

# Form of the element of Intangible Cultural Heritage

## Rebetiko

### I. Brief presentation of the element of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH)[1]

**Name:** Rebetiko

**Other name(s):** Rebetika, rembetiko, rembetika

**Identification and definition[2]:** A form of musical and cultural expression directly linked to word and dance, which spread gradually among the urban working-class populations during the first decades of the 20th century. In the post-war era it evolved into a type of music with a widespread popularity, functioning as a strong symbol of identity and ideology for the Greek popular music tradition.

#### ICH domain[3]:

- Oral traditions and expressions

Rebetiko, especially during the first decades of its creation, was distinguished by aspects such as collectivity, anonymous creation, and oral diffusion, which also determine the direct “folk” character of the form. Its performance and many of its characteristic features (poetical and musical) are connected with the folk song tradition, in particular that of the Greeks of Asia Minor and the Aegean islands. At the same time, it is in a dynamic dialogue with the musical traditions of the other peoples residing in the multinational and multicultural urban centres of the Ottoman Empire (Turks, Jews, Armenians, Balkan peoples, Levantines), creatively exchanging and adapting many musical elements. With the appearance of gramophone records and the mass media, particularly in the 1930s, rebetiko became even more widespread, without its daily “live” performance in tavernas, clubs, venues and ceasing even today.

- Performing arts

The song (poetic text), music and dance, in the form of the traditional unified triptych of “word-melody-movement”, are the structural elements of rebetiko that are transmitted from generation to generation. It is characteristic that Markos Vamvakaris would never record a song unless he had first “tried it on the legs” of a friend of his who was an excellent dancer.

- Social practices – rituals – festive events

Rebetiko, especially in the early decades of its initial creation, was associated with the behaviours and social practices of the marginalised social groups of the large port cities, and reflects their views on life, love, death, emigration, etc. It is associated with the strict “code of honour”, relations with power, the symbols of expression and communication, rituals and forms of entertainment of these social groups.

After the Asia Minor Catastrophe, it spread among the refugee groups that settled in the peripheries of the urban centres, acting as a powerful reference point for collective memory and identity, directly related to their rituals and particular form of entertainment.

From the 1930s and, especially after the Second World War, the social strata that followed rebetiko was expanded to the working and middle classes, with corresponding differences in the places and forms of its performance.

- Knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe
- Traditional craftsmanship

The form of traditional craftsmanship that is directly related to rebetiko is popular instrument making (bouzouki, baglamas, tzouras, guitar, barrel organ).

**Other[4]**

Place (administrative region, prefecture, municipality):

The form developed in the main urban centres of Greece, primarily ports (Piraeus, Athens, Syros, Thessaloniki, Volos, Hania, Rethymno, Heraklion, Patras, Kalamata, Trikala, and others). Today it has spread throughout the whole of Greece and among Greek diaspora communities abroad.

**Key words[5]:**

Rebetiko(a), rebetis, mangas, Asia Minor School, santouri and violin, bouzouki, bouzouksis, baglamas, tzouras, karaduzen, Eastern musical scales, taksim, zeibekiko, hasapiko, gramophone, 78 rpm discography, prison, tekes, koutouki, taverna, club, rebetiko revival, rebetiko ensembles.

**II. Communities, Institutions and/or individuals concerned**

1. Individual(s), group(s), organisation(s)

Name:

Identity[6]:

- Local Administration (community, municipality, region)
- Society
- Union

Friends of the Museum of Greek Folk Musical Instruments

Phoebus Anogeianakis

1-3 Diogenous St, 10556 Athens

- Parish
- Association of interested parties
- Guild
- Person

Other[7]

Seat/place:

Address: .....  
Postcode:.....

Tel. .... FAX.....

e-mail:..... URL/Website: .....

Person(s) in charge[8]:

Title:

Address: .....  
Postcode:.....

Tel. .... FAX.....

e-mail:.....

**Specialised information on the element:**

**Person(s) in charge:**

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Postcode:.....

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**III. Description of the ICH element**

**1. Short description: (up to 50 words)**

An urban popular music that flourished in the first half of the 20th century. With influences from both folk and Asia Minor songs, it reflects the historical and social context of its time, during which the private life of the margins developed in particular. Over time, it spread to the social strata of the refugees, and the working and middle classes, while today it is seen as a popular part of the cultural heritage that belongs to all Greeks.

