




RESEARCH ARTICLE

Carnival and urban space in Athens, 1834–1940

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Abstract

This article explores the spatial dimensions of Athens' carnival and their change in the course of a century. It is based on two polarities: first, that of the old city and the new city, which was related to the contrast between traditional and modern culture in the celebration of carnival. Both the old city and traditional culture were increasingly undervalued and denounced until the inter-war years, when nostalgia for old places and practices developed. The second major contrast is that between the centre of Athens and its periphery. There was a strong tendency towards the concentration of carnival events and crowds in the centre of Athens until the 1900s. This development is correlated with the reinforcement of the middle class and its cultural hegemony. A new autonomy of the neighbourhoods of the popular classes in the inter-war period did not result in the revival of popular carnival culture.

Carnival festivities have often been studied as a part of city life: cities constitute a clearly defined context, and have always hosted spectacles and large-scale celebrations. Specific festivities may form an integral part of a city's identity and thus help to create its specific profile, and brand and market the city as a differentiated tourist destination.¹ Festivals boost social life, promote civic pride and solidarity, foster community integration and contribute to the cohesion and unification of urban societies.² At the same time, however, they form a field of contest, both as regards the meanings and symbolic value attributed to places and the appropriation of urban space. F. Ferreira has placed particular emphasis on the power struggle that took place in the carnival of Rio de Janeiro over festive space; that is where the difference lies between festival and spectacle. The festive space may form a

¹U. Merkel, 'Making sense of identity discourses in international events, festivals and spectacles', in *idem* (ed.), *Identity Discourses and Communities in International Events, Festivals and Spectacles* (Houndmills, 2015), 3–33; D. Stevenson, *Cities of Culture: A Global Perspective* (London and New York, 2014); G. Richards and R. Palmer, *Eventful Cities: Cultural Management and Urban Revitalization* (Oxford and Burlington, 2010).

²G. Bertrand, *Histoire du carnaval de Venise, XIe–XXIe siècle* (Paris, 2013); P. Whalen, "'The return of crazy mother': the cultural politics of carnival in 1930s Dijon", *Social Identities*, 16 (2010), 471–96. The same is true for the neighbourhoods and suburbs of western metropolises: D. Georgiou, "'Only a local affair"? Imagining and enacting locality through London's Boer War carnivals', *Urban History*, 45 (2018), 99–127.

space of conflict and contest in many ways: the elites struggle to impose their hegemony on, and lower classes develop their resistance to, the establishment of a desirable scale of festive activities, or the manipulation of the transmission of memories that are related to particular places and determine the continuities and ruptures in the festivals.³

This article explores the struggle that developed in the last decades of the nineteenth century over the control of the centre of Athens; a struggle directly related to the deepening of the bourgeois hegemony and the resistance to it. But the focus of the article is on urban structures, the extent to which carnival festivities may bring them to the surface and converge or diverge with them as they both change. The social history of carnival may contribute to the history of a city, by shedding light on its structures and their development.

The aspect of urban structures that has attracted most interest in carnival studies is that of public and private space. Scholars studying carnival have noted the importance of the contrast between internal and external spaces to the unfolding of the celebration of carnival and its differentiation according to class and gender. The elite organized private balls in their spacious houses and in theatres, partially leaving the revelry in the streets and squares to the lower classes. This contrast, of course, was never absolute, and changed over time (for example, balls were held in public entertainment venues), and was altered by the existence of the lower middle classes who stood between upper-middle-class earners and the working class.⁴ As for the gendered experience of carnival, this was largely structured around taboos and prohibitions regarding the terms on which women could appear in the public space – prohibitions which in Athens were steadily relaxed from the Greek Revolution of 1821 onwards.⁵

This article will focus on two other polarities that defined the spatial dimensions of carnival in Athens from the time when it became the capital of the modern Greek state to World War II. The first is that of the old and new city, which corresponds to some degree to spaces of traditional and modern culture respectively. The contrast of modernity with tradition is itself a product of modernity, of the modern experience of time and change, among other things. During a time of rapid social change, the ‘traditional’ is often mistakenly conceived as compact and uniform,

³F. Ferreira, *L' invention du carnaval au XIXe siècle: Paris, Nice, Rio de Janeiro* (Paris, 2014), 214–18 (while on p. 229 the author notes that carnival involves a process of both conflict and exchange between opposing groups). However, I would not subscribe to his definition of carnival as a power struggle over the ownership of festive space: for a critique, see the review of the book by A. Godet, *Journal of Festive Studies*, 2 (2020), 337–40.

⁴E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Le carnaval de Romans* (Paris, 1979), 358–9 (inter-war); P. Filippucci, ‘Tradition in action: the Carnevale of Bassano 1824–1989’, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, 2 (1992), 55–68; R. Mitchell, *All on a Mardi Gras Day. Episodes in the History of the New Orleans Carnival* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 1995), 95ff; B. Brereton, ‘The Trinidad carnival in the late nineteenth century’, in M. Cozart Riggio (ed.), *Carnival: Culture in Action: The Trinidad Experience* (New York, 2004), 53–63; Bertrand, *Histoire du carnaval de Venise*, 273. See also P. Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (London, 1978), 270–81. Ferreira, *L' invention du carnaval au XIXe siècle*, 33–4 and 49, points out that there were less sophisticated bals masqués in Paris and associates them with the lower and middle classes.

⁵N. Potamianos, *Της αναίδειας θεάματ. Κοινωνική ιστορία της αποκρίας στην Αθήνα 1800–1940* (Heraklion, 2020), 217–39.

immovable, age-old and part of an uninterrupted chain of cultural continuity. Traditions supposed to be ancient, in reality may have been recently invented; what is codified and valorized as ‘tradition’ by intellectuals and state mechanisms is the result of processes of selection and objectification; customs in pre-modern societies are constantly undergoing change. And yet, the opposition of modern and traditional culture remains valid, when referring to the age in which modernity emerged outside western Europe, and as long as one is careful to avoid idealization, codification or identification of the traditional with lack of innovation. The traditional cultural forms and practices of carnival are indigenous, local, older (as they are identified with the practices of a previous generation) and usually form part of a folklore culture in which rituals, customary practices and magical thinking abound.⁶

The second contrast on which this analysis will be based is that between centre and periphery: this polarity is associated with the power of the bourgeoisie and the depth of its cultural hegemony. Theoreticians of space, such as Henri Lefebvre, define centrality as a basic constituent of urban life,⁷ which in contemporary multi-centric mega-cities is threatened and variable.⁸ M. Castells discussed the multiple levels of centrality (economic, politico-institutional, ideological/symbolic, the centre as ‘milieu of action and interaction’) and the way in which these may coincide or be separate in space.⁹ The manner and intensity with which activities are concentrated in areas of the city, the range of activities and the place of concentration are obviously subject to change. As the centre is a spatial expression of social relations, its characteristics cannot be considered immutable; as Lefebvre put it, each era and mode of production produced its own centrality. The character of the relationship between centre and periphery is also connected with concentration; it is a relationship of subsumption and control, which is constantly subject to question: the state mechanisms and the upper classes are based in the centre, while the periphery of the city, even when it is not inhabited by ‘dangerous classes’, is a space in which power exercises a weaker form of control.¹⁰

These contrasts in the space of Athens will also be examined from a broader perspective, beyond the way in which they are expressed during carnival and affect its celebration. First, however, it is important to consider the sources used, the position of Athens in the period under consideration and the history of its carnival in the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries.

