

The Greek Beat and Underground Scene of the 1960s and 1970s

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Abstract: In her article "The Greek Beat and Underground Scene of the 1960s and 1970s" Eftychia Mikelli discusses the renewed interest in the Beat Generation in Greece. She argues that it is less known that the Beats exercised significant influence upon Greek underground literature and culture in the sixties and seventies, inspiring the development of a Greek Beat "hybrid." Bearing the influences of US-American Beat, new writing emerged which was also shaped by a distinctively Athenian social and cultural context, eventually leading to the formation of the Greek "Scene." This is the term by which Beat-influenced Greek artists, such as Spyros Meimaris and Panos Koutrouboussis, were introduced in Σήμα (Sima) magazine (issue 9, 1975). Focusing mainly on texts published in this issue, Mikelli explores the literary and cultural significance of the early stages of the development of the Beat and Underground Scene in Greece thus charting further Transatlantic Beat connections.

Eftychia Mikelli

The Greek Beat and Underground Scene of the 1960s and 1970s

While recent years have seen a surge of renewed interest in the Beat Generation in Greece, with the regular publication of articles on the Beats and also various new translations of Beat novels and poems, the presence of Beat literature in Greece is actually recorded over a time span of about fifty years. In 2012 an exhibition on the underground literary scene of the sixties and seventies in Athens clearly documented the Beats' direct impact, inviting further reflection on Beat influences on Greek literature and culture. The assimilation of the Beat Generation into Greek literary and cultural contexts vividly exemplifies the contested and elusive meaning of the term "Beat" as it moves across time and geography, and this fluidity is also reflected in the critical engagement with Beat literature in Greece (or rather, the lack of substantial criticism). In the sixties, underground publications and fanzines were the main outlets of sporadic Beat texts, while even major publications of the left, such as *Επιθεώρηση Τέχνης* (Art Review), published between 1954 and 1967, largely ignored the Beats. When, in the late seventies, with the publication of translations of seminal Beat works, such as Aris Berlis's 1978 translation of "Howl" ("Ουρλιαχτό"), the Beats received more attention, this was within a much wider context of varied literary influences; Alexis Ziras cites authors as diverse as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, Vladimir Mayakovsky, Emily Dickinson, Paul Valery, Federico Garcia Lorca, Paul Éluard, Guillaume Apollinaire, Nâzim Hikmet, Sylvia Plath and Li-Po among others (33). In this pell-mell of influences, all gratefully and eagerly welcomed by the post-dictatorship young Greek poets, "Beat" was appropriated and interpreted freely and selectively.

Substantial Beat interactions first started with Allen Ginsberg's arrival in Athens from Tangier in 1961 (Miles 291; Finbow 90). The Beats exercised a strong appeal to controversial writer and publisher Leonidas Christakis, whose numerous publications have played a focal role in the Greek literary underground scene. Up until his death in 2009, Christakis published avidly on avant-garde, Beat, and Underground literature, his most notable magazine publications including *Κούρος* (intermittently between 1959-1975), *Panderma* (1972-1977) and *Ιδεοδρόμιο* (first published in 1978; according to Papadimitriou, about 126 issues were published in the course of 27 years [150]). Christakis has also written a book-length chronicle of the Beat community in Athens, where he notes: "Their presence in Plaka up until the foot of the Lycabettus Hill, in the Kolonaki area, was to a large extent encouraged by the poet Nanos Valaoritis, who maintained correspondence with Allen Ginsberg and Lawrence Ferlinghetti" (*Η Γενιά των Μπητ*; The Beat Generation 22; unless indicated otherwise, all translations from the Greek originals are my own). Alan Ansen lived on and off in Greece for about 40 years until his death in Athens in 2006 (Zervos 37) and Gregory Corso also visited Athens on several occasions. Further indicative of the notable community presence of the American Beats in Greece is that in 1965 the first issue of *Residu* was published in Athens by Daniel Richter. This was a publication in English, featuring among others the works of Harold Norse, Allen Ginsberg, Nanos Valaoritis and Kay Johnson.

