



Summary :

A distinguished linguist, Dimosthenis Oikonomidis lent systemization and scientific depth to the Pontic intelligentsia and particularly the collection and study of linguistic material.

Date and Place of Birth

1858, Argyroupoli (Gümüshane)

Date and Place of Death

21 February 1938, Athens

Main Role

Linguist, scholar

1. Descent – Family – Youth

Dimosthenis Oikonomidis was born in [Argyroupoli \(Gümüshane\)](#) in 1858. It has been said that his grandfather, who came from [Chios](#), was abducted during the catastrophe of the island in 1822 and was “sold as a slave in the salve-markets of the East”.¹ He was bought by a family from Argyroupoli who later employed him as manager of their holdings (*oikonomos*). According to tradition, the surname “Oikonomidis” occurred from his grandfather’s profession. Dimosthenis’ mother, Sofia Touti, came from the village [Cita](#).² The sources we have examined do not identify his father’s profession but they reveal the family’s great poverty. Dimosthenis’ childhood was difficult: “with strong willpower and untamed diligence he devoted himself to learning although during his childhood he came into contact with the harshness of people and he faced the hardest of conditions”.³

2. Studies

After finishing the Greek school in Argyroupoli, Oikonomidis agreed to take on a teaching position in Koronixa (today Arpalı), but because of his young age he was not kept on and “during winter he walked with his father for three days until they reached [Trebizond](#) (because they could not afford to hire animals), and he enrolled in the [Frontistirion](#)”. During his two-year studies, food and housing were supplied by a family related to his mother and later by a doctor in exchange for assistance to his children with their lessons. After his graduation, Oikonomidis worked as a teacher at the village Ae Muhal in Argyroupoli and as a tutor for the Fotoglou family in Pavretzi. The [Russo-Ottoman war of 1877-1878](#) forced him into unemployment in Argyroupoli. During this difficult period, the family of a military doctor who had been transferred to [Constantinople](#) (Istanbul) hired Oikonomides as an escort for the journey. In Constantinople he worked initially as an assistant in a pharmacy and applied to be accepted into the [Great School of the Nation](#), where he was accepted thanks to the involvement of the then director Grigorios Palamas. During his studies at the Great School of the Nation which must have lasted for two years,⁴ he was fed by the Patriarchate and, having gained the favour of his teachers, was recommended to the manager of the steam mill of [Hasköy](#) Pavlos Stefanovik to work as tutor to his son. Thus, he came into contact Tzannis Stefanovik-Skylitsis, Pavlos’ brother, who offered him a four-year scholarship for literature studies in Germany. He also handed over his son in order for him to study in German schools while also learning Greek from Oikonomidis. During his stay in Germany, Oikonomidis also had the financial support of [Gerbasios](#), the [metropolitan of Chaldia](#). In 1887 he finished his doctoral thesis entitled *Lautlehre des Pontischen* (Phonetics of the Pontic Greek) to the Philosophical School of the University of Leipzig and was made doctor of philosophy in August 1888. His thesis was prized with the award of 300 gold marks by the foundation of the linguist G. Kourtis, a sum which allowed him to publish it.

3. Collection of linguistic and folkloric material

While still a student and until 1888, Oikonomidis returned to the area of Argyroupoli in order to collect linguistic material on the