Newspapers and magazines were the primary sources consulted, together with memoirs and diaries, literature, the writings of European travellers, police orders and the archive of the Municipality of Athens. The press in Athens flourished at

⁶C. Isnart and A. Testa (eds.), ‘Ethnology’s hot notion? A discussion forum on how to return to “tradition” today’, *Ethnologia Europaea*, 50 (2020), 89–108; C. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World 1780–1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford, 2004). The terms ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ are seldom used in Athenian newspapers before the 1910s.

⁷H. Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville: espace et politique* (Paris, 1974).

⁸S. Bass Warner and A. Whittemore, *American Urban Form* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2012), 118ff; M. Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society*, 2nd edn (Chichester, 2010).

⁹M. Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach* (London, 1979), 221–9, at 228.

¹⁰J. Merriman, *Aux marges de la ville: faubourgs et banlieues en France, 1815–1870* (Paris, 1994), 14–15, 29–31, 35–8.

the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries: most newspapers were printed daily; their circulation rose substantially (in Athens as well as in the rest of the country); they introduced reportage and new forms such as vignettes; they continued to play an important political role, and at the same time they developed a stable financial base.¹¹

Extensive reportage and comments on carnival in the newspapers constitute a valuable, but biased, source. The descriptions published in the press generally follow social conventions and codes about representing everyday life, for instance as regards recording disreputable female behaviour. Sometimes, bias was the result of the political position of a newspaper and the fact that many articles acted as weapons in political strife, both directly in party politics and in broader class conflict (for example by attacking popular culture with the aim of reforming the public celebration of carnival). Other forms of bias were related to the commercial character of the newspapers, which sensationalized their material in order to sell more copies. Finally, newspapers tended to promote the public celebration of carnival at the expense of the private or the communal occasion. Public celebrations represented the relationships and values characterizing the society of anonymous 'distant strangers' (as opposed to those in face-to-face society),¹² and played a formative role in the transformation of neighbourhood carnival pageants into urban spectacles. Nevertheless, if we are able to define and detect bias, we may assess their influence, which varied with each newspaper. Moreover, the barriers created by rhetorical and social conventions in journalistic descriptions were not always closed to transgressive social practices.

The city of Athens and its carnival

Athens, a medium-sized city in the Ottoman Empire numbering around 10,000 inhabitants at the beginning of the nineteenth century, became the capital of the new Kingdom of Greece in 1834. Athens was rebuilt after the destruction wrought by the Revolution of 1821, and gradually a new city, following a modern urban plan, arose alongside the old.

The new city immediately became a magnet for families of provincial notables, prosperous farmers and petty bourgeois traders coming to open shops or workshops in the capital with their savings, as well as farmers and workers in search of a better life. In addition, refugees from the Cretan uprisings against the Ottoman Empire during the nineteenth century and internal migrants from areas in decline flocked to the city, as did civil servants, self-employed professionals and university students coming to work and study. The population of Athens grew steadily, rising to 50,000 in 1870, 115,000 in 1890 and 315,000 in 1920, before doubling in the following decade as a result of the large number of refugees arriving from Asia Minor after Greece's defeat in the last Greco-Turkish War in 1922. The city expanded correspondingly, spreading out from the foot of the Acropolis across

¹¹K. Mayer, *Ιστορία του ελληνικού τύπου*, 3 vols. (Athens, 1957–59); L. Droulia and Y. Koutsopanaganou (eds.), *Εγκυκλοπαίδεια του ελληνικού τύπου 1784–1974*, 4 vols. (Athens, 2008); N. Bakounakis, *Δημοσιογράφος ή ρεπόρτερ. Η αφήγηση στις ελληνικές εφημερίδες, 19ος–20ός αιώνας* (Athens, 2014).

¹²J. Vernon, *Distant Strangers. How Britain Became Modern* (Berkeley, 2014).

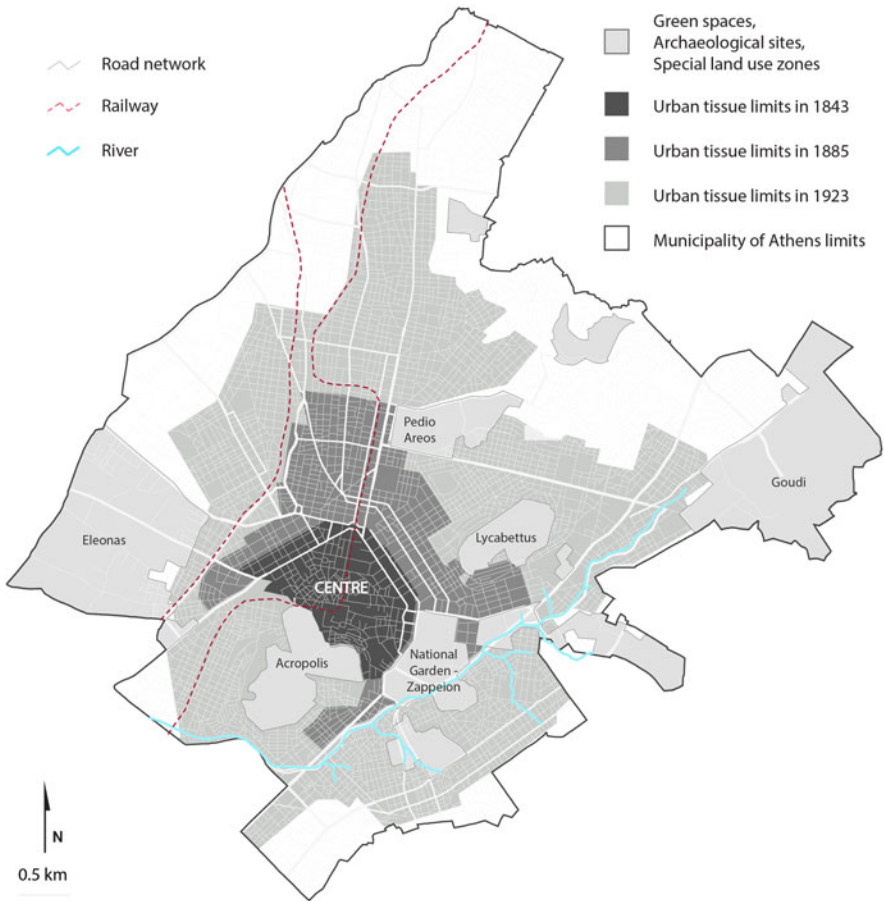


Figure 1. Growth of Athens, 1843–1923. Source: K. Biris, *Ai Athinai apo tou 19ou eis ton 20on aiona* (Athens, 1966), 86, 201 and 288. Created by Stavros-Nikiforos Spyrellis.

a wide area, and joining up with Piraeus at the end of the period examined here (see Figure 1).¹³

Athens functioned successfully as a melting pot for populations with different ethnic and local cultural traditions. The merging processes included the development of common cultural references, achieved in many cases by the adoption of innovations and the evolution of new practices, which is largely what happened with carnival culture.