Christakis gives an account of his interactions with the Americans: "It was there, at a small tavern near Dexameni [an area in Kolonaki] (1961-62) that I met and befriended poets Harold Norse and Ted Joans" (The Beat Generation 27). In 1963 he also met Beat-associated poet and filmmaker Conrad Rooks, and in the same year Christakis published Rooks' poem, "Chappaqua, Or the Invocation of Bran" in the first issue of his magazine *Το άλλο στην τέχνη* (A different kind of art, no pagination). In the second, and final, issue of this magazine there is yet another poem by Conrad Rooks, "Chere Selima," and also a short text celebrating Ted Joans' arrival in Athens: "he has come to Athens to bring a 'Happening,' to wake up the dull intellectuals, and to disturb the noncreators. To make something exciting 'Happen.' To help the young creators of Greece to create a 'Happening'" (no pagination; these texts are published in English in the original). This is suggestive of what the Beats stood for in the eyes of their Athenian peers. A forceful source of renewal and wild inspiration, they provided a creative basis for the Greeks to build on and finally produce a Greek Beat "hybrid" which was also informed by the social transformations of those times.

The early sixties were a period of considerable social tension; Kornetis discusses "Greece's incomplete democracy and the remnants of the civil conflict" at a time when, following their defeat by the Greek National Army, Communists were still considered to be a major peril and the Communist Party was outlawed (11). Despite the introduction of certain, albeit still restricted, liberal reforms in that period, Greece was in essence "still suffering from economic underdevelopment and social backwardness" (11), recognizing the need for modernization and slowly making an attempt to catch up with developments in post-war Western Europe. In this context of social unrest and need for change, Greek

authors sought alternative ways of expression, and turned to the Beats in search of literary innovation.

It was the underground literary magazines, such as those that Christakis published, that first engaged with the Beats. These, however, had a relatively small circulation; it is at this point that poet Nanos Valaoritis, another key figure in the introduction of Beat literature to Greek audiences, decided to launch *Πάλι* (Pali; Anew) magazine. Of more ambitious scope, *Pali* was conceptualized as an alternative to the stagnation in the Greek literary scene, at a time when the previous Modernist movement had already broken up, and "there was no other solution than to move forward, upholding a more radical and extreme form of renewal" (*Μοντερνισμός, Πρωτοπορία και Πάλι*; Modernism, the Avant-garde and Pali 37). Valaoritis further explains that, "with the physical presence in Athens and the cooperation of the American Beats, who shared with us a spirit of defiance, the magazine's broad aesthetic and ideological scope found instant recognition, despite our limited finances and irregular publication schedule" (43).

The Beats were a driving force for literary progress, assisting towards the formation of a new Scene, a "hybrid" blend of Beat and surrealism. Valaoritis observes that "precisely thanks to the support of the Greek bohemians of the time, who by then had been renamed 'beat,' a large team was created which was willing to help, especially as we were 'hybrids' bordering on surrealism" (43). So, while the Beat influence was very much present in many avant-garde texts of the time, in this case it is best to speak of a re-casting of Beat models through a distinctively Greek, even mostly Athenian, perspective.

In its six issues of publication from 1963 up to 1966, *Pali* helped towards the dissemination of international avant-garde literature and also provided a platform of expression for new radical voices in Greek literature. One of the most important "Greek Beat" figures to be published in *Pali* was Panos Koutrouboussis, also known as "Beat Pete," or, as *Μεσημβρινή* (Mesimvrini) newspaper described him at the time, "a well-known Athenian Beatnik" (qtd. in Christakis, *The Beat Generation* 71). Koutrouboussis was born in the small town of Livadia in 1937, but his family soon moved to Athens. Keenly involved with the artistic and self-proclaimed existentialist Athenian crowd of the early fifties, Koutrouboussis was a regular visitor at Simos' pad in downtown Athens. Known as "Σίμος ο Υπαρξιστής" ("Simos the Existentialist"), Simos Tsapnidis was notorious for the wild parties he held on the top floor of his upholstery shop. Mostly of a surrealist nature, nonetheless Simos' parties are sometimes considered to have prepared the ground for the Greek Beat and Underground scene, and Christakis refers to Simos as the "first Greek beatnik" (*The Beat Generation* 35).