## **2. Description: (up to 500 words)**

The rebetiko song tradition comprises a separate chapter in the history of Greek urban popular culture, as a collective form of expression and communication that has combined word, music and dance into a splendid whole. The period of its creation covers the first half of the 20th century, a time of growth for the urban centres of Greece and of the country's industrial culture. It is associated with certain social classes and groups: initially with the sub-proletariat of the city ports and, after the Asia Minor Catastrophe, with the refugee populations. After the Second World War, its social popularity expanded to the middle classes.

Rebetiko's "classic" repertoire produced many popular composers, singers and musicians and is associated with the appearance and rise in Greece and amongst the Greek communities in the USA of records and the mass media.

The conditions of rebetiko's creation and performance, the social background of the artists, as well as many other of its stylistic and structural elements have interesting similarities with the comparable urban popular musical forms that developed in this general period in other countries, such as Argentine tango, American blues, Portuguese fado, etc.

Even though the initial composition of rebetiko works appears to have ended in the mid-1950s, these songs remain exceptionally popular today, having been revived by younger generations through daily performances and interpretations in clubs and music venues and at social gatherings and festive events, as well as numerous research studies, conferences, publications and recordings, classes and seminars, radio and television programmes and concerts.

At the same time, they have acted as an important source of inspiration for many younger composers, lyricists and musicians, such as Manos Hadjidakis, Mikis Theodorakis and Stavros Xarchakos, while already in 1944-45 Nikos Skalkottas had used the theme from Vasilis Tsitsanis' song "I will go to Arapiá" in the second part of one of his compositions (Concerto for two violins).

The songs of rebetiko are a fertile field for historical, sociological/anthropological and ethnomusicological study, both of their artistic features (style, language, lyrics, musical scales, rhythms, orchestration, dance) and of their invaluable references to the customs, practices and traditions of a particular way of life, to specific events, places and people, social identities and ideologies.

Above all, however, they continue to represent a living musical tradition, with a strong symbolic/ideological and aesthetic/artistic character, through new performances of the songs by contemporary social groups, the young in particular.

## **3. Spaces and means of performance or implementation of the ICH element**

Spaces that are associated with the performance/realisation of the ICH element:

The spaces in which rebetiko was played when it first appeared were the prisons, tekedes (tekes is a hashish-den), koutoukia (small, underground tavernas), tavernas, and bires (beer bars), places that were frequented mostly by marginal social groups and refugees. Over time, in particular during the post-war period, these songs spread to the "nightclubs", which were frequented by people of different social classes.

With the revival of interest in rebetiko, especially in the 1980s, it has been performed in "rebetadika" (musical cafes and tavernas), events venues, concert halls and theatres, as well as in the open spaces of squares and stadiums, where concerts are performed.

Facilities (workshop, association building, auditoria, auxiliary buildings, etc.):

Equipment, modules and accessories (such as e.g. tools, utensils, uniforms etc.) that are used for the preparation and the performance of the ICH element:

Popular musical instruments are necessary for the performance of the songs (violin, santouri, bouzouki, baglamas, guitar). Modern ensembles also use other instruments, such as the accordion, piano, bass, percussion and idiophones such as tambourine, zills (cymbals), spoons, etc.. Since the 1950s electronic audio amplifiers have also been used (microphones, speakers, etc.).

Products or material objects in general (handicrafts, worship or secular vessels, goods, food, etc.) that are developed as an outcome of the performance or implementation of the ICH element:

The outcomes of performances are the reproductions and recordings of the songs on gramophone records, vinyl, CDs and DVD).

#### **4. Transmission of the ICH element from one generation to the next**

##### **Description:**

The initial means by which rebetiko was transmitted was exclusively oral transmission through the live performance of the songs. With the appearance and spread of sound recording, the mass media and cinema, the means of transmission were reinforced, as rebetiko was marketed and standardised and became extremely popular. With the rebetiko revival, radio and television programmes, the various educational and artistic activities, and mentions on social media have reinforced its promotion and impact both in Greece and abroad. Alongside this, the teaching of rebetiko in music schools, conservatories, universities and private lessons contributes to its wider circulation.

Modes and duration of learning / apprenticeship / initiation:

The traditional mode for learning rebetiko was primarily through oral/aural transmission, through the socialising of younger performers with older instrumentalists and singers in the places where the songs were performed. The duration of the learning-initiation process was not predetermined.

This practical way of learning, through this “orality” (live performances but also earlier and later recordings), is still important today, as the style and ethos of rebetika cannot be rendered only through recordings and the reading of a score.