¹³K. Biris, *Ai Athinai apo tou 19ou eis ton 20on aiona*, 4th edn (Athens, 1999), remains fundamental for the history of Athens. Other important studies include L. Leontidou, *Πόλεις της σιωπής. Εργατικός εποικισμός της Αθήνας και του Πειραιά 1909–1940* (Athens, 1989); E. Bastea, *The Creation of Modern Athens: Planning the Myth* (Cambridge, 2000); M. Dimitropoulou, ‘Athènes au XIXe siècle: de la bourgade à la capitale’, Université Lumière Lyon 2 Ph.D. thesis, 2008; N. Potamianos, ‘Η παραδοσιακή μικροαστική τάξη της Αθήνας. Μαγαζάτορες και βιοτέχνες 1880–1925’, University of Crete Ph.D. thesis, 2011, 45–120; E. Bournova, *Οι κάτοικοι των Αθηνών 1900–1960* (Athens, 2016).

Moreover, a more complex society was created in Athens after 1834 as new economic activities altered the social stratification of the city. Athens immediately became the administrative centre of the new state, and eventually the centre of Greece's import trade, the financial sector, health and education services and scientific professions, while it also developed a flourishing small craft industry and subsequently some factory industries.¹⁴

The construction of a more complex social pyramid and the intensity of social differentiation created the terms for a stronger cultural differentiation along class lines. This took the form of the development of a new bourgeois culture, whose distance from popular culture increased significantly. It should be noted, however, that the Athenian bourgeoisie was characterized throughout the nineteenth century by a cleavage between two groups: notable families with a local economic base and a more conservative culture, and an upper bourgeoisie that had come from Europe or the large cities of the East Mediterranean, engaged in commercial and financial activities, and identified with a Europeanized, cosmopolitan culture and modernizing tendencies.¹⁵

In the field of carnival culture, specifically, a striking contrast arose between bourgeois and popular culture, which was noted by various observers. A journalist commented in 1905 that 'at no other time does the chasm between the cultivated and the common people seem so great as during a festival' like the carnival revelries.¹⁶

In Ottoman Athens, however, there was probably no significant differentiation of carnival practices according to class.¹⁷ Elements of a rural form of carnival predominated, such as animal disguises and magical thinking, while aspects of festival such as noise and nocturnal bonfires or fertility rituals retained significant symbolic status. The festivities culminated on the first day of Lent, known as 'Clean Monday', with an all-day open-air fair in which the whole city participated.

A new carnival culture developed as soon as Athens became the capital of the new state. Athens, now the seat of the Palace, the embassies and bourgeois families of varying origins, became the centre of a 'high society' that turned its gaze towards European culture and introduced basic forms of that culture to the celebration of carnival: masquerade balls, elegant, elaborate costumes, European music and dances, a new form of socializing with large-scale or medium-sized gatherings with no segregation of the sexes, as well as theatrical performances held in theatres or salons.

Meanwhile, a new popular culture arose, in an environment featuring significant elements of modernity, close contact with the rest of the world and the forceful

¹⁴N. Potamianos, *Οι Νοικοκυραίοι. Μαγαζάτορες και βιοτέχνες στην Αθήνα 1880–1925* (Heraklion, 2015); C. Loukos, 'Η ελληνική πρωτεύουσα, 1890–1912', in C. Koulouγri (ed.), *Αθήνα, πόλη των Ολυμπιακών Αγώνων 1896–1906* (Athens, 2004), 55–98; C. Agriantoni, 'Η Αθήνα στο τέλος του 19ου αιώνα. Η γέννηση της μεγαλούπολης', in A. Solomou-Prokopiou and I. Vogiatzi (eds.), *Η Αθήνα στα τέλη του 19ου αιώνα. Οι πρώτοι διεθνείς ολυμπιακοί αγώνες* (Athens, 2004), 107–29; I. Chadjimichael, "'Συμβαλλόμενοι εν Αθήναις". Οικονομικές και κοινωνικές όψεις της Αθήνας στο πρώιμο ελληνικό κράτος (1833–1843)', University of Crete Ph.D. thesis, 2011, 116–211.

¹⁵Potamianos, *Της αναίδειας θεάματα*, 112–13; H. Belle, *Trois années en Grèce* (Paris, 1881), 35–8; A. Syggros, *Απομνημονεύματα* (Athens, 1908), vol. II, 128–33.

¹⁶*Skrip*, 27 Feb. 1905.

¹⁷The presentation of carnival and the development of its celebration is based on Potamianos, *Της αναίδειας θεάματα*.

presence of newcomers from places with different cultural traditions. Popular carnival culture, assimilating the influences it received from bourgeois culture or other Mediterranean carnivals, developed original forms and demonstrated a significant dynamic. Masquerade costumes were various and widespread, and were worn by women from the late nineteenth century. A rich social life developed around carnival entertainments, both at home and at public entertainment venues, and, of course, out in the streets. New forms of satire arose, their repertoire adapted to the circumstances of the new public sphere, and were often performed in masquerades: groups were carried through the town on carts, sometimes reciting texts or even performing entire sketches. The theatricality of street carnival was also expressed through the Fasoulis satirical puppet theatre. It was accompanied by a series of other urban spectacles (acrobatics, shows of strength, performing animals, amongst others), maypole dancing and some events with a more standardized structure, such as the 'camel', which was made in each neighbourhood and combined with noise, pranks or even petty theft.

The 1880s were an important turning point for the Athens carnival. The gradual demographic, economic and political reinforcement of the middle class, particularly that section of it aligned with the most modern cultural interests, now led to an aggressive attempt to expand and deepen its cultural hegemony. This began with a strident condemnation of popular carnival practices as vulgar, dirty and repulsive, and in 1887 there was a movement to reform public carnival by organizing parades down the main boulevards of Athens. The parades propagandized basic principles of bourgeois carnival culture with which all social strata could comply. The object was the 'gentrification' and 'civilizing' of carnival, within a plan of modernization and 'Europeanization' of the Greeks and their culture. The parades and masquerades had to be elegant, decorous, tasteful, luxurious and refined, as opposed to vehicles for crude jokes or trenchant political satire. The gentrification of the masquerades, however, appears to have led to their decline, both in the parades and more generally.¹⁸

Other aspects of popular carnival also retreated or even disappeared completely, as a result both of direct top-down regulatory intervention and of certain more impersonal processes connected to the advance of modernity. The 'civilizing process' moved forward both in the domain of control over sexuality and restrictions of aggressive behaviour.¹⁹ The 'magical thinking' and symbolic meanings lying behind carnival were downplayed. As Athens grew and became less of a face-to-face society, there was an increased tendency to disconnect carnival festivities from the community and transform them into more impersonal urban spectacles. Liberalization and democratization reduced the significance of carnival satire. Finally, the development of the capitalist economy entailed the increasing commercialization of entertainments and their disconnection from older communal

¹⁸A celebration that becomes less vivid is a common theme in the literature and is usually associated with interventions of the state and upper classes in the street carnival: see for instance Ferreira, *L' invention du carnaval au XIXe siècle*, 48–9; J. Brophy, *Popular Culture and the Public Sphere in the Rhineland, 1800–1850* (Cambridge, 2007), 176–8, for the carnivals of Paris and Cologne in the first half of the nineteenth century. This development in Venice has been recorded earlier: Bertrand, *Histoire du carnaval de Venise*, 95–6, 117–18 and 290.

¹⁹N. Elias, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Oxford, 2000).

practices, such as the celebration of Clean Monday at the Columns of the Olympian Zeus.

It was this last commercializing tendency, in the form of the considerable increase in public entertainment venues and ‘public carnival balls’, which sealed the decline of street carnival, and led to the ‘dance mania’ of the 1920s and the turn towards indoor spaces. Efforts in the 1930s to organize parades once more, now with other characteristics and motives, lacked the vitality of the earlier effort and failed to achieve the same success.

