of whom not only collected folk songs and traditional fairy-tales, but also ventured to write their own modern poems and novels on the basis of these materials. By the 1880s, the Athenian literary world was witnessing a fervent Demoticist movement, out of which occurred the aforementioned Krystallis and many other poets and novelists. For these authors, Folklore was not only a matter of national identity, but also a mean for the modernization of the arts through the rejection of previous academic pretenses and the adoption of the simple language of the common man.

What Fotos Politis was hinting to, in his aforementioned text of 1923, was an equivalent movement within architecture: a modern, Demoticist style and philosophy of design which would overthrow the academic Classicism that had dominated the Nineteenth Century by seeking inspiration in folk art and vernacular architecture. But, unlike its literary counterpart, “architectural Demoticism” was still in development [3]. Nikolaos Politis

and his peers were concerned with the collection, documentation and print re-publication of spells, riddles, wishes, popular saying, myths, anecdotes, fairy-tales, idiomatic expressions and other oral traditions [4]. Thus, although they had attracted the attention of the literary world, they were still unable to reach out to disciplines such as art and architecture which were concerned with the material aspects of culture.

In a manifesto text, titled "Laographia" and published in 1909 (Politis N. 1909), Nikolaos Politis attempted to bridge this gap by redefining the disciplinary range, as well as the object of Greek Folklore studies. To the already established, "monuments of the word", he added a second category of folkloric materials which he named, rather vaguely, "Practices and actions according to tradition" (Politis N. 1909, 11) [5]. This heterogeneous list of objects of potential folkloristic interest consisted of several equally immaterial categories of "practices", such as "social organization", "religious worship", "sorcery", "music", etc. But it also included two categories of objects which testified to a bold shift towards the material aspects of folk culture. The first category (placed first in the list) was titled "The house" and included the different "parts of the house", its "utensils and furniture", as well as a potential sub-category of "peculiar habitations (shepherds' huts, stone abodes, lakeside habitations)" [6] (Politis N. 1909, 11).

The second category was placed at the bottom of the list and seemingly disconnected from the aforementioned, was in fact complementary. It was titled "Artistry" and included "sculpture (figure-sculpting)", "decoration (the decoration of clothes, sculpted or drawn ornaments of furniture, instruments and buildings)" and the general "aesthetic of the colors and the shapes" of all the aforementioned (Politis N. 1909, 14) [7].

With these condensed descriptions of the new objects of folkloristic interest, Nikolaos Politis was in essence opening up a field previously dominated by linguists and literalists to architects and artists. The comprehensive description of these two new categories indicates that Politis and his philologist and linguist peers might have had sufficient overview and appreciation of the material aspects of folk life. But the synoptic and somewhat vague formulation of the text indicates that they might have been awkward in the face of these new materials. In the years

that followed, the majority of folklorists of Politis' circle showed limited interest in these new categories of folk material [8]. But specific architects and artists would soon afterwards respond to this call with a series of polemical texts and projects.

“Just as there is popular poetry, there must surely be popular architecture” (1900s-1920s)

Even before Politis' 1909 manifesto, hints to the need for a cross-disciplinary fertilization of architecture and folklore studies occurred through the writings of the national romantic cultural theorist Pericles Yannopoulos (1871-1910). Yannopoulos was a fierce opponent of all imported architectural and artistic styles and a fanatic supporter of local sources of inspiration. In 1899, he wrote a pamphlet on the interiors of fin-de-siècle Athenian bourgeois residences, rejecting their classicist and eclecticist ornamentation and furnishing. Yannopoulos claimed, instead, that the solution to the aesthetic problem of the home should come through “the undisputable outcomes of the modern science of the character of races [...] of their mores and customs, of their traditions” [9] (Yannopoulos 1899b), referring of course to the then emerging Folkloristic imperative of Nikolaos Politis. This urge for architecture to shift towards the scope of Folklore studies was made even more explicit by Yannopoulos in another article, where he urged his readers to visit the remote neighborhoods of Athens. There, he claimed, one would discover an “infinite amount of small houses, the simplest and most artistic, true masterpieces, through which one can clearly discern what is the tendency, the will and the aesthetic of the people” [10] (Yannopoulos 1899). Yannopoulos touched upon this issue several times in later texts and even attempted to demonstrate how such surveys on folk art and vernacular architecture could affect architectural design (Yannopoulos 1903, 20-22). But, like Nikolaos Politis, he was not the one who would systematize this transition; he was only an instigator.

Following the aforementioned drives, in 1911 the architect Aristotelis Zachos (1871-1939) published a short text titled “Popular Architecture” (Zachos 1911), which is considered to be the first Greek text on vernacular architecture [11]. Zachos' manifesto in defense of the architectural folk tradition of Greece began with a rather affirmative statement: “Just as there is popular poetry in Greece, so too there must surely be popular art,

popular architecture [...]” (Zachos 1911, 22). The epistemological leap that Nikolaos Politis had attempted with his “monuments of the word” was now concluding a full circle: From material architectural monuments to immaterial oral folk tradition and, finally, back to the material world of vernacular architecture and folk art. In 1911, Aristotelis Zachos was borrowing legitimization from the established episteme of philological folklorism to introduce a new field of architectural vernacularism. He thus responded to Nikolaos Politis’ call for a folkloristic understanding of not only folk songs, but also “the [popular] house” and the “artistry” it contained (Politis N. 1909).