Koutrouboussis was from a very young age drawn to this new way of life, and his fascination with artistic freedom continued well into the sixties, with the prolific production of comic sketches and short stories. Among his main influences, Koutrouboussis cites Jack Kerouac, Bill Burroughs, L. F. Céline, The Three Stooges and American comic strips (*Εν αγκαλιά Δε Κρισγισαούρτι*; In the Arms of Krishgiaourt, afterword, no page numbers). In March 1984, Koutrouboussis met and interviewed William Burroughs in Washington; the translated interview, which spans about 30 pages, was published in its entirety in Athens in 2005. When asked by Koutrouboussis as to how he perceived his function as a writer, Burroughs replied: "The function of every art—and in this I include creative scientific thinking—is to make people understand what they know but don't know that they know. Because you can't talk to anyone about anything they don't already know at some, even if sunken, level" (*Ο Μπάροουζ στην Ουάσινγκτον*; Burroughs in Washington 92).

While Koutrouboussis's work has broadly been associated with a Beat sensibility, it is often the case that his surrealist influences prevail over his Beat ones. At any rate, his pivotal contribution to "Greek Beat" literature is highlighted in *Σήμα* (Sima; Sign) magazine's September 1975 issue on "The Scene," which is the first systematic attempt to offer a coherent presentation of the collective work of "Beat and Underground" Greek authors. In 2008 Christakis also attempted to compile a short anthology of Greek Beat poetry ("*Ανθολογία beat ποίησης—ελλήνων 1960-1980*"; "An anthology of Greek beat poetry 1960-1980" 153-80), but the selection of contributors is rather inconsistent, and the anthology does not ultimately seem to be particularly convincing; therefore, the ninth issue of *Sima* magazine remains, to this day, the only substantial publication of this nature.

Addressing the factors which contributed to the formation and development of this "Scene," in his "Introduction" Michael Mitras acknowledges the influence of American Beat poetry and identifies Ginsberg's arrival in Athens as a turning point (2). In addition to the Greek texts, the ninth issue of *Sima* also contained translations of Burroughs' "The Job" (17) and Kerouac's "The Vanishing American Hobo" (28-29). The inclusion of American Beat texts alongside the work of Greek authors clearly indicates the strong bonds the Greeks felt they shared with their American peers. Further revealing of the Beats' appeal is that liberal magazine *Sima*, which first came out in February 1975 (a few months after the end of the Colonels' regime), was read by wider artistic and intellectual communities in Ath-

ens. While mainly focusing on literature, *Sima* 9 nonetheless contained various references to other forms of artistic expression of "the Scene," including a variety of drawings, some of which were of an explicitly erotic, and at times homosexual, nature. The members of "the Scene" made use of multiple genres, including novels, short stories, poetry, sketches, and even the *Ταχύδραμα* (Tachydrama), a term Koutrouboussis devised to describe his "short scenes with dialogue—or just action—very fast ones" (In the Arms of Krishgiaourti 11). The Beat and Underground Scene's musical tastes mainly revolved around jazz and rock and roll. In *Sima* 9 an article on "Jazz" provides a lucid account of the history of jazz music from ragtime to the electric jazz tunes of the 1970s, while it is also made clear in this issue that the members of "the Scene" likewise enjoyed rock and roll music. Dimitris Poulikakos, an integral part of the "Greek Beat" scene, mainly as a musician but also as a writer, explains the situation, discussing the "first underground music performance in Greece" in 1968 (18).