Old and new city, old and new culture

The basic contrast in the social structure of Athens up to 1870 was that between the old city and the new. The neoclassical capital of the new state, the modern city with its urban planning, its wide avenues suitable for carriages and its large public and private buildings, had to expand outside the labyrinth of the old densely built-up Ottoman city with its winding narrow alleyways and dilapidated houses. As Athens grew, the importance of the old city was constantly reduced, and gradually the bourgeoisie abandoned it in order to build stately mansions: first in every part of the new city and then more concentratedly in neighbourhoods such as Kolonaki and the district of Patisision Street.²⁰ The turning point was the 1870s, since in 1855 a high percentage of notables (both old Athenians and recent arrivals) still lived on Adrianou Street and in the Plaka neighbourhood.²¹

The old city centre, including its market district, remained the focus of carnival in the 1850s.²² However, the centre of both the city and the carnival events was already shifting towards the spaces of the new city. The junction of Ermou and Aioulou Streets, wide new thoroughfares, became the point ‘to which everybody flocks, as if to a centre’, on the afternoon of the last Sunday of carnival (see Figure 2).²³ To the north, the direction in which the new city was expanding, there was a new attraction for the crowd that gathered on the last Sunday of carnival. On Sundays in Kotzia Square in 1838, and on Patisision Street just outside the city in 1849, the army band played European music, bringing together Athenians out for a stroll. Crowds flocked there in the early afternoon, together with the royal family, on Cheesefare Sunday, the last day before Lent: the masqueraders performed their acts, as jesters and dancers simultaneously, in front of what were described as ‘countless spectators’.²⁴ The modernity of the music and dancing was combined with the modernity of the space: in 1836–38, Kotzia Square was described as a large public space in a newly built district, containing the first theatre

²⁰C. Agriantoni, ‘Συμβολή στην ιστορία της Αθήνας’, in the conference proceedings *Η πόλη στους νεότερους χρόνους. Μεσογειακές και βαλκανικές όψεις (19ος–20ός αι.)* (Athens, 2000), 183–91.

²¹N. Levidis, ‘Αι Αθήναι προ 70 ετών’, *Kathimerini*, 17–19 Mar. 1927. See also Chadjimichael, “Συμβαλλόμενοι εν Αθήναις”, 70.

²²L. Micheli, *Μοναστηράκι. Από το σταροπάζαρο στο Γιουσουρούμι* (Athens, 1984), 163.

²³D.K.S., ‘Πουκίλα’, *Efterpi*, vol. 2, 1 Mar. 1849, 310–11. See also Gorgias, “Έργα και Ημέρατα”, *Efterpi*, vol. 5, 1 Mar. 1852, 309–12.

²⁴C. Aggelomatis, *Η απελευθέρωση των Αθηνών* (Athens, 2007), 170 and 174. D.D.S., ‘Πουκίλα’, *Efterpi*, vol. 2, 1 Mar. 1849, 310–11; see also Wilhelmine von Plüskow, *Ημερολόγιο* [1846–54], 5 Mar. 1848 (https://busedocu.gr/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/diary_pluskow.pdf, accessed 13 Jul. 2021).



Figure 2. The carnival in Athens, 1834–1940. Created by Stavros-Nikiforos Spyrellis.

established in the city and numerous coffee shops, a place where thousands of people came for their Sunday promenade.²⁵

In contradistinction to developments in the new city, Clean Monday, the carnival feast which preserved more traditional elements of continuity with the Ottoman past, continued to be celebrated en masse at the Columns of the Olympian Zeus. The Pillars, as they were popularly known, remained outside the city, in an area where there was no expansion before the end of the nineteenth century.²⁶ It was a space for tradition, forming part of the neighbouring old city, which preserved some elements of the sanctity with which it was regarded by the Turkish inhabitants of Ottoman Athens, who prayed, made supplications for rain and celebrated their religious festivals there.²⁷ The Columns of the Olympian Zeus remained a place where the traditional celebration of Clean Monday (with folk music and dance, and a modest picnic on the ground) was held. Both location and ritual gradually fell into desuetude, and by the end of the nineteenth century new destinations for excursions had emerged as Clean Monday locations, closer to the modern and

²⁵ Aggelomatis, *Η απελευθέρωση των Αθηνών*.

²⁶ Until 1858, one of the two threshing-floors of Athens lay in the area of the Columns of the Olympian Zeus: (Diefthisis tis dioikitikis astynomias Athinon kai Peiraios), *Αστυνομικά διατάξεις* (Athens, 1849–57), 16 Apr. 1858.

²⁷ K. Biris, *Τα Αττικά του Evlya Celebi* (Athens, 1959), 47.

middle-class patterns of civilized consumption in beer houses and restaurants.²⁸ A striking example is that of Faliro, the closest beach to Athens, which in the last quarter of the nineteenth century became a recreational and summer holiday resort, accessible by train and tram, where the middle and lower middle classes could go for an excursion on Clean Monday and eat sitting at the tables of the seaside restaurants rather than on the ground.²⁹

The identification of the old city with a more traditional culture became stronger as the nineteenth century wore on. The name Plaka was applied from the second half of the century to all the old neighbourhoods of the city (whereas during the Ottoman period it was only used for the eastern part of the old town). The local costumes of the native Athenians survived there for a long time, while, as Dimitrios Kambouroglou noted, from the 1860s onwards ‘the Plaka also expressed a certain localist symbolism’, in opposition to the lifestyle of the newcomers to the city.³⁰ He also explained how in 1872 stones were thrown at a house in the Plaka where a concert of European music was held, because there was a rumour that the organizers were Freemasons.³¹ Although European music and dance soon penetrated there, too, the Plaka retained the character of a conservative neighbourhood, more resistant to modern cultural practices: in 1911, for example, the first young man to appear in the neighbourhood in a Scout’s uniform was jeered.³²

The contrast between the new and old city came to the fore once again in connection with the celebration of carnival in the 1930s, when the ‘carnival of old Athens’ was organized in the Plaka by the municipality, the Tourism Organization and a residents’ committee.³³ Throughout the previous 50 years, the focus of the public celebration of carnival was the new city centre, with its boulevards along which parades processed and people promenaded. In the inter-war years, however, most of the public carnival events disappeared, following the increasing preference for public entertainment venues and indoor dancing. The revival that was attempted in the 1930s could only be limited, in comparison to the period of carnival’s heyday; moreover, it was characterized by the tendency towards idealization, selectivity and suppression typical of attempts to codify ‘traditional culture’.

The choice of the Plaka seems self-evident in the context of the nostalgic mood expressed by the organizers of the celebrations. There was now a new understanding of tradition and its space. Around 1900, when observers turned their attention to the old city neighbourhoods, they did not generally mention the charm of the ‘Oriental town’ (as the devoutly Orthodox and well-known anti-Western conservative

²⁸Cf. M. Fuhrmann, *Port Cities of Eastern Mediterranean: Urban Culture in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Cambridge, 2020).

²⁹Potamianos, *Της αναίδειας θεάματα*, 182–93; *Efimeris*, 7 Feb. 1877; *Akropolis*, 18 Feb. 1892; *Asty*, 1 Mar. 1894; *Embros*, 18 Feb. 1903.

³⁰D. Gr. Kambouroglou, *Αι παλαιαί Αθήναι* (Athens, 1922), 98.

³¹D. Kambouroglou, *Απομνημονεύματα μιας μακράς ζωής 1852–1932* (Athens, 1985), 332.