Influenced by the linguistic basis of folklorism, in this early text of 1911 Zachos placed particular emphasis on the terminology of vernacular architecture: He devoted large part of his analysis to introducing the reader to the (presumably unknown) names of different architectural elements of the vernacular house. But Zachos was also affected by the nationalist narrative of cultural continuity, which had dominated philological folklorism. Through a parallel analysis of the morphology of the architectural terminology of the Greek vernacular house, he sought to prove that, (despite the fact that there is no obvious affinity) such constructions belonged to an undoubtedly “Greek” lineage of architecture, from Classical antiquity to the Byzantine era and all the way to the modern present (Zachos 22). Just like several folklorists before him had claimed that the folk songs of modern Greek peasants still echoed the spirit of Homer’s writings, Zachos was now supporting the idea that the Greek vernacular house was a distant relative of the Classical temples of Antiquity. His later, more elaborate texts on vernacular architecture, published throughout the 1920s, would continue this national claim, based on both linguistic and architectural evidence (Zachos 1923, 1928).

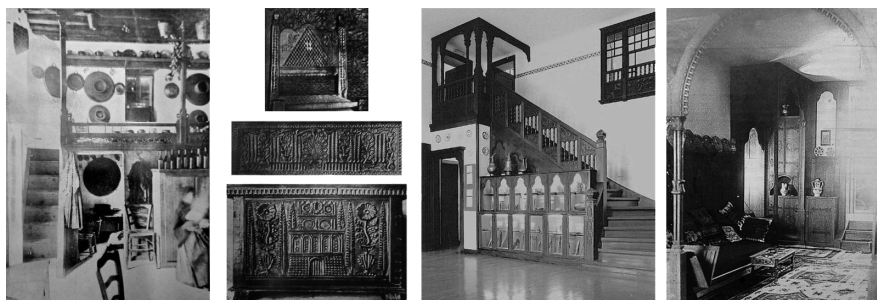
Working closely with Zachos, Angeliki Hadjimichali (1895-1965) was another seminal figure within this trans-disciplinary shift: Originating from an education in fine arts, Hadjimichali was one of the first Greek folklorists to specialize in the material and artistic aspects of folk art and go beyond the philological precedents. Just as Nikolaos Politis would transcribe (and then reproduce in modern print) folk songs and fairy tales, in order to preserve them, Hadjimichali collected and documented (through photographs and drawings) a great number of vernacular constructions

and objects of folk craft, from furniture to clothes and everyday utensils (Hadjimichali 1925, 1929 and 1931) [Figg. 2-3]. Several more architects and artists would join this new field of scholarship during the 1910s and 1920s. More than three decades after the foundation of this field in Greece on a philological and literary basis [12], the object of the field was expanding towards more and tactile materials. With the foundation of the “Museum of Greek Handicrafts” in Athens in 1918 [13] – essentially the first museum of folk art in the country – architectural and artistic folklorism grew from a side-interest to an institutionalized discourse.

Zachos’ pioneering text of 1911 and his balance between a researcher and a designer made him a central figure within this context. Already at the beginning of his career, came a recognition that was similar to the one Fotos Politis would give to Pikionis a few years later: The renowned politician and theorist of Greek nationalism Ion Dragoumis (1878-1920), who was also a close friend of Yannopoulos, maintained in 1914 that the different aspects of the folk culture of the Greek periphery should be studied and utilized as the basis of a “Neohellenic Civilization” (Dragoumis 1913). He posited that this should be the task of a new cultural “aristocracy”, consisting of young local intellectuals of different fields. When referring to architecture, he made an honorary mention to Zachos as an “enlightened architect [who] crosses the Greek cities and villages [and studies their buildings], in order to create the new Greek architecture”[14]. Zachos was certainly a pioneer in this direction of architectural folklorism, both in his research and his designs (Fessa-Emmanouil and Marmaras 2005, Fessa-Emmanouil 2013). But his approach to the vernacular would quickly be outdated by artistic and ideological changes within and beyond the country’s limits.

Aristotelis Zachos was certainly a modernist. Like the literary Demoticistes, he understood folklore as the way out of the academism of the Nineteenth Century and towards a new, rational art whose aesthetic would be more relevantly “Greek” than the saturated dogma of Classicism. But his attempts at this “new Greek architecture” in his most famous residential projects in the 1920s [Figg. 4-5] drew inspiration from the more elaborate aspects of the Greek vernacular: The “archontika” (mansions) of Epirus and Macedonia in the northern mainland, which was his place of origin (Zachos 1911). The simpler and more “primitive” forms of the ordinary vernacular

houses of the Greek periphery rarely found their way into his design [15]. Zachos' projects were certainly signifying a transition from historicist eclecticism to a more modern, vernacular-inspired architecture. But their heavily ornate style would quickly become outdated, as it was confronted by a younger generation of artists and architects who expressed an interest in the modesty and simplicity of vernacular architecture. Dimitris Pikionis was a pioneer of this shift. In fact, even before Zachos had built most of his aforementioned seminal projects, in 1923 Pikionis (who was sixteen years younger) was completing the unprecedentedly modest Moraitis House and pointing to a radically different genre of architectural vernacularism in Greece.