Sima's choice of contributors has been criticized for errors and omissions since the issue's publication. Christakis, for example, has been quite vehement in his criticism (The Beat Generation 43, 60-61), and the various objections put forth unavoidably raise questions as to the criteria for inclusion in the Beat and Underground Scene. Research is further complicated as, given the underground nature of the movement, reliable sources are not always readily available, and archival research poses limitations. Attempts at precise classification are also obscured by some contributors' disavowal of their Beat status. One such example is Maria Mitsora, who, in an article published in 2013, asserts: "Yes, I have been an 'Underground' writer, but not a Beat one" (<<http://www.lifo.gr/mag/features/3795>>). It seems to be a similar case with Sinclair Beiles. In an interview with Natassa Chatzidaki, he declares: "I should begin by saying that I am not a Beat poet," and then moves on to describe himself as an "erotic poet" (25). Further indicative of the fluidity of the attempt to signpost the "Scene" in *Sima* 9 is also the inclusion of Cordwainer Smith and, interestingly, a translation of Norman O' Brown's "Filthy Lucre" chapter in *Life against Death*. The choice of contributors in *Sima* 9 reveals a general complexity regarding the meaning of "Beat" and "Underground," which persists in Greece to the present day. The omission of the work of Lefteris Poulios, for example, might be met with scepticism by some, as he has often been classified as a "Beat" writer (Karen Van Dyck; Gair and Georganta). The publication of Poulios' poems in *Sima* 10-11 indicates that the magazine's editors were aware of his work, and suggests that they deliberately chose not to include him among the authors of the Beat and Underground Scene. Moreover, in an article published in *Panderma* 5-6 (c. 1973), Poulios' alleged Beat sensibilities are heavily criticised, his "ignorance" blamed for having "slaughtered every badly translated poem he read by Ginsberg and the others" (Iatropoulos). Iatropoulos here obviously refers to Poulios' "An American Bar in Athens" (published in 1971), and while his views are particularly strongly worded, a comparative analysis of the two poems indeed suggests that Poulios' work often does read like a Greek copy of Ginsberg's "A Supermarket in California" (an English translation of "An American Bar in Athens" can be found in *Boundary 2*, 1973).

Despite Mitras's admission that he can provide only an incomplete and sketchy framework of the "Scene," defining it along broad lines as a group of artists with "the tendency to question the mainstream" (2), the Beat nature of a number of texts in *Sima* 9 cannot be ignored; while aware of the multiplicity of interpretations the terms "Beat" and "Underground" lend themselves to in Greek contexts, for the purpose of this essay I have chosen to primarily engage with those *Sima* 9 texts which are ostensibly influenced by a Beat sensibility. In this light, particular emphasis will be given to the work of Spyros Meimaris, whom Tasos Falireas has saluted as "the first BEAT poet of a universal language" (*Χαριστική Βολή*; Coup de Grâce 106). Spyros Meimaris was born in Athens in 1942 and travelled extensively both in Europe and the United States. In 1959 he was in San Francisco, where he met and befriended the Beats, with several of whom he maintained long-lasting personal friendships. He has translated Kerouac's *Maggie Cassidy* and *Book of Dreams*, Ginsberg's *Journals: Early Fifties/Early Sixties* and his poem "Magic Psalm" (*Pali* 5, 35-38), while his own writing (especially in his earlier works) is also of a distinctly Beat nature. In a recent interview, Meimaris admits that "beat contributed more than anything else to the beginning of this underground movement" ("Ο ποιητής Σπύρος Μειμάρης"; "The Poet Spyros Meimaris" <<http://www.athensvoice.gr/the-paper/article/449>>), and while a more detailed exploration of Meimaris' work provides further meaningful insights into Greek appropriations of "Beat," for this introductory presentation of the "Scene" I will mainly focus on the material published in *Sima* 9. The direct references to the work of Ginsberg and Corso in his short story "PARIS 1961-ATHENS 1971" (30-31), for example, are suggestive of the decisive influence Beat poetry had on his writing, and Meimaris' connections with the Beats are also evident in terms of writing style and themes. In "PARIS 1961-ATHENS 1971," in Ginsberg-esque fashion he celebrates life, and rises above mainstream conformity as a creative force of love and life.