Even so, in the past few decades it is being increasingly taught in music schools, conservatories, universities and private lessons, without there yet being, however, any recognised degree course or officially approved teaching material.

People or institutions that are involved in the transmission of the element:

Instrumentalists, singers, rebetiko ensembles, conservatories and music schools, Music High Schools, Music Departments in higher education institutions.

#### **IV. History and genealogy of the ICH element**

Historical information or regional narrative about the emergence, continuity, presence and adjustments and/or modifications of the ICH element:

The characteristic features of the rebetiko tradition become markedly transformed as we pass from one historical phase of the form to another, from anonymous creators to famous composers. Through this transition, rebetiko gradually shifted from being an oral tradition to a music form that was circulated through gramophone records and, eventually, to its standardisation and mechanical reproduction by the record companies, which evolved into a major industry.

Over time, we can see that the producers and creators of rebetiko became increasingly “specialised” and were distinguished from the users/listeners, moving from a table in the taverna to a raised stage, and from there to the neon lights of the nightclubs and the covers of the popular magazines. This shift had its repercussions on the musical features of the songs, which followed the shift from the period of anonymity through to a process of gradual urbanisation.

Markos Vamvakaris (1905-1972) acted as a bridge between the older folk song and rebetiko. At this level, the composer had usually remained anonymous, but, even if he was known, he did not act alone. He created in the name of the group, with an awareness that he was expressing the common tradition and aesthetic. Markos was one of the first to record the bouzouki (in 1932 for Columbia and in 1933 for Parlophone), breaking the barrier of isolation for an instrument that had met with prejudice and persecution, despite the centuries-long presence of this type of instrument in the Greek world from antiquity.

He established the form of the ensemble with bouzouki and baglamas players, when, in 1934, he, along with Giorgos Batis, Anestos Delias and Stratos Pagioumtzis, formed the first band with bouzoukia, “the celebrated quartet of Piraeus”.

This is when the “santouroviola” and the Asia Minor School of rebetiko (established by composers such as Panagiotis Tountas, Vangelis Papazoglou, and others) began to recede, in favour of the “Peiraiot” sound. This new school absorbed and adapted the ethos and teachings of tradition up to that point, through a new interpretation, based on the bouzouki and the traditional “roads”, or musical scales. This school offered the most important examples of rebetiko, “classical” in form, content and function. As a result, Markos is considered the “patriarch” of rebetiko.

Vasilis Tsitsanis (1915-1984) took things in a new direction. Born in Trikala, he went to Athens in 1937 with “35 cantatas” in his bags, a characterisation that confirms the conscious differentiation of his repertoire from “heavy” rebetiko. This was a crucial and transitional period, and his songs immediately attracted attention in a country numbed by the censorship imposed by dictator Ioannis Metaxas. Their main feature was the “harmonies”, which gradually led to a vertical musical line (with western chords), abandoning the horizontal musical line, along with the traditional “eastern” “roads” of the folk and old rebetiko songs.

Tsitsanis took the popular song beyond the boundaries of the margins, integrating it into the new social reality, the rising new class of post-war Greece. He established a new style of playing, and made an important contribution to the enrichment of the orchestra, the role of the singers and the structure of the songs, which became more complex with verses and choruses. With Tsitsanis, rebetiko became an “art form” and the break with tradition was now apparent.

After the war, we can observe the transition to the era of the “celebrated” composers, preparing the ground for the style that was to become known as “entechno-laiko” (“popular art music”). The change in the forms of entertainment and the establishment of the four-chord bouzouki by Manolis Chiotis, formalised in around 1953, symbolically mark the end of rebetiko. Thus, the initial creation of the style comes to an end, without this meaning,

however, that it ceased to inspire, although on a different basis and mode, oriented now to all social groups.

The “return” to rebetiko, initially in the 1960s and then in the 1980s, was an attempt primarily by the young and students to reconnect with the richness, expressiveness, artistic power and deeper ethos of these songs, an attempt that still continues today.

Historical information on the bearers of the ICH element:

Updating of data (at least every 5 years):

## **V. Importance of the element for the Intangible Cultural Heritage**

### **1. Enhancement**

Actions, Promotion, Intercultural Dialogue:

Research, scholarly, educational, artistic and recreational activities in Greece and abroad:

Research studies, conferences, publications and discographies, classes and seminars, radio and television programmes, documentaries, concerts and festivals with the collaboration of Greek and foreign musicians and bands.