2-3 | Illustrations of objects of folk craft from Angeliki Hadjimichali's publications (Hadjimichali 1925; Hadjimichali 1929).

4-5 | House interiors designed by Aristotelis Zachos: *left*, the house of Angeliki Hadjimichali (1924; Fessa-Emmanouil 2017), *right*, the Loverdos House and Museum (1929; Fessa-Emmanouil 2013).

“The people hand down to us these shapes, as the words of our plastic language” (1920s)

It is clear that there was a long series of important precedents to the arrival of Pikionis on the scene. Both his first built project, the Moraitis house, and the way that Fotos Politis theorized it in his article, ought to be understood as the culmination of a decades-long debate on folklore and architecture.

Prophecies about Pikionis' rise to prominence appeared before the young artist had chosen the career of an architect: in the early 1900s, he obtained a degree in Engineering from the Athens Polytechnic and, in 1908, he moved to Munich and then Paris to follow his passion for painting and the arts. During his absence, Pericles Yannopoulos, warned his friends about the young and virtually unknown Pikionis (whom he had

met as an aspiring painter in Athens): “When he returns, all who are working [in the arts] should gather around him” because, as Yannopoulos claimed, Pikionis was the core around which would formulate “a force that will work towards the purpose of Greek Art” (Pikioni, Rokou-Pikioni 2010, 240). In 1908, Yannopoulos saw Pikionis as the latter saw himself: a painter and an artist. Although Pikionis never abandoned painting or his contact with the world of art, returning to Greece in 1912 he reluctantly made the pragmatic decision to work in architecture (Pikioni, Rokou-Pikioni 2010, 30). In essence, with the Moraitis house in 1923 and the text of Fotos Politis that same year, Pikionis was introduced to the Athenian scene as an architect.

But the Moraitis house occurred about a decade after Pikionis’ return to Greece. And it wasn’t simply the vindication of the hopes of his predecessors. A lot had changed in the meantime. And a lot separated Pikionis’ thinking from that of Yannopoulos and Zachos: From the 1880s until the 1910s, a series of wars and treaties allowed Greece to acquire the provinces of Thessaly, Epirus and Macedonia, expanding its territory north-eastwards to almost twice its original size [16]. During this period, when most of the aforementioned figures rose to prominence, the efforts of Greek folklorists were concentrated on proving the “Greekness” of the folk art and architecture of these contested territories, in order to solidify Greek sovereignty over them (Herzfeld 2002).

The expansionist ambitions of Greek nationalists were brought to an end in the early 1920s [17], but Folklore studies continued to flourish in Greece, often with different geographical and ideological focus: After Greek sovereignty had been established in the north-mainland, folklorists expanded their geographical focus to include the previously less studied Cycladic islands of the Aegean. In relation to the elaborate Byzantine and Ottoman-influenced architectures of the northern provinces, the vernacular houses of the Aegean islands consisted of simpler, white-washed forms. This sub-category of Greek vernacular architecture gradually gained more momentum, as Modernism dominated the country’s architectural discourse in the early 1930s. Folklore studies were still intrinsically tied to the idea of nationhood. But their intensely nationalistic ideology was now being fused with more avant-garde (and geographically and historically eclectic) modernist ideas. Growing up in this transitional period and having recently returned from Paris where he had encountered currents such as Surrealism and Cubism, Pikionis was able to see vernacular architecture in

a different way than his predecessors.

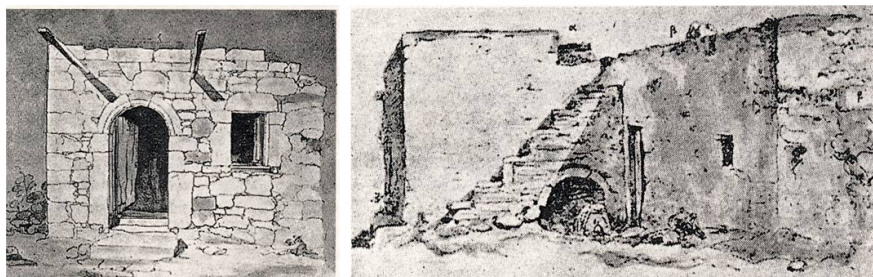
In the years prior to designing the Moraitis house, Pikionis travelled often to the island of Aegina, in the Saronic gulf, off the coast of Athens, and developed a keen interest in its vernacular architecture [18]. Shortly after the completion of the Moraitis house, he expressed his thoughts on the Aegina vernacular by publishing a text titled "Our folk art and we" (Pikionis 1925). The text is considered a significant follow-up to Zachos' "Popular Architecture" of 1911, but can also be seen as a document of Pikionis' radically different understanding of the object: although not completely redeemed from his predecessor's need to prove the historically continuous "Greekness" of these simple houses, Pikionis understood vernacular architecture as a "universal" and somewhat "natural" occurrence within a broader geographical and cultural framework.