His "ΑΔΥΝΑΤΗ ΩΡΑ: ΑΘΗΝΑΙ 1971" ("IMPOSSIBLE HOUR: ATHENS 1971") is another powerful *Sima* 9 text mostly punctuated by dashes and slashes, in which he narrates his own Beat and Underground story: "I did not scream but when I was falling apart/ I lifted the lid and saw callousness underneath—nothing—Bad taste, nothing else to be found anywhere/. I count the cinema shots of the Past so that you can contain me in the clear light of my Spine" (3). More than a personal chronicle, however, this 1971 text can also be read as a comment on the hardships Greece was undergoing at that time, as the Colonels' regime (in power since 1967) suppressed freedom of expression and kept people subdued whilst imprisoning, torturing, and even executing dissidents. Meimaris can thus be said to lament the brutality of those times, in a text that is reminiscent of Ginsberg's own "Howl" at a society where otherness is marginalized and punished. However, to classify Meimaris as a political writer would be very limiting, as a strong spirituality, sometimes of Christian and other times of Buddhist nature, is also prevalent in the majority of his texts. Inspired by the Beats' involvement with Buddhism, Meimaris' Buddhist influences can be traced back to his earliest poetry collections, *Αρνάκι άσπρο και παχύ* (Little lamb) (published in 1974), and *Όνειρα πραγματικότητας* (Dreams of reality) (published in 1975), where the holy blends with the everyday, as he seems to be sharing with Kerouac a belief "in the holy contour of life" ("Belief and Technique for Modern Prose," *The Good Blonde & Others* 72). Meimaris filters his Beat sensibilities through his own Greek perspective, his unique sensitivity to Beat writing ultimately establishing him as Greece's "only truly Beat poet" (<<http://www.lifo.gr/mag/features/1867>>).

Although *Sima* 9 was published at a turning point for Greece, as democratic structures were being re-introduced after the junta, engagement with Beat and Underground subject matter and language still came at a cost, as publishing literature about society's marginal figures was considered very provocative for its times. Following their acquittal of obscenity charges in May 1977, *Sima*'s editorial team, and issue contributor Tasos Falireas, stood trial again for a second time, when the case was appealed in June. "Beat and Underground" texts were accused of being offensive, and *Sima*'s prosecutors alleged that "this is not art," that "those who write like this are mentally ill" and that "from every single point of view the magazine is most dangerous, especially for the young" (qtd. in Papadakis 62). The prosecutors felt particularly offended by these lines: "Then Yorgos arrives and he tells us all about the blowjobs, the whisky and breakfast at Hotel Grande Bretagne. Harry wore a blonde wig and fur robe. He tried to screw him, but couldn't get it up, so they settled for blowjobs" (Falireas 4). In view of the trial, an overwhelming number of Greek intellectuals, including authors, artists, university professors, and art critics expressed their support to the defendants. Further to the collapse of the Colonels' regime in 1974, the country was now enjoying its newly found liberties, and was eager to embrace the freedom of speech it had been deprived of for seven years. Karen Van Dyck observes that, "While Kerouac, Corso, and Ginsberg, among others, were writing in the wake of McCarthyism in a society that imposed certain limitations on the sexual explicitness of their self-expression, Greek poets were writing under censorship with limitations on every aspect of their writing" (71). This comparison contributes to a better understanding of the bonds that the American Beats and the Greek Beat-influenced Scene shared, and further elucidates the political significance of the trial at a time of transition, following a long period of suppression of individuality and penalization of free expression. This association of the Beats with rebellion, or in recent years even abandonment, is still very persistent in Greece, unfortunately often at the expense of other aspects of Beat.

The spiritual aspect of Beat, for example, has largely been ignored, and Spyros Meimaris' poetry, with its preoccupation with reality and the mind, eternity, and the divine, stands unique in this context. In more recent years, poet and translator Yannis Livadas has identified this gap, urging for an appreciation of the spiritual dimensions of Beat writing. In a further attempt to redress the balance, I have translated parts of Kerouac's "The Origins of the Beat Generation," where Kerouac expands on the beatific dimensions of Beat (Mikelli 34). However, there still seems to be a long way to go before this aspect of Beat is accepted and embraced in Greece, where a partial understanding of the Beats still prevails. Given the elusiveness of the term "Beat" in Greek contexts, *Sima*'s presentation of the Beat and Underground scene acquires yet greater literary, cultural and historical significance. In defence of the editorial board's decision to publish an issue on the Beat and Underground Greek scene, editor Natassa Chatzidaki, also a talented author in her own right, explains to the court that: "Beat and underground literature has a history of 25 years. In Greece it was only in 1975, when this issue of *Sima* came out, that a more systematic presentation of the movement was undertaken" (qtd. in Papadakis 64). The ninth issue of *Sima* magazine documents a Scene that began emerging in the early sixties, at a time when, with the aid of the Marshall plan, the country was showing clear signs of recovery from the Second World War and the Civil War; it is at this point that the Greeks experienced direct interactions with the Americans who came to Athens to facilitate the implementation of the plan,

and it was then that the Athenians became more familiar with Beat literature, and also American popular culture.