³²I.G. Isaias, ‘Ανομήσεις και εικόνες από την παλιά γραφική Αθήνα’, *Ta Athinaika*, 76 (1980), 1–14.

³³A. Vlachos, *Τουρισμός και δημόσιες πολιτικές στη σύγχρονη Ελλάδα 1914–1950* (Athens, 2016), 189; Historical Archives of Municipality of Athens, *Proceedings of the Meetings of the Municipal Council*, book 72, 1541, 2 Mar. 1932; *Eleftheron Vima*, 2 Mar. 1932; *Athinaika Nea*, 25 Jan. 1934. The old city was the focal point of the festivities during the revival of carnival traditions in Dijon in these years: Whalen, “The return of crazy mother”.

A. Papadiamantis did), but mainly saw ‘irregular streets and poorer homes’, and referred to the sufferings inflicted on the Athenians by the Turks up to 80 years previously.³⁴ In a city where ‘everything they built was European, nothing must be reminiscent of the East’,³⁵ the devaluation of the old city was based simultaneously on the increased presence of the popular classes and on a devotion to a national narrative of Europeanization and modernization which the old town found difficult to keep up with. Innovations in lighting, water supply and refuse collection, for example, were harder to implement in the old town.

The course that led to the revaluation of the old city, as the space of a tradition to which value was ascribed, had already begun at the end of the nineteenth century, when the communities of memory and collective identity that referred to old Athens acquired institutional status with the foundation of the Association of (native) Athenians in 1895.³⁶ During the same period, there existed a reading public that supported the historical and folklore studies of old Athens conducted by Kambouroglou and others.³⁷ The turning point, however, should be sought in the cataclysmic changes wrought by the 1910s (including wars, civil war, the rise of the labour movement and the transformation of the party system), and the accelerating growth of the population and the city. In the inter-war years, there was a strong consciousness of the break with the pre-war period, and widespread nostalgia for the Belle Époque, while to the factors favouring the attribution of aesthetic and ideological value to the old neighbourhoods was added the new reading of folk tradition by the modernists.³⁸

The aesthetic revaluation of the old city in certain circles, and the promotion of the Plaka in the 1930s as the space of old carnival celebrations that were worth preserving, led to the identification of the ‘space of the traditional city’ with a particular form of carnival entertainment. The more modern spaces were associated with the transformation of carnival into a period of entertainment with relatively few features distinguishing it from the rest of the year. It was on this basis that the Plaka became the focus of the Athens carnival in the following decades.³⁹

Centre and neighbourhoods of Athens

The second key spatial contrast is that between the centre and the periphery of the city. As we have seen, Athens changed radically in character and size over the

³⁴A. Papadiamantis, ‘Αι Αθήναι ως Ανατολική πόλις’, in *Η Ελλάς κατά τους Ολυμπιακούς Αγώνας* (Athens, 1896), 293–5; S. Paganelis, ‘Τουρκοκρατούμεναι Αθήναι’, in *idem*, *Αθηναϊκαί ημέραι* (Athens, 1907), 231–45. 20 years earlier, T. Vellianitis, ‘Κοινωνική κατάσταση της Ελλάδος 1862–1888’, in *Εικοσιπενταετηρίς 1863–1888* (Athens, 1888), 36–42, spoke disparagingly of the ‘Turkish village’ in the old city compared to the ‘Europeanism’ of the new.

³⁵B. Guttman, *Στην Ελλάδα του μεσοπολέμου* (Athens, 1997), 87 (*Tage in Hellas* (Frankfurt a. M. 1924)).

³⁶K. Dimitriadis, ‘Πώς ιδρύθηκε ο “σύλλογος των Αθηναίων”’, *Τα Αθηναϊκα*, 25 (1963), 10–12; M. Markogiannis, *Ματιές στην Αθήνα που έφυγε* (Athens, 1996), 80–5.

³⁷For the histories of medieval and early modern Athens produced at the end of the nineteenth century, see N. Yakovaki, ‘Μεσαιωνική και νεώτερη Αθήνα: μια νέα συνείδηση για την πόλη της Αθήνας στα τέλη του 19ου αιώνα’, in *Αρχαιολογία της πόλης των Αθηνών* (Athens, 1996), 211–26.

³⁸T. Kayalis, *Η επιθυμία για το μοντέρνο* (Athens, 2007).

³⁹K. Brousalis, ‘Σερπαντίνες και κομφετι’, in T. Psarakis (ed.), *Ανθολόγιο της Αθήνας* (Athens, 1990), vol. IV (1963), 21–4; *Vima*, 5 Feb. 1961.

period of a hundred years. The city expanded constantly in space, and its 'centre' also shifted. Here, I am not as interested in following its consecutive shifts, as in identifying the changes in the relationship between the centre and the periphery of the city. In the nineteenth century, the centre was reinforced, both generally and in connection with carnival specifically; during the inter-war period, however, the city neighbourhoods appear to acquire a new autonomy.

Until the beginning of the twentieth century, then, the city centre grew in significance. On the one hand, the need to unify and co-ordinate urban activities increased as the city grew larger; on the other, the reinforcement of the bourgeoisie and the state also increased the importance of the city centre from a political, administrative and symbolic point of view. The reinforcement of centralization in the city's structures took the form not of retaining all the pre-existing activities in the centre (commercial functions, for example, were largely dispersed into the neighbourhoods), but of assuming central control of the neighbourhood activities.

As Athens ceased to be a city that could be walked around with ease, public transport became denser: first the trams, and then the buses in the inter-war period, ran from the centre, radiating out towards the neighbourhoods.⁴⁰ Shops and craftsmen gradually moved out of the old bazaar and spread throughout the city. New specialized districts were created in the centre for shops that did not sell items for everyday use (and therefore needed a larger reservoir of customers than that available in the neighbourhoods), while new covered markets which also operated on a wholesale basis were constructed in the centre, including the Varvakeios meat market in 1886, and the Lachanagora fruit and vegetable market in 1902.⁴¹

The new city centre was delimited by the large public buildings serving administrative purposes and/or of high symbolic significance (from the Palace and the ministries to the University and the Cathedral), by the squares and other public spaces, and also by new foci of supra-local entertainment like the theatres and later the cinemas. The centre of Athens was the area in which the first cracks were observed in the face-to-face society, while literature and the newspapers reflected its existence as a public space, light, noisy, crowded and mainly used by men.⁴² At the same time, it continued to be a residential area, albeit less densely populated than the neighbourhoods. And although both workers and members of the lower middle class lived in the centre of Athens, what gave it its particular character as a residential space was the fact that it was especially favoured by the upper middle class.⁴³ The model of the elite residing in the centre was thus

⁴⁰G. Sarigiannis, *Αθήνα 1830–2000. Εξέλιξη, πολεοδομία, μεταφορές* (Athens, 2000).

⁴¹Potamianos, *Οι Νοικοκυραίοι*, 55–62.

⁴²P. Apostolidis, 'Η οδός. Αθηναϊκή σελίς', *Poikili Stoa 1891*, 127–34; *Akropolis*, 12 Jun. 1910; P. Dimitrakopoulos, *Η χρυσομένη λάσπη* (Athens, 1925); G. Gotsi, *Η ζωή εν τη πρωτεύουσα. Θέματα αστικής πεζογραφίας από το τέλος του 19ου αιώνα* (Athens, 2004).