Like Fotos Politis and others before him, Pikionis made several parallels between vernacular language and vernacular architecture in his text of 1925. The most striking of such references came in the conclusion of the text, where Pikionis wrote: "The people, who hand down the words to the author, also hand down to us [architects and artists] these shapes as the words of our plastic language" [19] (Pikionis 1925, 69). Thus, Pikionis also urged his contemporary architects to follow the example of the Demoticist poets, who studied the popular dialect in order to make their own, new, locally rooted art. The verb which Pikionis used for this process (which I translated as "hand down") is "παράδιδω", which is etymologically related to the noun "παράδοση", the Greek word for "tradition". Pikionis understood "tradition" as a process [20], and not a fixed set of forms and practices. More importantly, he also saw the artistic practice as such a process of "tradition", of transmitting and receiving.

Pikionis presented the modern artist (author or architect) as the receiving end: words and forms are "handed down" to him or her by "the people" (i.e. the folk). This formulation implied a respectful and attentive stance of the individual artist towards an anonymous collective. But this formulation certainly obstructs the fact that the artist does not only "receive", but can also take, transform and displace elements of a folk tradition. The Moraitis House can be seen as a gesture that was faithful and respectful to an anonymous architectural tradition. But Pikionis was also aware of the tension generated by the "transfer" of this folk object from a village in Aegina to Athens. The Moraitis house was not a harmonious transplant, and it was probably not intended as such. It was

closer to an “objet trouvé”: An attempt to insert a piece of the pastoral Greek province into the growing modern metropolis; a building from a distant time and place, transferred to the modern present [21]. In essence, it was a provocative artistic gesture.

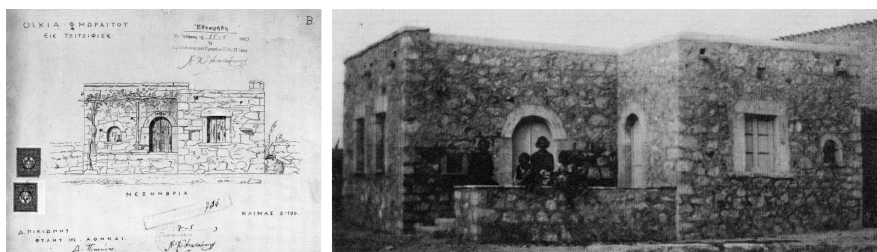
Pikionis’ aforementioned conception of “the people” resembles the figure of a Muse which gives inspiration to the author. But this peculiar folk-muse does not hand down entire stories to the author; she only hands down words and phrases. It is implied, through this, that the author should not copy and reproduce entire stories from folk tradition, but ought to put together new stories by assembling these pieces. If applied to Pikionis’ later works, this literary metaphor could be seen as an accurate description of the way in which he used “words” and “phrases” from different traditions and fused them together in his own architectural narratives. But the Moraitis house is an early stage of his artistic development: in 1923 Pikionis is not yet a mature “author” who could fuse and re-articulate different traditional forms to forge new compositions. He seems to act more like a meticulous folklorist who documents and reproduces what is already there. All this is not to say that the Moraitis house is a mere copy of a specific vernacular house. If we examine the sketches of vernacular houses of Aegina that illustrated the text of 1925 [Fig. 6-7], the Moraitis house appears like the condensation of all of them in seamless and simple house form; the reconstruction of a type, not the copy of an artifact.



6-7 | Drawings of the vernacular houses of Aegina, which illustrated Pikionis’ “Our Folk Art and We” (Pikionis 1925).

The process of drawing, both as documentation of the existing and as composition of something new, is integral to this process. In a later text, Pikionis spoke about drawing and painting and affirmed his loathing for the precision of the academically trained artist. Instead of this, what he

yearned to achieve was “the truth, the unpretentious truth [...] that had been granted to the simple man” [22] (Pikionis 1925, 25, footnote 2). Just like his literary counterparts, who praised the unpretentiousness of folk songs, Pikionis admired the simplicity of vernacular architecture and strove to incorporate it in his own designs. His drawings for the Moraitis house [Fig. 8] display this desire to draw like “a simple man”. Although they certainly prove that the architect had a profound understanding of construction, detail and proportions, their texture appears to strive for a more primitive effect. The elevations of the house are filled with picturesque details: overgrown vegetation, emphatically irregular stone masonry, a wooden porch shade covered with vines, a vase standing against the wall on a small stone shelf, etc. Such elements make the drawings look less like those of a project to be built, and more like the meticulous documentation of something that existed. The city bureau’s “Approved” stamp is perhaps the only detail which indicates that these emphatically picturesque drawings were actually part of a building permission.



8 (left) | A drawing of Dimitris Pikionis for the construction of the Moraitis House (Pikioni, Rokou-Pikioni 2010).

9 (right) | A photograph of the completed projects (Pikioni, Rokou-Pikioni 2010).

The few surviving photographs of the Moraitis House [Fig. 9] – presumably shortly after its completion in 1923 – demonstrate that the built reality differed slightly from the romantic aspiration of Pikionis’ drawings. Although the stone masonry of its exterior surfaces retains the primitivism of Pikionis’ drawings, many of the picturesque details, such as the vine-covered pergola, are missing. The window and door frames are more modern than the emphatically simple wooden boards that the architect had depicted in his drawings, thus giving the house a more aseptic look. But, at the same time, there are evidences of architectural spontaneity behind this surface impression: Comparing the drawings to the

photographs, it becomes apparent that there are several differences in the positions and shapes of openings. Although not much is known about the construction of the house or the collaboration between Pikionis and the builders, we can assume that the process included improvisations and changes, which hint towards a more “vernacular” logic of architecture.