While continued US-American involvement in Greek politics during the sixties and seventies was the source of major dissatisfaction among a substantial portion of the population, it is nonetheless the case that "Cultural Americanization enveloped the Greek society in the post-junta and particularly in the post-Cold War years. International education, cinema, television, [and] the media ... allowed the American 'way of life' to make impressive headway" (Botsiou 303). The overall influence of this way of life is clearly reflected in the particular text that went on trial, Tasos Falireas' short story, "Και το τρένο έτρεχε όλη νύχτα" ("The train kept a-rollin' all night long"), its title inspired by Tiny Bradshaw's song "The Train kept A-Rollin'," known to "the Scene" by the Johnny Burnette and the Rock and Roll Trio's cover version. The story follows the adventures of three young men wandering about in downtown Athens on a Saturday evening. The opening image is very evocative of Beat escapades: "We've been out a while, and spent all our cash, in poolhalls and on cognac, we're broke, it's Saturday, if that's anything to go by. We agree to head toward Jimmy's Bar. For sure we'll find a fag to mooch off, or maybe somebody will buy us drinks, and then we'll dig it and time will pass. All in all, we have no care on our minds. We're out for a good time" (Falireas 4). It is at this point that a stranger asks them for directions: "His name is Harry. It's obvious he's looking to get laid. We take him to Marko's place, where we can get some food too ... We sit down and order sausages and eggs, beer, whiskey, coffee and cakes. The tall fag looks loaded. He's on the ball. He's cool." Eventually Harry, who is "a diplomat in Brazil, or so he says," leaves with the one of the group who "has been with a fag before," and the others continue their adventures into the night. They end up in a queer joint, get involved in a fight, are arrested, and spend their night in a police station basement. Upon their release the next day, they resume their regular life pattern of carefreeness and rock and roll dancing.

Defending his publication before the court, *Sima's* Editor-in-chief Nikos Papadakis emphasises that "words and phrases should not be judged on their own, but within the context of the text that is on trial" (63). In the same vein, Tasos Falireas declares: "I think my text is honest; this social group is real, and I used language as they speak it. I could not do it any other way; this would be dishonest and obscene" (qtd. in Papadakis 65). Falireas' text makes a significant contribution to the corpus of Greek Beat-influenced writing, which, following the oppressive years of the Colonels' regime (1967-74), now re-emerges more assertively. Falireas persists with the Beat themes of the underground and the marginal, narrating the problems of the discontented youth of the post-dictatorship era, when earlier dreams for a better future for the marginalized failed to materialize as "new systemic/institutional imbalances were created that undermined what strength civil society was gaining" (Mouzelis and Pagoulatos 8). Falireas embraces this group of people, giving a literary voice to this Beat and Underground subculture. In a bold literary gesture, Falireas inscribes these outsiders into the social and literary scene of post-junta Athens.

While the text's literary value was widely acclaimed, its deeper social implications were not adequately addressed. Retrospectively reflecting on his text, Falireas explains: "what I finally wanted to indicate was the inefficacy of an entire cultural attitude. [I wanted to show] that the American way of life fell short and left gaps to be addressed, it could not provide any meaning. I am 43 years old and do not know of a generation that is more inadequate than mine. And by this I mean the rock and roll generation. None more fake, or insincere. More frigid. More perplexed. More tongue-tied. And worse generations will come unless we take care to clear up our fiasco" (Coup de Grâce 206). This comment invites further critical reflection on the reception of the Beats in Greece within the wider context of American cultural influences. It cannot be denied that the Beats provided their Greek peers with new ways of expression, leading to the formation of a literary scene which was substantially, though not exclusively, based on Beat formulas. However, there was also a darker side to this influx of American elements, to this wider Americanization, that Falireas sought to address, exposing the problems that were associated with the imitation of the American way of life. Similar to the American Beats, Falireas warns about the implicit dangers, and lays bare the inadequacies of this lifestyle to provide substance and meaning, pointing to the need for remedial action.