⁴³E. Bournova and M. Dimitropoulou, 'The capital's social and professional stratification 1860–1940', in *Athens Social Atlas* web project, 2015: www.athenssocialatlas.gr/en/article/social-stratification-1860-1940/, accessed 13 Jul. 2021. Even in 1944, G. Theotokas, *Τετράδια ημερολογίου (1939–1953)* (Athens, n.d.), 512, estimated that the makeup of the inhabitants of the centre of Athens was 'mainly middle class'.

reproduced: a model that originated with the pre-modern city and which in Athens, as in other cities, was slow to be replaced by the model of the middle-class suburb.⁴⁴

In contrast to all of the above, the neighbourhoods appeared as the places of residence of the popular classes in particular, penetrated by various networks of mutual assistance, in which face-to-face communities (neighbourhood and immigrant communities) survived; a place containing not only many food shops but also craft industries and other noisy and odorous workshops and factories; an area of inadequate urban infrastructure, low, cramped houses, with fewer public spaces and buildings.⁴⁵

Centre and neighbourhoods, therefore, differed from various points of view. What is more interesting than the differences are the relationships between them: these changed, with the reinforcement of the centre in the life of the city and the restriction of forms of direct communication between the neighbourhoods. The radial network of transport from the centre to the periphery resulted in an emerging separation of workplace from place of residence, and the increase of city routes in movement from the neighbourhood to the centre and vice versa.⁴⁶ The itinerant vendors who roamed the neighbourhoods selling produce from their gardens on the outskirts of Athens and the surrounding villages gradually gave way to neighbourhood greengrocers who bought their merchandise in the central fruit and vegetable market.⁴⁷ A third example has to do with the forms of political mobilization that arose: in the 1880s, demonstrations made their appearance in Athens. After a brief experimentation with routes through the neighbourhoods,⁴⁸ their route was established along the central avenues, which enabled people to coalesce from their neighbourhoods in greater number in order to protest, make demands or express their support of a candidate or a party. Here, too, then, a new radial relationship developed between the centre and the periphery of the city, as the neighbourhood was further subsumed into the centre.

In the mid-nineteenth century, public celebrations of carnival were reported to be concentrated at the junction of Ermou and Aiolou Streets on the afternoon of Cheesefare Sunday; however, the same descriptions gave the impression of an activity that was widely disseminated through the city.⁴⁹ The crowds increased along with the Athenian population, and in 1872, the police banned carriages and carts from Ermou and Aiolou on the last Sunday of carnival, in order to prevent accidents on the packed streets.⁵⁰ It is in those years, too, that we learn retrospectively of the flourishing of a carnival practice from its obituaries: the mass exchange

⁴⁴An important factor in the delay in the domination of this model in Athens was the construction of apartment buildings originally intended for middle-class wallets, set in central areas with high land prices: M. Marmaras, *Η αστική πολυκατοικία της μεσοπολεμικής Αθήνας* (Athens, 1991).

⁴⁵Potamianos, *Η παραδοσιακή μικροαστική τάξη*, 73–7 and 83–6.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, 87–92.

⁴⁷By 1907, we read that itinerant vegetable-sellers may survive, 'but he who plays a role in the neighbourhood is the neighbourhood greengrocer': *Akropolis*, 11 Dec. 1907.

⁴⁸*Mi Hanesai*, 1 and 2 Jul. 1883; *Akropolis*, 5 Jul. 1887.

⁴⁹For example D.K.S., 'Ποικίλα', *Efterpi*, vol. 2, 1 Mar. 1849, 310–11, refers vaguely to 'streets of Athens' which 'are full of merry-makers from morn to night'. See also *Tachypteros Fimi*, 10 and 15 Feb. 1851.

⁵⁰G.T. Bouklakos (ed.), *Συλλογή των Αστυνομικών νόμων, διαταγμάτων, διατάξεων και κανονισμών* (Athens, 1874), 341–2.

of masqueraders' visits from one neighbourhood to another. In 1891, in the criticism levelled by a newspaper with socialist sympathies at the direction taken by the carnival celebrations, the older popular and pure carnival celebrations that had disappeared included 'movements of whole families from neighbourhood to neighbourhood, disguised or otherwise'.⁵¹ Angelos Vlachos wrote in 1876 that 'the masqueraders of the lower classes cross the city until deep into the night, from Psyrri to the Plaka and from Neapoli to Agioi Apostoloi', while in 1928, Kostas Athanatos also mentioned the groups of masqueraders going from neighbourhood to neighbourhood in nineteenth-century Athens.⁵²

We do not necessarily have to accept that this direct relationship between neighbourhoods disappeared completely.⁵³ It was certainly restricted, and a decisive factor in this was the further reinforcement of the role of the city centre in the carnival celebrations, marked by the organization of parades from 1887 onwards. The intervention of the komitata, the committees that organized the parades, accelerated the changing of the map of the Athens carnival, shifting the focus of events further towards Stadiou and Panepistimiou Avenues, where the parade passed. The new focus of activity was combined with a higher concentration of events and people, at least according to the picture provided by our sources. In 1900–01, 'streams of people' are mentioned by newspapers as flowing from the neighbourhoods to Stadiou, with an increase in neighbourhood burglaries while the inhabitants were in the centre watching the parade.⁵⁴ In 1899, Papadiamantis set one of his Athenian tales in a neighbourhood during the carnival parade, the 'time of the great confluence towards the centres, the great emptiness in the outer districts'.⁵⁵ It is no coincidence that in Papadiamantis' story the group of people left behind in the neighbourhood consisted of women; however, the transformation of public carnival in the main streets brought about by the parades favoured the increased presence of women in the centre in the following years, and contributed to their achieving access to public space.

The increasing concentration of people at the carnival events is linked to the expansion of the city and the greater need for social and symbolic unification it entailed. It also matched another process – the disconnection of carnival from the community and its (gradual and incomplete) conversion to mere urban spectacle. The de-communitization of carnival was consistent with the increase of anonymity in the city, as opposed to face-to-face society,⁵⁶ and with the rise of a mass culture

⁵¹ *Efimeris ton syntechnon*, 3 Mar. 1891. The relationship between the flourishing of Montevideo carnival and the disparate nature of the celebrations is highlighted in K. McCleary, 'Ethnic identity and elite idyll: a comparison of carnival in Buenos Aires, Argentina and Montevideo, Uruguay, 1900–1920', *Social Identity*, 16 (2010), 497–517.

⁵² A. Vlachos, 'Απόκρεω και προσωπιδοφόροι', *Estia*, 1 (1876), 91–3; K. Athanatos, *Ταξείδι στην παλιά Αθήνα*, 2nd edn (Athens, 2001), 52.

⁵³ See for instance *Patris*, 30 Jun. 1916.

⁵⁴ *Skrip*, 7 Feb. 1901; *Esperini Akropolis*, 14 Feb. 1900; *Estia*, 17 Feb. 1914. Kosti's reminiscences refer to roughly the same years: 'as soon as the pre-Lenten carnival period began, masqueraders began to flock in from every part of the Capital': C.N. Kosti, *Αναμνήσεις εκ της αυλής Γεωργίου του Α΄* (Athens, 1948), 23. N. Gerakaris, *Σελίδες εκ της συγχρόνου ιστορίας* (Athens, 1936), 40, stresses the presence of 'guttersnipes', 'wide boys' and 'women from the neighbourhoods' at the first parade in 1887.

⁵⁵ A. Papadiamantis, 'Οι παραπονεμένες', *Άπαντα*, vol. III (Athens, 1984), 193–8, at 195.