From “Vampires and Fairies” to modern Folkloristics (1920s)

Pikionis himself has not written much about the Moraitis House. His only mention of the project in his autobiographical notes (Pikionis 2010, 33) is just two sentences long and it refers the reader to Fotos Politis’ text, indicating perhaps that Pikionis agreed with what the critic had written. So let us finally return to this text, with which we started our enquiry.

Fotos Politis belonged to the same generation as Pikionis. Although working in different fields, they shared the same sensibilities and concerns about folk tradition as a key element for a modern, albeit locally outdated, art [23]. As mentioned previously, Fotos Politis was the son of Nikolaos Politis, the founder of Folklore studies as an autonomous research field in Greece. The struggle for the recognition of the value of folk tradition was inherent to his immediate environment and upbringing. Therefore, although in a different field, he understood the efforts of Pikionis as pertinent to his own ideas. When the young architect eventually built his first project, Politis deemed it necessary to announce his arrival on the scene.

Unlike most of the texts mentioned previously, Politis’ 1923 text on Pikionis was not published in a specialized artistic or scientific publication. It was featured in a mainstream, daily newspaper of Athens, written in a playfully didactic tone, and posed as a matter of general public concern. “Paraschea” was, in fact, the first out of three interrelated articles [24], whose content gradually unfolded into a broader scope: after the cryptically titled “Parascheia”, which bridged poetry and architecture in a folkloristic perspective, came two texts more clearly oriented towards architecture: “Δημώδης Αρχιτεκτονική” (Popular Architecture) and “Η Αρχιτεκτονική και η Ζωή μας” (Architecture and our Life; Politis F. 1923b, 1923c). In these two latter parts, Fotos Politis abandoned the narrative style of “Parascheia” and moved on to a more straightforward, albeit still didactic, analysis. He elevated vernacular architecture to a matter of public

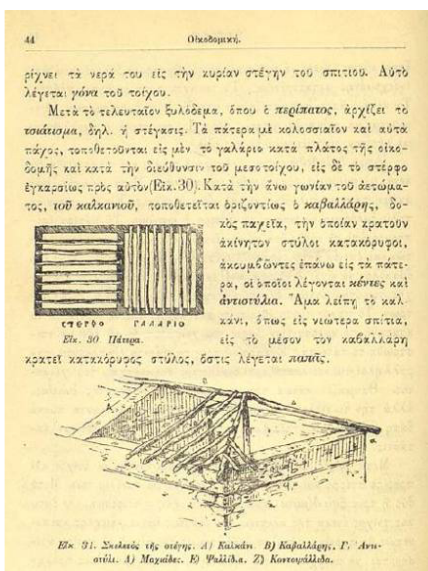
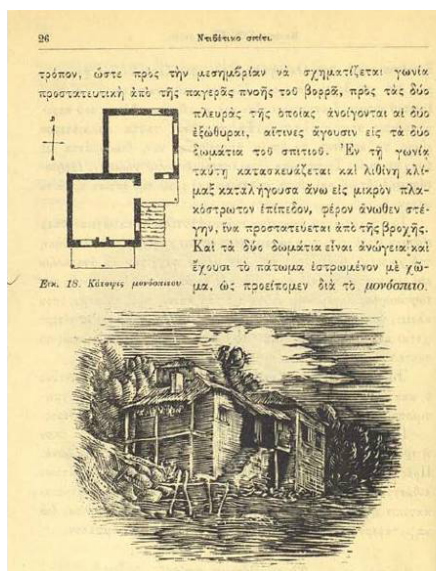
concern; a reservoir of wisdom from which people can draw inspiration to ameliorate their lives in the modern present. "Tradition" was presented as the last refuge of purity and truth in a rapidly modernizing life. Within this frame, Pikionis was presented as one of the people who have championed the value of this tradition. After decades of meticulous concern about ancient and medieval monuments, Politis claimed, Pikionis helped the Greek public understand its more recent architectural heritage: the vernacular house (Politis F. 1923b).

It becomes apparent through the text that the philologist and theater critic Politis knew a lot about vernacular architecture; a knowledge which he seems to owe to Pikionis. The trans-disciplinary exchange of knowledge on folklore had eventually gone full circle: Not only had architects learned from folklorists and poets, but also vice versa. Returning to his more familiar field of language, Fotos Politis attempted a poignant self-critique: Just like the "the poet who summons [...] archaic monsters" [25] is outdated, so is the "folklorist who would [...] try to upset us with Vampires and Fairies" [26] (Politis F. 1923b). Politis was calling for the end of romanticism and the beginning of a new era of modern, rational understanding of folk tradition in all fields, be it language, craft or architecture. Shortly after these comments, Politis asserted that (perhaps unlike several poets and folklorists) the architect Pikionis' has evaded such fallacies in his field and was approaching vernacular architecture in a new, rational way. The relation between the two fields had been inverted: Folklorists now had to catch up with architects.