An exploration of the influence of the Beats in Greece helps broaden our understanding of European interpretations and appropriations of Beat literature and further illuminates Beat Transatlantic associations. I have chosen to look at the sixties and seventies as it was during those decades that the Beat influence was more intensely felt, facilitated, in part, by the physical presence of some American Beats in Athens. By the late seventies, this influence stops being so straightforward, as at this point many of the American Beats had already left Athens and even more significantly, as we move into the eighties, social dynamics change considerably, and there is a shift towards new subcultures (for example, the emergence of the Greek punk movement). Nonetheless, as periodical publications in the

eighties and nineties suggest, the Beats did not disappear completely from the Greek literary scene. Examples of relevant publications include Meimaris' article "Στο ρυθμό των Beat"/ "Beat Rhythm" (*Τέταρτο*; [Crotchet] 34, 26-32) and *Διαβάζω* (Read) magazine's special editions on "Η Γενιά των Μπητνικ"/"The beatnik Generation" (issue 64) and "Jack Kerouac" (issue 249). Further indicative of a continuing interest in the Beats is that Ginsberg visited Athens again for a poetry reading at REX in the autumn of 1993. The revived attention the Beats currently enjoy with the proliferation of new publications, Giannis Haritidis' 2013 documentary on the Greek Beat and Underground Scene *Φωνές από το Υπόγειο* (*Voices from the Greek Underground*) and even a recent play adaptation of *And the Hippos Were Boiled in Their Tanks*, bears witness to a current attempt to revisit those times, and to re-assess and re-evaluate the impact the Beat Generation has been having on Greek literature and culture for the past fifty years.

In this study my objective is to present an introduction to the Beat and Underground Scene in Greece, exploring the ways in which Beat literature informed and helped shape the literary underground of the sixties and seventies. There is much scope for further study in this direction, and transformations of the "Beat" image and the cultural reception of the Beats in later years are also of particular interest, as the "beatniks," as they are best known in Greece, are still very popular today. The actual use of the term "beatniks" is yet another indication of the problematic nature of the re-definition of "Beat" in Greek contexts. In his chronicle of The Beat Generation, Christakis refers to the "Greek beatniks": "Οι Έλληνες μπητνικς, ή 'μπητνικοί'" (33) and the term appears regularly in the relevant literature, often taking over "Beat," with which it seems to be used interchangeably. The extra letter "ι" that Christakis inserts here is suggestive of a desire to linguistically appropriate the term, bringing it closer to Greek language patterns. With regard to linguistic plasticity, it was perhaps easier to add a Greek suffix to the word "beatniks" ("μπητνικοί"), rather than the monosyllable "Beats," which nonetheless Greek poet Andreas Embirikos lyrically rendered into "μπεάτοι" (beati) when referring to the Beats and other "Saints of non-compliance" in his text "Οι μπεάτοι ή της μη συμμορφώσεως οι Άγιοι" (first published in his poetry collection *Οκτάνα* [Octana] in 1980). In any case, the Greeks seem to be largely unaware of the negative connotations of Herb Caen's coinage and of Kerouac and Ginsberg's opposition to the term, with "Beatnik" and "Beat" bearing the same meaning in Greek literature and popular culture. Acknowledging the polysemy of the term "Greek Beat and Underground Scene," and the further complications that arise due to personal disagreements among the members of the Scene, in the ninth issue of *Sima*, Papadakis himself admits to the difficulties involved in forming a "Greek Beat and Underground" canon and points to the need for reconsideration "in some years' time" (2). Revisited from an early twenty-first-century perspective, critical engagement with the Greek Beat and Underground Scene sheds new light on Transatlantic contextualizations of "Beat." Greece, in particular, where the US-American political and cultural influence has been intense, provides very fertile ground for the study of these interactions and the emergence of new insights into what it means to be "Beat" outside familiar US-American contexts.

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