### **2. Safeguarding measures (at local, regional or national level):**

Documentation, digitization of old records and audiovisual material, preservation of archival material. Agents: Museum of Greek Folk Musical Instruments, Greek Public Television Archive, Departments of Music Studies in Greek Universities.

FILLED OUT BY THE SERVICE:

Pre-existing documentation

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Available data

Agency:

Type of research:

Type of data:

Inscription of the element in other inventories

National Inventory–Technical sheet of the element

Place and date of drafting:

Author

Name and surname:

Title:

Accompanying documentary material

Bibliography-archive research:

In situ research-interviews:

Audio recording:

Records:

- Gramophone (78 rpm/ Material: bakelite)

- Records (45 and 33 rpm/ Material: vinyl)

- Digital (CD)Photo recording:

Video recording:

- «ΡΕΜΠΕΤΙΚΟ», Κώστας Φέρης, 1983.

- «Καναρίνι μου γλυκό», Roy Sher, 2010.

TELEVISION (Series and documentaries)

- «Ο κόσμος του ρεμπέτικου» (documentary).

- «Το μινόρε της αυγής», ΕΡΤ, 1983-1984, television series.

- «Εις ανάμνησιν στιγμών ελκυστικών», Παναγιώτης Κουνάδης, ΕΤ1, 1994.

- «Τετράς η ξακουστή του Πειραιώς», Παναγιώτης Κουνάδης, ET1, 1998.
- «Ρεμπέτικη ιστορία», Νίκος Βολωνάκης – Πάνος Σαββόπουλος, ET3, 1999.
- «Γεια σου περήφανη κι αθάνατη εργατιά», NET, 2001.
- «Οι μουσικοί του κόσμου – Ρεμπέτικο και ξένοι», Λεωνίδας Αντωνόπουλος, 2006.
- «Η ιστορία του ρεμπέτικου», Κώστας Φέρρης, 2006.
- «Ονειρού Ελλάς», Κώστας Φέρρης, ET3, 2008-2010.
- «Οι παρέες γράφουν ιστορία – Οι ρεμπέτικες παρέες», NET, 6-2-2011.
- «Τα Μυστικά της Μουσικής», EPT 2012. Ντοκυμαντέρ. Επιμέλεια - Παρουσίαση: Νίκος Κυπουργός. «Στην Υγεία μας», NET - ALPHA. Μουσική εκπομπή. Παρουσίαση: Σπύρος Παπαδόπουλος.
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- «Η Μηχανή του Χρόνου», ALPHA. Σειρά εκπομπών.

#### MUSICALS AND THEATRE PRODUCTIONS

- «Αμάν Αμίν», Σταύρος Ξαρχάκος, 1995.

Record companies:

- COLUMBIA
- MINOS EMI
- HMV (His Master's Voice)
- ORFEON RECORD (Istanbul)
- FAVORITE RECORD (Germany)
- PARLOPHONE

Countries outside of Greece where there are rebetiko ensembles made up of Greek and foreign artists:

Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Turkey, Israel, Australia, USA, Canada.

#### ENSEMBLES

- Kompania
- Rebetokafenes Aigaleo
- Rebetoven
- Rebetien

- Trio para Tetarto

#### INDIVIDUALS

- Giorgos Xintaris
- Yiannis Lebesis
- Agathonas Iakovidis
- Babis Tsertos
- Christos Manifavas
- Dimitris Mystakidis

#### ONLINE

- Rembetiko forum

(<http://www.rembetiko.gr/forums/forum.php>)

(<https://www.facebook.com/rembetiko.gr>)

- Rebetiko sealabs

(<http://rebetiko.sealabs.net/home.php>)

[1] An ICH element is understood to be the realisation or accomplishment or performance of activities and actions forming a distinct ensemble that constitutes a representative expression of ICH.

[2] Short presentation (one sentence) of the identity of the ICH element. Henceforth this will be the identity under which the element will be recognised.

[3] ICH domain: The element can pertain to more than one domain.

[4] If necessary add a category that is not included in the fields above, e.g. traditional games.

[5] Key words allow the recognition of the identity of the element. e.g. ritual, celebration, events, artistic activity, traditional skills, traditional craftsmanship, etc.

[6] Choose which among the categories below the bearer of the ICH element belongs to.

[7] If this is chosen, fill in a category that does not exist in the fields above.

[8] E.g. Mayor, president of an association, etc.