As mentioned previously, by the early 1920s architects were responding to Nikolaos Politis' drive (Politis 1909) by publishing some of the first texts on the vernacular house. But, within Politis' own Journal of the "Folkloristic Society", no mention of the topic was to be found. Ten years after his call for a study of the materials aspects of folk culture, his immediate peers were still concerned with the transcription of folk songs and fables. In 1921, folklorist Dimitrios Loukopoulos (1874-1943) was one of the first authors to make a brief reference to the issue of the house in this journal, within a broad survey on the folk traditions of the area of Aetolia in central Greece (Loukopoulos 1921, 21). But, being still oriented towards language, what he published was a spell through which one could "haunt a house". The brief note included the transcription of the obscure spell (in

emphatically idiomatic language), but no drawings or references to the architectural aspect of the topic.

Four years later, and with the collaboration of Pikionis, Dimitrios Loukopoulos published a second, more extensive survey of Aetolia which displayed a complete shift in his perspective: “Aetolian Houses, Utensils, Foods” (published in 1925 around the same time as Pikionis’ “Our Folk art and we”) was one of the first systematic surveys of the architecture and material culture of a specific geographic region of Greece. It contained an extensive documentation of different housing types, analyzing their construction, the utensils and furniture that they contained and even the traditional food recipes of their inhabitants. Including texts by Loukopoulos and illustrations by Pikionis [Fig. 10-11], the book was the culmination of a long series of interdisciplinary collaborations [27]. It represented an attempt at a modern, rational and holistic study of folk culture, from its immaterial to its material expressions.



10-11 | Pages from Dimitrios Loukopoulos’ *Aetolian Houses, Utensils, Foods* (1925), with illustrations by Pikionis.

A last and more ambitious attempt to conciliate the architectural and the philological branches of Greek folklorism occurred only a few years later, again through the writings of Fotos Politis. In 1929, a newspaper article announced that an old stone-bridge in Arta (Epirus, northern mainland

Greece) was to be demolished because it was deemed no longer suitable to the modern standards of transport (*Το Γιοφύρι της Αρτας*, “Πρωϊά”, October 3, 1929). The bridge was famous because of its association with a folk song called “The Bridge of Arta”, which told the tragic story of its master-builder who had to sacrifice his own wife in order to finish the ambitious construction [28]. The song had attracted the attention of early Greek folklorists, already from the mid-Nineteenth Century (Zambelios 1852, 757), but its fame was apparently not enough to save the actual bridge from demolition.

Responding to the news of the bridge’s imminent demolition in 1929, Fotos Politis wrote an article (F. Politis 1929) which solidified further the bond between folk songs and vernacular architecture. He opposed the demolition by claiming that since the bridge was so intrinsically tied to Greek lyrical tradition, its architecture was also part of a national heritage. Touching upon issues of preservation, he argued that this bridge, built by anonymous craftsmen in a provincial area and then turned into a song, deserved equal treatment as the highly esteemed classical temples and archaeological sites. Expressing his frustration Politis drew another literary parallel and wrote: “It is [...] ridiculous to claim that we understand Homer, when we are not moved by a folk song, which came from within us and refers to a monument which we can still see” [29] (Politis 1929). Politis was referring to the diachronic problem of the imbalance of value ascribed to the country’s ancient heritage and its folk tradition. Through the long line of cross-disciplinary exchanges and advances within the folkloric discourse, this imbalance was gradually being rectified. So, by the end of the 1920s, Fotos Politis was able to use the rather immaterial evidence of a folk song as the argument for the preservation of a material artifact of vernacular architecture.

Epilogue: Dimitris Pikionis – an idiosyncratic individual or a symptom of his time?

The Moraitis house, which marked the start of Dimitris Pikionis’ long career, did not occur out of an epistemological and ideological vacuum. It was the result of a long series of debates on the value of Greek folk culture and of trans-disciplinary dialogues which formulated new objects and fields of study: Challenging the dominance of Classical archaeology and philology, folklorist Nikolaos Politis asserted the value of folk poetry

and lore. After developing a branch for the study of such immaterial cultural artifacts from a philological and ethnographic scope, he proposed an extension of this imperative to the material aspects of folk culture. Architects and artists like Aristotelis Zachos and Angeliki Hadlimichali responded to this call and initiated the collection, documentation and promulgation of folk art and vernacular architecture. Following the example of literary Demoticists (i.e. colloquialists) they used these artifacts to develop a new style of architectural and artistic Demoticism which challenged the previous dominance of classicism and historicism and prepared the ground for the arrival of modernism.

The arrival of Pikionis on the scene at the culmination of these ideological, epistemological and stylistic advances can be understood now, in retrospect, as a remarkable historical event. But his recognition as a radical newcomer was not (only) the result of a self-evident originality of the Moraitis house. It was due to a myth that was constructed through the praises of other influential authors of his time: Already before his return from his studies abroad, Pericles Yannopoulos was prophesizing his triumphant future to the Athenian artistic circles. And already before the Moraitis house was even completed, Fotos Politis was informing broader audiences about its value. Pikionis was thus portrayed as the worthy heir to a long lineage of authors and artists; the person that would finally vindicate the epistemological convergence of philologists and artists towards the vernacular. It is difficult to know if Pikionis himself thought of his own first project as such a success. As said previously, he wrote very little about it and entrusted its evaluation to the praiseful comments of Fotos Politis. In other words, although he was laconic about the Moraitis house, Pikionis appears to have been quite content with the myth generated around this timid first attempt.

