

**The importance of knowledge of *provenance* for the provenance of knowledge:  
The case of traditional costumes collections in Greece**

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In Greece there are several collections of traditional costumes, i.e. garments with a strongly local character and a great degree of standardization which were in daily use up to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many are in museums, others are private and some are still used by dance groups.

Traditional costumes are directly linked to Modern Greek folk culture: they were formed in its context and they are its most typical and obvious image. They have been often used as a national icon and are popular with people of all ages, who admire them and, on occasions of national celebrations and dance festivals, take pleasure and pride in dressing with copies of them.

Having stopped being worn many decades ago, their study and understanding cannot rely on direct observation of their use or on immediate evidence from their users. Therefore, the existing collections are a major source for their knowledge, and they are respectfully referred to by scholars, the public and makers of copies.

The *provenance* of these collections – the criteria used, the persons involved, the purposes served, etc. – affects deeply the extent and the kind of our knowledge for the objects included in them. Given the inadequate information usually provided on provenance issues, it is necessary to develop a set of tools for ‘unlocking’ them. In my paper, I will try to pinpoint the main parameters of the subject and draft a roadmap for approaching and interpreting historical costumes collections based on the understanding of their provenance.