⁵⁶ One indicator of this development is the placement of street number signs on buildings in Athens in 1887: *Asty*, 13 Sep. 1887.

that focused more on individual consumption than collective participation. Popular spectacles such as the maypole were already on the way to being transformed into more impersonal spectacles, performed by people who made a living from them, rather than being connected to local communities and performed by people of the neighbourhood.⁵⁷ Thus, the concentration of a large crowd in the centre to watch the parade was also consistent with the reduction in interaction between those in costume and the performers of masquerades on the one hand, and the people in the streets on the other (both in the neighbourhoods and in the centre).

Moreover, in the case of carnival a relationship between two developments of the period became clear: on the one hand, the reinforcement of the role of the new city centre and the increasingly radial relationship it developed with the neighbourhoods, and on the other, the reinforcement of the Athenian bourgeoisie, not only demographically but also economically, socially and politically.⁵⁸ The bourgeoisie lived in the centre, both literally (that was where their houses were concentrated) and symbolically: in the centre as the place of political and economic decision-making and as the 'emitter' of the values and symbols of power and authority.⁵⁹ The increasing importance of the middle class, and the attempt to deepen their hegemony to match their new-found power, also acquired a spatial expression: the 'reoccupation' of the centre of Athens (meaning the streets in the areas in which they lived) and its appropriate configuration during carnival, an increase in centralization at the level of both state and city. Here, it is worth recalling L. Gruppi's definition of hegemony as the ability to unify a social whole that is not homogeneous, and transferring it from the level of ideology to that of the city.⁶⁰

The spatial dimension of the contrast between bourgeois and popular culture also appears to intensify in the early twentieth century. A striking example is provided by the report in the *Estia* newspaper from Thissio Square, where there was a flourishing district of popular entertainment venues, in the summer of 1901: the trams brought 'groups of sightseers from the more Europeanized neighbourhoods, coming to see the festivals of the people'.⁶¹ Calling the curious Europeanized middle-class Athenians 'sightseers'; that is, tourists, indicates high levels of cultural differentiation. Although we should not take the expression literally, it was written, even if only for reasons of stylistic pretension, and presumably corresponds to a sense of great cultural distance. It should also be stressed that the 'more Europeanized neighbourhoods' were those of the centre and its environs, where the bourgeois residences were found. I have not located any similar exploration missions for the carnival period. However, the spatial-social dimension of a strong cultural difference is further stressed by complaints

⁵⁷C., 'Η απόκρεως', *Estia*, 29 (1891), 140–1; *Athinai*, 24 Feb. 1910; Y. Vlachoyannis, 'Μασκαράδες και πολίται στις Κολώνες να βρεθείτε', *Bouketo*, 26 Feb. 1931, 202–3.

⁵⁸Social and political changes, namely the rise of a Signoria dominated by aristocrats, were also expressed spatially in the carnival of Renaissance Venice: G. Bertrand, 'Venice carnival from the middle ages to the twenty-first century: a political ritual turned "consumer rite"?', *Journal of Festive Studies*, 2 (2020), 77–104, at 85.

⁵⁹Castells, *The Urban Question*, 227.

⁶⁰L. Gruppi, *Η έννοια της ηγεμονίας στον Γκράμσι* (Athens, 1977), 84 (*Il concetto di egemonia in Gramsci* (Rome, 1972)).

⁶¹T. Chatzipantazis, *Της Ασιάτιδος μούσης ερασταί...η ακμή του αθηναϊκού καφέ αμάν στα χρόνια της βασιλείας του Γεώργιου Α'* (Athens, 1986), 154.

in the newspapers about improper behaviour in the main streets during carnival: in 1905, the 'crude pranks' of the alleyways of Psyrri were said to have moved to Stadiou Avenue, 'the great open-air salon of genteel japes', while in 1920, there is a report of a 'brutal invasion of the main streets by gangs of layabouts'.⁶² In 1915, a journalist appealed to the police to remove the 'loathsome gangs of masqueraders' who asked for money for the spectacle they offered with the camel, the maypole, tumbling somersaults and 'other rubbish', or at least to 'confine them to the outermost neighbourhoods of Athens, so that the people of the centres may escape this aesthetic nausea'.⁶³ The 'outermost neighbourhoods', then, were identified as the natural habitat of these spectacles, lying far from the centre, the 'showcase' of the city and, above all, a place where people of more refined culture resided.

Parades were not held every year; the last took place in 1920. The impression given by the newspaper reports is that, even in years when there was no parade, the concentration of people in the centre remained high, although it would obviously have been lower than in parade years. It is reasonable to estimate that the concentration of people at carnival events peaked at the turn of the twentieth century, and then declined. The critical factor here was the transformation of carnival entertainments from public festivities and spectacles to dance.⁶⁴ Of course, the public entertainment venues in the centre of Athens were very crowded, while the carnival balls of the various associations were also held in central locations. Yet the neighbourhoods were in a better position to compete with the city centre in attracting people to entertainment venues rather than in offering urban spectacles. Women were also able to move more freely and safely in public without being subject to constant harassment, which meant that they were able to congregate in residential neighbourhoods as well as the city centre.

There was also the carnival of Plaka in the 1930s. This new 'centrality', however, was limited compared to the 1887–1914 one, and did not coincide with the political, economic and symbolic centre of the city.⁶⁵ Carnival events promoted the concentration of people in the centre of Athens: towards the end of the inter-war period, advertising floats were mentioned, with the riders throwing chocolates and ice creams into the crowd along the Zappeion–Panepistimiou–Omonoia–Stadiou route, followed by maypoles and masqueraders.⁶⁶ Overall, however, the intensity of concentration at carnival events diminished after the 1910s.

This reduction in concentration is likely linked to an increase in the autonomy of popular culture and the popular neighbourhood. The further spatial expansion of Athens, with the doubling of its population in the following years, reinforced various neighbourhood and inter-neighbourhood centres, and a more autonomous life for the 'outer' neighbourhoods.⁶⁷ As early as 1916, a columnist described 'small

⁶² *Skrip*, 1 Mar. 1905, and *Kairoi*, 19 Jan. 1920.

⁶³ *Akropolis*, 22 Jan. 1915.

⁶⁴ *Astir*, 21 and 23 Feb. 1916; *Embros*, 15 Feb. 1922; *Eva*, 4 Feb. 1923; *Apogevmatini*, 6 Feb. 1924.

⁶⁵ Castells, *The Urban Question*, 228.

⁶⁶ Interview with Matina Anameterou by the Oral History Group of Athens, 30 Jun. 2013; *Athinaika Nea*, 28 Feb. 1938.