Later historiography has framed Pikionis as an idiosyncratic figure of the Twentieth Century; a skepticist in the era of modernism from the inter-war to the post-war years. In this respect, Pikionis stance as an architect, a theorist and an educator is perceived as a noticeable and therefore influential exception. If, conversely, we try to understand Pikionis as the outcome of the immediately previous period, the late nineteenth and early Twentieth Century, the situation changes: Pikionis was not a peculiar exception, but the result of the cultural debates of his time. But this is not

to normalize the architect completely, or to say that he was a mere symptom of his time. Quite the contrary, Pikionis was an exceptionally active agent within an interdisciplinary exchange of objects, ideas and methodologies. Although he worked mainly as an architect, his broad kinship to other fields of art and cultural theory made him capable of crossing disciplinary boundaries and merging their interests. Pikionis emerged out of the transitory period of the turn of the Twentieth Century and, through his long career, became the symbol of a new cultural paradigm of modern vernacularism, within and beyond architecture.

His later, mature projects (like the Filopappou hill; Centanni 2017) have granted him the characterization of a cultural eclecticist; an artist who could successfully blend elements from different geographical contexts and historical instances within a consistent whole. If compared to the richness of his later oeuvre (Ferlenga 1999; Pikioni, Rokou-Pikioni 2010), the Moraitis House perhaps does not allow for such a characterization. Examined only from a purely architectural aspect, perhaps it could even be dismissed as a boring one-liner. Coming mainly from a literary and philological background, Fotos Politis was able to point out that the importance of Pikionis' Moraitis house does not lay primarily on its architectural features. Conversely, it lays in the agency of the project (and its maker) as a bridge between literature and architecture. By pointing to an affinity of these different epistemes and their goals, the Moraitis house became the symbol of a broader shift from vernacular language to vernacular architecture; a shift that defined not only the future career of its own maker, but also the future course of folklore studies and architectural design in Greece. By carrying the spirit of this paradigm shift from the turn of the Twentieth Century to the early post-war decades, Pikionis contributed to the establishment of vernacular architecture as a prominent object of study within architectural education and as the source of numerous different approaches to architectural design.

Footnotes

[1] Ibid. Original: “Κι αυτό το γιαπί, Κρυστάλλης είναι [...]. Το κτίζει ένας νέος αρχιτέκτων, ο κ. Δ. Πικιώνης. [...] Και ο ρυθμός του είναι εμπνευσμένος από την δημόδη αρχιτεκτονική, όπως οι σίχοι του Κρυστάλλη είναι εμπνευσμένοι από την δημόδη ποίηση”.

[2] Nikolaos Politis coined the term “Λαογραφία” (Laographia), derived from “λαός” (the people, the folk) and “γραφή” (writing, documentation), as a response to various international synonyms (Folklore/Folkloristics, Volkskunde, Ethnographie, etc) (Politis 1909, 3-6). To avoid confusing the reader with such a peculiar term (or with alternating between Greek and English terminology), for the rest of the article I will use the English term “Folklore studies” (and “Folklorist” for the scholar of this field), in order to associate this discussion with similar, predominantly national-romantic, Nineteenth Century European discourses.

[3] For a thorough historical account of this architectural movement, see: Philippidis 1984, 105-180, Fessa-Emanouil 1987, 18-22.

[4] Nikolaos Politis was a prolific writer of folklore studies, mostly on a philological basis. His oeuvre consisted of numerous publications and analyses of folk songs, poems, sayings, fairy-tales, and other oral traditions, published from the 1870s until the 1910s.

[5] Original: “Αι κατὰ παράδοσιν πράξεις ἢ ἐνέργειαι”.

[6] Original: “Ο οἶκος. Μέρη τοῦ οἴκου, δίαίτια ἐν αὐτῷ, σκευὴ καὶ ἐπίπλα. Ἰδιόρρυθμοὶ οἰκήσεις (ποιμενικαὶ καλύβαι, πατραῖαι, λιμναῖαι οἰκήσεις)”.

[7] Original: “Καλλιτεχνία. Γλυπτικὴ (ξοανογλυφία), γραφικὴ. Ποικιλικὴ (ἡ ποικιλικὴ ἰδία τῶν ἐνδυμάτων, γλυπτὰ ἢ γραπτὰ κοσμήματα ἐπίπλων, ὀργάνων οἰκοδομῶν). Αἰσθητικὴ τῶν χρωμάτων καὶ τῶν σχημάτων”-

[8] Despite Nikolaos Politis’ call, no articles particularly focused on folk art and architecture appeared in the pages of his journal (“Λαογραφία”) in the years following his manifesto text.

[9] Original: “τὰ ἀναμφισβήτητα πορίσματα τῆς νεωτέρας ἐπιστήμης ἐπὶ τοῦ χαρακτῆρος τῶν φυλῶν [...] ἐπὶ τῶν ἠθῶν καὶ τῶν ἐθίμων, ἐπὶ τῶν παραδόσεων”.