Pontic language, which he used – together with the material given to him by [Ioannis Parcharidis](#) (for the areas of Trebizond and [Of](#)) and A. Antonakopoulos (for the areas of [Amisos](#) and [Oinoi](#)) – for the completion of his thesis.⁵ Since then, the language and, to a lesser extent, the folkloric traditions of Pontus were the main areas of his scientific research. From the speech of the president of the “Euxeineios Club”, during the celebration of the Pontic linguist’s fiftieth anniversary of scientific contribution in 1937, we have a testimony about this period of his life, during which he concentrated on the [collection of folkloric and linguistic material in Pontus](#). The testimony is from the Çita village and dates from the second year of Oikonomidis’ studies in Germany: “On the stone sofas of the neighbouring house sat a small man, dark-skinned, of unimpressive appearance, timid. [...] He was cornered next to the elderly Sofia Maroulandon, bent over. He had collected her early in the morning. She was a close relative, from his mother’s side of the family. [...] But for Dimosthenis she was, apart from everything else, very precious. An endless source of stories. [...] So the gentleman who sat bent over her writing everything he heard from her had his reasons”.⁶ Oikonomidis’ collecting activity is interesting for the history of Pontic linguistics and ethnography in the sense that it represented the gradual passing from a condescending, fragmentary and, in many ways, amateurish pastime concerning the so-called “living monuments” into a systematic collection of material for the purposes of a thorough scientific study. As a result, Oikonomidis’ work was much more precise than that left by the early collectors regarding the recording of the information and much more objective regarding its linguistic analysis. Although Oikonomidis did not escape the prevailing ideology which considered language as an ideal, absolute essence, and confronted changes in time and place as a “decay”, he did not suppress nor deny, unlike [Savvas Ioannidis](#), the existence of many Turkish influences in grammar and syntax: “The extent of the influence of the Turkish language in the development of Pontic Greek is evident in the existence of Turkish phrases, but sometimes also of Turkish syntactical forms”.⁷

4. Educational and social activities

In 1888, and while still in Leipzig, Oikonomidis was elected professor of Latin at the Great School of the Nation, where he taught until 1914, teaching Latin initially, and later Greek as well. He also taught at the [Ioakeimeio Girls’ School](#) and the [Zografeion Gymnasium](#). As a teacher he must have been quite strict, but also charismatic, becoming a model and an object of worship for his students. But Oikonomidis’ educational activities were not confined to teaching. Following the tradition of the Great School of the Nation, which dictated the expansion of the mission of its teachers, and in an era during which “the opinions and convictions of teachers were weapons [...], while their intellectual activities influenced and to a wide extent formed public opinion”,⁸ Oikonomidis “as the first vice-president of the [Philological Association of Constantinople](#) and the Teaching Union [Didaskalikos Syndesmos], as member of the Central Committee of the Patriarchate, fought on the front line with scientific studies, lectures and proposals, which are monuments to science and profundity”.⁹ One of the issues with which he became greatly involved through numerous lectures and publications was the fiery language issue on which form of Greek would become “official”; Oikonomidis himself, opposed to both an extremely archaic version of Greek and to the “demotic” language,¹⁰ favoured the use of a moderately archaizing form (*katharevousa*). Another aspect of his activities concerned various social and educational associations of which he was an active member. Apart from the aforementioned, Oikonomidis was a founding member of the Philhellenic Association of Amsterdam, a founding member of the Asia Minor Educational Association of Constantinople, the founder and president of the “Mettaleus” Brotherhood of Argyroupolitans in Constantinople – which supported the educational establishments in the province of Chaldia – and, finally, member of the Linguistic Society and the Scientific Association in Athens. In November 1911 he represented the latter at the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of the Greek Philological Association of Constantinople. In 1914 Oikonomidis was called to Athens in order to participate in the editorship of the *Historical Dictionary of Modern Greek*. He worked on this project until 1926. From 1931 until his death on 21 February 1938 he was the director of the Medieval Archive of the Athens Academy. On 16 May 1937, during the celebrations for the fifty years of his scientific career in Athens and Thessaloniki, he was awarded the medal of the Order of the Phoenix by George II, and the office of the Archon Didaskalos (teacher) of the Nation by the Patriarch of Constantinople Benjamin.