⁶⁷ Y. Voulgaris, *Ελλάδα: μια χώρα παραδόξως νεωτερική* (Athens, 2019), 181, noted the 'autonomous internal economic activity' of the neighbourhoods of post-war Athens, which contributed to the extended survival of very small enterprises.

neighbourhoods' as self-sufficient, independent units: 'there are people who, except for an evening stroll as far as Syntagma Square, do not travel at all to the so-called centres. They belong to the neighbourhood. Its café, its pedestrian area, its pretty young girl, its small theatre, its bustle, become enough from day to day to satisfy their every interest.'⁶⁸ The classic play *Fintanaki* (1921) was set in a miniature version of the popular neighbourhood, the 'courtyard', which was presented as a complete world within which the lives of the inhabitants of the houses surrounding the communal courtyard unfolded.⁶⁹ Obviously, it would be wrong to think of the neighbourhood as an enclosed space, but between the wars it became more self-sufficient and self-contained; the publication of neighbourhood newspapers such as the *Foni tou Pangratiou* in 1930 were typical of this development. A sense of greater isolation and self-sufficiency was also reflected in the limited interactions between the native Athenians and the refugees who came from Asia Minor in 1922 and settled in new working-class districts around Athens.⁷⁰

The popular neighbourhood, in these circumstances of increased self-containment, was the space in which a new popular culture arose during the inter-war years, exemplified in the emblematic music and culture of rebetiko.⁷¹ The evidence, however, does not suggest new interest in carnival culture. Older popular spectacles such as the camel or maypole were not restored to their former glory,⁷² nor were satirical masquerades revived. The Asia Minor refugees, with the possible exception of the practice of flying kites on Clean Monday, did not leave their mark on carnival culture, as they did in fields such as music or cooking. A description of carnival life in the neighbourhood of Agia Triada published in 1924 may be representative: 'We did not see the crowds of yesteryear, the camel, the maypole, and the Fasoulis puppet theatre, nor did we see masqueraders. We did see a different crowd, of merrymakers on carts who sang various carnival songs, while in many alehouses others danced.' Festivities involving European and Greek dances also took place in houses, 'and it is rumoured that on the last days of carnival, balls will be held at all the alehouses of the neighbourhood, large and small, which will be temporarily transformed into dance halls to which, they say, only masqueraders in costume will be allowed entry'.⁷³ The neighbourhood streets would certainly have been busier, especially considering the lack of space in the poorer homes. Mobility remained relatively limited; the masqueraders of the inter-war period largely stayed within their own neighbourhoods, without leaving them to meet in the centre.⁷⁴ This was a reversal of the tendency

⁶⁸*Patris*, 30 Jun. 1916. See also the description by Ilias Lazanas, 'Η δική μου γειτονιά, τα Πιθαράδικα', in Y. Kairofyllas and S. Filippotis (eds.), *Αθηναϊκό Ημερολόγιο 1999* (Athens, 1999), 143–5, of the neighbourhoods of Athens in the inter-war period: 'Each of them a small, self-sufficient village.'

⁶⁹P. Horn, *Το Φιντανάκι* (Athens, 1921; 1992 edn).

⁷⁰G. Mavrogordatos, *Stillborn Republic: Social Coalitions and Party Strategies in Greece 1922–1936* (Berkeley, 1983), 182–225.

⁷¹M. Athanasakis, 'Ρεμπέτικο, το τραγούδι των ξεριζωμένων', in C. Hadjiiosif (ed.), *Ιστορία της Ελλάδας του 20ού αιώνα* (Athens, 2002), vol. B1, 157–87.

⁷²These are often described as being in decline (e.g. *Ethnos*, 5 Mar. 1924, and *Vradini*, 12 Feb. 1925), and references to their inter-war performances are accompanied by comments that nobody follows them through the streets as people used to do: *Proia*, 3 Mar. 1929, and *Vradini*, 10 Feb. 1931.

⁷³*Eva*, 23 Feb. 1924.

⁷⁴E. Papazachariou, *Η πιάτσα* (Athens, 1980), 205–6.

towards concentration observed in the earlier period, a reversal which might be viewed as the harbinger of the attempted military and political occupation of the centre of Athens, the seat of political power and the middle class, during the civil conflict of December 1944, by a Communist left that controlled most of the city's neighbourhoods.⁷⁵

Conclusion

This article has sought to explore how developments in the field of carnival events are inscribed within the structures of the city and interact with them. From this analysis has emerged a history of Athens that focuses on class relations on the one hand and on the contrast between modernity and tradition on the other. Specifically, it has examined certain urban structures of Athens as they appear in the celebration of carnival and the way in which the relationship between city and carnival changed over the course of a century, as both the city and the carnival changed. Two broad conclusions emerge.

The first concerns the contrast between the old and the new city, which was significant during the first 30–50 years of contemporary Athens, a contrast which was interwoven with the conflict between traditional and modern ways of celebrating carnival. This correlation was stronger in the first years of the period under consideration, while in the period 1870–1910, an emblematic contrast arose between the Columns of the Olympian Zeus, as a place of traditional celebration of Clean Monday, and Faliro, as a place where the traditional excursion was combined with modern consumption practices. The contrast between old and new city was later preserved, but its content changed, as the importance of the old city had been radically reduced and the public celebration of carnival in the streets had begun to decline. The predominance of 'modernization' and 'civilization', in both city and carnival, had become so overwhelming that it fed into nostalgia and the attribution of value to the 'traditional'. In those years, too, various practices in danger of being lost which were judged worthy of preservation began to be signified as 'tradition': the journal *Laografia* ('Folklore') was first published in 1909, while the first folk museum in Athens was established in 1918. Thus, the discreditation in 1880 of the old city as obsolete and of popular carnival culture as repulsive gave way in the 1930s to the emergence of a nostalgia for the old, pre-war Athens and its carnival, and the effort to revive the latter in the old city.

The second conclusion concerns the relationship between the centre and the periphery of the city. This also changed over the period. In the nineteenth century, the position of the centre shifted, as the new city grew. The key development, however, was the reinforcement of the pole of the centre: as Athens grew and both the state and the bourgeoisie were strengthened, neighbourhoods were subsumed under the centre and direct communication between them was restricted. An ever-greater concentration of carnival celebrations and crowds were found in the centre. This concentration peaked in the period from 1887 to 1914, when committees consisting of well-known members of the Athenian upper middle class organized parades through the main avenues of the city. Their aim was to 'reoccupy' the centre

⁷⁵M. Charalambidis, *Δεκεμβριανά 1944* (Athens, 2014).

(the residential area of the bourgeoisie), to create a space of ‘civilized’ entertainment, to ‘gentrify’ carnival, to propagate bourgeois culture to the crowds attending and to deepen the hegemony of the middle class (and particularly that section of it which was more mobilized by the vision of ‘Europeanization’), at levels corresponding to the new power it had gained at the end of the nineteenth century. Concentration was the spatial expression of political and cultural hegemony before the development of multicentred cities in the second half of the twentieth century.

In the inter-war years, this concentration was significantly reduced, giving way to a new autonomy for the neighbourhoods where the popular classes lived. The sudden major influx of new people meant that control of the neighbourhoods could not be retained at the previous levels. Moreover, this was a period characterized by the breakdown of hegemony, expressed at the political level by a series of military coups d’état, by an increased resort to violence and less institutionalized political conflict.⁷⁶ In the field of carnival culture, the reduction of concentration was largely the result of the decline of public street events and the shift towards dancing in public entertainment venues. But while other fields of urban popular culture flourished during the inter-war period, a development that can be linked to an increase in the autonomy of popular culture, this was not the case with carnival. The progress of modernity deprived carnival of many of the meanings with which it was invested, transforming it into a period of entertainment, riotous but lacking many qualitative characteristics differentiating it from everyday life.⁷⁷

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⁷⁶Κ. Kostis, ‘Τα κακομαθημένα παιδιά της ιστορίας’. *Η διαμόρφωση του νεοελληνικού κράτους 18ος–21ος αιώνας* (Athens, 2013), 562–3, 590–2.

⁷⁷It was in this sense that Baroja proclaimed that ‘el Carnaval ha muerto’: cited by V. Turner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York, 1987), 123–38, at 124.