[10] Original: “ἀπειρίαν μικρῶν οἰκίσκων ἀπλουστᾶτων καὶ καλλιτεχνικωτάτων, ἀληθῶν κομποτεχνημάτων ἐκ τῶν ὁποίων καταφαίνεται ἀρίστα ποῖα εἶνε ἡ τάσις καὶ ἡ θέλησις καὶ ἡ αἰσθητικὴ τοῦ λαοῦ”.

[11] The second text on the topic would appear only a year after: Kriezis 1912.

[12] This is a reference to the “Ἱστορικὴ καὶ Ἐθνολογικὴ Εταιρεία τῆς Ἑλλάδος” (Historical and Ethnological Society of Greece), founded in 1882 by Nikolaos Politis and a group of historians and philologists. This later gave its place to the epistemologically broader “Ἑλληνικὴ Λαογραφικὴ Εταιρεία” (Greek Folkloristic Society, founded in 1909). Politis’ aforementioned manifesto-text was published in the first issue of this society’s journal.

[13] Original: “Μουσεῖον Ἑλληνικῶν Χειροτεχνημάτων”. The museum changed several names and in 1931 it was eventually called “Museum of Greek Folk Art” (Μουσεῖον Ἑλληνικῆς Λαϊκῆς Τέχνης) and is still functioning today.

[14] Dragoumis 1913, 106-107. Dragoumis does not mention Zachos by name, but it is rather clear that he is referring to him: Fessa-Emmanouil 2013, 49.

[15] A notable exception is the Loverdos house in Varibopi in the outskirts of Athens (1928-30), designed by Zachos in a style that alluded to the simpler forms of the Aegean islands vernacular.

[16] In 1881 the region of Thessaly was annexed to Greece. After the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, the areas of Epirus and Macedonia also became part of Greece.

[17] At the end of the Greko-Turkish War (1919-1922), the Treaty of Lausanne (1923) forced Greece to make peace with the Ottoman Empire and to abandon its previous ambitions for further territorial expansion.

[18] This is where Dimitris Pikionis also discovered and studied the seminal vernacular house of the villager Alexandros Rodakis (1854-191X). For more on this, see: Kaimi, Vrieslander 1997.

[19] Original: "Ο λαός που παραδίνει τις λέξεις στο συγγραφέα, μας παραδίνει και τούτα τα σχήματα ως άλλες λέξεις της πλαστικής μας γλώσσας".

[20] The English term "tradition" (from Old French *tradicion*, or from Latin *traditio*), in the sense of transmission, or handing over, can also be seen as pertinent to such associations.

[21] The same applies Pikionis' second built project, two years later: The Karamanos house in Athens (1925) was, to a great extent, a re-construction of an ancient house from Priene in Asia Minor (which Pikionis had seen in archaeological drawings).

[22] Original: "ένας απλοϊκός" and "η αλήθεια, η ανεπιτήδευτη αλήθεια, η χαρισμένη στον απλό".

[23] The two were born only three years apart and followed similar trajectories, both studying in Germany and returning to Greece in the 1910s. Through the voice of his narrator-figure (Politis 1923a) Politis mentions that he had met Pikionis and that the latter explained to him what the logic of his design for the Moraitis House. However, not much else is known about the relation of the two men.

[24] Pikioni and Rokou-Pikioni 2010: 33. Pikionis mentions that Politis' article had four parts. I was only able to locate three.

[25] This is perhaps a reference to the negative example of poet Achilleas Paraschos, mentioned in the first part of his article.

[26] Original: "ο ποιητής εκείνος ο οποίος θα εκάλει [...] αρχαϊκά τέρατα". "ο λαογράφος, ο οποίος θα επεζήτηει να μας θορυβήση με Βρυκόλακες και με Νεράιδες [...]".

[27] Loukopoulos 1925: γ-ζ. The prologue of the book (written by the Director of the Archive of the Folkloristic Society, Stilpon Kyriakidis) underpins this interdisciplinary collaboration between architects and folklorists and makes explicit references to Aristotelis Zachos and Dimitris Pikionis.

[28] Variations of the story are met in different traditions all over the Balkan peninsula and beyond.

[29] Original: "είναι [...] κωμικό να υποστηρίζουμε πως καταλαβαίνουμε τυχόν τον Όμηρο, όταν δε μας συγκινή ένα δημοτικό τραγούδι, που ανέβρυσε από μας και αναφέρεται σε μνημείο που το βλέπουμε ακόμα".

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English abstract

Partly overlooked by historians, and much less sophisticated than his later works, Dimitris Pikionis' first built project, the Moraitis House (1921-23), is maybe not impressive at first inspection. However, while it was still under construction, this architectural project inspired cultural critic Fotos Politis to write a text called "Parascheia" (1923), which attempted a rather intriguing parallel between literature and architecture: Just like the stiff academic verses of the Nineteenth Century were being replaced by a modern, folklore-based poetry, architectural classicism was also about to be succeeded by a new vernacularist design current.

By looking into a series of precedents from the nineteenth and early-Twentieth Century, this text aims to re-contextualize the Moraitis House; to understand it not only as the beginning of Pikionis' career, but also as the conclusion of a much broader discussion on Folklore among Greek intellectuals of different fields: The discovery of folk tradition and the epistemological dialogues that led from the philological appreciation of folk songs to the architectural study of vernacular houses.



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Venezia • novembre 2019

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la rivista di **engramma**
ottobre **2018**
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