5. Works

Parallel to Oikonomidis’ rich educational and social activities ran his important writing activity. His main works were linguistic and ethnographic. Regarding the first category, apart from the *Leutlehre des Pontischen* (Leipzig 1888, second edition 1908) and his *Grammatiki tis ellinikis dialektou tou Pontou* (Grammar of the Greek dialect of Pontus), published post mortem in 1958, which



are his most important works, Oikonomidis also published numerous articles, which were often reprinted as autonomous studies; for one of these entitled "On our language issue" (Athens 1903), he received a letter of congratulations from I. Gennadios, the then Greek ambassador to London. Oikonomidis had already published in 1885 a *Syntaktikon tis germanikis glossis* (Syntax of the German language) in Leipzig.

Of his ethnographic works we mention a series of articles published in the *Imerologion tis Megalis Ellados* (Diary of Greater Greece): "The [parcharia](#) of Pontus" (1922), "Songs and dances of Pontus" (1923, pp. 331-343), "The [momogeroi](#) or the kocha" (1927, pp. 181-192).

Finally, Oikonomidis also wrote the book *O Pontos kai ta dikaia tou en afto Ellinismou* (Pontus and the rights of the Pontic Greeks) which was published in 1920 in Athens. The book was translated in French in the same year and was published in Constantinople. A full list of his works exists in the journal *Pontiaka Fylla* 15 (May 1937).

1. *Ποντιακά Φύλλα* 15 (May 1937), p. 116. From the speech by A. Bakalbasis, Member of Parliament for Rodopi, during the celebrations for the fiftieth anniversary of Oikonomidis' scientific career.
2. *Ποντιακά Φύλλα* 15 (May 1937), p. 133. From the speech of Theophylaktos, the president of the "Euxeineios Club".
3. *Ποντιακά Φύλλα* 15 (May 1937), p. 117. From the speech by A. Bakalbasis.
4. We know that Oikonomidis submitted his thesis in 1887, after 6 years of studies at the universities of Munich and Leipzig. We also know that he left Argypoupoli at the earliest after the outbreak of the Russo-Ottoman war, i.e. after April 1877, and that he did not enter the Great School of the Nation immediately. Finally, we know that he was fed at the Patriarchate during the reign of Ioakeim III, who was ordained in October 1878. It is most plausible, therefore, that Oikonomidis attended the School during the academic years 1879-1880 and 1880-1881.
5. See the introduction in his thesis *Lautlehre des Pontischen* (Leipzig 1908, second edition), p. vi, notes 2,3.
6. *Ποντιακά Φύλλα* 15 (May 1937), p. 133.
7. Οικονομίδης, Δ.Η., *Γραμματική της ελληνικής διαλέκτου του Πόντου* (Athens 1958), p. 5.
8. *Ποντιακά Φύλλα* 15 (May 1937), p. 116. From the speech by A. Bakalbasis.
9. *Ποντιακά Φύλλα* 15 (May 1937), p. 116. From the speech by A. Bakalbasis.
10. In *Ποντιακά Φύλλα* 15 (May 1937), p. 124, is mentioned a lecture by Oikonomidis entitled "I elliniki glossa kai oi malliaroi" (The Greek language and the supporters of the "demotic" language).

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	Π. Σ., "Δημοσθένης Οικονομίδης", <i>Αρχαίον Πόντου</i> , 8, 1938, 214-218
	Ελεόπουλος Νικηφόρος, "Δημοσθένης Οικονομίδης", <i>Ποντιακά Φύλλα</i> , 15, Μάιος 1937, 107-134

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Auxiliary Catalogs

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Συντακτικόν της γερμανικής γλώσσης (Syntax of the German language), Leipzig 1885.

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Περί τινων τύπων της νέας ελληνικής συνήθως εσφαλμένως τονουμένων (On some forms of Modern Greek, usually falsely stressed), offprint from the journal *Ο εν Κωνσταντινουπόλει Ελληνικός Φιλολογικός Σύλλογος*), Constantinople 1891.

Περί του γλωσσικού παρ' ημίν ζητήματος (On our language issue), Athens 1903.

Σεβαστοπούλειος Αγών Κωνσταντινουπόλεως. Εκθεσις της Αγωνοδίκου Επιτροπείας (Constantinople 1911).

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